

Syria: January-June 2018

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 47 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 That webpage also includes links to many historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.

In November 2017, there was a really important meeting of the Syrian opposition in Riyadh, at which the opposition "unified" and chose new leaders. But journalists barely reported this important meeting, which my [essay](#) called "news fatigue". Subsequently, I noticed journalists provided less coverage of the United Nations negotiations in Geneva than during 2014, or early 2016. At my website, I noticed that my 2017 essay on why Trump is unfit to be president has more than ten times the number of hits/week of any of my recent essays on the Syrian civil war. Because of both the lack of information and because of the lack of readers, I decided to spend less time on my essays on the Syrian civil war, and more time on my essays on Trump unfit to be president and the North Korean problem. Accordingly, my essays on the Syrian civil war will focus on:

- continually increasing death toll in Syria
- futile United Nations negotiations in Geneva, including quoting de Mistura's briefings
- failure of "guarantors" (i.e., Russia, Turkey, Iran) of Syrian ceasefire negotiated in Astana
- quoting United Nations briefings to journalists on failure of delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria
- chronicling major Islamic terrorist attacks in the world.

During 1-13 June 2018, I concentrated on the news about the Kim/Trump summit in Singapore and ignored 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.

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.

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

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

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

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

Chemical Weapons

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

On 27 February, journalists reported that the United Nations panel of experts on North Korean sanctions had concluded that North Korea supplied chemical weapons and missile technology to Syria. [New York Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#)(3Feb).

7 April 2018: attack on Douma

On 7 April 2018 at 19:45 Syrian time, a chemical weapons attack in Douma killed at least 40 Syrians — perhaps more than 70 dead. It is suspected that a nerve gas (e.g., Sarin) was used in the attack. [BBC](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On Saturday night, 7 April, the U.S. State Department issued the following statement, which included blaming Russia for allowing Assad to use chemical weapons again.

We continue to closely follow disturbing reports on April 7 regarding another alleged chemical weapons attack, this time targeting a hospital in Douma, Syria. Reports from

a number of contacts and medical personnel on the ground indicate a potentially high number of casualties, including among families hiding in shelters. These reports, if confirmed, are horrifying and demand an immediate response by the international community.

The United States continues to use all efforts available to hold those who use chemical weapons, in Syria and otherwise, accountable. The regime's history of using chemical weapons against its own people is not in dispute, and in fact nearly one year ago on April 4, 2017, Assad's forces conducted a sarin gas attack on Khan Sheikhoun, which killed approximately 100 Syrians.

The Assad regime and its backers must be held accountable and any further attacks prevented immediately. Russia, with its unwavering support for the regime, ultimately bears responsibility for these brutal attacks, targeting of countless civilians, and the suffocation of Syria's most vulnerable communities with chemical weapons. By shielding its ally Syria, Russia has breached its commitments to the United Nations as a framework guarantor. It has betrayed the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2118. Russia's protection of the Assad regime and failure to stop the use of chemical weapons in Syria calls into question its commitment to resolving the overall crisis and to larger non-proliferation priorities.

The United States calls on Russia to end this unmitigated support immediately and work with the international community to prevent further, barbaric chemical weapons attacks.

Heather Nauert, "On the Chemical Attack in Douma," [U.S. State Dept](#), 7 April 2018.

On the morning of 8 April, Trump made a two-part tweet that threatened that Assad will pay a "big price" for this attack on Douma:

Many dead, including women and children, in mindless CHEMICAL attack in Syria. Area of atrocity is in lockdown and encircled by Syrian Army, making it completely inaccessible to outside world. President Putin, Russia and Iran are responsible for backing Animal Assad. Big price...

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 09:00 EDT, 8 April 2018.

....to pay. Open area immediately for medical help and verification. Another humanitarian disaster for no reason whatsoever. SICK!

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 09:04 EDT, 8 April 2018.

Note that Trump sacked Rex Tillerson, the U.S. Secretary of State, on 13 March. The State Department is leaderless during a critical time with developments in Syria and North Korea. Moreover, on 22 March, Trump replaced his national security adviser with John Bolton, whose first day on the job is 9 April. Trump is currently *less* prepared to deal with a foreign policy crisis.

Note also that when Assad used nerve gas at Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April 2017, Trump retaliated with 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Assad's Al Shayrat airbase. A year later, Assad is again using chemical weapons. Trump's retaliation risks war with Russia and has *no* effect on Assad.

On 8 April, the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) and the Syrian Civil Defense (White Helmets) issued a joint [press release](#) that reported 42 dead in their homes from an "organophosphate" agent, and more than 500 wounded by chemical weapons. They said: "Following the chemical attack, the target site and the surrounding area of the hospital receiving the injured were attacked with barrel bombs, which hindered the ability of the ambulances to reach the victims."

In the early morning of 9 April, there were airstrikes on Assad's T4 airbase near Homs. Initially, Assad's government blamed the U.S. Military, but the airstrikes were actually done by Israel. Two F-15 warplanes from Israel entered Lebanese air space and there fired 8 missiles at Assad's airbase. Assad's government says the attack killed 14 people, including some Iranians. [Washington Post](#); [Jerusalem Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On the morning of 9 April, Trump told journalists:

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. I'd like to begin by condemning the heinous attack on innocent Syrians with banned chemical weapons. It was an atrocious attack. It was horrible. You don't see things like that. As bad as the news is around the world, you just don't see those images.

We are studying that situation extremely closely. We are meeting with our military and everybody else, and we'll be making some major decisions over the next 24 to 48 hours. We are very concerned when a thing like that can happen. This is about humanity. We're talking about humanity. And it can't be allowed to happen.

So we'll be looking at that barbaric act and studying what's going on. We're trying to get people in there. As you know, it's been surrounded. So it's very hard to get people in because not only has it been hit, it's been surrounded. And if they're innocent, why aren't they allowing people to go in and prove? Because as you know, they're claiming they didn't make the attack.

So if it's Russia, if it's Syria, if it's Iran, if it's all of them together, we'll figure it out and we'll know the answers quite soon. So we're looking at that very, very strongly and very seriously.

....

QUESTION: Mr. President, do you still want to get out of Syria? Do you still want to get out of Syria, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: We're going to make a decision on all of that, in particular Syria. We'll be making that decision very quickly, probably by the end of today. But we cannot allow atrocities like that. Cannot allow it.

QUESTION: Does Putin bear responsibility for this?

THE PRESIDENT: He may. Yeah, he may. And if he does, it's going to be very tough. Very tough.

"Remarks by President Trump at Cabinet Meeting," [White House](#), 11:39 EDT, 9 April 2018. See also [Washington Post](#) and [New York Times](#).

Trump's tweet on 8 April and remarks to journalists on 9 April caused Assad to put his army on high alert. [CBS News](#). Russia is prepared to shoot down any U.S. missiles. [Reuters](#). Politicians need to learn to keep their mouth shut, and not inform the enemy in advance of military strikes.

Russia's position is to assert a bald-faced lie that *no* chemical weapons were used in Ghouta recently, and if chemical weapons were used, then it was by insurgents who wanted to make Assad look bad.

The United Nations Security Council held an almost three-hour long meeting on the afternoon of 9 April, about chemical weapons in Douma. [U.N. press release](#). The [U.N.](#) posted a transcript of de Mistura's remarks. The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, called Assad a "monster" and she said: "The Russian regime, whose hands are all covered in the blood of Syrian children,...." [U.S. State Dept.](#)

On 10 April, the United Nations Security Council held a two-hour meeting about chemical weapons in Douma. [U.N. Press Release](#). One result of the meeting is that OPCW will send a fact-finding mission to Douma. [OPCW](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Assad and Russia may hope that the OPCW inspectors either delay or prevent Trump's military strike in Syria. But note that an OPCW fact-finding mission only determines whether chemical weapons were used (i.e., yes/no), and *not who* used chemical weapons.

The U.S. prepared a draft Resolution (S/2018/321) that would have re-established a JIM to determine *who* used chemical weapons in Syria, and also give the OPCW fact-finding mission independence in Douma. (In October 2017, Russia vetoed the re-authorization of the JIM for a third year.) On 10 April 2018 at about 15:20 EDT, Russia vetoed the U.S. draft resolution.

On 11 April, the World Health Organization [reported](#) 70 deaths and 500 injured in Douma with "symptoms consistent with exposure to highly toxic chemicals".

On the morning of 11 April, Trump told his friends in Russia that the U.S. (possibly together with France and U.K.) would launch a military strike on Syria.

Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria. Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and "smart!" You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 06:57 EDT, 11 April 2018.

[Reuters](#) reports that, in response to Trump's threats, Assad has been repositioning his warplanes to protect them from a U.S. Military strike. [Reuters](#) also reports that the Pentagon refused to comment on "potential future military operations." My comment is that Trump has reduced the success of the U.S. Military retaliation for Assad using chemical weapons in Douma, by warning Assad to prepare for a U.S. strike. Trump's big mouth has ruined the element of surprise.

A tweet by Trump in the year 2013 shows that Trump *knows* not to announce military actions in advance, because announcing military actions in advance ruins the element of surprise.

Why do we keep broadcasting when we are going to attack Syria. Why can't we just be quiet and, if we attack at all, catch them by surprise?

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 21:45 PT, 28 August 2013.

For more about Trump's knowledge, see the [Washington Post](#).

Given Trump's knowledge that silence is golden, *why* is Trump now being a loud mouth, blowhard who announces military actions in advance? I suggest that Trump is *not* in control of his emotions, since Trump has been obsessed for months about special counsel Mueller's investigation of Republican collusion with Russians in 2016, and especially after the FBI raided the office of Trump's personal attorney in New York City on 9 April 2018. Trump's lack of control of his emotions makes Trump unfit to be president.

On the afternoon of 11 April 2018, the President's press secretary said Trump was still undecided, after his 48-hour deadline came and went.

QUESTION: Two questions about the President's statement this morning. What does "Get ready Russia" mean? Is the United States planning to target Russian assets, personnel in Syria as part of the attack that the President himself said is coming — the missiles are coming? What does it mean?

MS. SANDERS: We're maintaining that we have a number of options, and all of those options are still on the table. Final decisions haven't been made yet on that front.

QUESTION: So does it mean anything at all? What does it mean?

MS. SANDERS: It certainly means — I think there's a lot there that you can read from. But at the same time, the President has a number of options at his disposal, and all of those options remain on the table, and we're continuing to look at each one of them.

....

QUESTION: But, Sarah, the President was direct in talking about missiles. He said, "Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and 'smart!'" Why is the President telegraphing military intentions on Twitter; announcing, effectively, an attack on Twitter?

MS. SANDERS: Again, the President has not laid out a timetable and still leaving a number of other options on the table. And we're still considering a number of those, and a final decision on that front hasn't been made.

"Press Briefing by Press Secretary Sarah Sanders," [White House](#), 16:00 EDT, 11 April 2018.

The [Associated Press](#) in Moscow reported that the Russian military would almost certainly retaliate for any U.S. strike in Syria. Similarly, the [New York Times](#) reported that the U.S. Defense Secretary was cautioning Trump against a military strike in Syria. [Reuters](#) has an article with the headline: "Threat of U.S.-Russia clash hangs over Syria".

On the morning of 12 April, Trump attempted to rescind his previous belligerent remarks on

8, 9, 11 April that implied the U.S. would soon attack Assad.

Never said when an attack on Syria would take place. Could be very soon or not so soon at all! In any event, the United States, under my Administration, has done a great job of ridding the region of ISIS. Where is our "Thank you America?"

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 06:15 EDT, 12 April 2018.

Notice that Trump attempted to change the topic from retaliation for Assad using chemical weapons on 7 April, to "thank you" for defeating ISIL.

On the afternoon of 12 April, the President's press secretary said Trump was still undecided, after his 48-hour deadline was one-day overdue. Trump now wants more consultations with France and the United Kingdom. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

13 April 2018: Trump's retaliation in Syria

On Friday night, 13 April 2018, warships and warplanes of the USA, France, and the United Kingdom launched an attack in Syria. Trump himself announced the attack while reading an eight-minute speech from a Teleprompter.

My fellow Americans, a short time ago, I ordered the United States Armed Forces to launch precision strikes on targets associated with the chemical weapons capabilities of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. A combined operation with the armed forces of France and the United Kingdom is now underway. We thank them both.

....

The evil and the despicable attack [in Douma on 7 April] left mothers and fathers, infants and children, thrashing in pain and gasping for air. These are not the actions of a man; they are crimes of a monster instead.

....

I also have a message tonight for the two governments most responsible for supporting, equipping and financing the criminal Assad regime.

To Iran and to Russia, I ask: What kind of a nation wants to be associated with the mass murder of innocent men, women, and children?

The nations of the world can be judged by the friends they keep. No nation can succeed in the long run by promoting rogue states, brutal tyrants and murderous dictators.

In 2013, President Putin and his government promised the world that they would guarantee the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons. Assad's recent attack — and today's response — are the direct result of Russia's failure to keep that promise.

....

America does not seek an indefinite presence in Syria under no circumstances. As other nations step up their contributions, we look forward to the day when we can bring our warriors home. And great warriors they are.

"Full transcript of Trump's address on Syria airstrikes," [Washington Post](#), 22:27 EDT, 13 April 2018.

I am quoting the Washington Post transcript, because the White House had not posted a transcript at 18:00 EDT on 14 April 2018. See also [New York Times](#). Astoundingly, a transcript of this important speech by Trump is still *not* posted at the White House website on 18 April 2018.

The Pentagon released a map of Syria that showed the attacks hit the Barzah Research Center near Damascus, and two storage sites in western Syria, near Lebanon.

"U.S., Allies Strike Syrian Targets in Response to Regime's Chemical Attacks," [Pentagon](#), 13 April 2018.

The Pentagon issued an informative press release on the night of 13 April:

U.S., British and French air and naval forces launched attacks against the Syrian government's chemical weapon arsenal in retaliation for the use of such weapons on civilians, Defense Secretary James N. Mattis and Marine Corps Gen. Joe Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at a Pentagon news conference tonight.

....

The strikes hit Syrian leader Bashar Assad's chemical weapon research, development and production facilities. The strikes tonight were far harder than the ones last year, when the United States launched 58 missiles against the Shayrat air base following a chemical attack.

"Obviously, the Assad regime did not get the message last year," Mattis said.

The strikes now send a very clear message to Syrian leaders "that they should not perpetrate another chemical weapons attack for which they will be held accountable," the secretary said.

Mattis emphasized that the strikes were directed against the Syrian regime, and the strike planners went to great lengths to avoid civilian and foreign casualties. "It is a time for all civilized nations to urgently unite to end the Syrian civil war by supporting the United Nations backed Geneva peace process," the secretary said.

....

The first target was a scientific research center in the greater Damascus area. The military facility was a center for research, development, production and testing of chemical and biological agents, the general said. The second target was a chemical weapons storage facility west of Homs. "We assess this was the primary location of Syrian sarin and precursor production equipment," he said. "The third target — contained both a chemical weapons storage facility and an important command post."

....

More than double the amount of ordnance used in last year's strike was used in this one, Dunford said. He said there were reports of Syrian anti-aircraft actions, but it is too early to assess the effectiveness. There were no allied casualties.

Jim Garamone, "Mattis, Dunford Detail Attacks on Syrian Chemical Arsenal," [Pentagon](#), 13 April 2018.

At night on 13 April 2018, details were sparse, but Reuters reported:

It was unclear if the strikes will deter Assad from again using chemical weapons. They seemed unlikely to have much impact on the balance of power in Syria's seven-year-old civil war, in which Assad's government has steadily gained the upper hand against armed opponents since Russia intervened in 2015.

....

A senior official in a regional alliance that backs Damascus told Reuters that said the Syrian government and its allies had "absorbed" the attack, and that targeted sites were evacuated days ago thanks to a warning from Russia.

State-controlled Syrian TV said Syrian air defences shot down 13 missiles fired in the U.S.-led attack. The Russian defence ministry said none of the rockets launched had entered zones where Russian air defence systems are protecting facilities in Tartus and Hmeimim.

Steve Holland & Tom Perry, "U.S., Britain, France launch air strikes in Syria," [Reuters](#), 01:55 EDT, 14 April 2018.

The Syrians evacuated their Barzah research center because of a warning from Trump, as explained above. The attack occurred at 03:55 local time in Syria, so the research center would normally be unoccupied. Nonetheless, destroying buildings at the research center implies that glassware in chemical laboratories, and bottles of chemicals, were also destroyed.

[The Telegraph](#) in England reported that the attack began at 21:00 EDT and ended sometime before 22:10 EDT, "meaning it lasted no more than 70 minutes." *The Telegraph* also reported: "Anatoly Antonov, Russia's ambassador to the United States, condemned the attack and said there would be 'consequences'."

On the morning of 14 April, [RIA-Novosti](#) in Russia reported that "Syrian air defense units had intercepted 71 cruise missiles out of the 103 launched, including all of the ones that had been fired at Dumayr military airport located in the northeast of Damascus, according to the Russian Defense Ministry." See also [TASS](#) and [Reuters](#).

On the morning of 14 April, Trump gloated about his military strike on Syria, a third-world nation.

A perfectly executed strike last night. Thank you to France and the United Kingdom for their wisdom and the power of their fine Military. Could not have had a better result. Mission Accomplished!

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 08:21 EDT, 14 April 2018.

My comment is that "mission accomplished" will be true only if Assad stops using chemical weapons.

On the morning of 14 April, the Pentagon briefed journalists on the attacks during the previous night. The Pentagon's press release says:

Chief Pentagon spokesperson Dana W. White and Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie, the Joint Staff director, briefed the press today from the Pentagon on the operation saying it was successful and that there were no allied casualties.

....

The operation was carefully orchestrated and methodically planned to lessen chances of civilian casualties, the spokesperson said. The missiles hit targets during the Syrian pre-dawn hours, and planners, weaponeers and aircrew were careful to ensure little collateral damage. "We successfully hit every target," White said.

....

One target, the Barzah center, housed the regime's research, development and production center for chemical and biological weapons. Photos taken after the strike show that where once three buildings stood, there is now nothing but rubble.

....

The allies fired 105 weapons at these targets. The missiles came from British, French and American platforms in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean, McKenzie said.

"All weapons hit their targets close to the designated time on target," he said. The American ships were: the USS Monterrey, the USS Laboon, the USS Higgins and the submarine USS John Warner. Two B-1 Lancer bombers launched joint air-to-surface stand-off missiles. Support aircraft — tankers, fighters, electronic warfare aircraft and more — also participated.

"None of our aircraft or missiles involved in this operation were successfully engaged by Syrian air defenses," McKenzie said. "We have no indication that Russian air defenses were employed."

Jim Garamone, "Pentagon Officials Describe Syria Strikes, Hope Assad Gets Message," [Pentagon](#), 14 April 2018.

The transcript of the briefing contains more details. General McKenzie said:

Against the first target, the Barzeh Research and Development Center, which is located in the greater Damascus area, we employed 76 missiles; 57 of these were Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles, and 19 were joint air-to-surface standoff missiles, or JASS's.

As you can see for yourself from the graphics, initial assessments are that this target was destroyed. This is going to set the Syrian chemical weapons program back for years.

We also note that we've successfully destroyed three buildings in metropolitan Damascus, one of the most heavily defended airspace areas in the world.

....

Against the second target, the Him Shinshar chemical weapons storage facility, which is located in Syria, just west of Homs, 22 weapons were employed, nine U.S. TLAMs, eight Storm Shadow missiles, three naval cruise missiles, and two Scout land attack cruise missiles.

So this target was attacked by all coalition forces — our Tomahawks, the British Storm Shadow, and then the French missiles went against it as well.

Against the third target — next slide — the Him Shinshar chemical weapons bunker facility, we deployed seven Scout missiles. Again, the initial assessment is that this bunker facility was successfully hit.

....

None of our aircraft or missiles involved in this operation were successfully engaged by Syrian air defenses, and we have no indication that Russian air-defense systems were employed.

We are confident that all of our missiles reached their targets. At the end of the strike mission, all our aircraft safely returned to their bases.

We assessed that over 40 surface-to-air missiles were employed by the Syrian regime. Most of these launches occurred after the last impact of our strike was over. It is likely that the regime shot many of these missiles on a ballistic trajectory. I mean, by that, without guidance. And we assess that the defensive efforts of Syria were largely ineffective, and clearly increased risk to their people based on this indiscriminate response. When you shoot iron into the air without guidance, it's going to come down somewhere.

Lt. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Pentagon Chief Spokesperson Dana W. White and Joint Staff Director Lt. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [transcript](#), 14 April 2018.

Syria claimed it shot down 13 missiles, and Russia claimed the Syrians shot down 71 missiles. The Pentagon claims the Syrians and Russians shot down *zero* missiles. I think the Pentagon has more credibility than the Russian liars.

In a detail ignored by journalists, the contributions of France and the United Kingdom were token contributions, intended to create an international consensus instead of the U.S. acting alone. The U.K. sent *four* warplanes from Cyprus, which launched a total of 8 cruise missiles

at Syria, a mere 8% of the total missiles in the airstrikes. [BBC](#). General McKenzie said that the French Frigate Languedoc fired 3 missiles and French Rafales and Mirages warplanes launched 9 missiles, for a total of 12 missiles. That means our two allies together contributed 19% of the total missiles in the attack on Syria.

On 14 April, Russia called an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to vote on a Russian draft resolution that condemned the “aggression” by the U.S., France, and U.K. Only three nations — Russia, communist China, and Bolivia — voted for the Russian draft. Eight nations voted against the Russian draft and four nations abstained. [U.N.](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The failure of the Russian draft resolution is consistent with most of the civilized world approving of Trump's airstrike in Syria. [The Telegraph](#); [The Guardian](#); [Arab News](#); [Sky News](#).

[CNN](#) and [The Guardian](#) published satellite images that clearly show massive damage to three targets in Syria. These images mean the Syrians and Russians are liars when they claimed no damage.

14 April to 3 May 2018: OPCW Fact-Finding Mission

On 10 April, Syria *invited* an OPCW fact-finding mission to visit Douma. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

The OPCW fact-finding mission arrived in Damascus on Friday, 13 April, and was supposed to begin work on Saturday, 14 April. [TASS](#); [Reuters](#)(12Apr).

But then Trump's airstrikes occurred on the night of 13 April and the residents of Damascus became hysterically defiant at Trump. [Associated Press](#).

On 16 April, Syrian and Russian authorities continued to prevent the OPCW inspectors from visiting Douma, because of vague "pending security issues". The U.K. and U.S. governments accused Russia of destroying evidence of the chemical weapons attack on 7 April. [OPCW](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 18 April, the OPCW inspectors attempted to visit Douma for the first time, but unknown gunmen fired on the United Nations convoy, forcing OPCW to retreat to a hotel in Damascus. [OPCW](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 19 April, the OPCW inspectors again did *not* visit Douma. The U.S. State Department publicly accused Syria and Russia of using the delay to destroy evidence of the use of chemical weapons on 7 April. Heather Nauert, the Spokeswoman for the U.S. State Department, told journalists at the Daily Press Briefing:

So to address both your questions, we can confirm that the OPCW team has still not been able to enter Duma in Syria. It is now 12 days since the attack took place on men, women, and children, those innocent civilians, in Syria. We have credible information that indicates that Russian officials are working with the Syrian regime to deny and to delay these inspectors from gaining access to Duma. We believe it is an effort to conduct their own staged investigations. Russian officials have worked with the Syrian

regime, we believe, to sanitize the locations of those suspected attacks and remove incriminating evidence of chemical weapons use.

We have also watched as some people have seemingly been pressured by the government to change their stories about what actually occurred that night. We have reports from credible people on the ground who have indicated that they have been pressured by both Russia and Syria to change their stories, to try to change their stories so that it doesn't appear that Russia and Syria are responsible for those attacks. We certainly know that Syria is responsible for those attacks.

....

Well, the delay certainly increases — on a few levels. One, the longer that those sites are not able to be investigated by OPCW fact-finding mission experts, the more that the evidence can certainly deteriorate, and that's a great concern to us. We also believe that it gives them additional time to try to clean up and sanitize those sites.

Heather Nauert, "Department Press Briefing — April 19, 2018," [U.S. State Dept](#), 19 April 2018.

On 20 April, the [Washington Post](#) described Russian and Assad's efforts to destroy evidence in Douma.

On 21 April — 13 days after Assad used chemical weapons in Douma and 7 days after the OPCW inspectors were ready to visit Douma — Assad and Russia finally allowed the OPCW inspectors to visit Douma. The OPCW inspectors collected some samples to analyze in laboratories. ; [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

My comment is that it is bizarre that on 10 April, Assad's government *invited* OPCW inspectors to visit, but then denied the OPCW inspectors access to Douma until 21 April. One would expect competent war criminals to wait to invite the OPCW inspectors until after evidence was destroyed.

On 25 April, the OPCW inspectors visited a second site in Douma and collected samples. [OPCW](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 4 May 2018, [OPCW](#) announced that its fact-finding mission had returned to Europe. [Reuters](#). It is expected to take at least four weeks to analyze the samples collected during the two visits to Douma. My comment is that after nearly three weeks in Damascus but only two visits to Douma, the fact-finding mission was a waste of money.

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).

In the OPCW monthly report for February 2018, the United Nations Secretary General wrote: With regard to the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, I note that OPCW is seeking further clarifications needed regarding activities conducted at the Scientific

Studies and Research Centre of the Syrian Arab Republic, following analysis of 19 documents submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic to OPCW in November 2017. I also note, with continuing concern, that OPCW has not received any new information concerning the other remaining gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the declaration by the Syrian Arab Republic and that these issues therefore remain unresolved. I urge the Syrian Arab Republic to extend its full and timely cooperation to OPCW.

S/2018/182 in cover letter (5 March 2018).

In the OPCW monthly report for March 2018, the Director-General of OPCW wrote: On 29 January 2018, the Director-General addressed a letter to the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, Dr Faisal Mekdad, in which he asked for further clarifications regarding activities conducted at the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), and attached to his letter a non-exhaustive list of questions.

Through a note verbale dated 19 February 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic provided answers to the SSRC-related questions raised in the Director-General's letter of 29 January 2018. The DAT assessed these answers and determined that while they partially addressed some of the questions, other questions remained unanswered.

On ... 13 March 2018, the Secretariat remains unable to confirm that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Convention and the decisions of the Council.

S/2018/283, ¶8-10 (28 March 2018).

27 June 2018: OPCW now allowed to assign blame

Traditionally, OPCW fact-finding teams were allowed to say only whether chemical weapons had been used, but *not* to say *who* used chemical weapons. That is why the JIM was created by the United Nations Security Council in August 2015, to assign blame. But Russia vetoed the renewal of the JIM in October 2017.

On 27 June 2018, the United Kingdom proposed changing OPCW's rules so that OPCW could assign blame for the use of chemical weapons. The member nations of OPCW approved the U.K. proposal by a vote of 82 to 24. Rogue nations (e.g., Russia, Iran, Syria, China) opposed the U.K. proposal. [OPCW](#); [Reuters](#).

Syria

Futile Peace Negotiations in Syria

Disorganization of the Syrian Opposition

& Politics of the Peace Process

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

negotiations.

Diversions

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

1. Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the **Ukraine**, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. By 30 May 2014, the crisis in the Ukraine appeared to be winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border. But on 28 June 2014, the Ukraine government and pro-Russian separatists were again fighting a civil war. On 17 July 2014, someone in eastern Ukraine shot down a civilian airliner. On 28 Aug 2014, Russia sent troops into eastern Ukraine to aid rebels. On 5 Sep 2014, another ceasefire began. On 24 Jan 2015, Russian rebels violated agreements and began an offensive against Mariupol. From the end of April 2014 to 2 Feb 2015, the United Nations says 5358 people died in the war in the Ukraine. During the first two weeks of Feb 2015, the war in the Ukraine seemed to dominate the attention of diplomats in Europe, as another ceasefire was negotiated.
2. a continuing civil war in the **Central African Republic**
3. more violence in **South Sudan**, as ceasefires are violated
4. On 14 April 2014, the Boko Haram Islamic terrorists in **Nigeria**, kidnapped more than 230 girls from a boarding school. On 20 May 2014, an Islamic bomb in Jos, Nigeria killed at least 130 people. Approximately ninety people were kidnapped by Islamic terrorists on 21 June in Nigeria. On 10 Nov 2014, a suicide bomber killed at least 48 pupils at a high school in Nigeria. On 28 Nov 2014, Boko Haram attacked a mosque in Kano, killing more than 102 people. On 3-7 Jan 2015, Boko Haram attacked 17 towns and slaughtered approximately 2000 people, "too many to count". [Guardian](#).
5. On 18 May 2014, a former Libyan general led an assault against the Libyan Parliament building, causing another crisis in **Libya**. Various parts of the government and military supported the general's anti-Islamist campaign. On 16 July, Islamic rebels attacked the airport at Tripoli, destroying airplanes and damaging the terminal building. On 31 July, Islamic extremist rebels seized control of Benghazi. On 23 Aug 2014, Islamic extremists captured the airport at Tripoli.
6. On 10 June 2014, ISIL — an Al-Qaeda inspired group that operates in both Iraq and Syria — captured Mosul, the second-largest city in **Iraq**. On 11 June, ISIL captured Tikrit. (See my essays for [June](#), [July](#), and [August](#) 2014.) The crisis in Iraq pushed Syria out of the news in Western newsmedia. Moreover, the capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — [changed](#) the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.

7. On 12 June 2014, palestinians kidnapped three boys in **Israel** and killed them. Their dead bodies were found in a field on 30 June. After terrorists in Gaza fired hundreds of rockets and mortar shells into Israel, the Israeli military began a military campaign in Gaza on 8 July. Despite the blatant provocations by the palestinians, the Arab newsmidia 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](#).)

Deaths in Syria

January 2018

The English-language website of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) did not publish a death toll for the month of January 2018.

February 2018

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

66 massacres carried out on the Syrian territory by the regime, Russia, Turkey and the International Coalition.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2595 persons in February 2018, and the death toll is as follows:

- A. Civilian casualties: 1391 people including 373 children under the age of eighteen, and 218 women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
- 122 including 21 children and 26 citizen women were killed in raids by Russian warplanes
 - 669 including 209 children and 88 citizen women were killed by bombardment by the regime's warplanes and helicopters on several areas of Syria.
 - 183 including 36 children and 29 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.
 - 4 citizens were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons.
 - 64 including 24 children and 11 citizen woman were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
 - 72 including 6 children and 5 citizen woman were killed in bombardment by Turkish warplanes and shelling by the Turkish forces
 - 2 citizens including a child were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
 - 2 citizens including a woman were executed by the "Islamic State" organization.
 - 162 including 58 children and 37 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the International Coalition.
 - 8 citizens including a child and 3 women were killed in the detonation of cars and booby trapped vehicles.
 - 20 citizens including 6 children and 6 women were executed by the factions and Hayyaat Tahrir al-Sham.

8 citizens including 2 children and a woman were killed by the Syria Democratic Forces.

- 27 including 3 children and 4 citizen women were killed in landmine explosions.
- 46 including 5 children and 7 women were killed in unknown circumstances.
- 7 citizens they including a child died due to poor health conditions and the absence of necessary treatment.

B. [Military casualties: 1204 people, as follows:]

- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 689
- The regime forces: 105
- Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 142
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 9
- Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 61
- Unknown people: 16
- 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: 182

And the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented 66 massacres during February 2018, which left 1064 civilian casualties including 161 citizen women and 271 children,

- where the Russian warplanes as well as the regime's warplanes carried out 41 massacres which killed 743 citizens including 102 citizen women and 183 children,
- while the regime forces carried out 10 massacres which killed 94 citizens including 15 citizen women and 24 children,
- while the factions carried out 2 massacres which killed 18 citizens including 3 citizen women and 3 children,
- while the warplanes of the International Coalition carried out 7 massacres which killed 157 citizens including 57 children and 37 citizen women,
- and the Turkish forces carried out 6 massacres which killed 52 citizens including 4 citizen women and 4 children.

Despite the conferences calling for dialogue and solution, the bloodshed continues on the Syrian territory and the killing and fighting continues without peace, and the cease-fire truces are only breaks between the conflicting parties in Syrian, where some parties were winners and others lost influence and control, so, 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, and 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.

"In the highest monthly death toll of civilian casualties about 1400 civilian casualties about 66% of them killed in the Eastern Ghouta during February 2018," [SOHR](#), 1 March 2018.

[Formatting of military deaths and massacres as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

March 2018

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

About 1050 citizens killed by the escalation on the Eastern Ghouta with more than 70% of the highest total death toll of civilian casualties during March.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 3673 persons in March 2018, and the death toll is as follows:

- A. Civilian casualties: 1460 people including 295 children under the age of eighteen, and 174 women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
- 938 including 179 children and 101 citizen women were killed in raids by Russian warplanes.
 - 229 including 76 children and 45 citizen women were killed by bombardment by the regime's warplanes and helicopters on several areas of Syria.
 - 43 including 5 children and 3 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.
 - one citizen was killed under torture in Syrian security prisons.
 - 66 including 13 children and 10 citizen woman were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
 - 133 including 16 children and 12 citizen woman were killed in bombardment by Turkish warplanes and shelling by the Turkish forces.

- one citizen was killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
- 3 citizens including a child were executed by the “Islamic State” organization.
- 5 including a child were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the International Coalition.
- 6 citizens including a woman were killed in the detonation of cars and booby trapped vehicles.
- 8 citizens including a child were executed by the factions and Hayyaat Tahrir al-Sham.
- 4 citizens were killed by the Syria Democratic Forces.
- 4 citizens including a woman were killed in landmine explosions.
- 14 including 2 children killed in unknown circumstances.
- 5 citizens including a child and a woman were killed in the fall of shells fired by the “Islamic State” organization.

B. [Military casualties: 2213 people, as follows:]

- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 1026
- The regime forces: 391
- Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 489
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 8
- Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 47
- Unidentified people: 28
- 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: 224

And the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented 78 massacres during March 2018, which left 1157 civilian casualties including 258 children and 146 citizen women,

- where the Russian warplanes as well as the regime’s warplanes carried out 61

- massacres which killed 988 citizens including 239 children and 132 citizen women,
- while the regime forces carried out 7 massacres which killed 43 citizens including 3 children and 3 citizen women,
 - while the factions carried out 2 massacres which killed 39 citizens including 4 children and 4 citizen women,
 - and the Turkish forces carried out 8 massacres which killed 87 citizens including 4 children and 7 citizen women.

Despite the conferences calling for dialogue and solution, and the UNSC resolution [2401] and the unreal truces, the bloodshed continues on the Syrian territory and the killing and fighting continues without peace, and the cease-fire truces are only breaks between the conflicting parties in Syria, where some parties were winners and others lost influence and control. So, 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. 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 components of the Syrian people. "About 3700 persons were killed in March 2018," [SOHR](#), 1 April 2018. [Formatting of military deaths and massacres as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

April 2018

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 1370 persons in April 2018, and the death toll is as follows:

- A. Civilian casualties: 395 people including 101 children under the age of eighteen, and 73 women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
- 49 citizens including 9 children and 10 citizen women were killed in raids by Russian warplanes
 - 122 including 32 children and 28 citizen women were killed by bombardment by the regime's warplanes and helicopters on several areas of Syria.
 - 61 including 12 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.

- One citizen was killed under torture in Syrian security prisons.
- 35 citizens including 8 children and 4 citizen woman were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
- 4 citizens were killed by the Turkish forces.
- 12 citizens including 3 children were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
- 4 citizens including a woman were executed by the “Islamic State”
- 8 citizens were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the International Coalition.
- 3 citizens including a child were killed by the factions and Hayyaat Tahrir al-Sham.
- 9 citizens including 4 children and 4 women were killed in landmine explosions.
- 66 including 28 children and 11 women were killed in unknown circumstances.
- 21 citizens including 4 children and a woman were killed in targeting by unknown gunmen and assassinations.

B. [Military casualties: 975 people, as follows:]

- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 305
- The regime forces: 176
- Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 219
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 5
- Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 65
- Unidentified people: 11
- 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: 194

And the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented 14 massacres during April 2018, which left 208 civilian casualties including 57 children and 44 citizen women,

- where the Russian warplanes as well as the regime's warplanes carried out 5 massacres which killed 124 citizens including 35 children and 22 citizen women,
- while the regime forces carried out 3 massacres which killed 20 citizens including 2 children and 10 citizen women,
- while the factions carried out 2 massacres which killed 17 citizens including 2 children and 3 citizen women,
- while 2 massacres were carried out by 2 explosion and claimed the lives of 36 citizens including 14 children and 9 women,
- and the "Islamic State" organization carried out 2 massacres which killed 11 citizens including 4 children.

Despite the conferences calling for dialogue and solution, and the UNSC resolution and the unreal truces, the bloodshed continues on the Syrian territory and the killing and fighting continues without peace, and the cease-fire truces are only breaks between the conflicting parties in Syrian, where some parties were winners and others lost influence and control. So, 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. And 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 components of the Syrian people.

"In the lowest monthly death tally since 70 months, about 400 civilian casualties out of 1370 killed were killed in April 2018," [SOHR](#), 1 May 2018. [Formatting of military deaths and massacres as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler. Run-on sentence in final paragraph broken into 3 sentences by Standler.]

May 2018

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 1165 people in May 2018, and they were distributed as follows:

- A. Civilian casualties: 244 people including 58 children under the age of eighteen, and 33 women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
- 19 citizens including 7 children and 4 citizen women were killed in raids by Russian warplanes
 - 38 including 13 children and 8 citizen women were killed by bombardment by the regime's warplanes and helicopters on several areas of Syria.
 - 39 including 4 children and 7 citizen women were killed in shelling by the regime forces using rocket and artillery shells, missiles believed to be ground-to-ground, targeting and sniper bullets.
 - 3 citizens were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons.
 - 6 citizens including a child were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
 - 10 citizens were killed by the Turkish forces.
 - 2 citizens were executed by the "Islamic State" organization.
 - 39 citizens including 16 children and 11 women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the International Coalition.
 - 8 citizens were killed by the factions and Hayyaat Tahrir al-Sham and Syria Democratic Forces.
 - 7 citizens including 2 children and a woman were killed in landmine explosions.
 - 29 citizens including 12 children and a woman were killed in unknown circumstances.
 - 24 citizens including a child woman were killed in targeting by unknown gunmen and assassinations.
 - 20 citizens including a child and a woman were killed in the explosion of booby trapped vehicles.
- B. [Military casualties: 921 people, as follows:]
- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 286
 - Defected of the regime forces: 1
 - The regime forces: 181
 - Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 190
 - Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 6
 - Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 76
 - Unidentified people: 6
 - 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: 175

And the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented 10 massacres during May 2018, which left 86 civilian casualties including 27 children and 19 citizen women:

- where the Russian warplanes as well as the regime's warplanes carried out 5

- massacres which killed 35 citizens including 11 children and 7 citizen women,
- while the regime forces carried out one massacre which killed 7 citizens including a child and a woman,
- while the International Coalition carried out 3 massacres which killed 39 citizens including 15 children and 11 women,
- while one massacre took place due to an explosion and claimed the lives of 5 citizens.

Despite the conferences calling for dialogue and solution, and the UNSC resolution and the unreal truces, the bloodshed continues on the Syrian territory and the killing and fighting continues without peace, and the cease-fire truces are only breaks between the conflicting parties in Syrian, where some parties were winners and others lost influence and control. So, 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. 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. [We wish] 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 components of the Syrian people.

"244 civilians including 91 children and women were killed in May, the lowest monthly death toll of civilian casualties since the beginning of the Syrian revolution," [SOHR](#), 1 June 2018. [Formatting of military deaths and massacres as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler. Run-on sentence in final paragraph broken into 4 sentences by Standler.]

June 2018

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of ~~1443~~ [1706] people in June 2018, and they were distributed as follows:

- A. Civilian casualties: 398 people including 92 children under the age of eighteen, and 52 women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
 - 130 citizens including 32 children and 21 citizen women were killed in raids by Russian warplanes.
 - 22 including 4 children and 3 citizen women were killed by bombardment by the regime's warplanes and helicopters on several areas of Syria.
 - 89 including 17 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.
- 18 citizens including a woman and 11 children were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
- 5 citizens were killed by the Turkish forces.
- 2 citizens were executed by the “Islamic State” organization.
- 50 citizens including 13 children and 10 women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the International Coalition.
- 4 citizens were killed by the factions and Hayyaat Tahrir al-Sham and Syria Democratic Forces.
- 12 citizens including 2 children and a woman were killed in landmine explosions.
- 44 citizens including 10 children and 2 women were killed in unknown circumstances.
- 16 citizens including 2 children and a woman were killed in the explosion of booby trapped vehicles.

B. [Military casualties: 1308 people, as follows:]

- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 336
- The regime forces: 141
- Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 192
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 7
- Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 94
- Unidentified people: 13
- 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: 525

And the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented 19 massacres during June 2018, which left 216 civilian casualties including 60 children and 33 citizen women:

- where the Russian warplanes as well as the regime’s warplanes carried out 8 massacres which killed 128 citizens including 30 children and 19 citizen women,
- while the regime forces carried out 6 massacres which killed 44 citizens including 12 children and 6 women,
- while the International Coalition carried out 3 massacres which killed 33 citizens including 12 children and 7 women,
- while the factions carried out one massacre which killed 5 citizens 4 of them were children,
- also the “Islamic State” organization committed one massacre that claimed that killed 7 citizens including 2 children and a woman.

Despite the conferences calling for dialogue and solution, and the UNSC resolution and the unreal truces, the bloodshed continues on the Syrian territory and the killing and

fighting continues without peace, and the cease-fire truces are only breaks between the conflicting parties in Syrian, where some parties were winners and others lost influence and control. So, 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. 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. [We wish] 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 components of the Syrian people.

"At least 19 massacres claim the lives of about 220 civilians out of about 400 civilians killed in June 2018," [SOHR](#), 1 July 2018. [Formatting of military deaths as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler. Run-on sentence in final paragraph broken into 4 sentences by Standler.]

Adding 398 civilian deaths and 1308 military deaths gives a monthly total of 1706, *not* 1443.

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* 360,000.

Turkey is an ally from Hell

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Turkish invasion of Kurdish territory in northern Syria in January 2018 is described [below](#).

U.S. troops in Syria

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 6 December 2017, 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.

On 17 January 2018, U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson said U.S Military would remain in Syria, perhaps until a new Syrian government is formed: "The United States will maintain a military presence in Syria focused on ensuring ISIS cannot re-emerge." [U.S. State Dept](#);

[New York Times](#).

On 29 March 2018, Trump gave a speech in Ohio, at which The [Washington Post](#) quoted Trump as saying: “We're coming out of Syria, like, very soon. Let the other people take care of it now. Very soon — very soon we're coming out.” [Politico](#) added that Trump also said: “We got to get back to our country where we belong, where we want to be.” For Trump, the end of the U.S. role in Syria comes when ISIL is defeated. Trump did *not* identify the "other people" who would "take care" of Syria, but the obvious possibilities are Russia, Turkey, and Iran — the three "guarantors" of the Astana agreements.

On the night of 30 March, journalists reported that, in private and since mid-February, Trump has wanted the U.S. Military out of Syria. This is a radical change from the U.S. policy that Tillerson announced on 17 Jan 2018. [Wall Street Journal](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 30 March 2018 — one day after Trump publicly declared he wanted the U.S. Military out of Syria "very soon" — Master Sgt. Johnathan J. Dunbar, a U.S. Army soldier, was killed by an improvised explosive device in Manbij, Syria. [Pentagon](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 4 April 2018, the White House declared:

The military mission to eradicate ISIS in Syria is coming to a rapid end, with ISIS being almost completely destroyed. The United States and our partners remain committed to eliminating the small ISIS presence in Syria that our forces have not already eradicated. We will continue to consult with our allies and friends regarding future plans. We expect countries in the region and beyond, plus the United Nations, to work toward peace and ensure that ISIS never re-emerges.

Sarah Sanders, "Statement by the Press Secretary on Syria," [White House](#), 4 April 2018

On 4 April, [CNN](#), [New York Times](#), and the [Associated Press](#) reported that Trump's advisers were nearly unanimous in urging Trump to keep the U.S. Military in Syria for the foreseeable future. Trump gave the U.S. Military six months (i.e., until end of September 2018) to defeat ISIL and stabilize Syria.

Peace Negotiations for Syria

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

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

that the fate of one person takes the whole political negotiation process hostage. It is unacceptable. The future of Assad must be decided by the Syrian people.” [Al-Arabiya](#). See also [Voice of America](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

aggressively on Raqqa? About President Assad, should he stay or should he go?

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

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

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

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.

History of Negotiations in Geneva during 2016-2017

My essays for [December 2015](#) and [January 2016](#) chronicled the creation and history of High Negotiations Committee (HNC), the opposition delegation that was supposed to negotiate in Geneva. (The HNC is also translated as the "Supreme Commission", which translation I used in my essays prior to April 2016.) But the HNC refused to negotiate until all of the following pre-conditions (i.e., demands) had been satisfied:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My essay for [October 2016](#) chronicled the failure of the United Nations to do something about Syria: a veto by Russia in the U.N. Security Council on 8 October, a unilateral Russian/Assad ceasefire in Aleppo on 20-22 October that was *not* reciprocated by insurgents, and on 20 October the U.N. Secretary General requested the U.N. General Assembly pass a resolution on Syria (but the General Assembly apparently ignored the request until 9 December).

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

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

negotiations with Assad and the insurgents.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My essay for [July 2017](#) mentions negotiations in Astana and Geneva during July. Both meetings failed to accomplish anything. Reuters suggested that de Mistura is scheduling Geneva meetings infrequently (i.e., once every two months) and for short durations (i.e., only 4 or 5 days): "simply a way of keeping an avenue for peace talks open in case of an unexpected breakthrough". The infrequent, short meetings allow de Mistura to assess the willingness of the parties to genuinely negotiate.

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.

My essay for [October-December 2017](#) mentions negotiations in Geneva, which failed to accomplish anything. 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. In October 2017,

Russia moved to fill the void created by the failure of the Geneva negotiations, when Russia announced it would sponsor a "Syrian People's Congress" in Sochi.

U.N. Negotiations in Geneva

Need Concrete Results

More than two years 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 July 2018, there have been *no* concrete results from any of the negotiations in Geneva since January 2016. But de Mistura was correct in 2016 to call for concrete results.

Planning for U.N. Negotiations in Geneva

On 17 January 2018, de Mistura sent invitations to Assad's government and the opposition to meet in Vienna on 25-26 January, before the Russian meeting in Sochi on 29-30 January. De Mistura's meeting will be in Vienna, because Switzerland is overwhelmed by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. De Mistura announced the agenda in Vienna would

be to discuss a new constitution for Syria. [U.N. Geneva](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). I wonder if this little two-day meeting is a final opportunity to see if the barbarians from Syria will negotiate.

On 24 January, de Mistura said before the talks in Vienna began: “It is a very, very critical moment.” [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#).

25 Jan 2018: Day Nr. 67

On 25 January, [Reuters](#) reported that de Mistura met separately with Assad's delegation and the opposition delegation. No results were mentioned. The Associated Press did *not* report on the first day of the meeting in Vienna.

26 Jan 2018: Day Nr. 68

On 26 January, [Reuters](#) reported *no* results from the negotiations in Vienna. Reuters quoted an opposition spokesman: “This whole round in Vienna was supposed to be a crucial one, a test for commitment. And we didn’t see this commitment. And the U.N. didn’t see this commitment.” The Associated Press did *not* report on the second day of the meeting in Vienna.

Although *not* on De Mistura's agenda for the Vienna negotiations, the opposition and Assad's delegation reached an agreement about a ceasefire in Eastern Ghouta. [Al-Arabiya](#).

On the evening of 26 January, De Mistura issued a statement to journalists:

In Vienna on 25 and 26 January 2018 I engaged in consultations in a special round 9 meeting with the delegations of the Government of Syria and the Syrian Negotiations Commission within the framework of the UN-facilitated political process on Syria.

In accordance with the invitation, I focused on the constitutional basket of the agenda of the intra-Syrian talks towards the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), and bearing in mind the parameters and observations laid out in my briefing to the Security Council on 19 December 2017.

While in Vienna, I also took the opportunity to consult delegations of a number of countries. The Secretary-General also followed the deliberations closely and held high-level consultations.

I recalled that the objective of the political process is the full and complete implementation of resolution 2254 negotiated in the Geneva intra-Syrian talks process under the auspices of the United Nations as mandated by the Security Council. All reaffirmed their commitment to respecting my mandate in that regard and to the Geneva political process facilitated by the United Nations.

Recalling that the only sustainable solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the

Syrian people, and also bearing in mind that the schedule and process for drafting of new constitution is to be set in the Geneva process in accordance with resolution 2254, I assess that it is understood that any Constitutional Committee would at the very least comprise Government, Opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks, Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women; that care would be taken to ensure adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components; and that final agreement is to be reached in the UN-led Geneva process on the mandate and terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, and selection criteria for the composition of a Constitutional Committee.

I was briefed on preparations for the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi on 29 and 30 January. I took note of the statement by the Russian Federation that the outcome of the Congress would be brought to Geneva as a contribution to the intra-Syrian talks process under the auspices of the United Nations in accordance with resolution 2254. I will fully brief the Secretary-General on the outcome of the Vienna meeting — it is up to him to decide what will be the response of the United Nations to the invitation to go to Sochi.

I will continue to discharge my exclusive mandate to convene formal negotiations and facilitate a Syrian-led political process to bring about the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué and resolution 2254, and I affirm the four baskets of the agenda and the particular focus to be paid to baskets 2 and 3.

I recall that a secure, calm and neutral environment is needed and that the ultimate goal of a constitutional process is to enable the Syrian people to freely and independently determine their own future in UN-supervised parliamentary and presidential elections meeting the requirements laid out in resolution 2254.

I am gravely concerned at the situation on the ground in all its dimensions — political, security, humanitarian and human rights. It is vital to end all violence and restore full respect for Syria sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence and for the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people through a Syrian-led and owned process facilitated by the UN. I particularly call for unhindered humanitarian access and progress on detainees, abductees, and missing persons.

I share the immense frustration of millions of Syrians, inside and outside the country, at the lack of a political settlement to date. I hope that the forthcoming Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi will contribute to a revived and credible intra-Syrian talks process under the United Nations in Geneva in accordance with resolution 2254, which I intend to reconvene in the near future.

Ultimately, what is required is political will. It is high time that diplomacy, dialogue and negotiation prevail for the interest of all Syrians.

As I said the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, has been briefed and will be briefed on the outcome of these Vienna discussions. Then it will be up to him to take the decision on the UN response to the invitation to attend Sochi.

Staffan de Mistura, "Note to Correspondents: Statement of Special Envoy for Syria Staffan

de Mistura at the conclusion of the special round 9 meeting of the UN-convened intra-Syrian talks in Vienna," [U.N.](#), 26 Jan 2018.

Notice that de Mistura does *not* say what happened during round 9 of his negotiations in Vienna. From the terse reports by journalists, I assume that the negotiations in Vienna were a complete failure. De Mistura is focused on Sochi, which is essentially a Russian effort to intrude on de Mistura's turf of being the convenor of the only Syrian negotiations that are authorized by the United Nations. De Mistura emphasizes: "I will continue to discharge my exclusive mandate to convene formal negotiations and facilitate a Syrian-led political process to bring about the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué and resolution 2254.... I share the immense frustration of millions of Syrians, inside and outside the country, at the lack of a political settlement to date." Note also that de Mistura declares he will reconvene his negotiations in Geneva "in the near future." So, de Mistura refuses to abandon his negotiations in Geneva, despite a series of nine failures during the past 25 months.

On Saturday morning, 27 January, the U.N. Secretary General appointed de Mistura to represent the U.N. in Sochi.

The Secretary-General, having been fully briefed by his Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and taking into account the statement by the Russian Federation that the outcome of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue, which will be held in Sochi on 29-30 January 2018, would be brought to Geneva as a contribution to the intra-Syrian talks process under the auspices of the United Nations in accordance with resolution 2254, has decided to accept the invitation of the Russian Federation to send a representative to attend the Sochi Congress. The Secretary-General has designated Mr. de Mistura for that purpose.

The Secretary-General is confident that the Congress in Sochi will be an important contribution to a revived intra-Syrian talks process under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva, based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué (2012) and Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

Stéphane Dujarric, "Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Syria," [U.N.](#), 27 Jan 2018.

My comment is that in three days, we will see whether the Russians can achieve results in Sochi, where de Mistura has failed in Geneva. To be clear, it is *not* de Mistura's fault that the barbarians from Syria have failed to achieve any results after 25 months of futile negotiations in Geneva.

Russia seizes initiative: Syrian Congress on National Dialogue

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. But the November conference was postponed until January. Later, the conference in Sochi was called the "Syrian Congress on National Dialogue".

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). In December 2017, Assad's government also obstructed the Geneva negotiations. 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.

On 22 December 2017, Russia announced during the Astana meeting that the first Syrian Congress of National Dialogue will be held in Sochi during 29-30 Jan 2018.

On 22 January 2018, Russia, Turkey, and Iran agreed on a list of 1600 Syrians to invite to Sochi. [Hurriyet](#) in Turkey; [Tasnim](#) in Iran; [Arab News](#). My comment is that it will be impossible to find a consensus amongst 1600 Syrians. Assume the Sochi meeting is for eight hours, then each delegate would have an average of 18 seconds to speak — inviting too many delegates shows the Russian publicity stunt is *not* a democratic discussion. Russia probably intends to impose a constitution on the disorganized Syrians.

On 23 January 2018, journalists reported on a Russian draft agenda for Sochi. The Russian draft agenda calls for the creation of three committees: (1) a presidential committee, (2) a constitutional reforms committee, and (3) a committee on elections and voter registration. The draft also specifies that de Mistura's list of 12 principles is the basis for the new constitution. [Asharq Al-Awsat](#); [The National](#) in UAE.

On the night of 26 January 2018, [Reuters](#) and [Al-Arabiya](#) reported that the opposition at the U.N.-sponsored negotiations convened by de Mistura decided *not* to attend the conference in Sochi. My comment is that the absence of the HNC will make it easier for Russia to impose an agreement that is favorable to Assad's regime. However, the boycott by the HNC means that the HNC has *no* influence on what happens in Sochi. Also, if results from Sochi are brought to the U.N.-sponsored negotiations in Geneva, then it is predictable that the HNC will want to re-negotiate what was already decided in Sochi.

On the morning of 27 January, the United Nations Secretary General appointed de Mistura to attend the Sochi conference.

On 27 January, [Reuters](#) reported that Russia had prepared a draft communiqué for the Syrians to issue at the end of the Sochi conference. Part of the draft communiqué says “The Syrian people independently determine the future of its country democratically by way of the vote.” This is *not* new: a vote is required in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 and again in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254 of December 2015.

29 Jan 2018 in Sochi

On the morning of Monday, 29 January, [TASS](#) reported: "The bulk of the delegates to the Syrian National Dialogue Congress scheduled for January 30 will arrive in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi on Monday [29 Jan]. According to the forum's organizers, the first delegates from among internal opposition members from Damascus have already arrived in Sochi." TASS reports the *new* start date for the conference. The conference was originally

scheduled to *begin* on Monday, 29 January. Looking at late arrivals to de Mistura's negotiations in Geneva, it seems to be a Syrian tradition to arrive a day late.

On Monday morning, Russia announced that de Mistura would chair the new constitutional commission to be formed in Sochi. [Reuters](#).

The [Associated Press](#) reported: "Russia, a key ally of President Bashar Assad, says it invited 1,600 representatives to the Syrian Congress of National Dialogue, but so far only the government and opposition representatives tolerated by it have shown up. The main Syrian opposition body has boycotted the talks. The main Syrian Kurdish militia, which is fighting in Afrin and controls some 25 percent of Syrian territory, has also declined to attend, saying it holds Russia responsible for the Turkish offensive."

On 30 January, it became clear that what was planned as a two-day conference beginning on 29 January had been changed at the last minute to a one-day conference beginning on 30 January. There was *no* explanation for the change in start date.

30 Jan 2018 in Sochi

At 07:51 GMT (10:51 Sochi time) on 30 January, [Reuters](#) reported: "A Syrian peace conference in Russia got off to a rocky start on Tuesday [30 Jan] after some delegates opposed to President Bashar al-Assad refused to leave the airport on arrival, saying they were offended by the presence of the Syrian state's flag and emblem."

At 09:57 GMT (12:57 Sochi time) on 30 January, [Reuters](#) reported: "Some delegates at a Syrian peace congress in [Sochi] Russia stood up and heckled Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov during a speech he was making on Tuesday, accusing Moscow of killing civilians in Syria with its air strikes, a Reuters witness said."

Later, Reuters explained:

But in a blow to Moscow, which has cast itself as a Middle East peace broker, the event has been boycotted by the leadership of the Syrian opposition, while powers such as the United States, Britain and France are not there because of what they say is the Syrian government's refusal to properly engage [in U.N.-sponsored negotiations in Geneva].

....

In another setback, one group of delegates, which included members of the armed opposition who had flown in from Turkey, refused to leave Sochi airport until Syrian government flags and emblems were removed.

"We will go back to Turkey," Ahmad al-Burri, who has taken part in Syrian peace talks in Kazakhstan, told Reuters by phone.

"Whatever happens we will not enter Sochi. We informed them (the Russians) of our conditions that they should remove all the logos and flags representing the Syrian

government.”

Mohammed Adnan, a journalist and member of the Syrian opposition based in Turkey, said there were about 70 people in the group at the airport and that they were waiting for a plane to take them back to Ankara.

Artyom Kozhin, a senior diplomat at the Russian Foreign Ministry, said the start of the congress had been delayed because the organisers had been waiting for many of the delegates and observers to arrive.

....

Lavrov had spoken by phone twice to his Turkish counterpart and been told that the problem would be resolved, said Kozhin.

Russian officials have complained of attempts to sabotage the conference, which was originally billed as a two-day event but was reduced to a one-day event at the last minute.

Kinda Makieh & Maria Tsvetkova, "Rocky start for Syria talks in Russia as some delegates refuse to leave airport," [Reuters](#), 10:44 GMT, 30 Jan 2018.

At 16:34 GMT, the previously cited Reuters article was updated to include another failure at the Sochi conference: "... organisers had later been forced to suspend a plenary session due to squabbling among delegates over who would be chosen to preside over the congress."

The National newspaper in the UAE reported:

Russian-led Syrian talks got off to a chaotic start on Tuesday [30 Jan] following a two-hour delay and boycotts by opposition groups.

....

But the congress, which runs parallel to UN sponsored talks, had a muddled inception after 80 delegates opposing the Syrian regime refused to leave the airport on arrival from Turkey late on Monday.

....

The morning took another shaky turn after reports emerged of a dispute between UN envoy Staffan de Mistura and Russian officials.

Mina Aldroubi, "Sochi meeting struggles to find peace for Syria," [The National](#), 20:18 UAE time (16:18 GMT), 30 Jan 2018.

After the end of the Sochi conference, Reuters reported:

“We don’t need a new process, we don’t need any competitive process,” U.N. Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura, who attended the Sochi conference, told reporters in New York by phone on Monday [29 Jan].

He said the constitutional committee agreed in Sochi “will become a reality in

Geneva,” where most of the U.N.-led Syria peace talks have been held. De Mistura also said he would decide the criteria for committee members and select about 50 people — from government, opposition and independent groups.

Kinda Makieh & Maria Tsvetkova, "Rocky Syria talks in Russia end, ignore key opposition demands," [Reuters](#), 21:44 GMT (24:44 Sochi time), 30 Jan 2018.

The Associated Press reported:

A Russia-hosted Syrian peace conference ended Tuesday with a plan to draft a new constitution as part of efforts to end the nearly seven-year civil war, but key opposition and rebel groups boycotted the gathering and it remained unclear if they would join the process.

....

Lavrov said the conference participants agreed to form a constitutional committee that will be based in Geneva. He said that the delegates proposed some of the committee's members and that groups absent from the Sochi talks will be invited to name representatives.

....

Alexander Lavrentyev, Russian President Vladimir Putin's envoy for Syria, said 1,393 delegates attended the congress.

....

De Mistura said he will come up with the criteria for participants and choose a maximum of 45-50 members for the committee.

Russia, Iran and Turkey have each submitted 50 names already, but he said there will definitely be “very substantial participation” from the opposition that skipped Sochi along with government, other opposition and independent representatives.

Nataliya Vasilyeva & Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia's Syria talks end with plan to draft new constitution," [Associated Press](#), about 24:00 GMT, 30 Jan 2018.

My comment is that the arrival of Syrian delegates on the day of the conference shows that the Syrians are so stupid they can not properly schedule airplane flights and hotel reservations — they should have arrived in Sochi the day before the conference began. As for being offended by Syrian flags, maybe the Sochi airport should have posted a banner in Arabic reading "Welcome Syrian barbarians and war criminals. Try to behave yourself in our city." The change from a two-day conference to a one-day conference, as well as the late arrivals to the one-day conference, shows the Sochi conference is *not* meeting promises by Russia. I think the Russians learned that managing the Syrian opposition is like herding cats.

Sochi Communiqué

The Russian Foreign Ministry posted an English-language communiqué:

We, the delegates of the Congress of the Syrian national dialogue, representing all segments of Syrian society, its political and civil powers, ethnic, confessional and social groups, have assembled at the invitation of the friendly Russian Federation, in the city of Sochi, with the intention to put an end to seven years suffering of our people, through the achievement of a common understanding of the necessity for the salvation of our homeland from armed confrontation, social and economic ruin, the restoration of its dignity on the regional and world stage, the provision of fundamental rights and liberties for all its citizens, and most importantly, the right to a peaceful and free life without violence and terror. The only way to achieve this particular goal is the political settlement of the problems of our homeland on the basis of the following principles:

1. Respect of and full commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity of the [Syrian Arab Republic / state of Syria] as a land and a people. In this regard no part of the national territory shall be ceded. The people of Syria remain committed to the recovery of the occupied Syrian Golan by all lawful means in accordance with the UN Charter and international law;
2. Respect of and full commitment to Syria's national sovereign equality and rights regarding non- intervention. Syria shall take its full role in the international community and the region, including as part of the Arab world, in conformity with the UN Charter, and its purposes and principles;
3. The Syrian people alone shall determine the future of their country by democratic means, through the ballot box, and shall have the exclusive right to choose their own political, economic and social system without external pressure or interference, in line with Syria's international rights and obligations;
4. The [Syrian Arab Republic / state of Syria] shall be a democratic and non-sectarian state based on political pluralism and equal citizenship irrespective of religion, ethnicity and gender, with full respect for and protection of the rule of law, the separation of powers, judicial independence, the full equality of all citizens, the cultural diversity of the Syrian society, and public freedoms, including freedom of belief, featuring transparent, inclusive, accountable and answerable governance, including before the national law, with necessary effective measures to combat crime, corruption and mismanagement;
5. A state committed to national unity, social peace, and comprehensive and balanced development with fair representation in local administration;
6. Continuity and improved performance of state and public institutions, with reforms where necessary, including the protection of public infrastructure and property rights and provision of public services to all citizens without discrimination, in accordance with the highest standards of good governance and gender equality. Citizens shall benefit from effective mechanisms in their relations with all public authorities in such a way as to ensure full compliance with the rule of law and human rights and private and public property rights;

7. A strong, unified, meritocratic and national army that carries out its duties in accordance with the constitution and the highest standards. Its functions are to protect the national boundaries and the people from external threats and terrorism, with intelligence and security institutions to maintain national security subject to the rule of law, acting according to the constitution and the law and respecting human rights. The use of force shall be the exclusive prerogative of competent state institutions;
8. Unqualified rejection of — and active commitment to combat — terrorism, fanaticism, extremism and sectarianism in all its forms and to tackle conditions conducive to their spread;
9. Respect and protection of human rights and public freedoms, especially in times of crisis, including non-discrimination and equal rights and opportunities for all without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, cultural or linguistic identity, gender or any other distinction, with effective mechanism for their protection, which give due regard to the political and equal rights and opportunities of women, including by the taking of active measures to ensure representation and participation in institutions and decision-making structures, with mechanisms aimed to achieve a level of representation of at least 30% for women, and the goal of parity;
10. A high value placed on Syria's society and national identity, its history of diversity and the contributions and values that all religions, civilizations and traditions have brought to Syria, including the coexistence among its various components, along with the protection of the national cultural heritage of the nation and its diverse cultures;
11. Combatting and eliminating poverty and providing support for the elderly and other vulnerable groups, including persons with special needs, orphans and victims of war, which shall include ensuring the safety and refuge of all displaced persons and refugees, as well as protecting their right to voluntary and safe return to their homes and lands;
12. Preservation and protection of national heritage and the natural environment for future generations in accordance with environmental treaties and the UNESCO declaration concerning the intentional destruction of cultural heritage.

We, the representatives of the proud people of Syria, having lived through terrible misery and having found enough strength to fight against international terrorism, herewith declare our determination to restore the well-being and prosperity of our homeland and to make life decent and comfortable for each and every one of us.

To that end we agreed to form a constitutional committee comprising the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation along with wide-represented opposition delegation for drafting of a constitutional reform as a contribution to the political settlement under the UN auspices in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2254.

The Constitutional Committee would at the very least comprise Government, Opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks, Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women. Care would be taken to ensure adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components. Final agreement is to be reached in the UN-led Geneva process on the mandate and terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, and selection criteria for the composition of the Constitutional Committee.

We appeal to the United Nations Secretary-General to assign the Special Envoy for Syria for the assistance of the Constitutional Committee work in Geneva.

"Final statement of the Congress of the Syrian national dialogue, Sochi, January 30, 2018," [Russia](#), 22:42 Moscow time (19:42 GMT), 30 Jan 2018.

On 14 February, Russia submitted the Sochi Statement as United Nations Security Council document [S/2018/121](#).

The 12 points are probably copied from de Mistura's November 2017 list of 12 points in common ("living essential principles") between Assad's government and the opposition. I say probably, because de Mistura's list was *not* made public. But see my essay for [March 2016](#) that quotes de Mistura's earlier list of 12 Points of Commonalities.

My comment is that de Mistura seems to have wrested the new Syrian constitution away from Russia and put it in his U.N.-sponsored negotiations in Geneva, where the drafting of a new constitution always belonged. Now de Mistura has two difficult tasks. First, the HNC — who caused de Mistura's negotiations in Geneva to fail during 2016-17 and who boycotted Sochi — will want a large number of delegates to the constitutional convention. Second, Assad continues to oppose negotiations in Geneva. Somehow de Mistura must select delegates to a constitutional convention who will actually work, and he must convince Assad to negotiate.

End of Sochi Conference

De Mistura addressed the conclusion of the Sochi conference. Here is part of what he said:

I am aware that there were intense discussions in this room today and you are proving it. This is normal in a democratic environment, it is totally normal.

I have taken, on behalf of the UN and the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, due note and careful note that in your Final Declaration today you have embraced 12 principles developed in the Geneva political process, which describe a vision of Syria that all Syrians should be able to share.

I also take note that those of you who are here agree that a constitutional committee is to be formed comprising the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation along with a wide-represented opposition delegation for drafting a constitutional reform, and that your agreement is intended as a contribution — thank you again — to the political settlement under UN auspices in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254.

You did work hard today. You concluded that a Constitutional Committee should at the very least comprise the Government, Opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women — and women. You have also concluded that care would be taken to ensure adequate representation of Syria's ethnical and religious leaders — and we have seen many here today.

....

And I will be indicating as soon as possible — because Syria cannot wait — how I intend to proceed on my mandated task under resolution 2254. Which means in practice setting in Geneva a schedule and process for constitution drafting. This way a Constitutional Committee can really and concretely be established and begin to work. That's what you want, I know.

....

Let me recall that all Syrians seek a safe, calm and neutral environment for a constitutional drafting to unfold. And last but not least, all Syrians need a sustained ceasefire, full humanitarian access and the release detainees, abductees and missing people.

"Note to correspondents from Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy for Syria from Sochi," [U.N.](#), 30 Jan 2018.

While "intense discussions" are "normal in a democratic environment", only in a dysfunctional place do delegates arrive late, interrupt the speaker, and then adopt the communiqué prepared more than one week in advance by the host.

De Mistura was being polite when he said "you did work hard today". The [New York Times](#) reported: "... the schedule was almost evenly split between talks and meals." The results of the Sochi conference were determined by Russia at least one week in advance. If there were a diverse group of delegates at the Sochi conference, it is because Russia invited them.

On 7 February 2018, Neil Hauer, writing in the [Middle East Eye](#), said Russia's failure in Sochi means more military action by Assad and Russia in Syria. He also noted: "... the common wisdom today is that Geneva [negotiations] largely continues to exist as the political costs of outright halting the talks outweigh those of continuing them. ... the Geneva process is moribund, obsolete, and incapable of producing anything of note without substantial changes to its format or goals." Hauer cited a [Century Foundation report](#) in June 2017 that says continuing Geneva avoids "ceding the negotiating space to the rival, Astana negotiations track, over which Russia has presided."

On 13 February 2018, Assad's government rejected de Mistura's project to write a new constitution for Syria. [Reuters](#).

On 14 February, de Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council, in which he reported on the unraveling of the Astana ceasefire agreements. Note that de Mistura did *not* report any progress in the Geneva negotiations to develop a new constitution for Syria and arrange for elections in Syria.

Mr. President, Members of the Security Council,

1. I have come to New York to convey in person, I could have done it by video as we have done many times, to [convey to] the Security Council the Secretary-General's grave concern at the escalation of violence in Syria — and to urge you to focus on de-escalating that violence and on the political path forward for the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254.

2. We have seen a string of dangerous and worrying escalations, including inside the de-escalation zones established by the Astana guarantors and outside them. There has been a gradual return to back-and-forth competition over territory in Idlib and in Hama. We have seen heavy and sustained airstrikes across the northwest and in besieged Eastern Ghouta including today. *Civilians have been killed and injured on a horrific scale — reports suggest more than 1,000 civilian casualties in the first week of February alone — and strikes have continued to hit hospitals, schools and markets. There have been several allegations of chlorine attacks, in Ghouta, in Idlib, and also now recently in Afrin. While we cannot independently verify these allegations but if confirmed, it is outrageous and should be having no impunity. At least 320,000 people have been displaced due to fighting in Idlib in just two months — an area that is already hosting over 1.2 million IDPs. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham — which is basically al Nusra — is active in Idlib. Meanwhile, we have reports of heavy mortar shelling falling even across residential Damascus, wounding and killing civilians and damaging infrastructure, embassies and even close to the hotel where the UN is.

3. The conflict is also further spilling over Syria's borders in more than one direction and there have been increased military intervention from multiple sources. The last several weeks have seen a new cross-border conflict in Afrin with yet no clear end in sight. There are reports of exchanges of fire between Turkish and Syrian Government forces in Idlib, between the US-led Coalition and pro-Syrian Government forces in the Euphrates valley, with loss of life. We have seen a Russian aircraft shot down over northern Syria — with the loss of its own pilot. And now, over the last weekend, there have been Israeli reports of an Iranian drone entering Israeli airspace — those reports have been denied by Iran; Israeli jets striking targets inside Syria; an Israeli jet shot down by Syrian Government anti-aircraft fire; and what Israel calls large-scale strikes against the Syria Aerial Defence System and Iranian targets.

4. In short, we see developments that raise questions as to the sustainability even of the Astana de-escalation arrangements, in which we have a lot of hope and we still continue having hope, and threaten wider regional stability. I have been now four years as the Special Envoy. This is as violent and worrying and dangerous a moment as any that I have seen in my time of tenure so far. Therefore, I strongly reiterate the appeal of the Secretary-General to all concerned in Syria and the region and beyond to de-

escalate immediately and unconditionally, and urge all stakeholders, including the Astana guarantors, to use their influence to help reduce violence. I also urge continued attention to maintaining the Amman de-escalation arrangements in place in the south.

Mr. President,

5. Not only are Syrian civilians being killed and displaced in large numbers more than before — they are also being deprived of the humanitarian assistance they need.

6. There has not been a single UN humanitarian convoy to any besieged area since the 28th of November — two and a half months. Last week, together with Senior Adviser Jan Egeland, I warned the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group in Geneva of a collective failure to enable effective humanitarian action. I urged at that time the two co-chairs — the Russian Federation and the United States — as well as other States, to promote urgent actions to ensure immediate and unfettered humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas in particular. A series of urgent consultations are actually underway in Geneva while we are talking — so far, however, without concrete results except one convoy. We urgently need genuine de-escalation to protect civilians, evacuate the sick and the wounded, particularly children, and allow humanitarian aid to reach the 390,000 people in besieged areas and those who are also in the hard-to-reach areas. We just learned a few minutes ago — actually before coming here — that 7,200 people in besieged Nashabyeh received a partial delivery today, this morning. This is fine but let's think about it — that is less than two percent of the 390,000 people which have been and are still in the besieged areas. We need much more and much more sustained.

7. We must also never forget, because that's what people in Syria tell us, the need for concrete steps on the release of detainees and abductees, and for the disclosure at least of information regarding persons missing in Syria since March 2011. The UN will leave no stone unturned to press this issue, in accordance with resolution 2254. We also remind the Astana guarantors of their own commitment agreed last December to form a Working Group, and we urge them to move ahead on this important issue when they meet next.

Mr. President,

8. What we are seeing in Syria today not only imperils de-escalation arrangements and regional stability—it also undermines the efforts for a political solution. Yet we will not be deterred from pursuing the Geneva process, which is the only, the only sustainable path towards a political solution, and which is mandated by yourselves, by this Council.

9. You will recall that in December, when I briefed you, I laid out a number of parameters and observations regarding baskets 2 and 3 of the agenda of the political process, which mean the constitutional and electoral baskets. Then, on January 25 and 26, I convened a special round 9 meeting of the intra-Syrian Talks in Vienna focused specifically on the constitutional basket. After intensive consultations with the Syrian parties and key states, I made a statement regarding any constitutional committee to be

formed and stressed that final agreement on the composition, mandate and terms or reference of a constitutional committee would need to be reached in Geneva.

10. For its part, the Russian Federation, which had invited the Secretary-General also on behalf of Turkey and Iran to a Congress of National Dialogue in Sochi, affirmed that the outcome of Sochi would be brought to Geneva as a contribution to the UN-led intra-Syrian talks in accordance with resolution 2254. There were intensive consultations between the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Secretary-General and myself regarding such an understanding. I also maintained, on that occasion in Vienna and beyond, close consultations with a number of other states at that time.

11. Accordingly, the Secretary-General asked me to attend Sochi. The Congress took place over one day on 30 of January. I attended the opening address by Foreign Minister Lavrov, as did the senior representative of Turkey and Iran and others. Afterwards, all internationals left the gathering to enable the discussion to proceed among Syrians. Only Russian Presidential envoy Lavrentiev remained in the room as host to facilitate the debate — and he did so very effectively — alongside with senior Syrian figures and a presidium of Syrians. I was later officially informed by the hosts that the Final Statement had been adopted, and was made aware of its content — you can see it published on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Arabic, Russian and English as Foreign Minister Lavrov publicly confirmed yesterday after his meeting in Moscow with the Belgian Foreign Minister.

12. As Secretary-General has publicly noted, Final Statement embraced a vision of the future Syria for all Syrians — as reflected in the 12 living intra-Syrian essential principles that came out of the UN-led talks in Geneva in November last year. The Final Statement, which took place in Sochi, affirmed that a Constitutional Committee should be formed and stated that it should at the very least comprise of Government, Opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks — which means those which are facilitated by the UN in Geneva — Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women. The Final Statement noted that care should be taken to ensure adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components. And it made clear that final agreement on the mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, and selection criteria for the composition of the Constitutional Committee is to be reached in Geneva, and appealed for the UN, in Geneva, assistance in that regard.

13. Given this important Final Statement, I joined the closing of the Congress to welcome it and to affirm the UN's intention to proceed speedily accordingly, so as to assist in finalizing all aspects of a constitutional committee, thereby enabling its establishment in Geneva. And I noted to the Congress publicly as I note to you that the mandate given by this Council to the UN in Geneva is indeed to set, in the context of resolution 2254, a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution.

14. We've been assured by the Russian Federation that it will endeavour to ensure that the Government of Syria fully supports the official outcome of the Sochi Congress, at which many Syrian government officials were present. I also take note that the Syrian Negotiating Commission — that is the Opposition embracing all components

specifically mentioned by name in resolution 2254 — has issued a public statement by and large positive towards moving ahead on a constitutional committee under the auspices of the UN in Geneva.

Mr. President,

15. Since the Vienna and Sochi meetings, both of them important, I have been consulting intensively on the establishment of a constitutional committee. I have had initial discussions so far in Geneva with representatives of the Government of Syria, Syrian Negotiating Commission, and with a number of Governments. My team continues to be in touch with a wide array of Syrians — women and men. And I continue to look carefully at the candidates for a constitutional committee developed in Sochi and other relevant inputs.

16. I also continue to pursue the convening, naturally, of the further formal intra-Syrian talks and advancing on all the four baskets of the political process in Geneva in accordance with resolution 2254. I am particularly aware of the need to focus now more than ever on the establishment of a secure, calm, neutral environment if any constitutional process is to unfold — and if UN-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections pursuant to a new constitution as envisaged in resolution 2254 are to take place.

17. I am proceeding from here to Munich, God willing, where I will be consulting the Secretary-General and engaging a number of Ministers and other senior officials present for the Munich Security Conference.

18. Here is therefore Mr. President, the bottom line of my intervention: I intend to strike while the iron is hot and try to move the Geneva process ahead in consultation with all concerned. To do this, I need all the members of this Council, indeed the Council as a whole, and all who have influence on the Syrian parties, including the Astana guarantors and others, to push hard on three main points:

- First: to work urgently for de-escalation, civilian protection, and humanitarian access;
- Second: to support the UN in Geneva to give effect in Geneva to the Sochi Final Declaration within the framework of 2254;
- Third: to support the UN in convening the political process for the full implementation of 2254, in particular advancing real issues in the baskets to promote a safe, calm and neutral environment.

Mr. President,

The Syrian people and the United Nations need this Security Council's support now more than ever.

"Briefing to the UN Security Council by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), also at [U.N.](#), 14 February 2018.

Following the briefing, de Mistura held a press conference.

de Mistura: Thank you. This was an open session, so you I'm sure you have been

following it and you heard what was said. So basically, what I can say is that the Security Council was now in the private session, completely supportive of the role that the UN is expected to have in following up both on resolution 2254 and on the outcome of the declaration in Sochi for the facilitating the establishment of the constitutional committee in Geneva. I can't speak for the President [of the Council], but I can tell you what I told them when I thanked them for what I heard.

Second — now going back to the main points because there are some points that are more important than others — you must of heard how extremely worried everybody was about the military escalation in several areas of Syria, you heard that and frankly that was repeated. And it was also particularly evident due to a clear danger of regional spillovers which can have unpredictable consequences; that is a major concern. And then the consequence of lack of humanitarian access, and you heard that too and it was reiterated again at level of Security Council. And the fact that as I said in four years this is probably one of the most potentially dangerous moments I've seen in the conflict.

On the political process, I explained the outcome of the recent Sochi conference, which has a final declaration — only one, there is only one final declaration and the Russian Federation very wisely and very effectively today distributed to the Security Council; and that one speaks very clearly on what is the UN role and what are the expectations of a UN role. We will be working on that basis and working hard with a role of facilitating, in a most creative possible way, what is required for a UN-facilitated, but Syrian-led, constitutional process. There is no country in the world where the constitution be written by foreigners, we all agree on that. But in view of the major differences which exist among the Syrians, there is no surprise that 2254 — that is the only mandate I have — but also Sochi have indicated the need for the UN to facilitate that in Geneva and that's what we plan to do. Over to you, I know you have a question.

QUESTION: Yes Special Envoy, we listened very carefully to what [Syrian] Ambassador Jafari said, that he seemed to say that it wasn't your role to choose the members of this constitutional committee. We've watched you do this hard work for four years going all over the world, but what we constantly see is the Syrian Government not being prepared to fully engage with your plans, isn't now time it's yet again they seem not to be engaging for you to call them out on their obstruction?

SdeM: Thank you, I'm a diplomat and I'm a facilitator, my job is not to call out anyone — it's actually to make sure that we move forward. And as I just said, we are working on the basis of a very clear Security Council mandate and basically on a very clear message I got from the Security Council today; and what is said in the final declaration is that we have a job to do with respect to the Syrian-led job to do in writing a new constitution, but we will implement what we've been asked to do.

....

QUESTION: Special Envoy, you didn't mention in your remarks the proposal for a 30-day humanitarian ceasefire, which is before the Council now in the form of a draft resolution, do you think such a ceasefire is feasible? Do you think Russia should

support that?

SdeM: First, I leave it to Russia to answer the second part, although in the meeting they were expressing themselves some concern regarding the lack of humanitarian action, but anyway I leave it to them. Regarding a ceasefire, for humanitarian access, as you know I have a very senior and very respectable colleague which is Mark Lowcock who has that file — that's why I didn't elaborate on that, my file is more on the political, but you're right everything is connected; having political talks in Geneva with humanitarian tragedy or escalation obviously is not a good proposition at all, we have done that, through that before. Bottom line what I think I would have said if I had more time to elaborate on that was, there is an urgent need for de-escalation which means ceasefire, specifically in order to allow convoys to reach the besieged and the hard-to-reach areas. Now thirty days, forty days, twenty days, I leave it to Mark Lowcock to indicate — but sustained and sustainable yes — it can't just be one day.

QUESTION: I would like to read to you a few words from the speech of Ambassador Bashar Jaafari, he is arguing that the people, the Syrian people in Sochi conference did not give Mr. de Mistura, Special Envoy to Syria, any authorization for mandate to (inaudible) the constitution of the, constitutional committee and that we in Syria are committed to what the people have voted for in that conference and we are not concerned with any, with any committee being formed by a foreign body — meaning the UN in this case. He's arguing that you don't have the mandate from the conference in Sochi and hence they're not concerned. If the chief negotiator of the Syrian Government is not concerned with what your efforts are going to be, how do you aim, how you going to create success?

SdeM: First of all you were — he was referring and you are referring to the Sochi declaration — correct? Good. Let me read it to you. The Sochi declaration says that the constitutional committee would at the very least comprise government, opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks (the opposition we convene in Geneva), experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women. Care would be taken to ensure adequate representation of Syria ethnic and religious components — OK? Final agreement is to be reached in the UN-led, UN-led Geneva process on the mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, selection criteria for the composition of the constitutional committee. And the Sochi declaration, which is the one Ambassador Jaafari was referring to says, we appeal to the UN Secretary-General to assign the Special Envoy for Syria for the assistance — facilitation — of the constitutional committee work in Geneva. That's what I will be doing.

QUESTION: But Mr. de Mistura, you must agree that if the chief negotiator does not recognize all what you have just read now and he is not concerned with the committee that you gonna form under (inaudible) supervision that doesn't overwhelm to the success of your mission Sir?

SdeM: My mission is not an easy one. Thank you.

"Press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, following the UN Security Council briefing," [U.N. Geneva](#), 14 February 2018.

De Mistura said "my job is not to call out anyone". But when a member is obstructing negotiations, the job of the chairman or facilitator is to stop the obstruction. Otherwise, the obstruction will prevent progress and make the meeting futile, as we have seen during the past two years in Geneva.

The urgent proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Syria was adopted by the Security Council on 24 February, ten days after this meeting. The delay was caused by Russia.

Syrian Ambassador Bashar Jaafari misrepresented what the Sochi communiqué said. De Mistura *does* have a mandate to choose the members, make rules of procedure, etc.

Round 8 of the Geneva negotiations ended on 14 December 2017. Round 9 of the Geneva negotiations occupied a mere two days in January 2018. There was *no* meeting in Geneva during February 2018. There is no indication when the next meeting in Geneva will be held. In February 2018, I have the impression that that Geneva process is essentially dead, as a consequence of Assad's government and the opposition refusing to negotiate.

16 March 2018: Briefing U.N. Security Council

On 16 March, de Mistura again briefed the United Nations Security Council.

Mr President and Dear Karel,

1. I am joining you by VTC from Brussels because I had very minor eye surgery on my right eye which had been affected in many missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, and it was useful to do so. The only consequence of it was that I am not allowed to fly until Sunday. My apologies for doing it from Brussels, that is why I am here with VTC. The good thing is that I have two eyes and I can speak and work. That is why we have been constantly, round-the-clock, in spite of this minor local surgery, in touch with the Secretary-General and my colleagues in the field and with all those with influence, because of the events (some of which are very worrisome) that have been taking place in the last few days.

2. On 7 March, I briefed you in consultations on the status of the implementation of resolution 2401. At the time, I said that there had not been a sustained ceasefire and there had not been enough humanitarian access at that stage. On 12 March, the Secretary-General himself orally reported to this Council on the implementation of resolution 2401, including UN efforts to create those conditions by using its own good offices and his own teams, including ourselves. The Secretary-General also underscored that it is incumbent on the parties and all those with influence — in this Council, in Astana, in the broader ISSG — to act on the resolution, throughout Syria, without delay.

3. Let me update, with your permission, on where we stand on these matters, since the Secretary-General made a comprehensive report — and on the very day after the sad anniversary of the beginning of this conflict. We are entering the eighth year. In everything we are doing in this horrific conflict, our compass, and I know you feel the same, has been, is and should be the Syrian people, wherever they are, who are telling us they are fed up with this conflict and the way civilians are being affected in the

cross-fighting. So whatever we do these days and whatever we suggest, including our current facilitation role, is constantly framed by the urgent need of the ordinary civilians — women, children and men.

4. Further meetings have taken place between the Russian Federation and Jaish al-Islam, in the last few days, on the outskirts of Douma — the northernmost of the three opposition-controlled enclaves in Eastern Ghouta. As a result of this engagement, a tenuous, fragile ceasefire between the Government, the Russian military and Jaish al-Islam forces has continued to largely hold, for 6 days now, and we hope it will continue so, notwithstanding engagement between government forces and Jaish al-Islam in other areas outside of Douma, such as the village of Reihan. The ceasefire was effective and implemented with Jaish al-Islam in Douma, but not beyond that. But this is only one part of Eastern Ghouta. It is not being replicated in the rest of Eastern Ghouta or elsewhere and it is extremely fragile. As we are talking, I understand, at this very moment, some delicate meetings are taking place regarding the follow-up to this arrangement regarding Douma. Let us hope that this ceasefire holds, because it is at least one good news among very bad news.

5. The UN has been proactively offering its own good offices, but efforts to facilitate meaningful contacts between the Russian Federation and Failaq al-Rahman or Ahrar al-Sham have not yet produced results. These are the dominant forces in the two other enclaves of Eastern Ghouta, in Harasta and around Kafr Batna/Ain Terma/Irbid/Zamalka/Jobar respectively. In those two other areas we have not seen any ceasefire to speak of. Rather, we have seen Government forces and their allies pursue a concerted escalation against these two enclaves, with rapid ground offensives, accompanied by shelling and airstrikes. Reports are just coming in a public market in Kafr Batna having been hit — we need to verify this of course because they are fresh reports — with numerous civilian casualties. And we have also seen continuous outgoing shelling from these areas of Eastern Ghouta inside civilian areas of Damascus. We are also hearing from people inside Eastern Ghouta asking the UN, this Council, and members states with influence to pressure AOGs to let civilians to leave and to pressure all parties for a ceasefire and protection for those who do not want to leave and want to stay. The bottom line is too many civilians are suffering, too many have died in that area.

6. But let me first say: it need not be this way. Negotiations in Douma in the last few days do show that there is a way to create the conditions to advance the implementation of your resolution 2401. The UN therefore stands ready to offer its own good offices, as we have done so far, to all parties, to facilitate further engagement of this kind, so as to make a concrete contribution to the realisation of resolution 2401, in all areas of Eastern Ghouta. What the UN is not ready is to facilitate ultimatums from any side to the other one. Rather, what the UN is ready to, is facilitate discussion, facilitate ceasefire, facilitate evacuations.

7. Meanwhile, violence has escalated across many other parts of Syria, where there is no ceasefire to speak of. In Afrin, Turkish Government forces and their armed allies continue to take ground rapidly. We have also received reports of shelling on besieged Fouah and Kefraya, these two villages which have been for a long time besieged by

opposition. And there have been airstrikes in Idlib, a new armed opposition offensive in Hama, and clashes and airstrikes in Daraa in southern Syria. Well, if this is a de-escalation moment, you better try to convince me that this is exactly a de-escalation. All what we are seeing on the map looks actually the opposite: escalation. Let me re-emphasise: resolution 2401 cannot be applied piecemeal. It is not a menu à-la-carte. It applies to all non-Security Council-listed terrorist groups, across all of Syria. Let me also re-emphasise, and I quote from the Secretary-General, that: “even efforts to combat terrorist groups identified by this Council do not supersede these obligations” under international law.

8. On the humanitarian side, I am sure you will be having opportunity to hear a briefing from Mark Lowcock, but meanwhile, since I have this opportunity today, let me give some elements of information. On the humanitarian front, on 13 March, the UN observed the evacuation of 147 civilians (among them 10 critical medical cases), finally, mostly women and children from Douma to the Dweir collective shelter in Rural Damascus. On 15 March — and this was the outcome of discussions and meetings between Russian military and Jaish al-Islam, facilitated by the UN — United Nations colleagues also delivered a convoy of food assistance to Douma for 26,100 people in need. Additional medical cases were evacuated. These, let us be honest and admit it, positive efforts, which are long overdue, are welcome but they are still limited. These civilians need much, much more, including medical and health supplies, the restoration of water, commercial access and freedom of movement. You must have seen a report where Peter Maurer was meeting some of the people in Eastern Ghouta who were asking just water. Humanitarian colleagues who entered into these areas spoke of having seen hunger, dire want, poverty, haggard faces and despair all around, and even for experience people like my own and humanitarian colleagues it was an unsustainable situation, where people are, literally, at the tip of collapse. And that is in few kilometres, 20 minutes of drive from Damascus.

9. And let me be clear: this is only in Douma, an area where we have seen a few days of ceasefire and some positive movement on humanitarian access. Can you imagine elsewhere? In the other two enclaves of Eastern Ghouta, further south, we have seen no ceasefire to speak of and, to borrow the words of the Secretary General, people are still living in a “hell on earth”: scores killed and the injured unattended because health workers could not reach them due to relentless airstrikes. We have seen fresh allegations of the use of incendiary weapons in these areas, urban areas, and the targeting of medical facilities since 12 March, as well as fresh and disturbing allegation of chlorine use in the area; as the Secretary-General said, we cannot independently verify these allegations but we also cannot nor should ignore them. We have also received reports of thousands displaced — some moving further into Eastern Ghouta and many others exiting en masse, in large groups, — as a result of Syrian Government advances in Hammouriyeh and in Saqba. Evacuations not observed by the UN staff are also reported to have taken place, including from Misraba and other areas. The UN was not present to observe these evacuations so is unable to know the precise number.

10. We urge all parties that any evacuations must take place in accordance with the highest protection standards under international humanitarian and human rights law. Whether civilians choose to stay or leave, they must be protected against attack and

have access to the essentials to survive. Evacuations must be safe, voluntary and to a place of their choosing. The UN stands ready to provide assistance to people in need, both those who want to stay and those who want to leave.

11. We are also highly concerned at the situation for civilians across all of Syria. This means: those being displaced as well as the almost 3 million in besieged and hard-to-reach areas and those caught up in escalations in Idlib, Hama, Aleppo and Daraa. Resolution 2401 demands to “all parties to immediately lift the sieges of populated areas”. We have not seen this as you know.

12. The situation in Afrin is particularly worrying, according to my own colleagues: we have received reports of tens of thousands of people displaced within Afrin and to nearby Tal Refaat and surrounding villages, Nubul and Zahra and other areas of Aleppo governorate. The UN has also received reports of civilian casualties, some restrictions on movement for many of the large numbers of civilians seeking to leave the city of Afrin, with violence on the main exit road. I urge all parties to ensure that those civilians seeking to leave Afrin be given safe passage. Since 6 March, people in Afrin city have also reportedly suffered from severe water shortages again as the source of water to Afrin city has reportedly been damaged by fighting.

13. Allow me to add a point of particular importance, and this came out through recent report: Syrian women face specific threats, particularly in this moment of evacuation and end of a siege and of a battle, to their security in areas of conflict, including widespread sexual and gender based violence, which has been widely documented as well as voiced by women’s groups. Their protection and needs must be forefront in our own response.

14. On a separate humanitarian issue, Mr President: On 14 March, my technical team participated in the first session of the Working Group on detainees and missing people in Astana. We have pressed the Astana guarantors, on that occasion and before, to make progress on this crucial issue, which to us is one of the main reasons to attend Astana, because there is an issue which has been on the forefront of our concern, and we have offered to host a Standing Secretariat so that they can be keeping the detainees file moving between one meeting and other of the Working Group. The Guarantors so far simply agreed to consider our proposal about the Standing Secretariat in Geneva to follow up on detainee issue, but no final decision, even this time, was taken. We will intensify our contacts with them and the parties in order to accelerate the work of this important humanitarian issue. We should remind ourselves that the issue of detainees and missing people was first raised in Astana one year ago and sadly we are not seeing any concrete progress so far. We owe it to the Syrian families who have been waiting for too long to know the fate of their relatives on all sides.

Mr President, Members of the Security Council,

15. Even though the logic of war is clearly still prevailing, what we have just seen and said, and resolution 2401 is not being implemented as it must be — as the Secretary-General said — we refuse to lose hope to see Syria rising from the own ashes. Syrian people deserve to be helped. Syrian people are proud, they love their country. We need to help them go back to having a normal country. There too, it is with the people of

Syria in mind and their legitimate aspirations for the long-term shape of their own country that we continue our political efforts, in spite what we see on the ground, for a sustainable settlement of the conflict. And there too, the voice of women across Syria conveying their wish to play a meaningful role, like we are having with our own web of civil society, in the next stage of the political process must be heard.

16. My team and I have therefore continued to consult, in the context of the political process, widely and intensively on the formation of the constitutional committee in Geneva, in an effort to advance the full and complete implementation of resolution 2254, within the framework of the UN-facilitated political process in Geneva — and to this end seeking to leverage the momentum produced by the Sochi Final Declaration, which emphasized the fact we should have a constitutional committee in Geneva with an assistance of the UN. We take note of the statement of the Astana guarantors in their ministerial meeting today, in which they reaffirmed “the results of the Sochi Congress, especially to form the Constitutional Committee and to facilitate the beginning of its work in Geneva with the assistance of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Syria as soon as possible.”

17. However, I have to be frank, I must report that at this stage, which is more than two weeks after one month since the Sochi Congress, we have not yet received the complete inputs on the pool of candidates for a constitutional committee developed in Sochi, from the three guarantors. It is my intention, in close consultations with all concerned, to look carefully at this pool when we receive it and at others as required and consistent with resolution 2254 to facilitate the establishment of the constitutional committee. I must also report, once again, that there is still some serious homework to be done regarding the Syrian Government’s readiness to engage on implementing the Sochi Final Declaration and carrying forward a constitutional committee in Geneva. I have impressed this on the relevant guarantors repeatedly in recent weeks, just as I continue to make clear the readiness of the UN to engage the Government of Syria on this matter. We need them to be part of it. We need to have a comprehensive participation of all Syrian parties.

18. In the meantime, we have been proactive in offering creative suggestions as to how to expedite the formation of that constitutional committee. We continue to assess various options on how to advance discussions on all four baskets of the political process in Geneva. In particular, it is clear that there must be more serious talks with the Government, opposition and all Syrian and international stakeholders on what is required to establish a secure, calm, neutral environment, as per resolution 2254, in which a constitutional process and UN-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections pursuant to a new constitution could viably take place. We remained determined to engage everyone.

19. As I said in my last briefing a month ago [14 Feb], conflict is increasingly spilling even over Syria’s borders, or at least has the danger of doing so. This month we have further incidents of international potential and real confrontation within Syria, that we cannot independently verify but which concern us. This risk is precisely why we need urgent action on the political front. Syrians need to see some positive movement on the political process.

20. On Monday [19 Mar] I will be attending a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers here in Brussels — so I do not need to fly, and by Tuesday I should be allowed by doctors to take a flight which would bring me back to Geneva — at the invitation of High Representative Mogherini — and in the context of the preparatory efforts by the EU and the UN, in their own joint Ministerial Conference in Brussels at the end of April. I hope the Conference will provide a significant opportunity to further the international support to the Syrian people through humanitarian commitments. I also hope that the gathering of an important number of Foreign Ministers in Brussels in that occasion, will also represent a chance to reinvigorate the collective efforts by the international community towards a sustainable peace through the UN-led peace process in Geneva within the framework of resolution 2254 and other relevant resolutions.

21. Mr President, in conclusion, let me finishing by cautioning: we are witnessing developments of substantial gravity on the ground, we have to recognise, that demand action, and the world is worried and watching. I remain concerned that concrete matters that we have been trying to advance — resolution 2401, detainees and a constitutional committee — need to move faster and with more meaningful impact than has so far proven possible. And de-escalation needs to replace what we are watching at the moment — escalation. I will continue creatively and determinedly to seek to facilitate the overall political process. As the Secretary-General said on Monday, the ultimate goal is the Syrian people, and the ultimate goal is to “see a united, democratic Syria able to avoid fragmentation and sectarianism with its sovereignty and territorial integrity respected and to see a Syrian people able to freely decide their future and choose their political leadership.”

Thank you, Mr. President and members of the Council.

"Note to Correspondents: Briefing by Staffan De Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Syria, to the Security Council [As delivered]," [U.N.](#), 16 Mar 2018.

Most of de Mistura's briefing was about the failure of the Syrian ceasefire in U.N. Resolution 2401, the collapse of de-escalation agreements reached in Astana, and the failure to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria. The next negotiations in Geneva were not mentioned. (¶18) The last significant meeting in Geneva ended on 14 December 2017, three months ago. The Geneva negotiations appear moribund — two years of negotiations (2016-17) produced *no* concrete results. And there is no reasonable hope that the Geneva negotiations will produce results in the foreseeable future.

The Sochi conference was on 30 January 2018. 45 days later, the Astana guarantors (Russia, Turkey, Iran) still have *not* submitted a complete list of names for the membership of the Constitutional committee. Further, Assad's government is not yet ready to "engage" in the Constitutional committee. (See ¶17.)

De Mistura says "the world is worried and watching." (¶21) I suggest the world *no* longer cares about Syria. Worse, the leaders of Syria have failed the Syrian people: Assad is focused on winning the civil war and remaining in power, while the opposition is focused on acquiring power in a new Syrian government. The big problem in March 2018 is nuclear weapons and ICBMs in North Korea.

18 April 2018: Attempt to Restart Geneva Negotiations

On 18 April 2018, the United Nations Office in Geneva issued a press release, the first paragraph of which said:

Further to his meeting with the Secretary-General in Riyadh on 16 April 2018, and in view of the current tensions, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, is undertaking intensive high-level consultations with the aim of proactively ascertaining the options for a meaningful relaunch of the UN-facilitated political process as called for in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

"Statement on behalf of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 18 April 2018.

The U.N. Geneva press release then describes de Mistura's meetings with Arabs and Turks, and future meetings with Russians, Iranians, Europeans, and the U.S. Sometime after 25 April, de Mistura "will then brief the Secretary-General on the outcome of these consultations, and in due course brief the Security Council."

I have the image in my mind of de Mistura standing outside on a very cold winter morning. His car will not start, because the battery is dead, the condensed water in the gasoline line has frozen, and someone stole his spark plugs. "I am going to be proactive and meaningfully restart my car," says de Mistura. A neighbor says helpfully, "be sure and follow all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions."

Note that the Geneva negotiations are dead. The most recent negotiations were four months ago and nothing was accomplished. Assad does *not* want to negotiate. The opposition — who represents no one in Syria — *says* it now wants to negotiate, after the opposition stalled during 2016 and most of 2017.

24-25 April 2018: de Mistura in Brussels

On 24-25 April, de Mistura was in Brussels, at a conference of donors to Syria. Here is what he said at two press conferences:

Thank you Federica [Mogherini]. First of all, thank you to Belgium for organising this very useful and important occasion. Today, as Federica was saying, we are sending a message that the conference tomorrow is not only among countries — and many of them have a stake, and want to have a stake, in the future of Syria — but first listen to the people, talk to the people, listen to the Syrian people. They were sitting around the table together today, many of them did not agree with each other, in fact we noticed it, but they were able to sit around the table, that's exactly what we want at the political level, which has not yet happened [in Geneva].

Second point is that they were asking us, I am referring to the meeting today with the Civil Society — how can we be involved, more involved, and the answer we gave is, of course there is a road map called [Security Council resolution] 2254 but there are two specific areas, one is Constitutional Commission, or reform or change, and the

second one are UN-supervised elections. And Civil Society needs to be part of both of the Constitutional Commission — and we will make sure that happens, if finally the Government and the opposition, particularly, agree on doing it, and we insist on that. And in the elections, that's exactly the purpose of the UN-supervised elections, but they need a safe, neutral environment, people should not be kidnapped or killed when they try to be part of it. So that was one of the messages.

The other one is referring to the reality on the ground. We have seen in the last few weeks, days, we have seen it with our eyes, that military gains, territorial gains, and military escalation do not bring a political solution, have not brought any change on the political (level) — on the contrary, we have seen very difficult moment, because at the Security Council, and I can say that because we were attending a seminar the other day, what has been achieved by the Secretary-General is to lower the pressure, the temperature, which was getting to a very dangerous level of rhetoric and of discussions, lower it in order to be able to start talking again about a political solution. The truth is that everyone has their own political solution, and that is what we need to work on and it is time for high diplomacy on this.

Last point, we were concerned, our concern is on the humanitarian side: Idlib, because Idlib is the big new challenge. 2.5 million people, and you will not believe that all of them are terrorists, of course, they are women, children, civilians, and this is looming up there, so we hope that would be an occasion for also making sure that Idlib doesn't become the new Aleppo, the new eastern Ghouta because the dimensions are completely different.

And very last, while we are trying and pushing, together with everyone, in particular with the EU, who tomorrow is promoting this remarkably timely conference, that the humanitarian aspect of the Syrian people, while they are waiting for this famous political solution, would not be abandoned — because that's the danger too, while they are waiting for it, that suddenly the humanitarian aid is reduced. So that is basically today, tomorrow is going to be more political and more humanitarian, but today I felt good vibration from the Civil Society — they didn't fight, they didn't argue, they were making concrete proposals and they were not desperate, they didn't lose hope, so we cannot lose hope even if it is not a good moment.

....

Let me add to that because this is a very important point, there is a job that Astana's three countries are supposed to do, and they claim they want to do it, and that is de-escalation — we have seen recently the opposite, escalation. So it is right that we expect and ask them to do that job. Sochi had one job: to create the environment for the Constitutional Committee, they were supposed to deliver it to the UN, and that has not yet happened. Geneva and the UN is where all this should be used in order relaunch the political process based on what we discussed. That's why everyone has his job. Asking the UN to do a miracle, or the EU to do a miracle when big players are not doing their part, is asking for too much. So we are asking them to do their part.

"Transcript of Joint press conference by Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria, with Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and

Security Policy and Vice-President of the EC," [U.N. Geneva](#), 24 April 2018. Copy at [U.N.](#).

The Sochi conference was on 30 January. Three months later, Russia has still not delivered the list of names to de Mistura. In my opinion, that shows that Russia is *not* serious about negotiations, and the Sochi conference was only a Russian-propaganda stunt.

On 25 April, de Mistura held another press conference. Here is a small part of what he said:
Now I took advantage of this opportunity because it was the first one after this week of very serious tensions, to go through and analyze what are the current avenues, mechanisms, for political process. One is called Astana, and I indicated that the duty of Astana, the assignment given by themselves, three countries, to themselves was to de-escalate. They achieved that last year and they have been doing quite a lot of progress, but lately we have been seeing escalation, not de-escalation, and we have seen nothing happening on a very important file — for a year, waiting for Astana to deliver, which is the issue about prisoners, of detainees, of missing people. So Astana is in the danger, in my modest opinion, and I am not the only one, to become seeing its limits, unless they decide to work hard on de-escalation, again, and on detainees. So that is one, then you have got Sochi. Sochi was a very useful and very important effort, and it did produce a very good proposal, but the problem is that there was no follow-up to it. We have been waiting for the outcome of Sochi to come to Geneva but there has been no follow-up on it, so Sochi risks also to be considered having produced a stillborn unless there is a pro-activity in this famous Constitutional Commission.

That leads me to Geneva — well all this doesn't help Geneva. That's why I am waiting and holding the fort about new intra-Syrian talks because in the current atmosphere that would not lead to a genuine discussion between the Government and the opposition.

"Transcript of Joint Press Conference by Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria, with Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the EC and UN USG for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock," [U.N. Geneva](#), 25 April 2018. Copy at [U.N.](#).

April-May 2018: Low Profile for de Mistura

From 26 April through 31 May 2018, de Mistura maintained a low public profile. De Mistura did not brief the United Nations Security Council in April 2018. On 16 May, de Mistura briefed the Security Council, but a transcript of his remarks was posted at neither the Secretary General's webpage nor the U.N. Geneva webpage. The 16 May U.N. [press release](#) mentions nothing about the date of the next meeting of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, although de Mistura says he is working "to revive" those talks.

On 28 May 2018, de Mistura told [Reuters](#) that Assad's government had given him a list of name for the constitutional committee. Note that the list comes approximately four months after the Sochi conference. De Mistura will now select approximately 50 delegates for the constitutional committee.

14 June 2018: Statement by de Mistura

On 14 June 2018, de Mistura issued a statement reporting a tiny bit of progress toward a new constitution for Syria.

Good afternoon. I want to make a short statement today to bring you up to date. For the moment I will probably not take questions because there are many details that I would like to be able to elaborate on at a second opportunity [when you will be able to ask questions].

I am in a process, as you know, of consultations and the reason is that we are intensifying our efforts to facilitate the way forward on the Syrian political process as mandated by the Security Council and resolution 2254.

I have just returned from consultations in various countries, in particular in Turkey, Iran and Egypt; as you know I have been also before consulting many Arab leaders when I was at the Arab League Summit, with the Secretary-General. And then, I have been recently meeting senior US officials in Brussels; and I have been in telephone contacts with many others, in particular including obviously Russia and a number of European countries.

The Secretary-General, with whom I was in touch yesterday also, is closely following and supporting the consultations underway.

In the context of efforts to facilitate the establishment of a constitutional committee, as called for in the Sochi final declaration, there has been some movements and I would like to share them with you.

Recently, the Government of Syria officially conveyed to me, having also, I presume, discussed it with both Russia and Iran, a list of 50 names. I have conveyed to the Government of Syria my acknowledgement and welcomed this step. I have conveyed to Russia and Iran my appreciation for their work to encourage and help this movement. I look forward, therefore, to intensifying contacts with the Government of Syria, on this issue and other issues.

I have since had contacts with the opposition representatives and a number of countries. When I was in Turkey and in Egypt, I appreciated the support of those countries and their advice and counsel. And the same goes for a number of other countries. Serious work is, while we are talking, ongoing in order to prepare an opposition list, and I think there is a need for progress on that soon, and we may hear it soon.

As the Sochi Final Statement makes clear, besides government and opposition, it will be important that independents, civil society, experts, and women — and as you know we have been strongly recommending at least 30% of women — all find their place into this constitutional committee. We must have an inclusive process.

These elements must come together in a constitutional committee. And I believe, God

willing, that ultimately they can and will end up in a Syrian-owned — because that is the real purpose — Syrian-led, and UN-facilitated — that's our role — constitutional committee. The process will need the consent of the Syrians. My task is, therefore, one of facilitation. But I need the support, counsel and advice of many, and I am proceeding with a deliberate speed.

As announced yesterday, I have invited senior officials from Iran, Russia and Turkey to meet with me here at UN Headquarters in Geneva early next week — 18th, 19th. These were the co-sponsors of the Sochi congress that produced the Final Statement on a constitutional commission, and it was Sochi which called for it to be established with UN facilitation in Geneva. The Secretary-General asked me to be present in Sochi based on solid understandings. So, I want to discuss with Iran, Russia and Turkey some preliminary thinking — and hear their own views too — on how the Sochi Final Statement can be given effect to, and to seek their further guidance and support. I want to also very much hear the opinion of the Syrian government and of the opposition separately. I want to add here that I already did have very useful and in-depth discussions in Tehran on all aspects of these matters.

I also want to inform you that I am inviting senior officials from France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States, in alphabetical order, the so-called Small Group of countries — to Geneva for consultations the week thereafter here at UN headquarters in Geneva, as the previous meetings are taking place at UN headquarters in Geneva. I want to discuss matters with them, and hear their own views too. Their counsel and backing is also important for the UN effort. And the United States has already confirmed its own attendance for the date of the 25th of this month, so we are aiming at that date.

And I will also be consulting obviously with other countries because they are all interested and involved in wishing the best for this outcome.

As we proceed methodically and carefully in the task of facilitating the establishment of a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led constitutional committee, we recall that this is a key building block of a revitalized political process. I believe from all my consultations that there are real points in common about seeing the political process called for in Security Council resolution 2254 in order to move forward. And I would hope that some bridges can be built with care in that regard. We saw recent important consultations between Chancellor Merkel and President Putin and then thereafter between President Macron and President Putin, and many other consultations that you are perhaps not been seeing because they have not been as public as the previous ones. And I particularly valued recently the counsel and insights of President Al Sisi of Egypt on this point in my in-depth discussion, which I just had with him in Cairo.

So, bottom lines:

- This is a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led, UN-facilitated effort that we are seeking and intending to carry forward.
- We are seeing movement, and we will keep seeking more of it.

- I don't expect, let's be frank, a major breakthrough. But I am confident progress is possible and there is something moving in that direction and we need to capitalize on it.
- We are focussing on moving forward on a constitutional committee and that's our purpose, there are many other things that are important but this is the one we are focussing on.
- We also want to see continued bridging of international positions in support of Geneva and the wider political agenda and resolution 2254. This bridging is becoming more and more important, and potentially more and more possible.
- We have to do serious work, we recognize it, all of us, on these points with the countries coming to Geneva soon, both, and with the Syrian parties, very much, and I want to engage them seriously and with full respect of their concerns and sensitivities, the government in particular and the opposition, and the other parts of the civil society of Syria.

Let me conclude with a message, if you allow me, to all Syrians: Syrian people, women and men, we are working, wallahi, believe me, night and day, and we have been doing it for four years, and my predecessors have been doing it for many years before, to bring or try to bring about a meaningful political process, which is the only way to finally end this conflict and turn towards a better future for Syria and the Syrians. In that spirit, I want you, Syrian people, to believe that we are determined in this and want to wish you, with this message, Eid Mubarak.

Thank you.

"Note to Correspondents: Press statement by United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), 14 June 2018. [brackets in original]

Note that de Mistura does *not* mention when the Syrians will next appear in Geneva to negotiate a new constitution. There have been no negotiations during the past six months, which hints that the process has died.

De Mistura mentioned "the so-called Small Group of countries". This is the remnant of the Friends of Syria group of foreign ministers, which was established by Hillary Clinton in Feb 2012 and accomplished nothing. In April 2013, the Friends of Syria reconstituted into a group of 11 foreign ministers, known as the Core Group or London-11 or Small Group. Now the Small Group is only six nations.

Since 2016, de Mistura has been consulting the various nations that he mentioned in his 14 June statement. *If* those nations were going to use their influence with the insurgents or Assad's government, they would have done it long ago. I think it is futile to expect any of the foreign meddlers to make the Geneva negotiations successful. On 21 June 2018, Assad's army — aided by Russian airstrikes — began to violate a long-standing ceasefire agreement in Daraa province in Southwest Syria. Russia and Iran are actively assisting Assad's pursuit of a military victory in Syria, which makes Russia and Iran unreliable partners in the Geneva

negotiations.

27 June 2018: Briefing U.N. Security Council

On Wednesday, 27 June 2018, de Mistura publicly briefed the United Nations Security Council for the first time since 16 March 2018.

Mr. President, Vassily Alekseevich, thank you so much for this opportunity. Dear members of the Security Council:

1. When I last briefed this Council on 16 May, I spoke of three bottom-line priorities:
 - A. de-escalation;
 - B. reviving the political process and;
 - C. bridging different groups of international stakeholders through high-level diplomacy.

Let me report on where we stand on each of these elements.

De-escalation

2. On de-escalation, I regret to say, I have very little to report, or I have little positive to report. In fact, I am gravely concerned at the turn of events, particularly in the south-west. There, now, while we are talking, we see a full-scale ground offensive and aerial bombardment, as well as exchanges of fire from both sides. We, at the Security Council, cannot allow, I want to believe, this to become another Ghouta, Eastern Ghouta, or another Douma, or another Eastern Aleppo, or Aleppo in general, where so many civilians were sacrificed and died. And yet I see things moving in this direction.

3. Let us be aware of what this would mean, if the south-west sees a full-scale battle-to-the-end: it could be like East Aleppo and Eastern Ghouta combined together, in terms of the population in areas that might be affected. Some 45,000 people, perhaps almost 50,000 I hear, have already been displaced due to fighting, mostly from eastern Daraa governorate to areas near the Jordanian border. This year alone, nationwide, more than 900,000 people have been displaced in Syria. Can you imagine? If we would add to that also the number of all those who are in eastern Daraa governorate. My colleague John Ging, who I see and greet from here, will brief you on these issues in more depth in due course.

4. And we must think also of the regional implications. As the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, himself has said, escalation in the south-west poses significant risks to regional security and stability — a point I have myself constantly underscored. In fact, regional tensions continue. Just to give you one example: only this Monday [25 June], airstrikes were reported on Damascus airport, which Syrian state media attributes to Israel. We are not in a position to independently confirm this — nor has Israel made any statement on the matter. But we are concerned that a full-scale battle in the south-west could only add fuel to this type of tensions.

5. Our position — on Aleppo, on Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria — has always been to put the sanctity of human, civilian lives above all else. We have seen months of intensified back-and-forth regional dialogue on the south-west. We looked at it with interest, because we saw and we believed that there was some progress. So I urge, therefore, all parties — the Syrian Government, the armed groups and all interested parties — to draw on the lessons that we all learnt from Eastern Ghouta, Ghouta and Aleppo and elsewhere, and use the channels that already exist — and we know where they are, and we know they exist — and work on arrangements that prevent further human suffering, protect civilians and provide an exit from this potential further tragedy of the seven-years-old cruel conflict. I hope we will have an opportunity in the private chamber to debate on this issue, because we are concerned.

Constitutional Committee

6. Now on the constitutional committee, we are beginning to see some movements towards a political process. Hence, we are concerned that military escalation could have the potential of compromising the progress that we are seeing on the political front.

7. During this month, we have intensified our efforts to find a way ahead for the implementation of the Sochi final statement — for the establishment of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, UN-facilitated constitutional committee, within the framework of the Geneva process and in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254.

8. The Syrian Government provided, 4.5 months after the Sochi declaration, a catalyst on 28 May, when they conveyed to my office in Damascus 50 names for their government list. I have expressed my appreciation to the Syrian Government for this important step. I have also expressed my appreciation to the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, with whom I know the Syrian Government discussed this list and whose encouragement helped produce this movement.

9. After receiving the list, I decided to consult key regional partners — in Istanbul, Tehran, Cairo, and elsewhere. I saw senior officials of those countries, President Sisi of Egypt, Officials of the Arab League and opposition leaders. I was in contact with the Russian Federation at several levels, the United States and European countries. On the basis of these useful discussions, I determined that it was time to take advantage of this initiative of the Syrian Government and step up consultations and go deeper.

10. On 19 June, I held formal joint consultations at a senior level in Geneva, with the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran. We discussed the best way to implement the Sochi final statement — to establish a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned constitutional committee, under UN auspices, in Geneva. I must say, it was a constructive meeting. Much of the discussion concerned the composition of the committee, as well as issues such as decision-makings and how to avoid deadlocks. The aim was to seek some preliminary understandings. Participants did exchanged opinions on these matters in a very interactive and constructive way. Some common ground actually emerged, preliminary, but emerged. Overall, a spirit of

productive negotiation and potential compromise did emerge. I also detected that all three countries recognize the need for a constitutional committee that is credible in the eyes of the international community.

11. On 22 June, I met with officials from the European Union, who provided sound advice; I will shortly meet with High Representative Mogherini on these issues tomorrow.

12. On 25 June, I hosted joint consultations in Geneva, with France, in alphabetical order, Germany, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States. We discussed de-escalation arrangements in depth — a key element, obviously, underpinning progress on the political front. Views were exchanged on the importance of diplomatic bridging between different groups on Syria and prospects for progress on the constitutional track. There was a clear expectation from these countries — and let me be frank, these countries are having an interest and a stake in the process, and also are the ones who could be important players in any potential reconstruction — that any constitutional committee must be credible and internationally-legitimate, that it must contain a diverse and representative spectrum of Syrians, including those mentioned in the Sochi final statement, such as independents, civil society, experts, and women.

13. Based on my consultations with many stakeholders, I intend to maintain my prerogative to contribute to adjust the committee so as to ensure 1) its credibility and, 2) international legitimacy. And in terms of women, let me underscore my own expectation that any constitutional committee must include, at a minimum, 30% women. In this connection, I noted with pleasure, that in the government list that was provided to us, the 50 names, there was 26% women. Not enough, because we are aiming at 30%, but a very good signal. And I will certainly not be impressed by the arguments that others may raise, that there are not enough Syrian women competent on constitutional issues.

14. Just yesterday, for instance, over 200 Syrian women from diverse backgrounds met in Beirut for a conference organized by UN Women. Despite their differences, they agreed on many points including on women's equal participation in decision making, including in any constitutional committee. I also take note of the recent letter of support for women's full and effective participation at a least 30% representation in the constitutional committee, which was sent around to you and to us, by the representatives of the Security Council, Peru, Sweden and United Kingdom.

15. We now await an opposition list of names, and we hope this will come shortly, — on which serious work, I know, is being conducted while we are talking. And I will be proceeding also to facilitate the process of bringing the independents, experts, tribal leaders, civil society and women as indicated in the Sochi declaration, and frankly, in many of our common deliberations.

16. I should add that both meetings in Geneva underscored one important point, and I would like to underscore it myself, the support of key countries for the UN role in facilitating the political process in Geneva, including very much the constitutional

committee.

17. Overall, these consultations represent a cautious — I have to be cautious having seen now we went sometimes one step ahead and two backwards — a cautious step forward. But let me be clear: this is a package, and that is something we discussed with everyone, where nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. That is why it is a work in progress. And I am also aware that this process will need the consent and engagement with the Syrian Government and parties, with full respect of their concerns and sensitivities — the Government, the opposition, and civil society.

18. I will continue on my side to facilitate further movement in this direction to seek the support, counsel and advice of many — which is why I anticipate inviting the Sochi co-convenors back to Geneva in the coming weeks, as well as the six countries I saw on Monday and others, and then, of course, report to you, to the Security Council.

19. And let me also flag — if we are to move on a constitutional process, and towards what everyone in Syria tells us they want, a safe, calm and neutral environment, it will be important to start to see steps that have the prospect of restoring trust and confidence and social peace. And that is why we are concerned when we see unilateral legislative acts, such as the Law Number 10, which we understand, many refugees got very worried about, and frankly, I heard even very much neighboring countries such as Lebanon.

20. We also urge concrete action on the detainees file. Today a technical team, while we are talking, from my office is in Ankara for the Working Group on the release of detainees/abductees, the handover of bodies and the identification of missing people, of which the UN is a member together with Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey. As you know, so far the outcome has been zero. However, we are not giving up. Today's meeting is already the third meeting of the Working Group, which deals with a key humanitarian issue that affects thousands and thousands of Syrian people. What is necessary now is, and what we expect and what the Syrian people expect, are some concrete steps and results to alleviate the suffering of all those who are affected by this tragic situation. Members of my team, who are present in Ankara today, will continue to proactively support the Working Group, which was established in Astana.

21. I hope that all actors involved will demonstrate the required political will to produce some results in this field.

Bridging

22. In the meantime, we continue to seek ways to bridge different groups of international stakeholders through high-level diplomacy — my third bottom line, and we have seen this taking place. Serious, robust and sustainable dialogue is vital, to underpin de-escalation, which is needed very much now, and the political process in general.

23. I discussed this issue with President Sisi in Cairo when I was there, who gave me

some constructive ideas in this regard. And I believe we are already seeing an emerging web of international high-level discussions on Syria — frequent contact between the United States and Russian Federation, for instance, at many different levels; communications, at very high-level, between President Putin and President Macron, and President Putin and Chancellor Merkel; intensified talks between the United States and Turkey over various issues. All that, we can build on.

24. I have shuttled around all relevant capitals recently. And so I can say, with some authority or confidence, that there is some common ground to build upon, which could provide solid ground for some understanding. Many countries are not that far on issues, which are frankly easy to resolve or address, such as national sovereignty, unity and many others, and we have been working on it. Let me reiterate, once again, that the UN stands ready to use its good offices and competence and experience, we have a whole team working on this bridging of commonalities, to contribute to facilitating international dialogue in the search for commonalities.

25. So, in sum: First, Mr. President and dear members of the Security Council, we are moving cautiously in the right direction on the political front. And I ask for all of your support, including the support of the Syrian Government who is sitting in the Security Council [Chamber], in facilitating this effort — an effort that must ultimately be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, because no country or no organization can simply impose a *fait accompli* on the Syrian people. That we know, but we need to move forward. Second message: currently, we are gravely concerned by battlefield developments and their potential to expand into regional tensions. So we do urge this council and all interested parties to help in finding an arrangement or a solution, in the south-west that will spare civilian suffering and large movements of displaced people and reduce potential tensions, so we do not see once again, seven year afterwards, perhaps when we are getting closer and closer to the end of this conflict, a repetition of what we saw sadly in Aleppo and Eastern Ghouta.

Thank you.

"Briefing to the security council by M. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 27 June 2018.

My comments. In paragraph 15, the Syrian opposition has not yet delivered its list of names for the constitutional committee, five months after the Sochi conference. This delay indicates either the incompetence or obstruction by the opposition.

In paragraphs 10 and 24, de Mistura spoke of commonalities. What I see as common is that Assad, Russia, and Iran are all pursuing a military victory. And the remainder of the foreign meddlers have lost interest in Syria, because a military victory by Assad seems inevitable. Meanwhile, de Mistura is pursuing a political solution, including a constitutional committee, because that is what Resolution 2254 (December 2015) tells him to do. But Assad does *not* need a new constitution drafted in Geneva.

The negotiations amongst Syrians in Geneva are dead. The last negotiations were in December 2017 and accomplished nothing. Notice that de Mistura does *not* say when he will convene the next negotiations in Geneva.

After this 27 June briefing to the Security Council, de Mistura kept a low profile, as Assad's army won a series of military victories in southwest Syria.

Negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan

When the negotiations in Astana began in January 2017, the intention was that Syrians would agree and the three convenors (i.e., Russia, Turkey, Iran) would "guarantee" the results. But the Syrian opposition boycotted many of the meetings in Astana, so the Astana negotiations morphed into discussions amongst Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Having a two-day meeting every two months is *not* adequate meeting time to discuss and resolve complicated problems, so I believe the Astana negotiations are mostly a propaganda stunt by Russia.

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

16 March 2018: Astana

On 16 March, the foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey, and Iran met in Astana. Journalists reported *neither* the topics of discussion *nor* the results. The Associated Press did not mention the March 2018 meeting in Astana. [Reuters](#). The Russian Foreign Ministry posted a [Joint Statement](#) at their website. The Statement is also United Nations Security Council document S/2018/233. The Statement has no content that is relevant to a ceasefire or problems in Syria, so I am ignoring the Statement.

14-15 May 2018: Astana

On 15 May, de Mistura spoke to journalists in Astana. Here is the entire text of his remarks. Good afternoon. We had a useful ninth meeting in Astana with some concrete discussions on de-escalation. As you know de-escalation is the priority of Astana, and our priority too, especially on the major pending issue, which is still pending, but requires a lot of homework, the issue of Idlib, as you know.

The issue of Syrian territorial integrity, national unity was clearly stressed by everyone.

Third point, I have got five points, in particular, the UN participated very actively in a working group where the Guarantors had constructive engagement, which was very much supported by us, on issues of detainees, abductees and missing people.

We are looking forward very much to see more discussions of this working group in Ankara soon, on the pressing humanitarian issue of detainees, abductees and disappeared people, which is affecting so many thousands of Syrian families.

Fourth point, we welcome the intention of the Astana Guarantors to actively and regularly engage with the UN in Geneva, in order to see a concrete follow-up to the

Sochi declaration on the establishment of a Constitutional Commission and we do look forward do so also with other interested countries and parties.

Last but not least, we thank like everyone has done, his Excellency President Nazarbayev for hosting generously this ninth session of the Astana de-escalation process.

Thank you very much.

"Press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 15 May 2018.

Notice that de Mistura did *not* mention any accomplishment in Astana. And he did *not* mention when the talks in Geneva would restart.

Continuing Civil War in Syria

History

Full-text of agreements on a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria is posted at [rbs0.com](#). The first two agreements collapsed during April 2016 and September 2016. The third agreement began on 30 Dec 2016. The fourth agreement, creation of four safe zones, occurred in Astana on 4 May 2017.

My essay for [February 2016](#) chronicled the cessation of hostilities on 27-29 February. My essay for [March 2016](#) chronicled more violations of the cessation of hostilities, although the ceasefire was generally respected. It was amazing that the ceasefire generally held, given that there was *no* investigation of violations, and *no* punishment of violators.

My essay for [April 2016](#) chronicled the daily reports of violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement, including alarmist reports by journalists about the alleged "unraveling" of the agreement. The facts are that the cessation of hostilities was holding in *most* of Syria, but there were violations near the city of Aleppo, and attacks by jihadist groups in Latakia and Damascus provinces.

My essay for [May 2016](#) chronicled the collapse of the cessation of hostilities, despite promises by the ISSG to restore the ceasefire. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported a death toll in May that was similar to months before the ceasefire began.

My essay for [June 2016](#) continued to chronicle violations of the cessation of hostilities. The only source of daily reports on violations is by Russia, which does *not* include violations by Assad and Russia. As I reflected during June 2016 on this omission, I decided to discontinue in July my quoting of the Russian statistics on ceasefire violations, because they are incomplete and misleading.

My essay for [July 2016](#) chronicles a failed Eid al-Fitr truce declared by Assad during 6-14 July, bombing of more hospitals in Syria, and some of the siege of Aleppo.

My essay for [August 2016](#) chronicles the futile attempts of the United Nations to establish weekly 48-hour ceasefires in Aleppo, to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid. I collect reports of bombing of hospitals and medical clinics in Syria. I also chronicle the surrender of Daraya and tersely mention the siege of Aleppo.

My essay for [September 2016](#) chronicles the hundreds of violations of the new ceasefire during 12-19 Sep, the ferocious new assault on Aleppo by Assad and Russia that began on the night of 21 Sep, the complete failure to deliver humanitarian aid in Aleppo during September, the delivery of humanitarian aid to a mere six towns in Syria during September, and the surrender of Moadamiyeh on 1 Sep. Also, I collect reports of bombing of hospitals and medical clinics in Syria.

My essay for [October 2016](#) chronicles a unilateral Russian/Assad ceasefire in Aleppo on 20-22 October that was *not* reciprocated by insurgents.

My essay for [November 2016](#) mentions a one-day ceasefire by Russia and Assad in Aleppo city on 4 November, which was *not* reciprocated by insurgents. I also chronicled Assad's renewed military campaign to liberate Aleppo, beginning on 15 November. The United Nations failed to deliver any food or medicine to Aleppo city since early July 2016, so starvation began in late November. This section of my essay was previously titled "Reports of Violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement". But on 6 October 2016, de Mistura correctly said: "we don't have any more a cessation of hostilities".

My essay for [December 2016](#) chronicles a 13 December Russian-Turkish agreement to evacuate insurgents from eastern Aleppo city. Owing to numerous violations of the agreement, the evacuation was not completed until the night of 22 December. On 22 December 2016 insurgents ended the water supply to the city of Damascus. On 30 December 2016, a nationwide ceasefire in Syria began. Also during December 2016, the U.S. Government and the United Nations suddenly became unimportant in Syria, while Russia and Turkey began negotiations with Assad and the insurgents. December 2016 was the final month for the section in my essays on bombing hospitals in Syria.

My essay for [January 2017](#) explained that on 28 January Assad captured the water supply for Damascus, and more insurgents were transported to Idlib province.

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

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

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

at least 126 people, mostly children.

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

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

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

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

My essay for [Oct/Nov/Dec 2017](#) mentions problems with delivery of humanitarian aid. My chronicling the Syrian civil war became sporadic, because I was devoting my limited time to chronicling Trump's efforts to solve the [North Korean](#) problem.

January to July 2018: War in Syria

On 6 January 2018 insurgents used 13 drone aircraft to attack Russia's Hmeimim air base and Tartus naval base inside Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 12 January, Russia announced it had killed the insurgents who Russia believed were responsible for the attacks on Russian bases. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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](#).

On 13 January 2018, Turkish president Erdogan announced that the Turkish military would attack Kurdish soldiers in Afrin, Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

In January 2018, the U.S. Military planned to maintain a Kurdish army of 30,000 soldiers in northern Syria, to prevent the return of ISIL. On 15 January, Turkish president Erdogan angrily promised to "drown this army of terror before it is born". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [New York Times](#).

On 19 January, Turkish artillery began shelling Afrin Syria in preparation for an invasion. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 20 January, 72 Turkish warplanes bombed Afrin. Russia removed its military personnel from Afrin. [New York Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 21 January, soldiers from the Turkish army entered Afrin. [Reuters](#).

On 29 January, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Assad's warplanes had put the only hospital in Saraqeb, Idlib province, "out of order". [SOHR](#) reported that a total of 103 people were killed in Syria on 28 January.

On Wednesday night, 7 February 2018, Iranian-sponsored Syrian militia engaged Kurdish forces supported by the U.S. Military in the desert between the city of Deir al-Zour and the Iraqi border. U.S. airstrikes killed pro-Assad Syrians and also may have killed Russian mercenaries, in what could be an escalation of hostilities in Syria. [Reuters](#)(8Feb); [Associated Press](#)(8Feb); [New York Times](#)(8Feb); [Washington Post](#)(12Feb); [New York Times](#)(13Feb).

Eastern Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus that is under rebel control, is supposed to be a "safe zone" created by the Astana agreements. But, beginning on the night of 18 February, Assad's warplanes have been bombing Eastern Ghouta. [SOHR](#) reports that 250 civilians were killed in Ghouta during the first 48 hours of Assad's bombing campaign. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Reuters](#).

On 22 February, the United Nations Security Council held a meeting to stop the bombing and shelling of Eastern Ghouta that has killed at least 300 civilians there this week. The [Associated Press](#) cites the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights for a death toll of 382 civilians. But Russia vetoed a draft Resolution that would have imposed a 30-day ceasefire with delivery of humanitarian aid to Ghouta. [Associated Press](#)(blog); [U.N.](#); [New York Times](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 23 February, the death toll in Ghouta passed 400, while the impotent diplomats in the United Nations Security Council postponed a vote on a ceasefire resolution until tomorrow. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). [CNN](#) published an article that said Western nations "simply don't care" about the continuing atrocities in Syria.

On 24 February, a Saturday, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2401 that calls for a ceasefire in Ghouta "without delay". Russia had objected to earlier drafts that called for an immediate ceasefire. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said a total of 510 civilians died in Ghouta during the past week. [U.N.](#); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

In the three days after Resolution 2401, Assad's military continued to bombard Eastern Ghouta. Russia decreed a ceasefire from 09:00 to 14:00 every day, but that ceasefire was not only ignored, but also too short. [U.N. News](#)(28Feb); [Washington Post](#)(27Feb); [Associated Press](#)(28Feb); [Reuters](#)(28Feb).

On 28 February, the United Nations Security Council met for 2 hours and heard Jeffrey Feltman, U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, tell the Council about continuing problems in East Ghouta. Resolution 2401 had demanded had demanded a 30-day ceasefire, but Russia had misinterpreted that ceasefire as a daily five-hour cessation of hostilities. [U.N.](#).

See Egeland's 1 March 2018 statement, quoted [below](#).

On 4 March 2018, there were still *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid to Eastern Ghouta, despite the demands in Resolution 2401 that was approved on 24 February. [Reuters](#).

On Monday, 5 March, the United Nations/Syrian Arab Red Crescent made a delivery of humanitarian aid to Douma (part of Eastern Ghouta), but Assad's army pilfered medical supplies from the trucks. Some of the 46 trucks departed from Douma before unloading, owing to continued fighting. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the death toll in Eastern Ghouta had reached 745 civilians since 18 February. [U.N. News](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(6Mar); [New York Times](#).

On 7 March, the United Nations Security Council met again about the continued fighting in Eastern Ghouta. The U.N. did not publicly release a record of this meeting.

On 8 March, the United Nations/Syrian Arab Red Crescent planned to make a second delivery of humanitarian aid to Eastern Ghouta, but the delivery was postponed owing to continued fighting there. [Associated Press](#).

On 9 March, there was a second humanitarian aid delivery to Eastern Ghouta, but fighting continued during the delivery. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 12 March 2018, the U.N. Secretary General told the Security Council that humanitarian aid convoys were unable to safely enter Eastern Ghouta because of continued fighting. *None* of Resolution 2401 has been implemented by Assad and Russia. [U.N.](#); Meeting Record at [U.N.](#).

On 18 March 2018, Turkey seized control of Afrin, Syria. [New York Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

During the month of March 2018, more people died in the Syrian civil war than during any previous month since Assad began the final assault on Aleppo city in November 2016. The cause of the high death toll in March 2018 was Assad's assault on Ghouta, the eastern suburbs of Damascus. As with Aleppo, the assault on Ghouta ended with the insurgents surrendering and being evacuated to Idlib province.

On 22 March 2018, Harasta was the first town in Ghouta to surrender. The Ahrar al-Sham insurgents there were transported out on buses. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 24 March, most of insurgents had been evacuated from Ghouta, except for the large city of Douma. [Reuters](#).

On 1 April, insurgents began to leave Douma, the last town in Ghouta to surrender. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 2 April, [Reuters](#) reports the insurgents began to leave Douma. The difference in dates is owing to different groups of insurgents surrendering on different days.

On 3 April, [Reuters](#) reports that Jaish al-Islam continues to negotiate a surrender in Douma. Jaish al-Islam is the last remaining insurgent group in Ghouta.

On 6 April, Assad's warplanes, artillery, and rockets resumed bombardment of Douma after a 10-day ceasefire collapsed. Jaish al-Islam failed to reach an agreement with Assad's government over evacuation. Approximately three dozen civilians were killed on 6 April, adding to the 1600 killed in Ghouta beginning in February 2018. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On the night of 7 April, Assad used chemical weapons to attack Douma, as described [above](#).

On 8 April, Jaish al-Islam reached an agreement with Russia for evacuation. Approximately 100 buses transported 8,000 insurgents and 40,000 of their relatives to Jarablus, in Aleppo province. Jaish al-Islam released approximately 200 hostages. The conquest of Ghouta is a huge victory for Assad, comparable to his conquest of Aleppo and Homs. [BBC](#); [Arab News](#); [Reuters](#)(9Apr).

On 25 April 2018, the United Nations held a conference in Brussels for donors to Syria. The U.N. sought a minimum of US\$ 7 billion, but received only \$ 4.4 billion in pledges. The U.S. Government did *not* pledge any money for Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). I interpret the shortfall as unwillingness to continue to fund humanitarian aid, when the Syrians have failed to achieve anything in 2.3 years of peace negotiations in Geneva.

On the night of 9 May 2018, Iran's Quds Force in Syria fired 20 rockets at Israel. Most (80%) of the Iranian rockets fell to Earth before reaching Israel, but Israel intercepted 4 rockets that would have struck Israel. On 10 May, Israel retaliated with air strikes on 70 Iranian positions in Syria, striking most of Iranian infrastructure in Syria. [Haaretz](#); [Jerusalem Post](#); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Not only did Israel militarily overwhelm Iran, but also there was an international diplomatic condemnation of Iran's attack on Israel. Iran has been a rogue nation since 1979, when Iran's government was replaced by Islamic extremists who took 52 U.S. diplomats hostage.

On 17 May 2018, Russian president Vladimir Putin told Assad that "foreign forces" (e.g., Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah) needed to depart from Syria. [TASS](#); [Associated Press](#). On 23 May, Assad's government refused to eject Iran and Hezbollah. [PressTV](#) in Iran.

On 21 June 2018, Assad's army began to violate a long-standing ceasefire agreement in Daraa province in Southwest Syria. The ceasefire agreement was arranged by the USA, Russia, and Jordan in July 2017. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 22 June, the United Nations Secretary General said he was "gravely concerned by the recent military escalation, including ground offensives and aerial bombardments, in southwestern Syria." [U.N.](#).

On 24 June 2018, the U.S. Military in Syria told rebels in Daraa *not* to expect military support from the USA. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). While that decision avoided a confrontation between Russian and U.S. forces, it was a betrayal of rebels by the USA. Since the early days of the Syrian civil war, the U.S. Government had encouraged the rebels mostly with words, but also with munitions through a clandestine CIA program. Trump ended the CIA program in June 2017. The rebels were disorganized and fragmented, which made them less effective.

On 27 June 2018, Assad and Russia again committed war crimes by bombing hospitals, this time in Daraa. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#); [Washington Post](#); I say again, because Assad and Russia bombed all of the hospitals in Aleppo at the end of the year 2016.

On 12 July 2018, Assad's army conquered the town of Daraa, where the revolt against Assad began in March 2011. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
[Washington Post](#).

On 25 July 2018, a series of ISIL suicide bombings in the province of Sweida, in southern Syria, killed more than 200 people. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Briefings on Humanitarian Aid

1 Feb 2018: Briefing on Humanitarian Aid

On 1 February 2018, Egeland briefed journalists for the first time since 21 December 2017. Note that the Humanitarian Task Force was created in February 2016 by Russia and the USA.

Thank you very much. We just concluded the Humanitarian Task Force meeting, and heard from colleagues sitting in Damascus, Gaziantep on the Turkish border and in Amman. The message was unusually blunt to the member states. When we need their ability to influence the parties on the ground the most in this bleak hour for humanitarian work, humanitarian diplomacy seems to be totally impotent. We are getting nowhere at the moment.

The last UN convoy to a besieged area was at the end of November, 28th of November to a place called al-Nashabieh and it was only for 7,200 people.

So through December and through January there hasn't been a single convoy of life-saving relief, medical supplies, food to any besieged area, that is the worst we have experienced since 2015 before we started our work. We have not had any medical evacuations since the end of December from eastern Ghouta.

The summing up of 2017, which we also did, is again horrific, the history of the war of Syria is really a war of millions of people fleeing for their lives, every single year for the last six years. The figures that are now made which are counting displacements, how many times a child, a woman and a man displaced last year in Syria. Well, 2 million and 875,000 times, nearly 2.9 million times.

So that's you know a quarter of a million per month, they fled to three thousand places, many of them war-torn in Syria. We haven't seen such a catastrophe of unprotected people in a generation.

Among the places that was most hard-hit in terms of displacements was Deir ez-Zor where we had the campaign against Islamic State forces, 850,000 people fled, number two was Raqqa, also a campaign that had an enormous cost on civilian lives, and the

third one was Aleppo last year.

So can we continue like this? No, we cannot continue like this, it is more than the city of Geneva being displaced every single month, in one country. One of the places that people fled too massively was Idlib, so people fleeing for their lives end up to a large degree in the province of Idlib. It took 641,000 arrivals in the last year.

Well now the war also came to Idlib, it is coming after them, so only in the last three weeks 170,000 times a person has been displaced within Idlib, or to Idlib from the adjacent Hama area. 170,000 displacements in three weeks, 270,000 since mid-December.

So the situation is screaming for a ceasefire there, told the members of the humanitarian task force, we cannot have a (inaudible) warfare in what is essentially a refugee camp.

Idlib is densely populated and it is filled to the brim with refugees and displaced. Of the 2.4 million civilians there, 1.2 million are internally displaced, many have been displaced many times, so again, and again they are displaced. We need an end to the fighting and we need to have Russia, Turkey and Iran again get de-escalation, as they called it, which did work to a large degree in 2017, now there is no de-escalation. On the contrary hospitals are being bombed, displaced civilians are being hit in cross-fire by both sides, and in air raids, including the hospital in Saraqeb which was hit twice in nine days on the 21st and 29th of January and heroic aid doctors were then wounded or killed as they treated civilians from another attack.

In Eastern Ghouta we need a humanitarian pause and we need it desperately. A humanitarian pause is something you declare when civilians cannot be treated, helped, reached, assisted and we have that kind of situation now. A humanitarian pause is where both sides of the conflict say: let's stop our hostilities and let the mutual impartial humanitarian workers come and help us and let's evacuate the wounded.

We urged again a special effort to get such a humanitarian pause, we have indications from both sides that they want it, but it hasn't happened and it is both sides who have to help us here, there are air raids, there is fighting from government side, but there is a barrage of mortars and grenades going from this area into civilian neighborhoods in Damascus.

Let me also mention a couple of other places, there are three other besieged areas outside of eastern Ghouta, which is by far the biggest besieged area now with 390,000 people, those three areas are Foua and Kafraya besieged by armed opposition groups, in Idlib, there are some 8000 or more civilians there. And then there is Yarmouk, which is the Palestinian refugee camp close to Damascus, and we are going to none of these three places because the armed groups around Foua and Kafraya and government allied forces around Yarmouk are blocking our access respectively. We haven't been there for four months.

In Raqqa I was surprised, taken aback by having now been some 534 blast-wounded

and 112 confirmed deaths in Raqqa city after it had been retaken from Islamic State because of unexploded ordnances. Basically it was such a voracious campaign from land and from air that the civilians who have returned, and there has been around 60,000 of them, see people dying and being wounded around them in high numbers every week, up to 50 casualties per week, which is again a stark reminder that those who talk about this is the time for the return of millions of refugees and the millions of displaced to Syria, they don't really know what they are talking about because most places of Syria are still unsafe and it is unsafe for many reasons including that the place had been peppered by explosives.

Perhaps a final issue, Afrin, the Turkish military operation Olive Branch has now been going on for already sometime and we have reports of 15,000 civilians fleeing into Afrin town. There are also reports that local authorities make it hard for people to flee from the Afrin area. We are very concerned also there for the protection of civilians.

So, we need a re-boot really, that's our humanitarian message to the member states, they are not effectively getting results on either of the two sides, we are failing hundreds of thousands of people in the besieged and hard to reach areas, as we are assisting millions and millions in government controlled areas and opposition controlled areas that are not in the crossfire.

This is a war where armed men are specializing in the suffering of the civilian population and those who are their sponsors are not able to end it. That's my thing.

....

QUESTION: You said that the people who are sponsoring these (cumbersome) are not able to exercise any real influence or get them any restrain, is that what they were telling you today at the meeting?

JE: What they are telling me is that they are working hard to help our access and help our work for assistance and protection of civilians. What they frequently refer to is all of the bad things that the other side is doing. The reason we are not making progress is that the other side is shelling, the other side is bombing, the other side is sabotaging, the other side is breaking agreements, the other side is doing a lot of things. And that is exactly what we also hear when we are talking to the government and the armed opposition parties on the ground. So we are denied access and that is because: stop the provocation of the other side, and then of course you can go. Why haven't you stopped the provocations of the other side or the government says, why do you want to go with such a big load, and then we say: because that's exactly our assessed needs, the government said: we don't agree to that, you can go with half, which means that people are left with an impossible situation, cannot come with half of the supplies to half of the people that need the supplies, because it is seen as a provocation on the other side.

So I am so fed up with the counter arguments that these men in offices, men in suits and uniforms always have of why they are not allowing cross-line to the civilians on the other side. It has to stop.

"Transcript of the press stakeout by Mr. Jan Egeland, UN Senior Advisor to the UN Special

Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 1 Feb 2018.

1 March 2018: Briefing on Humanitarian Aid

On Thursday, 1 March 2018, Egeland briefed journalists on the failure of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2401 and the continuing slaughter in Eastern Ghouta.

de Mistura: Thank you, it is true I will be very short — not because of lack of politeness but I have a meeting which has already started with three members of the Security Council — but I wanted to come here directly now.

As you can understand our focus is on the humanitarian situation, there is no question, and that's why I will leave Jan Egeland here with you and he will be elaborating more on what we have been doing.

I would like to say three things. First of all I think the Security Council meeting yesterday spoke very clearly about where at least the UN stands. What you heard from the humanitarian OCHA Under-Secretary-General and Jeff Feltman is the position of the Secretary-General and therefore also very much mine, so I will not add anything to that.

What I would like you to know is that the UN here has not and will not give up, in asking for the full implementation of [resolution] 2401, and we will continue asking until we are blue in the face for both sides — I say both sides because there has been on both sides shelling, not comparable in terms of proportion but there has been from both sides — to stop shelling each other's areas, and for convoys to be allowed to get to Eastern Ghouta in particular.

We don't have and we cannot afford the luxury of giving up, so any type of feeling that the UN is frustrated — forget it, we are not frustrated, we are determined because this otherwise becomes the copycat of Aleppo, and we saw it already happening. And I was here, with you, on that occasion.

Now your question here is my main message because Jan will be able to elaborate more on what is being done, or not yet done, on the humanitarian side.

The political process: well we are working hard at the moment, very discretely, on the follow-up not only on the meeting we had in Sochi but certainly what has been the 2254 mandate. But you will agree that today, the priority needs to be stopping the suffering and the tragedy of the civilians in Eastern Ghouta and elsewhere.

Towards the next few days, you will be getting from me some indication of a clear initiative on our side — because by the way, yesterday was one month after Sochi, and in Sochi there was a clear declaration which meant that in Geneva a Constitutional Committee should be starting working soon. We have initiatives, we have ideas, we will come up and we will share them obviously with you once we have also discussed them with the various parties.

So that is my main message, I don't take questions because I think the questions will be mostly to Jan but I wanted to make sure that by not seeing me you will not feel that I, somehow we are giving the feeling of frustration, or just wait and see, or just being sad about what is happening. We are determined and we are constantly pushing for it. We cannot see a copycat of Aleppo taking place. And 2, is that while this is happening, since everyone will say there is no solution except the political solution, we know it, but we also working hard while we are doing it, but we are also aware that when people are dying the priority is to stop that. Thank you.

Jan Egeland: The message to the 23 member states of the Humanitarian Task Force was, I think, unusually blunt today, from colleagues in the field, from us who are humanitarians working with and for the United Nations. You are failing to help us help civilians in Syria. The Syrian war is unique in two particular ways, I would say. Number one, by the blunt force against civilians, I know of no other place that is even close to having so many children, families, innocent people being displaced, fleeing for their lives, being killed, being maimed. The other thing that is unique about Syria that it is a place where parties have for a very long time specialized in denying humanitarian access to these civilians.

So this is a story of an operation that had humanitarian resources available, trucks, warehouses, courageous humanitarian workers, and enormous civilians' needs that parties on the ground denied being delivered to the civilians and also blocking even of children and the sick and wounded to be evacuated.

The Humanitarian task force was created to help us in the situation with all of the countries that are sponsors of parties, they have influence on the parties, to change that on the ground, and for a period it changed it. **But I felt something really happened towards the end of November of last year, we were then not getting through anymore.** So is it because they were not able or they were not willing as sponsors of parties on the ground to help us, I don't know, but something changed.

Now three weeks ago we said to the Humanitarian task force we cannot continue like this with weekly meetings, we had actually one hundred meetings since the beginning of February and for long it was actually effective, at times we had even great achievements through humanitarian diplomacy, but of late it has been very very little. Therefore we called for ad hoc targeted task force meetings with the two Co-Chairs, the Russian Federation and the United States, and then we called on other countries who had influence on the ground, like Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and others, to solve the obstacles in Eastern Ghouta, in Idlib, with Foua, Kefraya and Yarmouk, three besieged areas we are not reaching, Rukban which is a place next to Jordan we are not reaching.

So how did we do in these last three weeks? Well we did as bad as we have done in all of 2018, we had no success what so ever, so I had shared, I think, this score card of ours, on humanitarian diplomacy and it is has failed great on the score card, because we had one cross-line convoy out of 25 to 30 which was the capacity of the last eight weeks: one convoy. It was able to reach 7,200 people in Nashabiyah, in Eastern

Ghouta, which is less than 2 percent of people in the besieged area, we reached zero of the 2.5 additional million cross-line in hard to reach areas.

In the same period needs grew, so 2017 ended horribly, 2018 started worse. This map is one showing the biggest forced displacement, what is forced displacement? When families fleeing for their lives really, many of them flee for the second or the third or the fourth time, and you would see that in the month of January alone, more than a quarter of a million displacements happened, more than 257,000 times a person had to flee in one country: Syria. Nowhere else displacement is worse than in Idlib and Aleppo [governorates], especially Idlib in the north west, with 2.5 million people is a huge refugee camp really, more than half of the population there, 1.3 million probably more, are displaced, most of them several times.

Now, Eastern Ghouta is the place where the violence is at its worst, humanitarian law was created many generations ago to prevent attacks against civilians, many medical facilities protected people. Eastern Ghouta is devoid of respect for international law. 24 attacks reported between the 18th and the 22nd of February alone, including 14 hospitals, 3 health centers and 2 ambulances, health sector. Of course, in the same period there was a constant barrage of rockets and mortars going from Eastern Ghouta into Damascus. It is often said by those who support the government side that we tend to forget to mention that, perhaps they are right, let me then be on record to say that it is an equal violation of international law to send indiscriminate rockets of course into Damascus.

But there is of course a difference between besieging and being besieged. When we are not moving any convoys into Eastern Ghouta, haven't been able to move any convoys so far into Eastern Ghouta at all, since the one little convoy mid-February, it is because we haven't gotten a single facilitation letter by the government.

Now that can change of course, today we got reports in the task force that we may have the first facilitation permits from the government to go to Duma in a very long time, where we have 45 trucks standing by to go there, and full warehouses to load into the trucks as soon as we get the permit. It was also reported that our colleagues in the ICRC is able to reach another place in Eastern Ghouta today [the UN Senior Advisor clarified at the end of the press stakeout that "our colleagues in the ICRC entered Afrin, not East Ghouta today"]. So maybe this was the bleakest hour, maybe it is now changing, maybe we can get progress.

We call again Russia, US and those countries who have influence in Eastern Ghouta and other places, to beg them to help us with several things: get several convoys per weeks to reach all places in Eastern Ghouta, get over 1,000 priority medical cases evacuated from Eastern Ghouta, and also to see evacuation of civilians out of the conflict zone. All of this should be possible, if the Security Council Resolution became a reality. Since the Resolution was adopted, and I was myself in New York when it happened, since it was adopted it did not get better, **it got worse**.

Now, maybe at the end a word on the funding situation also in Syria. We have a 95% underfunded humanitarian operation for all of Syria so far for this year, one of the

arguments that has been raised by those who share our deep frustration by not getting to besieged and hard to reach areas and getting no cooperation from the government is that why should we fund an operation in Syria if the government does not help you reach those who are besieged? I would think it would be an enormous violation of humanitarian principles if we stopped working for the millions in deep deep crisis in both government and opposition controlled areas that we are reaching every single month because we are denied access elsewhere. Those men who sit comfortably in offices not allowing us to reach women and children in besieged and hard to reach areas, are not going to be punished, it is those who had fled violence, including violence by terrorist groups, who will be punished.

I said we may now be able to go to Eastern Ghouta in the next few days, we are also ready with the 45 truck convoy to go to Rukban, where we now have a short safety inside the area called the Berm in Rukban at the Syrian-Jordan border, we are just waiting for the facilitation letter, we are willing and able to go to Foua and Kefraya, besieged by armed opposition groups, and Yarmouk, which has a terrible situation, it is the Palestinian refugee camps, we just need the parties to agree and there is a lot of effort to make them agree in that three towns arrangement, and we are in Idlib begging for an end to hostilities and that is also in between armed opposition groups that are fighting each other.

QUESTION: My first question, I did not quite understand what Mr. Egeland said about the bombs falling on Damascus and the bombs falling on Eastern Ghouta, what is the difference, I did not understand. My other question is about the humanitarian corridor that Mr. Lavrov said was targeted by armed groups, what is your comment on that?

Egeland: Well in terms of the attacks on Eastern Ghouta and the attacks from Eastern Ghouta, well they are both deplorable, I saw an account some ten days ago that more than 800 grenades and mortars had gone from Eastern Ghouta to Damascus and civilians have been killed and civilians have been wounded. It is contrary to international law.

The constant air raids, the other way, is of course much bigger in volume. There is a difference, as I said, between besieged and besieging, and there is also a difference between having an air force and having no air force, so in proportionality the attacks in Eastern Ghouta is much bigger but they are both hitting civilians.

The unilateral Russian declaration of the five-hour pause to enable civilians to leave Eastern Ghouta is a unilateral declaration of a pause, it is positive to have pauses in all fighting, it is positive to try to let civilians escape a war zone, I called for pauses in Raqqa for example when there was really seemingly no escape for civilian population from Raqqa. But I have to declare that I know no humanitarian actor, zero humanitarian actor, who thinks the five hours is enough for us to be able to deliver relief into Eastern Ghouta and to organize orderly medical evacuations out, so what we said in the meeting today was: can we sit down now with Russia and others and see whether we can help make this pause initiative meet humanitarian standards for a pause and for a corridor namely, that there are two ways that we can go in with supplies as well as people go out. For us to go in we need government permits which

we haven't had. Secondly, that it is long enough for humanitarian actors to do what is needed, five hours is not enough, and that it is also negotiated between the parties so that all respect the pause and we can influence groups inside, we have countries who can influence the groups inside with us. So we are going to sit down with Russia and others, to see whether this could happen. Of course what the Security Council had promised us was a month ceasefire. There is a big difference between this and 5-hour pause.

"Note to Correspondents: Transcript of joint Press Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and UN Senior Advisor, Jan Egeland," [U.N.](#), 1 Mar 2018. [Bracketed text added by U.N. Boldface added by Standler.]

4 April 2018: Briefing on Humanitarian Aid

On 4 April 2018, Egeland gave another briefing to journalists.

Thank you very much. We had another meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group. The message to the Member States is the following: The marathon of pain, suffering and violence in Syria is far from over. So it is wrong that it seems to be fading from the attention globally, there has been less coverage of recent massive displacement of people, and there has been less humanitarian funding for Syria.

We have 7.7% funding only after one quarter of the year finished, in a situation where needs have risen compared to recent years. So a very well-funded humanitarian operation for Syrian civilians is now an acutely under-funded operation.

Perhaps the number one sign that the suffering is continuing and this is the very wrong time to turn our back to Syrian civilians is that more than half a million men, women and children have been displaced in the first three months of the year, more than half a million people. They have been displaced in and around Idlib, they have been displaced in and around eastern Ghouta, Rural Damascus, and from the district of Afrin in northern Aleppo.

Hopefully the battle is over now in the heavily populated area of eastern Ghouta after many years of besiegement and suffering. We have no reports of recent fighting, no reports of recent air raids. There were some 400,000 people besieged in eastern Ghouta for several years. At the end of the fighting, 130,000 people left eastern Ghouta, this is since the 9th of March, of this 83,000 went to eight collective shelters within rural Damascus in government-controlled areas. Conditions there had been terrible, our humanitarian partners were overwhelmed, the people came in the tens of thousands within a short period of time, now the operation is picking up and there is more help, but I was struck by 940 toilettes were installed, but if there are still 50,000 people in these collective shelters it is really terrible that they couldn't be given more assistance more quickly, but that is the horrible conditions of the area.

Of the 83,000, one third have been now able to leave the collective shelters and that is important because it has to be freedom of movement for everyone, these are people

who have been sponsored by, taken care of by relatives and others.

There is an ongoing negotiation between the Government and the Russian Federation and the armed groups inside Douma, which is the remaining area still under armed opposition control. We hope that that agreement will lead to people being able to stay, if they chose to, to get amnesty for those who put away their arms, but also be an opportunity to leave for those who chose to leave Douma. These evacuations have been massive; 50,000 people have left for Idlib alone.

Evacuations of civilians are desperate measures in desperate times. The best thing is that there is no war in urban areas, but all of those end battles in Syria going from one city to the other have been very bloody, and very costly in terms of civilian lives and civilian blood.

I think the evacuations helped end the battle and as such, it is a good thing. But 50,000 left for Idlib, we had a report to the group of countries on the conditions in Idlib. There are 2.2 million people in this small province. Of those two thirds are internally displaced people, they are displaced, so one and half million are displaced people in a small province means it is the biggest refugee camp on earth, in many ways, or cluster of refugee camps on earth. One and a half million people, I haven't ever seen a province where two-thirds of the entire population were displaced, and many were displaced multiple times. This shows that we need to learn from the battles of Homs, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, eastern Ghouta: Idlib cannot become a battle zone, it is full of civilians and they are vulnerable, displaced.

Conditions for humanitarian partners trying to help the hundreds of thousands are horrific, they have to care for hundreds of thousands without a home, without a shelter, without conditions. They are completely overwhelmed and on top of that, they are acutely underfunded. The appeals for the civilians in Idlib have not been funded, we should be able to do better at this last leg of the marathon of suffering in Syria.

Now there are also very concerning reports on the fate of the 140,000 displaced from and within the Afrin district in northern Aleppo governorate. Since the Turkish operation that started in late January, 140,000 people had been displaced, and estimated 50,000-70,000 people remain in Afrin town. We are concerned with restrictions on the movement of some of those who had left, for example it is very hard for sick and wounded to go Aleppo city as they may wish. In short, it is difficult, terrible for displaced from eastern Ghouta, displaced from Idlib, or displaced from the Afrin region.

We also had a report to the meeting on the important first big assessment mission to Raqqa city by the United Nations. This was an assessment done on 1 April, it was with 25 UN experts from a number of the key agencies. They report perhaps now that as many as 100,000 people have come back to Raqqa city. These are humanitarian workers who visited there and many said they had not seen such devastation before, ever. It seems worse than what was seen after the battle of Aleppo and the battle of Homs ended. A particular area of concern is the unexploded bombs, grenades and explosive traps: the latter left behind by Islamic State fighters and the former by this

enormous military campaign to take or to liberate Raqqa.

So homes are still full of bombs, grenades. Children, civilians are still being killed when and if they return. And it is still a city without a functioning public service, public services are planned but they are not really there yet. There is one functioning private hospital, there is no real police law and order, no real services in terms of public records, IDs, marriage certificates, birth certificate or anything. That has to come under control because there is another 100,000 people just outside of Raqqa wanting to return to the place.

Now let me perhaps end on a one point, it is related to Idlib and other areas where war is still raging or threatening, and it is the issue of de-confliction and protection of protected sites and installations under humanitarian law. You will know that basic principles of humanitarian law are that those waging war are told where a hospital is, where a humanitarian office is, where a humanitarian warehouse is, where a convoy is going. By in large in war zones this means clearly greater protection. In all war zones there are violations or attacks even on protected sites where coordinates had been given so-called de-confliction. We haven't been able to have a full and functional system in Syria throughout the war, some organizations have given their coordinates, many actually have chosen not to. The hospitals were hit, schools and other protected sites at an astronomical (rate) in Syria, through the war. Of late, many of the organizations have regained trust in the system and 170 sites have been de-conflicted, meaning the organizations have voluntarily decided to give the coordinates to the UN, who then say we watch for these being neutral and impartial places and then giving the coordinates to Russia and the United States who are the Co-Chairs of this Humanitarian Task Force. Now it is part of the de-confliction system that when there is an attack on a place where coordinates were given, we investigate as UN, we then provide report on what we found in terms of attacks and we give it to the two co-chairs. And on 20 March we got reports of a serious incident in terms of a health facility in Arbeen, east Ghouta, which was hit, and where sick and wounded have been treated for many years, and apparently one patient died. This has been then reported to Russia and the United States and we have urged them to investigate what can have happened.

I am saying all of this because it is not even half over in terms of protection needs in Syria, Idlib is one of the places full of protected installations and we need to see no more attacks.

....

Yes, it is possible to deliver humanitarian assistance to Raqqa, assistance is being delivered to Raqqa by a number of non-governmental organizations and other actors, and the UN will also start our assistance programmes there. The United States in the Task Force today explained all the activities that they have sponsored in terms of assistance to Raqqa and all that they have done to clear roads and streets and so on. But still it is incredible how much there is in any home and any back yard and so on, so people returning are taking a too large a risk still and it just shows the fierceness of this battle and again the question was it necessary to totally destroy a city to liberate it?

"Note to Correspondents: Transcript of Stakeout by UN Special Envoy's Senior Adviser Jan

Egeland," [U.N.](#), 4 April 2018.

My comment is that the mere 7.7% funding shows that many nations have abandoned the Syrian problem, perhaps as an expression of disgust at continuing the civil war for an eighth year, instead of negotiating peace in Geneva. The mass evacuations are perhaps the beginning of a partitioning of Syria, instead of maintaining a unified Syria.

3 May 2018: Briefing on Humanitarian Aid

On 3 May 2018, Egeland gave another briefing to journalists.

We just finished a long meeting of the Humanitarian Taskforce. We had a long list of challenges, a long list of problems, and there were somber reports from our colleagues in the field, from Damascus, from Gaziantep, and our Regional Coordinator, Panos Moutzis, who had come from Amman.

The Syria war has been synonymous really with hundreds and hundreds of thousands living in besieged areas, and millions in hard-to-reach areas. As we look back one year ago, there were 4.6 million living in hard-to-reach areas, and 625,000 people living in besieged areas. Today 2 million people live in hard-to-reach areas, less than half, and 11,000 people live in besieged locations. So a dramatic decrease, and what has happened are military events, military agreements. This is not a result, I am sad to say, part of any besiegement being lifted, as it should have been long ago, through negotiations, or that the war is ending through negotiations.

It is a good thing that people are not anymore living massively in besieged areas, and that much fewer people are living in hard-to-reach areas, but when this comes at the cost of horrific battles in heavily populated areas, and when it comes because of agreements made by a small group of military people and politicians, too often humanitarian concerns and the protection concerns for the civilian population is lost. The cost for these changes has been too high, a bad agreement is better than horrific war, but a good agreement is what we should strive for.

As we speak, the three remaining areas, and it is well documented in this map that is distributed to you, there are only three places where people are still besieged according to the UN documentations, and that is the two Shi'a towns of Foua and Kefraya, in Idlib, and then the ancient Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk, just south of Damascus.

As we speak, there are local agreements having been reached by the military actors that mean that people now have left and are leaving Yarmouk and the nearby place called Yalda. People have left and seems to be leaving for Idlib: these are fighters and families and possibly others, and there are also people evacuated from Foua and Kefraya and there are reports that there are agreements of potentially all or most, possibly all, of the two Shi'a towns being evacuated.

It would have been better, it is better if there were agreements for protection of people where they are, and that we can have an end to the besiegement and end to the fighting

in these places, that is the UN urging and I repeat again the UN has not been part or invited into talks about these deals, no humanitarian actor has, as far as I know it, been consulted on how to protect the civilians and make sure that evacuations are voluntary, protected, assisted and to a place of their choosing for the civilians and that they really had an option to stay with protection.

Now the battle for eastern Ghouta, which was the last large besieged area, is over. There were 390,000 people in this area, still 40,000 of these people live in congested displacement camps, outside of their area, there are reports of lack of freedom of movement, especially men between 16 and 65 years, have no freedom to leave these camps. It is also concerning that the UN is having severe restrictions on our access to eastern Ghouta: the battle is over, the civilians need our help, there should be no more restrictions, and this was very much the message now to the Humanitarian Taskforce, and that countries who can influence, including Russia, must make it fully possible to get access to all in eastern Ghouta, and for the people of eastern Ghouta to have freedom of movement wherever they are.

Tens of thousands of people left eastern Ghouta for Idlib. There are reports that now many people may be leaving Yarmouk and Yalda and the areas south of Damascus for Idlib. Others have left, seems to be leaving, Hama and northern Homs areas, also for Idlib. So Idlib is already filled to the brim of internally displaced civilians in often desperate conditions. The humanitarians, heroic humanitarian actors on the ground are completely overwhelmed. Again bad agreements and lack of choice for civilians, where they end up in Idlib, which may not be their choice, are not good agreements. We need to monitor this closely. We are there for the sake of the civilian population; we are not there to serve militaries in their military logic.

Now our fear is that the civilian suffering will see no respite, it saw no respite after the battle of eastern Ghouta was over, the battle just moved elsewhere. It moved to Yarmouk, Afrin in the north, was already a battle zone, there are attacks in Hama, in Homs, in the Islamic State-held areas in the east, and there are air raids in Idlib. So this notion that it is sort of ebbing this war is completely wrong, this war is on and it is still in the midst of civilian population.

One positive development is that we do now for the first time, more than seven years of war and conflict, we seem to have a beginning of a deconfliction and protection system for protected sites under humanitarian law. Syria is the worst place in modern history in terms of attacks against the medical profession, hospitals, clinics, but also schools, camps for the displaced people, and humanitarian warehouses and offices.

Until the beginning of this year, there was around 160 places that had voluntarily asked the UN to submit to the Russian Federation and the United States, and in the north also to Turkey, their coordinates, so they say we are here, we are medical or we are humanitarian, this is our location, we guarantee that we are doing only humanitarian work, UN: can you vouch for us and give the coordinates to these air forces and national militaries?

In the course of this year, 500 more sites had been so called deconflicted, coordinates

had been voluntarily handed over through the UN, so it is now 661 sites as of today. Four of these sites have had reported attacks, all of these four, and there had only been four out of the 661 places, all of these four has happened in 2018. Two of them in eastern Ghouta, two of them in northern Homs. We have reported these attacks to the Russian Federation and to the United States, United States reported back that they were not active militarily in either of these places. The Russian Federation undertook to investigate what happened. Today at the meeting I received reports from the Russian Federation of investigations of the attack in Arbin in eastern Ghouta, and in Douma, a children's hospital in Douma, and both are in the course of end March, beginning of April. The Russian military have visited the sites, they have investigated, they have provided photos, they gave a report back to us, now we will study them, we will certainly share them with the humanitarian NGO who gave the report, and then we will have to go back to Russia with our comment on their reports. It is a good thing that we have the reports because if those who are receiving the coordinates are not taking it very seriously the whole deconfliction system does not work.

Finally, on the convoys, of course all of this is changing now that there are hardly any besieged areas left, but again it didn't end well when we saw that in the course of March and April we reached 7% of the people that we asked to reach in the cross-front-line convoy plan. There was a convoy on 25 March to 75,000 people, 7% of the 1,030,000 people we asked to reach. I hope we will be better now, we were still asked to go cross line again and again we have asked recently to be able to go to Yarmouk, just now, asked to go Yarmouk, we need to go to northern Homs, there are still many many hundreds of thousands of people who live in opposition-controlled areas and who cannot be reached cross border from neighboring countries.

"Note to Correspondents: Transcript of Press Stakeout by Senior Adviser to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Jan Egeland," [U.N.](#), 3 May 2018.

28 June 2018: Briefing on Humanitarian Aid

On Thursday, 28 June 2018, Egeland gave his first briefing since 3 May.

We just finished the work of the Humanitarian Task Force today, we have had now three meetings in a row where we have had themes discussed in addition to the reports from the field. The themes are urgent, difficult, important. Today was discussed the possible humanitarian consequences on the sanctions on Syria, or coercive measures, as they are called. We have had a meeting, three meetings ago, on the so-called law 10, which is on the ownership to land, and housing in Syria, and we have had a special meeting on health care and attacks on health care in Syria.

We also had reports from our field colleagues in Damascus, from Amman and from Turkey. The most urgent concerning, burning issue today is the war coming to the southwest, Dar'a and Quneitra. So, as we met, tens of thousands of civilians are fleeing for their lives, really, in the southwest. This is heart wrenching because this was a zone where people felt safe until just days ago.

In July of last year, we applauded that Russia, the United States and Jordan enabled a

de-escalation zone which meant a rare area of sanity and of protection for civilians. Now, there is no protection, there is only war. We cannot have the war coming to an area with 750,000 civilians, those are now increasingly fleeing for their lives, many are already internally displaced.

The reports from our colleagues are that even the extremely effective life-line, across the border from Jordan, has been discontinued due to the fighting in recent two days. Humanitarian actors have prepositioned supplies inside Dar'a and inside Quneitra however movement is very difficult and humanitarian operations are paralyzed in too many areas.

So, our appeal, my appeal today also to the members of the Humanitarian Task Force and in particular to Russia, the United States and Jordan, is: do what you did last July, end the fighting, we cannot have fighting, in, on, and through civilian communities as we are seeing now, this must end. I hope we have learnt something from Aleppo, from Raqqa and from eastern Ghouta, where the war was fought on civilians, on humanitarians, on health care.

Now, Idlib is one of the other areas with extreme concern of the 900,000 who have fled so far, this year, 900,000 times a man, a woman or a child have fled from their homes, or the temporary shelter in Syria, so far, this year, 500,000 of those have fled to or within the small corner which is called Idlib in the north west. It has become increasingly difficult to do operations in Idlib, in part because it is overcrowded, in part because of attacks, including on two hospitals in the middle of this month, and in part because of the actions of the armed opposition groups who are not helping humanitarian actors, and who are in particular making health work difficult, even kidnapping health workers.

So, a word on health care in particular because it is a horrific catastrophe in what is the worst war of this generation. We have had more attacks on health in Syria than in any other war of our time. More than 700 attacks altogether on health facilities since the start of the war. So what is the answer to this? It is respect for humanitarian law, and one of the tools to get that is de-confliction of all hospitals and medical facilities and humanitarian work and workers.

We have had progress there, so today well over 660 hospitals, humanitarian sites, schools, IDP camps have had their coordinates delivered to the Russian Federation and to the United States and in some other cases to others who have air forces or who have participated in the fighting. Of these, more than 500 have been de-conflicted: coordinates have been given to the parties so far, this year. Vast majority has happened this year, it is too bad that it is at what seems to be the end of this horrific war that we get the system up and running.

In Dar'a, in the south, 51 humanitarian sites and premises, have been de-conflicted, 16 are public health centers, 22 are schools and the rest are humanitarian premises. I say this because the bombing is ongoing in these areas and we cannot have more bombing of hospitals, already 5 medical facilities, none of them de-conflicted, have been hit in Dar'a.

The whole point then is that if a de-conflicted site is hit the UN investigates, the UN reports its investigation to our Co-Chairs, Russia and the United States, and we ask for their investigations. Four of these 660 sites have been hit, this was in March and in April and it happened in eastern Ghouta and it happened in northern rural Homs, including hospitals in Arbin and Douma. Russia has agreed to investigate, those where the ones who were active militarily in these areas, we have had reports back from Russia, we were not satisfied with those reports, and we have engaged in an exchange that is ongoing. We will stay on this until we find out what happened to these attacks and we will also do that in the future. The only way to get preventive action is that all military actors feel that there are consequences.

Now final point on convoys: there have been more convoys of late to hard-to-reach areas. They have had two problems: UN staff have not been allowed on some of them and medical items have still been offloaded on some of them, which is a way mind boggling that the government is still insisting to offload medical supplies even to places that they now have taken control of of late. In the most recent convoy this week, the Humanitarian Coordinator has succeeded in having UN staff and medical supplies reinstated on the convoy. We hope that that will be the case again.

"Transcript of Press Stakeout By Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 28 June 2018.

U.N. Reports

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

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

Prosecution for War Crimes ?

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

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

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

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

The plight of those in Aleppo and elsewhere across the country underscores that civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic are as much at risk as they have ever been owing to the continued blatant disregard for humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. Ongoing sieges are depriving civilians of the most basic items necessary for their survival, such as water and food, and strikes are launched on heavily populated areas from both air and ground, without regard for civilian presence. Parties to the conflict must immediately abide by international humanitarian law and individuals who fail to do so should be brought to account. Civilians must not and cannot ever be a target and all efforts should be made to protect civilian lives, including at the expense of gaining a military advantage.

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

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

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

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

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

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

....

S/2016/714 at ¶51 (16 Aug 2016).

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

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

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

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014),

2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/796 at ¶41 (16 Sep 2016).

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

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

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

....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

accountable. I look forward to the deliberations by the Security Council on this report. Ban Ki-moon, "Letter dated 2 November 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council," S/2016/928, 2 Nov 2016.

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

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

....

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

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

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

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

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

The Secretary-General reminds all parties to the conflict that targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure is a war crime. He calls on all sides to immediately cease any such attacks. Those responsible for these and other atrocities in Syria, whoever and wherever they are, must one day be brought to account.

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

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

2016.

My comment is that this U.N. statement on 20 November 2016 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 each of his following monthly reports:

- S/2017/623 at ¶41 (July 2017),
- S/2017/733 at ¶42 (Aug),
- S/2017/794 at ¶44 (Sep),
- S/2017/902 at ¶44 (Oct),
- S/2017/982 at ¶48 (Nov),
- S/2017/1057 at ¶42 (Dec 2017),
- S/2018/60 at ¶45 (Jan 2018),
- S/2018/138 at ¶43 (Feb 2018),
- S/2018/243 at ¶45 (Mar 2018),
- S/2018/369 at ¶45 (April 2018),
- S/2018/484 at ¶51 (May 2018), and
- S/2018/619 at ¶46 (June 2018).

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.

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":

- 115 dead (not including police and not including Anbar province) during January 2018. [UNAMI](#).
- 91 dead civilians during February 2018. [UNAMI](#).
- 104 dead civilians during March 2018. [UNAMI](#).
- 68 dead civilians during April 2018. [UNAMI](#).
- 95 dead civilians during May 2018. [UNAMI](#).
- 76 dead civilians during June 2018. [UNAMI](#).

On 3 December 2016, UNAMI announced it would stop reporting casualty numbers for the Iraqi army, because the Iraqi army wanted to keep those numbers secret to prevent loss of

morale. [UNAMI](#); [Associated Press](#). That change in reporting means that future UNAMI casualty numbers will be smaller than past numbers, making it difficult to compare monthly numbers before and after the month of November 2016.

ISIL attacks in Iraq and other news from Iraq

On 15 January 2018, two ISIL suicide bombers exploded in Baghdad, killing at least 38 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The [New York Times](#) reported “The carnage in Tayaran Square punctured a growing sense of hope and pride that had permeated Baghdad after Iraq’s security forces,” had declared victory over ISIL in Iraq.

On 5 February 2018, the U.S. Military began withdrawing troops from Iraq. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 12 February 2018, the the director-general of Iraq’s planning ministry said Iraq needed about US\$ 88 billion for reconstruction after ISIL was defeated in Iraq. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is that foreign nations will *not* be enthusiastic about paying this additional cost to the oil-rich nation of Iraq. The ISIL invasion of Iraq in 2014 was largely the result of former Iraqi prime minister Al-Maliki's incompetent government. And Iraq still has a dysfunctional parliament and corrupt government, despite current prime minister Abadi's efforts.

The majority of people in Iraq — and the majority of the Iraqi parliament — are Shiite muslims. These Shiites in the Iraqi government since 2003 have discriminated against the Sunni muslims. So when ISIL — a Sunni muslim extremist group — appeared in 2014, some Sunnis in Iraq welcomed ISIL as an alternative to the Iraqi government. Most of the towns and cities that were destroyed in the war against ISIL had a Sunni majority. The failure to rebuild Iraq will create conditions for new Islamic insurgencies in Sunni areas of Iraq, as Sunnis see the lack of rebuilding as evidence of continuing discrimination against them.

On 14 February, donors at a United Nations conference in Kuwait pledged US\$ 30 million to rebuild Iraq. Even if *all* of the pledges are paid, that is only one-third of the amount needed. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [New York Times](#). Some of the money delivered to Iraq will go into the personal accounts of corrupt Iraqi government officials, continuing the waste of precious resources.

On 7 March 2018, the [Associated Press](#) reports that corpses of ISIL fighters still lie in neighborhoods in Mosul, because the Iraqi government does not have the resources to properly dispose of rotting corpses.

On 2 May 2018, ISIL insurgents conducted a drive-by shooting north of Baghdad that killed at least 8 people and wounded 13 people. [Associated Press](#).

12 May 2018: Iraqi election

On Saturday, 12 May 2018, there was a nationwide election for 329 seats in the Iraqi parliament. Voter turnout was light, only 44% — the lowest turnout since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. The previous elections in 2014 had a 62% turnout. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Sky News](#).

Preliminary results on 13 May showed three major coalitions of political parties:

1. Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr leads the Sayirun Alliance coalition of parties. Reformer who opposes corruption in current Iraqi parliament. Opposed to both Iranian and U.S. influences, but allied with Communists.
2. Hadi al-Ameri, who also leads a large Shiite militia, leads the Fatih (Conquest) Alliance. Influenced by Iran.
3. Incumbent Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi leads the Victory Alliance coalition of parties. Abadi is aligned with the U.S. Government. Abadi is a reformer, but he has been stalemated by a corrupt Iraqi parliament and opposed by former Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki. (Mismanagement by al-Maliki allowed ISIL to overrun Iraq in 2014.)

Sources: [Rudaw](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 14 May at 17:12 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported "preliminary results were based on a count of more than 95 percent of the votes cast in 10 of Iraq's 18 provinces." Sadr had 54 seats in Parliament (16% of the 329 total seats), Amiri had 47 seats (14%), and Abadi had 42 seats (13%). Notice that these three largest political coalitions together have only 43% of the seats, not enough to select a prime minister. Of course, as more votes are counted, the number of seats for each alliance may increase.

Part of the problem is that there were approximately 7000 candidates from 87 parties or alliances competing for only 329 seats in the Iraqi parliament. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Al-Awsat](#). That large number of parties/alliances makes it easy for *no* party/alliance to have a majority in parliament. The worst case would be for each of the 87 alliances to win 3 or 4 seats (1%) in parliament.

On 19 May, the final results of the election were announced. The [Associated Press](#) grimly reported: "No one alliance won an outright majority and negotiations over forming the government are expected to drag on for months as parties try to form a bloc large enough to gain a majority in parliament." [Rudaw](#) reported the total number of seats won by each of the major parties/alliances:

1. cleric al-Sadr's Sayirun — 54 seats
2. Hadi al-Ameri's Fatih — 47 seats
3. Haider al-Abadi's Victory (Nasr) alliance — 42 seats
4. al-Maliki's State of Law — 26 seats

Note that al-Sadr needs to form a coalition with parties/alliances that have at least 111 seats, to obtain a majority of the 329 seats in the new Iraqi parliament. With parliament fragmented

with many small parties and alliances, obtaining a majority will be very difficult.

Iraq was planning to do a full manual recount of ballots, but on 10 June there was a fire in one of four warehouses where the ballots were stored. But Reuters reported that Interior Minister Qasim al-Araji said that "not a single box was burned." [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

Beginning 8 July 2018, there were protest demonstrations in various cities (e.g., Najaf, Kerbala, Basra) in southern Iraq. The protesters are angry about lack of government services (e.g., electricity, water), lack of jobs, as well as corruption in the Iraqi government. [Reuters](#)(8July); [Associated Press](#)(12July); [Washington Post](#)(14July); [Reuters](#)(14July); [Associated Press](#)(15July); [Reuters](#)(15July).

As I prepare to abandon my chronicle of ISIL in Iraq, it appears that the Iraqi government is corrupt and dysfunctional. There still have been *no* criminal prosecution of Army officers and former prime minister Maliki for allowing ISIL to overrun Iraq in 2014. Moreover, Iraq can *not* afford the cost of rebuilding cities destroyed by ISIL (e.g., Ramadi, Fallujah, Mosul).

On 17 July 2017, the [Washington Post](#) published an article titled "ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq less than a year after Baghdad declared victory". Liz Sly and Mustafa Salim reported: "The Islamic State is creeping back into parts of central Iraq just seven months after the government declared victory in the war against the group, embarking on a wave of kidnappings, assassinations and bombings that have raised fears a new cycle of insurgency is starting again."

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Introduction

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

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

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

Back in August 2014 there was a burst of condemnation of terrorism by Islamic clerics. (See

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

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

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

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

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

My Proposal

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

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

- sell captured women as sex slaves

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. **Collect and display truth about Islamic terrorism:**

Create and operate websites that

- A. explain why ISIL and Al-Qaeda are violating teachings of Islam,
- B. collect and display Fatwas against ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
- C. list atrocities committed by ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
- D. hire Muslim clerics to write blogs or essays about how terrorism is evil.

Each website to have versions for Arabic, French, and English languages.

2. **Social media:** Monitor social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and refute propaganda. Cite URLs of websites that display truth about Islamic terrorism.
3. Produce press releases that can be published by newspapers or reported by radio/television stations.
4. Use ridicule and parody to humiliate ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

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

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

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

Need to Kill *Ideology* of Islamic Terrorism

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

- In June 2006, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL).
- In May 2011, the U.S. Military killed Osama bin Laden.
- In September 2011, a U.S. drone strike killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an Islamic cleric and Al-Qaeda terrorist in Yemen.
- On 9 June 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi (aka al-Wahishi), head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). He was also the apparent successor to current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.

- On 13 June 2015, U.S. fighter jets may have killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Libya. He is/was a leader in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.
- On 16 June 2015, an airstrike in Syria smote "a senior ISIL leader", Tariq bin Tahar al-'Awni al-Harzi. [Reuters](#); [AP](#).
- On 11 July 2015, Abu Khalil al-Sudani, an Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, was killed by a U.S. airstrike. The [Pentagon](#) boasted of the accomplishment. See also, [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 18 August 2015, a U.S. drone strike near Mosul killed the Nr. 2 leader of ISIL, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hayali, also known as "Hajji Mutazz", "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani", or "Abu Mutaz Qurashi". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). On 13 October, [Reuters](#) reports ISIL has confirmed his death.
- On 15 October 2015, a U.S. Coalition airstrike in Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh — also known as Sanafi al-Nasr — who was the leader of the Al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 12 November 2015, a U.S. drone airstrike in Syria apparently killed Mohamed Emwazi — a U.K. citizen also known as "Jihadi John" — who had executed at least 6 hostages (e.g., Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Abdul-Rahman Kassig, David Haines, Alan Henning, Kenji Goto) beginning in August 2014. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 13 November and 2 December 2015, U.S. airstrikes killed al-Qaida leaders in Libya and Somalia. [Pentagon](#).
- In "late November" 2015, a U.S. airstrike in Iraq killed Abu Salah, the financial minister of ISIL. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 29 December 2015, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes had killed 10 senior ISIL leaders during 7-27 December. Some of the dead leaders were involved in the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 Nov. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 29 Dec; [Reuters](#) on 30 Dec.
- On 25 March 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S. Military had killed Haji Imam, "who was an ISIL senior leader, serving as a finance minister and who is also responsible for some external affairs and plots." Imam is also known as Abdul-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) spells the dead man's name as "Haji Iman — an alias for Abd ar-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli".
- On 4 May 2016, Australia announced that a Cambodian immigrant who had joined ISIL had been killed by a U.S. airstrike in Mosul on 29 April. His name was Neil Prakash, also known as Abu Khaled al-Cambodi. Neil had been featured in ISIL recruiting videos. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [ABC](#); [Sydney Morning Herald](#).
- On 9 May 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that an airstrike on 6 May had killed "Abu

Wahib, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's military emir for Iraq's Anbar province". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

- On 21 May 2016, the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, was killed by an airstrike from a U.S. drone in Pakistan. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). [Reuters](#) reported: "The death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour ... could further fracture the Taliban — an outcome that experts cautioned might make the insurgents even less likely to participate in long-stalled peace efforts." And [Reuters](#) reported the Pakistani government is wailing about the U.S. violation of Pakistani sovereignty. [Obama](#) was pleased that Mansour — also spelled Mansur — was killed by the U.S. military. Four days after Mansour was killed, the Taliban elected a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 4 August 2016, an Egyptian military airstrike killed the leader of ISIL in Egypt, Abu Doaa al-Ansari. [Ahram](#); [Associated Press](#); [Ahram](#)(18 Aug confirmation); [Al-Arabiya](#)(19 Aug).
- On 30 August 2016, a U.S. airstrike near Al Bab, Syria, splatted Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani. He is said to be the head of external operations of ISIL (i.e., in charge of attacks in Europe, etc.), a tactician, and their chief spokesman. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#)(31Aug); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Pentagon](#)(12Sep).
- On 8 September 2016, Abu Hajer al Homsy, also known as Abu Omar Saraqeb, the top military commander of Nusra Front (now called "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham") was killed by an airstrike in the village of Kafr Naha, Syria. [Reuters](#); [Middle East Eye](#). On 9 Sep, [FRANCE24](#)(AFP) and [Al-Arabiya](#) reports that the Pentagon denied a U.S.-airstrike killed him.
- On 7 September 2016, a U.S. airstrike splatted Wa'il Adil Hasan Salman al-Fayad, a senior leader of ISIL and the ISIL minister of information, who prepared terrorist videos. [Pentagon](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#)(10 Oct).
- On 3 October 2016, a U.S. airstrike in Idlib province of Syria killed Sheikh Abu al Faraj al-Masri (real name = Sheikh Ahmad Salamah Mabrouk), an Egyptian terrorist who in the 1980s fought in Afghanistan with Ayman al-Zawahri (the current Al-Qaeda leader). [Reuters](#) says the dead Sheikh was a "prominent member" of Nusra Front in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 26 November 2016, a U.S. drone airstrike in Raqqa killed Boubaker el Hakim, an ISIL member who allegedly was involved in planning the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper offices in Paris on 7 Jan 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 4 December 2016, a U.S. drone splatted three ISIL members in Raqqa. The three were allegedly plotting attacks in foreign nations, and two of them had allegedly been involved in the Islamic attacks in Paris on 13 Nov 2015. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-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](#) of this essay gives examples of major attacks by ISIL after May 2015, to show that ISIL has *not* been defeated.

Mullah Omar was the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 1996. Omar was reclusive and not seen in public since 2001. On 29 July 2015, there were unconfirmed reports that Omar had died in a hospital in Karachi, Pakistan in April 2013. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 30 July 2015, the reports were confirmed and the Taliban appointed a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Express Tribune](#) in Pakistan; [Associated Press](#). This example shows us how unimportant a leader is to a terrorist organization. The Taliban functioned successfully with a dead leader for more than two years! Journalists report that Omar's death may make peace negotiations more difficult, because some Taliban want to continue fighting. But — regardless of who leads the Taliban — there will be some Taliban who want to continue fighting, in the hope for a total victory.

On 25 September 2016, the Associated Press

Five years after Anwar al-Awlaki was killed by an American drone strike, he keeps inspiring acts of terror.

Investigators say a bomb that rocked New York a week ago, injuring more than two dozen people, was the latest in a long line of incidents in which the attackers were inspired by al-Awlaki, an American imam who became an al-Qaida propagandist.

....

Terror experts say al-Awlaki remains a dangerous inciter of homegrown terror. He spoke American English, and his sermons are widely available online. And since he was killed in Yemen on Sept. 30, 2011, martyred in the eyes of followers, those materials take on an almost mythic quality. His primary message: Muslims are under attack and have a duty to carry out attacks on non-believers at home.

Among the attackers who investigators and terror experts say were inspired by al-Awlaki and his videos: the couple who carried out the San Bernardino, California, shootings, which left 14 people dead in December [2015], and the brothers behind the Boston Marathon bombing, which killed three people and injured more than 260 others in April 2013.

....

The director of the Center on National Security at Fordham Law School, Karen Greenberg, noted her center's study of the first 101 Islamic State group cases in federal courts, updated through June, showed more than 25 percent of the cases' court records contained references to al-Awlaki's influence.

Larry Neumeister, "US terror attacks' common denominator: Anwar al-Awlaki," [Associated Press](#), 25 Sep 2016.

The Internet serves as a giant library, which is continuously available to everyone. It should be *no* surprise that the Internet gives ideas an immortality beyond the life of their author. Just as the Internet continues to spread the terrorist messages of Anwar al-Awlaki, the Internet *could* also spread the message of mainstream Islam that condemns terrorism.

Admittedly, the world is a better place with ISIL terrorists — of any rank — dead. However, killing a few leaders of ISIL will *not* cause ISIL to collapse. Killing leaders of ISIL is a temporary inconvenience to ISIL, *not* a death knell. It is also possible that a new ISIL leader may be more competent or more vicious than the previous leader. Continually attacking the ideology of Islamic terrorism is more detrimental to a terrorist organization than the brief inconvenience of killing a terrorist leader.

Despite the essential importance of countering the ideology of Islamic terrorism, during the first year of the U.S. war against ISIL, the Sawab Center in the UAE was the only organization created and dedicated to countering ideology. (See my essay for [July 2015](#).)

Recent Events

On 31 January 2017, the [Associated Press](#) exposed flaws in a U.S. Central Command program on the Internet to counter recruiting by Islamic terrorist organizations. An early version of the Associated Press article said the military program was "botched" because the operatives "have little experience in counter-propaganda, cannot speak Arabic fluently and have so little understanding of Islam they are no match for the Islamic State online recruiters." Moreover, the management is "beset with incompetence, cronyism and flawed data". My comment is that the CENTCOM program of hiring immigrants from Morocco is not as good as my 2015 proposal above to use refugees from Syria and Iraq who remain in the Middle East (e.g., Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.).

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

On 22 March 2017, the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, spoke at the Global Coalition Summit and said: "We are not doing enough to counter the perverse ideas and narrative of ISIS. Our challenge is to ensure these ideas are pushed to the fringes of our societies. There must be more Muslim moderate voices drowning out the extremists." [Australian ForMin](#). See also [The Australian](#).

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

ISIL is *not* defeated

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

1. On 10 June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), but, as of April 2017, the Iraqis have been unable to liberate Mosul.
2. My essay for [Jan 2015](#) chronicled the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.
3. On 23-24 Feb 2015, ISIL abducted more than 220 Assyrian Christians in Syria. As of 30 Aug 2015, only approximately 46 have been released by ISIL.
4. On 17 May 2015, ISIL captured Ramadi in Iraq. After seven months of procrastination and delay, on 27-28 Dec 2015, the Iraqi army captured the government center in downtown Ramadi, as explained in detail in my essays.

5. On 20 May 2015, ISIL captured Palmyra in Syria. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#).
6. On 22 May 2015, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in a Shiite mosque in Saudi Arabia, killing 21 people. [Washington Post](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).
7. My essay for [June 2015](#) cited that an ISIL suicide bomber killed 27 people at at Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahrum](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).

19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."
21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least 57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.
24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels. See my essay for [March 2016](#).
25. On 12 June 2016, an Islamic terrorist perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando Florida. The terrorist pledged allegiance to ISIL, although there is *no* evidence that ISIL communicated with him. See my essay for [June 2016](#).
26. On 16 June 2016, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), John Brennan, testified before a committee of the U.S. Senate that "Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [CNN](#).
27. At night on 28 June 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers attacked an airport in Istanbul, Turkey. At least 42 people were killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
28. At 20:45 on 1 July 2016, seven ISIL terrorists attacked a bakery/restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taking hostages. The terrorists killed 20 hostages and 2 policemen. The terrorists had the hostages recite verses from the Koran, to identify who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim hostages were tortured and killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). While the Bangladeshi government attempted to deny that the terrorists were affiliated with ISIL, the terrorists belonged to a gang that had pledged allegiance to ISIL. [NY Times](#) ("... a local extremist group that has pledged loyalty to the Islamic State butchered

- diners in a restaurant."); [Reuters](#) ("... Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen claims it represents Islamic State."). Further, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Dhaka. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Moreover, the attackers uploaded photographs of their attack to the ISIL headquarters in Syria. The children of upper-class parents had joined the terrorist gang, which the [NY Times](#) says is evidence of the radicalization of the population. More about the elite attackers is at [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).
29. On 3 July 2016, an ISIL truck bomb detonated at a shopping center in Baghdad, killing at least 292 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
 30. On 4 July 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in the parking lot outside the mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, where the prophet Mohammed is buried. The blast killed four Saudi Arabian soldiers who were guarding the mosque. This attack is important because it occurred at one of the holiest sites of the Islamic religion. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Saudi Press Agency](#); [The Guardian](#).
 31. On 14 July 2016, an ISIL terrorist drove a truck through a crowd of people in Nice, France, killing 86 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
 32. On 18, 24, and 26 July 2016, there were ISIL terrorist attacks in Würzburg in Germany, Ansbach in Germany, and Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in France. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
 33. On 2 August 2016, [NBC News](#) published an exclusive report of a classified National Counterterrorism Center briefing to the White House, that showed a "fully operational" ISIL had spread to 18 nations during Obama's presidency. ISIL is "aspiring" in six additional nations.
 34. On 6 August 2016, an Islamic terrorist — and illegal immigrant from Algeria — used a machete to slash the faces of two policewomen in Charleroi, Belgium. See my essay for [August 2016](#).
 35. On 20 August 2016, ISIL sent a suicide bomber to a wedding party in Gaziantep, Turkey, where at least 54 people were killed. Early reports said the suicide bomber was between 12 and 14 years old. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(21Aug); [Associated Press](#)(22Aug).
 36. On 10 December 2016, ISIL recaptured Palmyra, Syria. Assad's army had liberated Palmyra from ISIL in March 2016.
 37. On 11 December 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated inside St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo, the seat of the Egyptian Orthodox Church, killing at least 25 people. [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#).
 38. On 1 January 2017 at 01:15, a man dressed as Santa Claus walked into a nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey carrying a rifle. He shot 108 people, of whom 39 died. He shouted "Allahu Akbar" as he shot unarmed civilians. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#)(1Jan); [Anadolu Agency](#); [Reuters](#)(2Jan). ISIL claimed responsibility. [Reuters](#);

- [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#). On 16 January 2017, police in Turkey arrested the gunman, who was a citizen of Uzbekistan who had trained in Afghanistan. [Anadolu](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
39. On 7 Feb 2017, an ISIL bomb at the Supreme Court building in Kabul, Afghanistan killed 22 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
 40. On 8 March 2017, a group of four ISIL terrorists dressed as medical personnel and attacked a military hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan — killing more than 30 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
 41. On Palm Sunday, 9 April 2017, ISIL terrorists attacked Coptic Christian churches in Tanta and Alexandria, Egypt, killing at least 45 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
 42. On 12 May 2017, an ISIL bomb exploded targeted a convoy of automobiles for the deputy chairman of the Pakistan Senate, killing at least 25 people in the town of Mastung. [Reuters](#).
 43. On 26 May 2017, ISIL attacked buses carrying Coptic Christians in Egypt, killing 29 people. The Egyptian government retaliated with airstrikes on ISIL training camps in Libya. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Los Angeles Times](#).
 44. On 7 June 2017, ISIL gunmen and ISIL suicide bombers attacked Iran's Parliament and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran, killing at least 12 people. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#).
 45. In June 2017, ISIL began an active insurgency in the city of Marawi, in the southern Philippines. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Navy Times](#). 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](#).
56. On 18 February 2018, an ISIL gunman killed 5 people and wounded another 5 people in a church in Kizlyar, in Russia's province of Dagestan. [TASS](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
57. On 22 April 2018, an ISIL suicide bomber attacked a voter registration center in Kabul Afghanistan, killing at least 57 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
58. On 16 June 2018, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a gathering of Taliban and Afghan Army soldiers, who were celebrating a ceasefire, killing at least 26 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
59. On 25 July 2018, a series of ISIL suicide bombings in the province of Sweida, in southern Syria, killed more than 200 people. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [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 9 August 2018, the Pentagon website has a very stale number for 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 9 August 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.](#)

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.
- My essay for [Oct-Dec 2017](#) described Islamic terrorists in Canada and France at the end of September 2017, an Islamic terrorist in New York City on 31 Oct 2017, another Islamic terrorist in New York City on 11 Dec 2017, and an Islamic terrorist in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on 22 Dec 2017.

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.

Recent Islamic Terrorists

15 September 2017: Islamic terrorist in London Subway

As chronicled in my [Aug-Sep 2017](#) essay, Ahmed Hassan was arrested on the morning of 16 September 2017 for putting a bomb aboard a subway train in a London suburb. Ahmed claimed — without evidence — to be 18 years old and an orphan from the Iraq war.

On 16 March 2018, Ahmed was convicted by a jury of the bombing of a train at the Parsons Green subway station in suburban London. [BBC](#); [Evening Standard](#); [Reuters](#).

On 23 March 2018, Ahmed was sentenced to between 34 years and life in prison. The judge found that Ahmed had lied about his age, he was older than 18 years. [The Telegraph](#); [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#).

7 March 2018: Islamic terrorist in Vienna

On 7 March 2018 at 19:45, a refugee from Afghanistan stabbed three people outside a restaurant in Vienna, then fled to the Praterstern, where he stabbed a fourth person. He was arrested after stabbing the fourth person. [CNN](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 8 March, the 23 year old Afghani confessed to the four stabbings. He said he committed the crimes because “he was in a bad, aggressive mood and upset about his life’s situation.” [Associated Press](#).

23 March 2018: Islamic terrorist in France

On 23 March 2018, a 26 year old Muslim from Morocco named Redouane Lakdim hijacked a car, shot at police officers who were jogging, and then took one hostage in a supermarket in the town of Trèbes, France. In the supermarket, Lakdim yelled “Allahu akbar!” several times. A brave gendarme traded places with the hostage. Police then shot Lakdim dead.

The total:

- 4 dead (not counting Lakdim):
 - Lakdim killed a passenger in the hijacked car.
 - Lakdim killed two civilians — a customer and an employee — in the supermarket.
 - Lakdim shot a gendarme who had traded place with the hostage in the supermarket. The gendarme died in a hospital the following morning.
- 15 wounded, including:
 - the driver of the hijacked car,
 - one jogging policeman,

13 people in the supermarket

ISIL's Amaq news agency claimed Lakdim was "a soldier of the Islamic State".

Sources: [New York Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Associated Press](#)(blog); [The Telegraph](#); [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(24Mar).

1 May 2018: Islamic terrorist arrested *before* he attacked shopping mall near Dallas Texas

Matin Azizi-Yarand was a 17-year old high school student in Plano, Texas. He was planning a mass shooting at Stonebriar Mall in Frisco, Texas sometime during Ramadan, which begins on 15 May 2018. He selected Ramadan to minimize the number of Muslims who would be at the mall. His downfall was that he communicated online with an FBI informant, beginning in December 2017. In his manifesto, Matin pledged allegiance to ISIL. Matin was arrested on 1 May 2018. He will be tried in Texas state court as an adult on charges of (1) criminal solicitation of capital murder of a policeman and (2) making a terroristic threat.

Because Matin was radicalized on the Internet, and learned about terror attacks and bomb-making on the Internet, terrorists like Matin could appear anywhere in the world.

Sources:

- "Texas Teen Matin Azizi-Yarand Arrested For Planning Mall Shooting Spree," [CBS-DFW](#), 19:33 CDT, 2 May 2018.
 - "Arrested Plano Student Was Inspired by Islamic State to Carry Out Attack at Stonebriar Mall: Police," [KXAS](#), 23:31 CDT, 2 May 2018.
 - "Plano teen arrested in ISIS-inspired plot to commit mass shooting at Frisco's Stonebriar mall," [Dallas Morning News](#), 2 May 2018.
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12 May 2018: Islamic terrorist in Paris

On Saturday at 20:47 (Paris time), 12 May 2018, a man with a knife attacked people near the Opera House in Paris. He stabbed 5 people, of whom one died. The stabber was shot and killed by police.

The Telegraph reported at 20:26 GMT (22:26 Paris time): "The assailant shouted 'Allahu Akhbar' (Arabic for God is great) as he lunged at pedestrians, witnesses said." About three hours after the attack, ISIL's official Amaq news agency claimed the knifeman was "one of its soldiers". That claim may mean that ISIL hopes that its propaganda inspired the attack.

The Islamic knifeman carried no identification, so police identified him by his DNA. He is Khamzat Azimov, born in Chechnya in Nov 1997. He and his parents have lived in France as

refugees since the early 2000s. Since 2016, he has been on a French counter-terrorism watchlist of suspected Islamic radicals, but only because Khamzat was friends with Islamic terrorists who wanted to travel to Syria.

At about 18:00 GMT on 13 May, ISIL's official Amaq news agency released a 2½ minute video of the alleged Paris knifeman in which he pledges allegiance to ISIL's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The man in the video also urges European Muslims to attack their home nation. One can not be certain that the man in the video is the Paris knifeman, because his entire face is covered except for his eyes.

On Monday, 14 May, I searched Google News, Reuters, and the Associated Press, but I found no significant news. On Sunday morning, police arrested Khamzat's parents and on Sunday afternoon, police arrested a 20 year old friend of Khamzat — then began interrogating the three. The interrogation continued on Monday.

Sources:

GMT is two hours earlier than Paris time.

- "Knifeman shot dead by French police after stabbing several people in Paris," [The Telegraph](#), 20:26 GMT, 12 May 2018, updated later.
- "The Latest: 1 person killed, suspect dead in Paris attack," [Associated Press](#), 20:25 GMT, 12 May 2018, last updated 01:15 GMT on 13 May.
- "Islamic State group news agency claims suspect in Paris knife attack as one of its soldiers." [Associated Press](#), 22:10 GMT, 12 May 2018. ("Islamic State group news agency claims suspect in Paris knife attack as one of its 'soldiers.'")
- "One killed in Paris knife attack by man shouting 'Allah Akbar'," [Reuters](#), 22:38 GMT, 12 May 2018, updated later. ("The first call to police was placed at 8:47 p.m. local time (1847 GMT), officers were on the scene within five minutes, and the attacker was 'neutralized' within nine minutes of that first call, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe told reporters.")
- "Islamic State group claims responsibility for deadly Paris knife attack," [FRANCE24](#), about 04:00 GMT, 13 May 2018. ("The executor of the stabbing operation in the city of Paris is a soldier of the Islamic State and the operation was carried out in response to the calls to target the coalition states,' a security source told IS's official Amaq news agency, according to SITE.")
- "French police identify knife-wielding killer in suspected Paris terror attack," [FRANCE24](#), about 06:30 GMT, 13 May 2018. ("A judicial source said the attacker was born in Chechnya in 1997.")
- "The Latest: Monitoring group ID's Paris suspect in IS video," [Associated Press](#), 06:20 GMT, 13 May 2018, updated later. ("Chechnya's president identified [the suspect] on Sunday [13 May] as Khamzat Azimov.")

- "Paris knife attacker was known to counter-terrorism police," [The Guardian](#), 10:50 GMT, 13 May 2018.
- "Paris knife attacker was French citizen born in Chechnya," [Reuters](#), 15:29 GMT, 13 May 2018. ("A judicial source named the attacker as Khamzat A, without giving his full name, which BFM TV and other French media said was Azimov." "The attacker had since 2016 been on a counter-terrorism watchlist of suspected radicals who may be a threat to national security, government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux said.")
- "Friend of Paris knife attacker handed charges in rampage," [Associated Press](#), 17 May 2018. (A 20 year old from Chechnya and friend of Khamzat, Abdul Hakim A., was arrested on a charge of "association with terrorist criminals" (i.e., Khamzat). In other news, "[France's anti-terrorism prosecutor] Molins said Azimov's parents, who were detained shortly after the stabbing spree, recognized their son in a video declaring allegiance to the Islamic State group that was released a day later.")

29 May 2018: Islamic terrorist in Liège, Belgium

On 28 May 2018, Belgium temporarily released Benjamin Herman from prison on a two-day furlough. That was a mistake. Herman used his temporary freedom to murder a former prison inmate who Herman knew.

On 29 May 2018 at 10:30 Belgium time, Herman stabbed two policewomen in Liege in the back. He then stole their pistols, and shot them dead. He also shot and killed a 22 year old man.

Herman fled into a school, where he took a woman hostage. Eventually, Herman walked out of the school and fired the stolen pistols at police. Herman shouted "Allahu akbar" as he fired at police. The police shot Herman dead.

Sources:

GMT is two hours earlier than Belgium time.

- "Belgium gunman 'killed man before Liege attack': what we know," [euronews](#), 29 May 2018. ("The gunman attacked two female police officers — aged 45 and 53 — from behind with a knife at around 10.30am CET, seized their handguns and shot them dead.")
- "The Latest: Belgian officer's killing orphans twin daughters," [Associated Press](#), 21:00 GMT, 29 May 2018.
- "Killings by Belgian inmate treated as terror; IS claims role," [Associated Press](#), 30 May 2018. ("Herman, 31, a convert to Islam, was known to local authorities as a repeat offender involved in petty crime and drugs. He spent most of his time in prison since 2003 and was on a two-day leave when he launched his attack.")

- "The Latest: Islamic State group claims deadly Belgium attack," [Associated Press](#), 19:00 GMT, 30 May 2018. (ISIL's Amaq news agency claims Herman was a "soldier of the caliphate".)
 - "Islamic State claims Belgian attack as city mourns," [Reuters](#), 19:58 GMT, 30 May 2018.
 - "Prison May Have Made Belgian Attacker a Radical, Officials Say," [New York Times](#), 30 May 2018.
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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.

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".)

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

3. Glimmer of Hope for End to Syrian Civil War

On 29 January 2016, peace negotiations began in Geneva.

However, peace negotiations in Geneva were scuttled by an obstructionist opposition delegation. From its creation on 11 December 2015, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) — the main opposition delegation — insisted on pre-conditions (i.e., demands) *before* the HNC would begin negotiations:

1. end to the airstrikes by Assad and Russia,
2. end sieges by Assad's army,
3. delivery of humanitarian aid to rebel-controlled towns,
4. Assad releases all political prisoners, and
5. Assad resign.

At different times, the HNC made slightly different demands, but the above-mentioned five demands were commonly made. The HNC attempted to obtain through demands what they could not militarily win during five years of civil war. Obviously, one should *not* go into negotiations with Assad with a demand that Assad resign — the role of Assad in the future of Syria is for *all* the people of Syria to decide in an election.

Because the HNC arrived late, de Mistura first met with the HNC on 31 Jan 2016, two days after the negotiations formally began. The HNC refused to negotiate with the delegation from Assad's government, because none of the HNC's demands had been satisfied. De Mistura suspended the negotiations on 3 Feb 2016. The negotiations were supposed to resume no later than 25 Feb 2016. The negotiations actually resumed on 14 March 2016.

After a heroic effort by diplomats from Russia and the USA, and by de Mistura, on 27 February 2016, a "cessation of hostilities" began in Syria. This diplomatic effort quickly reduced the death rate by about 90%, a remarkable accomplishment. But the HNC was ungrateful for this accomplishment, and instead whined about minor violations of the ceasefire — some of which were caused by insurgents who continued fighting. The HNC also shifted emphasis to their other demands, such as humanitarian aid and release of prisoners.

Note that the [statements](#) by the ISSG and United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2249, 2254, and 2268 continue to insist on implementing the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. The [review](#) that I wrote in June 2014 explains why the Geneva Communiqué is flawed. The

United Nations (e.g., Ban and de Mistura) are now trying to solve the problem that existed in the years 2011 and 2012: convert Assad's dictatorship to a democratic government. But, since June 2014, the current big problem is ISIL's creation of a caliphate in Syria, Iraq, and eventually other nations. Another current problem is Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda) creating an emirate in Syria. Other current problems are numerous jihadist organizations who want to create a radical Islamic government to replace Assad's secular government. Looking at all of these current problems, I conclude that Assad is better than any of the alternatives amongst the insurgents. That makes the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 an obsolete and wrong plan.

In mid-March 2016, I saw a glimmer of hope in the Geneva negotiations. But on 15 April 2016, I again concluded that the negotiations were "futile", because of the refusal of the parties to meet face-to-face, and the HNC's intransigent demand that Assad relinquish power. Then on 18 April 2016, the HNC walked out of negotiations and vowed *not* to return until all four of their demands were met by Assad. Then, on 28 June 2016, many opposition groups who were also participating in the Geneva negotiations threatened to quit the negotiations, unless their four demands were met. Sadly, there was *no* reasonable hope of satisfying any one of the demands of the HNC and other opposition groups, so the peace negotiations in Geneva were dead.

The new agreements between Russia and the USA on 9 September 2016 for a nationwide ceasefire and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid everywhere in Syria gave another glimmer of hope. But there were hundreds of violations of the new ceasefire during the first week, and the ceasefire collapsed on 18 Sep. On the night of 21 Sep, Assad and Russia began a ferocious new assault on Aleppo that extinguished the ceasefire. A major goal of the 9 Sep agreements was delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo, but there were *no* deliveries to Aleppo during September 2016, as another indicator of the failure of the new agreements. During 20-30 Sep, international diplomats frantically attempted to resuscitate the dead ceasefire, but failed.

On 18 October 2016 Russia unilaterally suspended airstrikes on Aleppo, and Russia/Syria had a unilateral ceasefire in Aleppo on 20-21-22 October 2016, to allow Nusra to depart from Aleppo, and to evacuate wounded from eastern Aleppo. This wonderful opportunity was another glimmer of hope, but was quickly rejected by insurgents in eastern Aleppo. Nusra refused to depart from Aleppo, which frustrated Russia's main reason for offering the ceasefire. The insurgents refused to allow wounded to leave eastern Aleppo, and the insurgents refused to allow civilians to leave eastern Aleppo. And finally, the insurgents repeatedly violated the three-day ceasefire. History shows the insurgents *again* prevented peace in Syria.

Finally, on 13 Dec 2016, the insurgents in Aleppo agreed to depart. After many violations of the agreement in Aleppo, the evacuation was completed on the night of 22 December 2016.

Blame for Failure in Geneva in 2016

In my essay for December 2015, I wrote:

I predict that in February 2016 people will realize the operative principle is the German

saying "von nichts, kommt nichts" (out of nothing, nothing comes).

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

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

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

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

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

1. Since the HNC was created in December 2015, the HNC has consistently demanded its pre-conditions be satisfied *before* they would negotiate. In March 2016, Assad proposed a so-called "national unity government", but the HNC refused to consider the proposal. The HNC walked out of negotiations on 18 April 2016. It is clear that the HNC *never* wanted to negotiate.
2. On 18 April 2016, the jihadist group Ahrar al-Sham began a military offensive in Latakia province. In June 2016, Jaysh al-Islam, another jihadist group, conducted a military offensive in Damascus province. My previous essays chronicle other violations of the cessation of hostilities by rebels and jihadist groups.
3. Assad is now clearly pursuing a military solution, as he declared in his 7 June 2016 speech, and again on 12 Sep 2016. On the night of 21 Sep 2016, Assad — with the assistance of Russian warplanes — began a ferocious assault on the city of Aleppo.
4. The foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, USA) continue to pour weapons and ammunition into Syria, in support of a military victory. Convincing these foreign meddlers to stop supporting the Syrian civil war currently appears impossible. My essay for [May 2016](#) cites repeated calls during 2013 and 2014 by the United Nations Secretary General for nations to stop the flow of weapons to Syria, but those calls were ignored by *all* of foreign meddlers.
5. The USA and Russia, as co-chairs of the ISSG Ceasefire Task Force, failed to recommend frequent violators of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for

punishment. In particular, on 11 May 2016, the USA blocked Russia's attempt at the United Nations to declare Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam as terrorist organizations, which would exclude them the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. And Russian airstrikes are supporting Assad's military campaign against rebels and jihadists. Neither Assad nor Russia are being punished for violating the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

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

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

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

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

4. February 2017: No Reasonable Hope for Geneva Negotiations

The Syrian opposition to Assad is in deep trouble:

- The rebels — and to a lesser extent the jihadists — are being clobbered by Assad's army, Russian airstrikes, and attacks by Iran and Hezbollah. After the insurgents were defeated in Aleppo in December 2016, foreign meddlers appear to have reduced their

support of insurgents.

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

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

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

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

As I explained in my essay for [February 2017](#), Resolution 2254 has the *wrong* agenda. What Syria really needs is:

- A. *all* insurgents stop fighting,
- B. punishment of violators of the ceasefire,
- C. unimpeded deliveries of humanitarian aid to all who need food or medicine, and
- D. reconstruction of Syrian cities and towns, roads, electricity infrastructure, water infrastructure, and hospitals.

3. The delegates are too uncivilized to meet in the same room, face-to-face. Further, the opposition intransigently demands that Assad resign — a result that the opposition has failed to achieve in six years of civil war.
4. From what they have said and from how 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.

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.

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 360,000 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure — costing Syria approximately US\$ 200 billion [Reuters](#).
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,
- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- more than five million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, (see [Reuters](#)); plus a flood of one million migrants to Europe in August-December 2015.

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

15 March 2018 is the beginning of the eighth year of the Syrian civil war, and there is *no* foreseeable end to that civil war. Repeated efforts by diplomats to end the Syrian civil war have failed, largely because of the belligerence and intransigence of the Syrians themselves. The Syrian civil war is *not* a problem that foreign nations (e.g., the United Nations) can solve for the Syrians, although some foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar) have made the problem worse. The leaders of Syria have failed the Syrian people: Assad is focused on winning the civil war and remaining in power, while the opposition is focused on acquiring power in a new Syrian government.

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.

Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism

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

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

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

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

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

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

U.S. War on Terror

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By May 2016, the U.S. airstrikes on ISIL had significantly limited ISIL's finances. In response, ISIL began inviting Islamic terrorists to attack targets in their local nation in

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 was defeated on the battlefield. But ISIL will remain alive as a brand of Islamic terrorism, which will inspire attacks worldwide. My essays chronicle years of suicide bombings and car bombings in Baghdad, as well as ISIL taking credit for inspiring terrorist attacks in Russia and Europe.

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

[my homepage](#)