

Syria: February 2014

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Foreword

My [first](#) essay on Syria covered dates from 8 Sep 2013 to 5 Oct 2013, and chronicled the history of:

- the threat of U.S. military strikes on Syria,
- the aborted proceedings in the U.S. Congress on the approval of Obama's request to use a military strike to punish the Syrian government for using allegedly chemical weapons on 21 Aug,
- the 16 Sep Report of United Nations Inspectors that concludes chemical weapons were used in Syria on 21 Aug,
- the Russian concern with the export of experienced terrorists from Syria (20 Sep) and tersely — and incompletely — discusses the scourge of Islamic terrorism,
- the evolution of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 on the removal of chemical weapons from Syria,

- and why I believe peace negotiations are futile with the current conditions in Syria.

My [second](#) essay on Syria covered dates from from 6 Oct 2013 through 31 Dec 2013, and chronicled the history of:

- destroying chemical weapons in Syria,
- the 12 Dec Report of United Nations Inspectors about alleged use of chemical weapons at six sites in Syria,
- occasional mentions of atrocities by jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria,
- the preparations for the Geneva2 peace conference,
- the disorganization of the Syrian National Coalition,
- the role of Assad in the future government of Syria,
- and the politics of the peace process.

My [third](#) essay on Syria covers January 2014, and chronicled the history of:

- removal of 4% of chemical weapons from Syria
- war against ISIL by rebels/jihadists
- United Nations conference in Montreux on 22 Jan 2014
- negotiations in Geneva on 24-31 Jan 2014
- failure to implement agreement of 26 Jan to deliver food to Homs
- and the reasons for failure of Geneva2 negotiations.

Because news media in the USA often ignore details of what is happening in Syria, at least once a day I checked the Middle East webpages of both (1) *Al-Jazeera* and (2) *Al-Arabiya*. I also made daily searches of the websites of Reuters in England and the Associated Press to find news about 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.

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

I use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) for events in Europe and Syria. Eastern Standard Time in Boston is -5 hours from GMT, Geneva is +1 hour from GMT, and *Al-Jazeera* in Qatar is +3 hours from GMT.

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.
2. The "jihadists" want to impose an Islamic government on Syria.
3. And at least two Al-Qaeda affiliated groups fighting in Syria: (a) the Nusra Front and (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.

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. Thus, there is different word usage between my text and quotations from journalists.

Government

The Arab nations, Western Europe, and the USA recognize the Syrian National Coalition, an exile group in Turkey, as the *only* legitimate government of Syria. However, there are hundreds of rebel or jihadist groups operating in Syria, and the Coalition represents only some of the rebel groups and none of the jihadists. As explained in detail in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria, the Coalition is unable to make decisions, and — in my opinion — has no credibility as a future government of Syria. However, there is no other alternative government for Syria. Since October 2013, several commentators have noted that Assad is preferable to having Al-Qaeda control Syria.

History During Feb 2014: Destruction of Chemical Weapons And Some Atrocities in Syria

2-8 Feb 2014

**2 Feb 2014
Islamic Beheading**

We begin the history of the civil war in Syria during Feb 2014, with an Islamic beheading by

the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), an Al-Qaeda group. Reuters reports:

Rebels in Syria with ties to al Qaeda have decapitated a man believed to have been a pro-government Shi'ite fighter, an amateur video of the public beheading posted to the Internet on Saturday [1 Feb] showed.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group which posted the video, said the beheading was conducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a foreign-led group fighting to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad and establish an Islamic emirate in Syria.

The footage shows armed men in black standing outdoors in a circle around a man who is lying on the grass. One of the militants leans over the victim and appears to cut off his head with a small knife, cheered on by the others.

Once the head is detached, the militant holds it up and places it on the man's back before it rolls off and settles on the ground about a meter (3 ft) away from his body.

The remainder of the three-minute video shows the crowd, which includes several children, talking, laughing and taking photographs of the scene.

"Video shows beheading of man in Syria by al Qaeda rebels," [Reuters](#), 00:38 GMT, 2 Feb 2014.

The Associated Press reports:

Also Sunday [2 Feb], a group that supports militants posted a video to social networks showing a Sunni fighter beheading another man as adults and children gathered to watch.

In the video, adults cheer as the fighter cuts the other man's head off with a small knife.

The beheaded man's hands are tied, and it isn't clear if he was alive while he was being beheaded. The men's accents and languages suggest the fighters are a mix of Russian-speakers, foreign Arabs[,] and Syrians.

Abdurrahman of the Observatory said Sunday that the video was likely filmed in the central Syrian province of Homs last week.

Photos of the body and severed head were also posted to a separate Instagram account by a supporter of the Al-Qaeda linked Islamic State. The photograph showed another decapitated body nearby.

The video underscores why many among Syria's Christian and Muslim minorities support Assad in the three-year uprising against his rule, fearing extremist militants will ultimately prevail should Assad fall.

Diaa Hadid, "Al-Qaeda fighters in Syria kill rival rebel leader," Associated Press, 2 Feb 2014. (removed from AP website before night of 2 Feb) Copy posted at [Arab News](#).

My comments: This atrocity is important, because it shows the continuing barbaric conduct

of ISIL in Syria. Assad is frequently accused of war crimes, but Assad does not publicly behead his opponents. In a choice between Assad and ISIL, Assad is better.

4-5 Feb 2014

Missed Deadlines and Syria's Promise

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov, told Reuters on 3 Feb that the delays in delivering chemical weapons were caused by "the very difficult security situation" and also logistical issues. [Reuters](#), 18:31 GMT, 3 Feb 2014.

On 4 Feb, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Gennady Gatilov, said the Syrian government would soon send a large amount of chemical weapons to the port of Latakia, and Syria would deliver all of its chemical weapons before 1 March 2014. [Voice of Russia](#); [Reuters](#), 06:23 GMT; [The Guardian](#) (Reuters), 07:32 GMT; [Reuters](#), 09:47 GMT; [Al-Arabiya](#), 10:49 GMT; [Al-Jazeera](#), 16:05 GMT; [BBC](#); all on 4 Feb 2014.

Journalists mention an interview on the Russian-language *RIA* news service, but the English-language *RIA-Novosti* website did not publish this story.

Syria completely missed a 31 Dec deadline to deliver all of its most dangerous chemicals for destruction, actually delivering nothing before 7 Jan. Syria missed a 5 Feb deadline to deliver *all* of its chemical weapons. [Associated Press](#), 12:15 GMT; [Al-Bawaba](#), 12:54 GMT; [Al-Arabiya](#), 13:05 GMT; [Reuters](#), 15:33 GMT; all on 5 Feb 2014.

Syria missing deadlines — possibly the result of Syria stalling — is a serious matter. However, it is important to keep this problem in perspective. The M.V. Cape Ray has not yet arrived at the port in Italy, so OPCW is currently unable to transfer any Syrian weapons to the Cape Ray for destruction at sea. The Russian ambassador to the United Nations made this clear:

On other issues, [Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly] Churkin said that despite the Syrian government's failure to meet another deadline Wednesday [5 Wed] for destroying its chemical weapons, "we are confident that the project ultimately is going to be accomplished in a timely manner."

He noted that the American vessel on which the most dangerous chemicals are to be destroyed hasn't arrived in the Mediterranean yet, so if Syria had met its deadline the chemicals would have been languishing on Danish and Norwegian ships "maybe causing a lot of nervousness in some Mediterranean countries."

Edith M. Lederer, "Russia Opposes A Humanitarian Resolution On Syria," [Associated Press](#), 21:23 EST, 5 Feb 2014. Copies at [Washington Post](#); Minneapolis [Star-Tribune](#); [Gulf News](#) in UAE.

My comments: Usually I do not mention future intentions, unless they are critical (e.g., the hesitation of the Syrian National Coalition about attending Geneva2).

The deadlines that Syria has missed are *not* in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, but are in OPCW executive council document EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated

15 Nov 2013. Resolution 2118 specifies only that *all* Syrian chemical weapons will be destroyed not later than 30 June 2014.

Syria now promises to meet the 30 June deadline, but note that deadline is for the *destruction* of all Syrian chemical weapons, **not** the *delivery* of all Syrian chemical weapons. It will take months for the USA and Western Europe to destroy all of the chemical weapons, after Syria delivers those chemical weapons.

6 Feb 2014
UN Security Council

On 6 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

The U.N. Security Council is calling on Syria to speed up the removal of the most harmful chemical agents from the country for destruction.

Under a timetable set up by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Syria was to have given up its entire stockpile of chemical weapons by Wednesday [5 Feb].

A council statement issued Thursday [6 Feb] after a briefing by Sigrid Kaag, the head of the mission charged with destroying Syria's chemical weapons, called on Syria "to expedite actions to meet its obligation to transport in a systematic and sufficiently accelerated manner all relevant chemicals to Latakia for removal from Syrian territory." "UN Tells Syria To Hurry On Chem. Weapons Disposal," [Associated Press](#), 12:46 EST, 6 Feb 2014.

On 6 Feb, *Al-Arabiya* reported:

Under a timetable set up by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Syria was to have given up its entire stockpile of chemical weapons by Wednesday [5 Feb].

A council statement issued Thursday [6 Feb] after a briefing by Sigrid Kaag, the head of the mission charged with destroying Syria's chemical weapons, called on Syria "to expedite actions to meet its obligation to transport in a systematic and sufficiently accelerated manner all relevant chemicals to Latakia for removal from Syrian territory."

Kaag said she does not believe the Syrian government is deliberately delaying the transfer of its chemical arsenal abroad.

"No I don't think so," Sigrid Kaag told reporters when asked if the Syrian government may be deliberately stalling. "Delays are not insurmountable. Delays have a reason, there's a rationale, there's a context."

"U.N. confirms humanitarian pause in Homs," [Al-Arabiya](#), 18:36 GMT, 6 Feb 2014.

Kaag's statements are in contrast to Kerry's hysteria about stalling.

I looked at the United Nations Security Council website at 18:50 EST on 14 Feb, but I could

not find any document about chemical weapons in Syria with a date of around 6 Feb.

The United Nations/OPCW website has a press release that says:

The United Nations today welcomed a long-sought accord to let in convoys with life-saving supplies for 500 Syrian families trapped by war in the Old City of Homs without any aid for two years, but voiced growing concern at the slow pace in ridding the country of chemical weapons, calling for swifter action.

But even with deadlines being pushed back several times in carrying out the agreement brokered by Russia and the United States under which Syria renounced its chemical weapons material and joined the 1992 Convention banning them, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced hope that the 30 June target date for completion would be met.

"This may be a very tight target, but I believe it can be done with the support of the Syrian Government," he told a news conference in Sochi, Russia, where he is attending the opening of the Winter Olympic Games. "I expect that they will do it, and also [have the] full logistical and political support from many countries."

At UN Headquarters in New York, the Security Council held consultations on the issue, noting the removal of "limited quantities" of chemical weapons material from Syria on 7 and 27 January by ship, but it voiced "growing concern at the slow pace" of their removal.

The 15-member body called upon Syria to "expedite actions to meet its obligations to transport in a systematic and sufficiently accelerated manner all the relevant materials to Latakia ... and to intensify its efforts to expedite in-country movement," the Council President for February, Raimonda Murrumokaite of Lithuania, told reporters afterwards.

After briefing the Council, Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN, said there is "a clear expectation" of swift movement. "The delays are not insurmountable," she told reporters. "What is important is keeping the eye on the ball."

Under the agreement Syria was meant to remove all its most critical chemical weapons material to Latakia for destruction outside the country by 31 December of last year.

Less critical elements are to be destroyed within the country, all by 30 June.

[UN/OPCW](#), 6 Feb 2014. Original at [UN](#).

9-15 Feb 2014

9 Feb 2014

Detail on 30 Jan OPCW Meeting

On 9 Feb 2014, Reuters provided more detail about a OPCW meeting on 30 Jan in The Hague:

At a closed door meeting, Western governments led by the United States took Syria to task for failing to surrender its chemical weapons under ambitious deadlines agreed with Russia after a poison gas attack in August.

Speaker after speaker stood up to berate Damascus at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), until it came to Russia's turn and Moscow took a much more lenient view — the international split over Syria writ large.

Russia defended President Bashar al-Assad and said his government needed more time to ship the chemicals safely through territory where it is fighting rebels.

Syria missed a first deadline to give up the most dangerous toxins on December 31 and another cut-off date passed on Wednesday [5 Feb], when it was due to hand over all the remaining critical chemical materials.

The success of the destruction program, now also at risk of missing the final June 30 deadline, is in the interests of both powers, but the confrontation in The Hague on January 30 exposed a deep division between Moscow and Washington over how to respond to Syria's lack of progress.

....

.... On Tuesday [4 Feb] Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said Syria was planning a large shipment of chemical substances this month and was ready to complete the process by March 1.

....

A senior Western diplomat said the Syrian government is "teasing us" by dragging its heels while doing enough to avoid being declared in non-compliance with its obligation to destroy its chemical weapons program.

Anthony Deutsch, "Syrian chemical weapons stalling tests limits of U.S.-Russian deal," [Reuters](#), 09:34 GMT, 9 Feb 2014.

My comment: Syria has already wasted 1/3 of February with zero delivery of chemical weapons. If Syria is serious about meeting the new 1 March deadline for delivery of *all* chemical weapons, it has only 19 days remaining. It appears that Syria will fail to meet a third deadline on 1 March.

9 Feb 2014

News About Nuns Kidnapped on 2 Dec 2013

My [second](#) essay on Syria covered the kidnapping of 12 Christian nuns in Syria by Islamic terrorists on 2 Dec 2013.

On 9 Feb 2014, the *Al-Jazeera* blog on Syria reports:

A group of nuns from the historic Christian-majority town of Maaloula in Syria have

appeared in a video obtained by Al Jazeera.

The women are reportedly 12 nuns from a Greek Orthodox convent of Mar Takla in Maaloula who were seized by armed men in early December.

The video, aired on Sunday [9 Feb], was recorded on February 5.

The nuns appeared in the recording without audio, but a commentator said "they say they are in good health, haven't been mistreated ... and they are waiting for their release to return to the convent".

There is no indication of where the nuns are being held, but they are Syrian and Lebanese and have been kidnapped.

On December 6, Al Jazeera broadcast a short video of the nuns in which they denied they had been kidnapped.

[Al-Jazeera](#), 18:33 GMT, 9 Feb 2014. The 9 Feb video is posted at [YouTube](#).

On 9 Feb 2014, the Associated Press reported:

Meanwhile, the Qatar-based broadcaster al-Jazeera aired what it said was new footage of a dozen Syrian nuns who have been held captive by rebels since December.

Rebels seized the nuns and at least three other women from the Greek Orthodox Mar Takla convent when fighters overran Maaloula, a mainly Christian village north of Damascus. The group, who work in the convent's orphanage, was taken to the nearby rebel-held town of Yabroud.

An activist from the area who uses the name Amer, said rebels belonging to the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front were holding the nuns. He said Qatar officials were trying to negotiate their release and that the video was likely issued to prove to mediators that the women were in good health.

Barbara Surk & Daa Hadid, "600 Evacuated From Blockaded Syrian City Of Homs," [Associated Press](#), 19:57 GMT, 9 Feb 2014.

This is the first unambiguous identification of the kidnappers, the Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda group.

On 10 Feb, ITAR-TASS news agency in Russia reports that the Nusra Front is demanding the release of 500 Nusra fighters from Syrian prisons in exchange for the release of the 12 nuns. [ITAR-TASS](#), 22:52 GMT, 10 Feb 2014.

My comment: Kidnapping nuns is bad. Holding them for more than two months is worse. Even worse is forcing them to make the video "in which they denied they had been kidnapped". Forcing kidnapped people to make false statements reminds one of the practice in North Korea, when they seize a foreigner and force a "confession" to imaginary crimes.

Back in early December 2013, soon after the nuns were kidnapped, Nusra Front made the

claim that the nuns had been removed from their convent for their own protection. This claim is now seen as a false statement that was intended to make Nusra Front look good. The nuns were kidnapped for ransom.

10 Feb 2014
Third Delivery of Weapons

On 10 Feb, Syria made a third delivery of chemical weapons. The UN/OPCW website posted a press release:

A third shipment of chemical weapons material took place from the Syrian Arab Republic today [10 Feb]. The material is on board a Norwegian cargo vessel accompanied by a naval escort from the People's Republic of China, Denmark, Norway, and the Russian Federation. The United Kingdom is participating in the naval escort in international waters. Finland is providing experts onboard the Danish vessel.

The Joint Mission confirms that in-country destruction of some chemical materials has taken place alongside the removal of chemical weapons material, and welcomes progress to date. The Syrian Arab Republic is encouraged to expedite systematic, predictable and high-volume movements to complete the safe removal of chemical materials.

The Joint Mission continues to work closely with the Syrian Arab Republic and Member States to achieve timely implementation of UNSC resolution 2118 (2013) and OPCW Executive Council decisions.

[UN/OPCW](#), 10 Feb 2014. Copy at [OPCW](#).

The OPCW Director General issued a statement:

The movement of the third consignment of chemicals from Syria took place today. The Director-General, while noting this movement and the recent destruction of 93 percent of the Isopropanol, has expressed hope that these activities generate new momentum.

A significant effort is needed to ensure the chemicals that still remain in Syria are removed — in accordance with a concrete schedule and without further delays — consistent with the obligations of the Syrian Arab Republic deriving from the OPCW Executive Council decisions and UN Security Council Resolution 2118.

[OPCW](#), 10 Feb 2014.

Reuters reported:

Syria shipped out a third consignment of chemical weapons materials on Monday [10 Feb] and has also destroyed some materials on its territory, the international mission overseeing the elimination of its chemical arsenal said.

Syria has already slipped more than a month behind schedule for the removal of its chemical weapons, agreed after a chemical weapons attack in Damascus six months ago. Western diplomats said the Syrians would need to make a shipment every two days to get back on schedule.

"Syria ships out third load of chemical weapon materials," [Reuters](#), 15:04 GMT, 10 Feb 2014.

On 4 Feb, as mentioned above, a Russian diplomat said Syria would deliver all of its chemical weapons by 1 March 2014. On 11 Feb, the Syrian ambassador to Russia said that Syria would deliver its most dangerous chemical weapons — i.e., the weapons that were supposed to have been delivered by 31 Dec 2013 — by 1 March. [Reuters](#), 12:04 GMT, 11 Feb 2014. Also see [Al-Arabiya](#).

12, 14 Feb 2014 Syria fails

On 12 Feb, CNN reported: "Syria has shipped out 11% of its chemical weapons stockpile — falling far short of the February 5 deadline to have all such arms removed from the country, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons told CNN Wednesday [12 Feb]." [CNN](#), 20:44 GMT, 12 Feb 2014.

On 14 Feb, Reuters reported:

Syria has relinquished only 11 percent of its chemical weapons in three shipments and is on track to miss a politically-loaded midyear deadline to completely destroy the toxic stockpile, sources told Reuters on Friday [14 Feb].

....

A third shipment this week contained 54 metric tonnes of hexamine, a raw material for explosives, bringing the total shipped so far to a bit more than 140 tonnes, three sources at the OPCW said. That includes only about 5 percent of the most toxic priority chemicals, the sources said.

....

Five armoured containers are expected to arrive this week and another 10 in the coming month, sources said. However, they said the armour adds new logistical hurdles to what is already a complex, expensive international effort.

The armour, funded by the United Nations, is so heavy it will limit the chemical cargo that can be carried. Cargo will have to be transferred to other containers when it leaves the war zone so that the armoured containers can be reused.

"The whole discussion about security is nonsense," said one Western diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "They have been moving this stuff around for years without armoured vehicles, why do they need it now?"

Anthony Deutsch, "Exclusive - Syria on track to miss deadline to destroy chemical weapons," [Reuters](#), 18:34 GMT, 14 Feb 2014.

13 Feb 2014

M.V. Cape Ray waiting for Syrians to deliver

The U.S. Department of Defense issued a press release:

The container ship M/V Cape Ray has arrived at Rota, Spain, for a port visit while en route to aid in removal of Syrian chemical materials, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren said.

The vessel — part of the Transportation Department Maritime Administration's Ready Reserve Force program — left Portsmouth, Va., Jan. 27. Hundreds of government and contract personnel worked for several months to prepare the vessel to neutralize Syrian chemical materials and precursors using hydrolysis technology.

"When Syria has completed removal of its chemical materials, MV Cape Ray will depart Rota and proceed to the transloading port in Italy, where she will take the chemicals on board," Warren said in a statement announcing the vessel's arrival in Spain. "Our ship is prepared and our crew is trained to safely neutralize Syria's chemical materials. We stand ready to fulfill our contributions to this international effort; it is time for Syria to live up to their obligations to the international community." "Cape Ray Arrives in Spain to Await Syrian Chemical Mission," [DoD](#), 13 Feb 2014.

14 Feb 2014 More Atrocities

On 14 Feb, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported two atrocities in Syria by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a former Al-Qaeda group. Reuters reported:

An al Qaeda splinter group in Syria executed at least 21 people including fighters from rival rebel groups and their relatives, a monitoring group said on Friday, an incident that could worsen infighting among enemies of President Bashar al-Assad.

....

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said ISIL militants had executed 17 men in Haritan, just northwest of Aleppo, one of the most contested areas in an almost three-year-old civil war between insurgents and Assad's forces.

The bodies of the men, who included rebels who were detained by ISIL after laying down their arms, were thrown into a well.

ISIL militants also beheaded at least four fighters from rival rebel factions after capturing them during fighting in Azaz, north of Aleppo near the border with Turkey, said the Observatory, a London-based monitoring group.

"Al Qaeda splinter group executes 21 in Syria: report," [Reuters](#), 16:26 GMT, 14 Feb 2014.

The Associated Press reported on a car bomb outside a mosque in Syria during Friday prayers on 14 Feb:

A car bomb blew up outside a mosque in a rebel-held village in southern Syria as

worshippers were leaving after Friday [14 Feb] prayers, killing dozens of people and filling clinics and hospitals with the wounded, anti-government activists said.

The explosion in Yadouda charred vehicles parked nearby and damaged the mosque, which has a white dome, according to video images posted by activists who are fighting to oust President Bashar Assad.

....

The motive for Friday's blast could not immediately be determined and activists provided varying death tolls ranging from 29 to 43. State-run TV confirmed the bombing but said only 3 people were killed.

Car bombs have frequently been used by Islamic extremists both against the government and against moderate rivals in the Sunni-led opposition movement. Government forces also have been known to use explosive-packed vehicles and the two sides frequently trade blame in attacks targeting mosques.

An activist in the nearby region of Quneitra, Jamal al-Golani, said the car bomb killed at least 29 people of which 18 were identified. He gave The Associated Press a list of the names of the identified men who were killed.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which uses a wide network of local activists to track violence in the country, said 32 people were killed, including a child and 10 rebels.

Diaa Hadid & Bassem Mroue, "Car Bomb Outside Mosque In Syria Kills Dozens," [Associated Press](#), 19:00 GMT, 14 Feb 2014.
See also [Reuters](#), 16:35 GMT, 14 Feb 2014; [SOHR](#).

14 Feb 2014 OPCW Chooses Vendors

On 14 Feb, OPCW announced the winning bids for contracts to dispose of effluents and Syrian chemicals.

Following a rigorous tendering process, the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü announced today that the OPCW has awarded contracts to the following two companies with respect to the Call for Proposals for Transport, Treatment and Disposal of Hazardous and Non-Hazardous Organic and Inorganic Chemicals, Effluents and Related Materials (Reference: CFP# CDB-P14-002):

- Ekokem OY AB (Finland)
- Veolia Environmental Services Technical Solutions, LLC (U.S.A.)

In response to the Call for Proposals, 14 bids were received as of 19 January 2014 at 16:00 CET. Qualifying bids underwent a thorough process of technical and commercial evaluation. The conclusion of this process represents an important step towards the full destruction of Syrian chemical weapons within the agreed timelines. Details on

substances per contract awarded:

....

"OPCW Awards Contracts to Two Companies for Destruction of Syrian Chemicals and Effluents," [OPCW](#), copy at [UN/OPCW](#), 14 Feb 2014.

My comment is that the Syrian government has failed to deliver 89% of their chemical weapons. Until most of the chemicals are delivered, the process of destroying those chemicals can not begin.

15 Feb 2014
Death Toll Passes 140,000

On Wednesday, 12 Feb 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that, since the peace talks began on 22 Jan, people in Syria have been dying at the highest rate since the civil war began in March 2011: 4959 dead/21 days, an average of 236 dead/day. [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#); [BBC](#). This 12 Feb announcement did not appear at the English-language SOHR website, but apparently was posted only at the Arabic-language SOHR website.

The SOHR believes the increased death rate is caused by increased military action to capture as much territory as possible before the Geneva2 negotiations impose a ceasefire. For that reason, the SOHR said: "After reaching the highest death toll since the revolution started, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights calls for the Geneva 2 talks to be suspended if [the talks do] not include an immediate halt to all military operations." [Al-Jazeera](#). (Bracketed text added by *Al-Jazeera*.)

On Saturday morning, 15 Feb 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) announced the death toll in the Syrian civil war was now at least 140,041:

More than 140 thousands people have died since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution and the bloodiest days since Geneva II talks started.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, documented the martyrdom, the killing and the deaths of 140041 people, since the start of the Syrian Revolution in the date of the martyrdom of the first martyr in Daraa province in the 18th of March-2011, until the date of 14th February-2014. The statistics are in the following form:

- Civilians martyrs: 71141, including 7626 children, 5064 female over the age of eighteen and 21910 combat battalions fighters.
- Unknown victims, documented by pictures and video clips: 2837
- Dissidents fighters martyrs: 2257
- Islamic battalions, ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra, the vast majority of non-Syrian

nationalities, some of them are faceless: 8972

- The Syrian regime forces losses: 33591

....

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights notes that these statistics do not include the fate of more than 18,000 missing people inside the Syrian regime's jails.

The statistics do not include as well, the fate of more than 7,000 prisoners from the Syrian regime forces, loyal gunmen and hundreds of abductees who are believed to be loyal to the regime, in the Islamic battalions, ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra's jails.

The statistics do not also include hundreds of the Islamic battalions, Rebels and ISIS fighters, who had been abducted during the clashes between these parties since January 3.

We[,] the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights believe that the real number of the martyrs of the Syrian combat brigades, the non-Syrian nationalities casualties in the ranks of the Islamic combat battalions, Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIS, and the casualties in the ranks of the Syrian regime forces and the loyal militants, is more than about 60 thousand, of the numbers that the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was enabled to document, due to extreme secrecy by all parties during the clashes and shelling on areas and centers in several villages, towns and cities in Syria.

....

We[,] the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, and in light of the horrible casualties increase during the last 24 days, which witnessed the largest daily rate of casualties, in conjunction with the start of Geneva II talks, between the Syrian opposition factions and the Syrian regime representatives, where the first condition for holding the sessions was supposed to be to stop all of the military operations. We call on all of the parties in the international community, which have an actual effect in Syria, to work more hard and serious, to impose an immediate ceasefire on the ground, before seeking any political solution, because it's a shame and non-immoral for the international community drawling with the respect of human rights and defend them, to continue to stand idly towards the tragedy of the Syrian people, who lose hundreds of children, women[,] men[,] and elders daily.

[SOHR](#), 15 Feb 2014. The reference to "24 days" in the 15 Feb announcement by SOHR refers to the interval beginning 22 Jan (the Montreux conference) and ending 14 Feb (the next to the last day of the Geneva2 negotiations).

See also [Reuters](#), 16:37 GMT, 15 Feb 2014.

21 Feb 2014
Assad wants new schedule

There were no news reports during 16-20 Feb 2014 about chemical weapons in Syria. Assad has made only three deliveries of chemical weapons, totaling just 11% of his previously declared stockpile. Obviously, Assad is failing to deliver his chemical weapons.

Then, on Friday evening, 21 Feb, Reuters reported that Assad wants a new schedule for delivering chemical weapons:

Syria has submitted a new 100-day plan for the removal of its chemical weapons after failing to meet a February 5 deadline, but the international mission overseeing the operation believes it can be done in a shorter time frame, diplomats said on Friday [21 Feb].

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons executive committee met on Friday in The Hague to discuss the joint OPCW and U.N. mission amid growing international frustration at Syria falling behind on its commitments.

....

The OPCW declined to comment on Syria's proposal.

....

Of Syria's 1,300 tonnes of declared chemicals, [U.S. ambassador to the OPCW] Mikulak said, 95.5 percent of the worst toxins and 81.1 percent of the so-called priority two chemicals remained in the country. The worst chemicals are supposed to be destroyed by the end of March and the rest of the arsenal by the end of June.

Michelle Nichols, "Syria submits new 100-day plan for removal of chemical weapons," [Reuters](#), 20:56 GMT, 21 Feb 2014.

Note that *all* of what Reuters calls the "worst toxins" were scheduled to be removed from Syria not later than 31 Dec 2013. This deadline was completely ignored by Assad: his first delivery was on 7 Jan.

Note that *all* of the "priority two chemicals" were scheduled to be removed from Syria not later than 5 Feb 2014. This deadline was essentially ignored by Assad, as he delivered only two small consignments of chemical weapons in January.

Agence France-Presse reported:

The executive council of the Hague-based watchdog tasked with destroying Syria's chemical weapons arsenal failed Friday [21 Feb] to reach agreement on what to do about Damascus's delays, because of divisions between Syria's allies and the West.

Different sources close to the talks at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) said China, Iran and Russia wanted flexibility over the timetable, but the United States and the European Union insisted on being strict.

....

The US rejected a Damascus request for a 100-day extension to an end-May deadline for it to ship out the totality of its chemical arms, according to one source.

"The Syrian government continues to put its energy into excuses, instead of actions," said the US representative in the OPCW, Robert Mikulak.

The anti-proliferation chief in Britain's foreign office, Philip Hall, said: "Two weeks on, there has been no substantial progress in removing chemicals from Syria. Our concern is growing that the 30 June deadline for the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons will not be met. Syria's commitment to that date is in question."

....

The OPCW's executive council will meet again on Tuesday [25 Feb], and a formal meeting will be held early March to continue discussion.

"Chemical arms watchdog split on Syria delays," [GlobalPost](#), 21 Feb 2014.

See also [Al-Jazeera](#), 22 Feb 2014.

My comments on 21 Feb: Assad *may* be planning to keep some chemical weapons, to protect his future Alawite enclave, as reported [below](#). Or maybe Assad is slowly delivering his chemical weapons, because as long as he has some chemical weapons, Western Europe and the USA has an interest in Assad continuing to control Syria's arsenal.

Legally, Assad appears to be in violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution Nr. 2118, §7, which requires the Syrian government to "cooperate fully with the OPCW and the United Nations, including by complying with their relevant recommendations...." However, that Resolution contains no sanctions for failure to comply.

On 4 Feb, Russia said that Syria would deliver all of the remaining chemicals not later than 1 March, but Syria will surely also miss this third deadline, as there has been only one delivery so far in February. How can I be sure Syria will miss the 1 March deadline? The first three shipments contained 11% of the chemical weapons. At that rate, another 24 shipments will be needed to deliver the remaining 89% of Syria's chemical weapons. At one shipment every day, starting tomorrow [22 Feb], the delivery will be complete on 17 March. Even if Syria delivers at *twice* the previous rate, Syria will still miss the 1 March deadline.

What is really needed is more deliveries of chemical weapons by Syria, *not* a new schedule. If *all* of Syria's chemical weapons are destroyed before 30 June 2014, then everyone will forget that Syria missed a few deadlines. But, currently, Syria is seriously behind schedule, a fact that should *not* be concealed by adopting a new schedule.

Syria never clearly explained why the old schedule (i.e., the OPCW executive council decision on 15 Nov 2013) could not be honored. Without a clear explanation of a good reason, a pessimist would suspect that Syria is stalling — which is polite language for the concept that Assad is dishonest, fraudulent, manipulative, deceitful, untrustworthy,

It is too bad that there are no meaningful sanctions that can be imposed on Assad by the United Nations. At the very least, Assad ought to reimburse the expenses of the Norwegian and Danish cargo ships, and the M.V. Cape Ray, that are idling, waiting for Assad to deliver his chemical weapons.

26 Feb 2014
Fourth and Future Chemical Weapons Deliveries

Syria finally delivered a fourth consignment of chemical weapons on 26 Feb, about two months after the OPCW deadline for the removal of *all* priority-one chemicals. The OPCW press release said:

The Government of Syria today transported a fourth consignment of chemicals, a quantity of sulfur mustard, to the port of Latakia where it was loaded onto a cargo ship and removed from the country. The sulfur mustard is one of five "priority chemicals" in Syria's chemical weapons programme and will be destroyed at sea aboard a U.S. vessel, the MV Cape Ray.

"The removal of this sulfur mustard is an encouraging and positive development," said the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü. "Much work nonetheless remains to be done, and we look to the Syrian Government to accelerate its efforts to transfer the remaining chemicals in regular, predictable and systematic movements."

[OPCW](#), 26 Feb 2014.

In a separate development, Syria and OPCW agreed on 26 Feb to a new schedule, in which Syria promised to deliver "most" of its chemical weapons no later than 13 April 2014. Reuters reports "consignments from two sites where security was precarious would be delivered to Latakia by April 27", which would complete the delivery of all chemical weapons. [Reuters](#), 17:28 GMT, 26 Feb 2014. See also: [Al-Arabiya](#); [Al-Jazeera](#), and [Al-Bawaba](#). Strangely, the Associated Press did not report this story on 26 Feb. [OPCW](#) reported this story on 4 March, which is quoted in my next essay on Syria.

As mentioned above, on 21 Feb Assad had requested a new schedule with all chemical weapons being delivered before early June 2014. Thus, the 26 Feb agreement is less favorable to Assad than what he sought on 21 Feb.

26 Feb 2014
ISIL Persecutes Christians

On 26 Feb 2014, there were shocking reports from Raqqa, Syria that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) had increased persecution of Christians:

1. ISIL demands that wealthy Christians pay a "protection" fee of 13 grams of gold, middle-class Christians pay 6.5 grams of gold, and poor Christians pay 3.25 grams of gold. This protection fee derives from the medieval (7th Century) Islamic concept of

"dhimma".

2. The BBC says: "Christians must not make renovations to churches, display crosses or other religious symbols outside churches, ring church bells or pray in public."
3. The BBC says: "Christians must not carry arms, and must follow other rules imposed by ISIS (also known as ISIL) on their daily lives."
4. Reuters says: "The directive also bans Christians from owning weapons and from selling pork or wine to Muslims or drinking wine in public."
5. The BBC says ISIL offered Christians three choices: "[1] convert to Islam, [2] accept [ISIL's] conditions, or [3] reject [ISIL's] control and risk being killed." About twenty Christian leaders chose to accept ISIL's conditions, given that the other two so-called choices were less palatable.

References:

- [Al-Jazeera](#), 17:58 GMT, 26 Feb.
- [Reuters](#), 19:20 GMT, 26 Feb 2014.
- Agence France-Presse [Google](#), 26 Feb.
- [BBC](#), 27 Feb 2014.
- [Associated Press](#), 19:07 GMT, 27 Feb.
- [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, 27 Feb 2014.

Some of these news articles mention the website of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, but the English-language webpages there do *not* mention this story. Apparently, the Arabic-language webpages are more comprehensive, but I do not read Arabic.

Remember, on 2 Dec 2013, 12 Christian nuns in Syria were kidnapped by the Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda terrorist group. These nuns are still kidnapped after almost three months.

[Al-Jazeera](#) posted before and after photographs, showing ISIL had removed the cross from the roof of an Armenian Catholic Church in Raqqa, Syria and replaced the cross with ISIL's black flag in Sep 2013.

27 Feb 2014

Syria claims attacks on chemical weapons

On 27 Feb, Reuters reported two alleged attacks on chemical weapons convoys inside Syria, both on 27 Jan 2014. On 27 Jan, the Syrians delivered their second consignment of chemical weapons to OPCW at the port of Latakia. Reuters says:

There were two attempted attacks on Syrian convoys transporting chemical weapons late last month, Syrian authorities told the international mission overseeing the removal and destruction of its toxic arsenal, according to a U.N. report on Thursday [27 Feb].

The monthly report to the U.N. Security Council of the joint mission of the United

Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said the attempted attacks were on January 27. It gave no details on the location of the convoys.

"In addition, Syrian authorities indicated that ongoing military activities rendered two sites inaccessible during most of the reporting period," the five-page report said.

This delayed "in-country destruction of the final quantities of isopropanol, preventing some activities to consolidate chemical material into a reduced number of locations, and preventing the physical verification of chemical material prior to movement on 27 January 2014." Isopropanol is one of two key ingredients for sarin.

Michelle Nichols And Louis Charbonneau, "Syria says two attempted attacks on chemical weapons convoys: U.N.," [Reuters](#), 00:52 GMT, 28 Feb 2014.

We have no way of knowing whether these two alleged attacks are a fabrication by Assad's government, in an attempt to justify missing two major OPCW deadlines and violating U.N. Security Council Resolution Nr. 2118, §7. Note that Syria has delivered only a tiny fraction of their chemical weapons, in only four meager consignments, 22 days *after* the original OPCW deadline for delivering *all* of their chemical weapons.

Why Peace Negotiations Futile: Disorganization of the Syrian National Coalition & Politics of the Peace Process

My [first](#), [second](#), and [third](#) 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.

2 Feb 2014 Arab Commentary on Geneva2

The bureau chief of Al Arabiya News Channel in Washington, DC — Hisham Melhem — wrote a thoughtful commentary on the failed Geneva2 negotiations during 24-31 Jan 2014:

They came to Geneva, and like two ships sailing at night, they passed each other, leaving behind waves of bitterness and rancor. The delegation from Damascus looked, acted and talked as if Syria was frozen in time since the 1950's. Dour faces, shrill voices, grandstanding and fake indignation were on display behind closed doors and in their surreal exchanges with an incredulous international media. Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, Bouthaina Shaaban and Co. expected a fractured maybe incoherent, or as they said an "immature" opposition delegation, but they were surprised, like most people, when they saw instead the coalition delegation led by Ahmed Jarba, presenting a coherent inclusive political alternative for a future Syria free of the depredations of

the Assad regime.

....

It is true that no one anticipated political progress at Geneva II, but the "process" failed the Syrian people in another more palpable way; when the regime refused to allow humanitarian relief convoys access to besieged areas in Ghouta, East of Damascus, the old city of Homs, parts of Aleppo and others areas where emaciated people particularly children and elderly have perished and many suffer from severe malnutrition.

....

That nothing has been achieved at the Geneva II conference on Syria is not surprising. It is not that the gap between the negotiators is too deep; that is a given, but that the objectives are simply irreconcilable. To put it bluntly, when the opposition insists, correctly, that the purpose of the talks is to establish a "transitional governing body" for a post-Assad Syria, it is asking Assad and his representatives to negotiate themselves out of power.

When the GenevaI communique was written more than a year ago many people thought that Assad's demise was at hand. A year later, Assad is doing relatively well on the battlefield, (a euphemism for raising whole neighborhoods, terrorizing cities and towns by throwing barrels filled with explosives from helicopters on schools, hospitals and other non-military targets, while subjecting whole residential areas to Medieval like starvation sieges) and he is more determined to cling to power.

....

With the rise of the Islamist insurgents and their wanton violence against Christians, including killing civilians, burning and destroying churches and kidnapping nuns, (and killing Muslim civilians who are deemed insufficiently pious) and their stated objective of establishing an Islamic state in Syria based on Sharia' law, we have seen a number of former officials and pundits calling on the Obama Administration to re-assess its anti-Assad posture.

Frank G. Wisner and Leslie H. Gelb two former officials were the latest such voices. In a recent article they called on Obama to "Face the Assad Reality In Syria" [[Daily Beast](#), 26 Jan; and [Across the Aisle](#), 31 Jan 2014.] which begins with realizing that the current policy will fail, and instead Washington should pressure the moderate rebels (and Assad with Russian help) and inter into a temporary alliance against the growing common enemy; the Jihadists. In December, Ryan Crocker, one of America's best diplomats and ambassador extraordinaire with stints in Beirut, Damascus and Iraq, stirred a controversy when he declared, much to the chagrin of many of his admirers, that "Assad Is the Least Worst Option", because the alternative is a country at "the heart of the Arab world in the hands of al-Qaeda."

All of these views re-enforce President Obama's well documented determination not to

get involved directly in Syria. At Geneva, watching Rambling Moallem, and shrieking Bouthaina fake indignation at an ungrateful world that does not appreciate Syria's valiant struggle against terrorism and its protection of the Christians, was akin to Dracula decrying sucking blood.

The opposition, notwithstanding the professionalism and poise of the coalition delegation in Geneva, is too fragmented on the ground, and is marred by the rise of an ugly strain of Islamism that is unabashed in its primitiveness. Moreover, the "sponsors" of the warring parties don't share a common vision of the future of Syria and are not fully engaged or committed to push seriously for an end to the war, now that they have achieved what they consider a tactical victory by merely getting the two sides into the same room.

....

One would expect the U.S. and Russia to push the parties, particularly the Syrian regime to return to Geneva to continue the "process" in a second round. Yes, the Geneva's Syria process maybe flawed, but the "sponsors" now have an investment in maintaining it since it will allow them to claim progress in posh hotels and splendid rooms on that idyllic shore of Lake Geneva, while the killing machines in Syria continue to churn out fresh bodies.

Hisham Melhem, "Sense and nonsense at Geneva talks," [Al-Arabiya](#), 07:42 GMT, 2 Feb 2014.

My comments: Mr. Melhem clearly favors the rebels over Assad's government. But, that bias aside, I think Mr. Melhem is correct that the Syrian National Coalition (rebels) generally performed better in Geneva in January 2014 than Assad's government.

The failure to deliver humanitarian aid to besieged cities is attributable to *both* Assad's government *and* the rebels/jihadists. I concur that Geneva2 failed the people of Syria in not agreeing on (1) a ceasefire and (2) routine and continuing delivery of humanitarian aid. But the Coalition insisted on a futile discussion of a transitional government.

Mr. Melhem is correct that the objectives of Assad and the Coalition "are simply irreconcilable" when they discuss Assad's future. That is one reason why they should have discussed ceasefires and delivery of humanitarian aid. But the Coalition has little influence over rebels in Syria, no influence over jihadists in Syria, and absolutely no influence over Al-Qaeda in Syria — so it is not clear that any agreement in Geneva will actually be implemented in Syria. For example, look at the debacle in Homs, where an agreement was reached on 26 Jan in Geneva, but nothing happened in Homs until a few people were evacuated on 7 Feb, a few supplies were delivered on 8 Feb, and then the ceasefire broke down during the delivery of humanitarian aid.

I inserted a citation in brackets to the article by Wisner and Gelb. The interview with Ryan Crocker is cited and discussed in my [second](#) essay on Syria. I personally agree that Assad is the least-worst option, but that is *not* an endorsement of Assad.

Mr. Melhem comparing the whining of Assad's negotiators in Geneva to "Dracula decrying

sucking blood" is funny and probably deserved by Moallem and Bouthaina. <grin> However, it is true that kidnapping of Christians was *not* common in Syria during Assad's rule before the civil war brought in jihadists and Al-Qaeda, so Assad did protect Christians. While Assad and his supporters do overplay the "fighting terrorism" claim, there is no doubt that both the jihadists and Al-Qaeda are genuine terrorists, who have committed atrocities. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), one Al-Qaeda terrorist group in Syria, is so bad that jihadists and rebels have been fighting against ISIL since 3 Jan 2014.

Mr. Melhem is correct in mentioning the problem of the "sponsors" of the war in Syria. Iran and Russia want Assad to remain in power in Syria. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and other predominantly Sunni Islam nations want Assad out of power. But the supporters of the rebels and jihadists are *not* united in a vision for the future of Syria, just as the rebels and jihadists themselves are disorganized and fragmented. In my opinion, this lack of a consensus for the future of Syria makes unwise any foreign military involvement in Syria.

At its heart, the civil war in Syria is a religious war between Shiite muslims (i.e., Assad and his fellow Alawites, Hezbollah, Iran) and Sunni muslims (i.e., the majority of Syria and its neighbors). Mr. Melhem does *not* mention this important religious dimension to the Syrian civil war.

Mr. Melhem's final paragraph is bitter and accuses Russian and U.S. diplomats of relaxing in "posh hotels" in Geneva while the civil war in Syria continues unabated. However, Mr. Melhem does not suggest a better alternative to the negotiations in Geneva. The two obvious possible alternatives have obvious problems:

1. The United Nations is too fragmented and too weak to impose any solution on Syria. Moreover, having external meddlers impose a solution leads to future problems, just as France and England carving up the Middle East after World War I led to some of the recent problems and current problems.
2. There is no one who would enforce an arms embargo on *all* parties in Syria.

Perhaps what Mr. Melhem wanted to say was that amongst Western Europeans and Americans, there is a tendency to want to *do something* to solve a problem, even if that something is unlikely to be effective. In that sense, Geneva2 allows everyone to say we are doing something, and if Geneva2 fails to be successful it will be the fault of the Syrians.

While I disagree with some of Mr. Melhem's commentary, his editorial is really good and worth reading.

2 Feb 2014 Possible Future for Assad

The Sunday Times in London, England began its story:

Bashar al-Assad of Syria is accused of stockpiling advanced weaponry, including chemical and biological arms, in the heartland of his Alawite sect as an insurance policy in case his country is eventually partitioned.

Israeli and Russian sources say the weapons are being upgraded with the help of North Korean and Iranian experts. The work is continuing despite the chaos of Syria's civil war that has caused hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of refugees.

Following the inconclusive end last week of the first round of peace talks in Geneva between Assad's regime and the rebels, concern is growing about the Syrian leader's failure to fulfil his pledge last year to hand over all his chemical weapons for destruction.

Uzi Mahnaimi, "Assad hoards WMDs in heartland," *Sunday Times*, 2 Feb 2014, (subscription only, so I can not read the entire article.)

Al-Arabiya summarized the above article in *The Sunday Times*:

As the removal of Syria's chemical stockpile drags on, President Bashar al-Assad has been accused of stockpiling advanced weaponry — including chemical and biological arms — in the heartland of his Alawite sect, according to *The Sunday Times* this week.

The British newspaper cited Israeli and Russian sources as saying that the weapons have been "upgraded with the help of North Korean and Iranian experts."

....

According to the newspaper, Israelis believe that chemical warheads are being hidden in the Alawite enclave — in western Syria and along the coast around Latakia up to the Turkish border. Analysts believe Assad will eventually retreat to the enclave.

"Down the line, Assad is doomed," an unnamed Russian expert told the paper. "His plan B, C, and D is to retreat to the Alawite enclave and try to protect the Alawite community."

An Israeli military intelligence source told the newspaper that Assad has recently stepped up efforts to guard the enclave.

"This region is now totally fortified and isolated from the rest of Syria.... The most advanced weapons manufactured in Syria and imported from Russia are kept there," the source was quoted as saying.

"Is Assad hoarding WMDs in Alawite heartland?," *Al-Arabiya*, 12:35 GMT, 2 Feb 2014.

The *Jerusalem Post* summarized the article in *The Sunday Times*:

The Sunday Times quoted both Israeli and Russian sources as claiming that Syrian President Bashar Assad is stockpiling weapons of mass destruction in Alawite enclaves on the western coast of Syria.

....

Israel believes that the collected arsenal is mainly consistent of chemical warheads for missiles and warheads, and that it is concealed within the Alawite enclave on Syria's

western coast. One IDF source said about Assad's defense of the Alawite region between Latakia and Turkey that, "This region is now totally fortified and isolated from the rest of Syria."

Assad's apparent strategy is to defend the Alawite sector, a western diplomat stated. "The reason for some of the worst ethnic cleansing and murder of Sunni civilians on the edge of the Alawite enclave in places like Homs, was to give better protection to the Alawites."

"Assad 'armed to the teeth,' stockpiling weapons of mass destruction," [Jerusalem Post](#), 2 Feb 2014.

See also: [Haaretz](#).

My comment: Should Assad's new Alawite enclave become the nation known as Alawitistan, Assadistan, or Sarinistan? <smile>

3 Feb 2014 Al-Qaeda Repudiates ISIL

Al-Qaeda's headquarters (Ayman al-Zawahri ?) issued a public statement on 3 Feb that repudiates the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and again asserts that the Nusra Front is the only branch of Al-Qaeda that is authorized to operate in Syria. The Associated Press said:

In Monday's [3 Feb] statement, al-Qaida's general command announced it has "no connection" with the Islamic State, underlined that the group "is not a branch of the al-Qaida organization," and said al-Qaida "is not responsible for its actions."

Al-Qaida did not condone the group's creation "and in fact ordered it to stop," the statement said.

[Associated Press](#), 13:52 GMT, 3 Feb 2014.

Reuters reported:

Al Qaeda's general command said on Monday [3 Feb] it had no links with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), in an apparent attempt to reassert its authority over fragmented Islamist fighters in Syria's civil war.

After a month of rebel infighting, al Qaeda disavowed the increasingly independent ISIL in a move likely to bolster a rival Islamist group, the Nusra Front, as al Qaeda's official proxy in Syria.

....

Rebel-on-rebel violence in Syria has killed at least 2,300 this year alone, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group.

....

In a message on jihadi websites on Monday [3 Feb], the al Qaeda General Command said ISIL "is not a branch of the al Qaeda group. ...(Al Qaeda) does not have an organizational relationship with it and is not the group responsible for their actions."

In April [2013], ISIL head Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi tried to force a merger with the Nusra Front, defying orders from al Qaeda chief Ayman Zawahri and causing a rift. [Reuters](#), 13:33 GMT, 3 Feb 2014.

The Washington Post reported:

Al-Qaeda formally dissociated itself from its onetime affiliate in Iraq and Syria on Monday, culminating months of feuding and exposing the dwindling influence of the group's leadership over an emerging new generation of radicals.

The repudiation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria came after the failure of repeated efforts by al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to heal a dispute between ISIS and the officially anointed al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra that has erupted in fighting in parts of rebel-held northern Syria.

Liz Sly, "Al-Qaeda disavows any ties with radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq," [Washington Post](#), 3 Feb 2014.

See also: [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)

al-Zawahri's representative killed by ISIL

Abu Khaled al-Suri was a co-founder of Ahrar al-Sham, one of the seven jihadist groups in the Islamic Front. Although al-Suri was born in Syria, he fought alongside Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. Al-Suri was appointed in 2013 by Al-Qaeda leader al-Zawahri to mediate a dispute between Nusra Front and ISIL. On 23 Feb, a suicide bomber (probably from ISIL) exploded and killed al-Suri. Both the Associated Press and Reuters say the death of al-Suri will fuel the continuing battles between ISIL and rebels/jihadists, which battles began on 3 Jan 2014. [Al-Jazeera](#), 05:12 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 18:31 GMT; [Reuters](#), 18:44 GMT; [Al-Bawaba](#), 19:08 GMT, all on 23 Feb 2014. [NY Times](#); [Al-Jazeera](#), 01:23 GMT; [Al-Arabiya](#), 07:43 GMT, all on 24 Feb 2014.

5 Feb 2014

UN Security Council Resolution 2139

Arab and Western nations proposed a United Nations Security Council Resolution condemning the failure to deliver humanitarian aid to besieged cities in Syria, including Homs. The Associated Press reports:

Russia said Wednesday [5 Feb] it opposes a new U.N. Security Council resolution on the humanitarian plight in Syria, an announcement that is likely to torpedo a Western and Arab-backed draft that would pressure the government and opposition to allow desperately needed aid into the country.

....

Council diplomats said they expect to circulate a draft humanitarian resolution this week, following the failure of peace talks between the Syrian government and opposition to achieve any concrete results, especially on possible humanitarian aid convoys to besieged parts of the city of Homs.

....

Russia and China, which support the Syrian government, have vetoed three previous Western-backed resolutions that would have pressured President Bashar Assad to end the violence. The deeply divided council did come together in October to approve a weaker presidential statement appealing for immediate access to all areas of the country to deliver aid to millions of civilians.

....

[Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin] said the latest information he saw on Tuesday [4 Feb] was that an agreement on who would be allowed to leave Homs, and when and how humanitarian assistance would be supplied to the city, "is about to happen."

Edith M. Lederer, "Russia Opposes A Humanitarian Resolution On Syria," [Associated Press](#), 21:23 EST, 5 Feb 2014.

Reuters reports:

As Western and Arab nations prepared to push for a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for better access to aid in war-torn Syria, Russia said on Wednesday that now was not the right time for such a move.

....

Western members of the 15-member Security Council have been considering a resolution on aid for almost a year. After months of talks, the council eventually made a non-binding statement on October 2 urging more access to aid.

But that statement produced only a little administrative progress, such as visas for aid workers and clearance for convoys. No action has been taken on big issues such as the demilitarization of schools and hospitals, and access to besieged and hard-to-reach communities.

After a first round of peace talks in Geneva last week failed to reach a deal on aid to some 2,500 Syrians trapped in the besieged Old City of Homs, Western and Arab nations said they planned to press for a legally binding resolution.

Western council diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a draft resolution could be circulated among council members as early as this week.

However, Churkin made Russia's position clear on Wednesday [5 Feb], saying, "we believe it's a wrong move."

....

Western council diplomats said a draft resolution would include most aspects of the council's October statement, which urged Syria to allow cross-border aid deliveries and called on the combatants to allow pauses in fighting to help humanitarian aid convoys.

The draft would also call for access to besieged areas such as Homs.

Michelle Nichols, "Russia says now is not the time for U.N. resolution on aid to Syria," [Reuters](#), 21:05 EST, 5 Feb 2014.

See also: [Al-Arabiya](#), 11:46 GMT, 6 Feb.

On Friday, 7 Feb 2014, Reuters reported:

Australia, Luxembourg and Jordan have presented to the five permanent U.N. Security Council members a draft resolution demanding full access for aid workers across Syria, which was quickly dismissed by Russia as a "non-starter."

....

Diplomats said the resolution condemns rights abuses and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and urges an end to sieges, demilitarization of schools and hospitals and lifting bureaucratic obstacles that hinder aid deliveries.

....

With a second round of Syria peace talks set to resume in Geneva next week, some Western diplomats said that they might not rush to put the resolution to vote immediately to avoid disrupting the fragile negotiations in Switzerland.

Michelle Nichols And Louis Charbonneau, "Russia calls new U.N. Syria aid-access draft a 'non-starter'," [Reuters](#), 16:18 EST, 7 Feb 2014.

On 11 Feb 2014, *The New York Times* published the [draft](#) UN Security Council Resolution.

13 Feb 2014

Russian Counter-Proposal

Russia countered the draft UN Security Council Resolution on humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians with a Russian draft of a Resolution on terrorism in Syria. Reuters reports:

Russia has presented draft U.N. Security Council resolutions on humanitarian aid access and the fight against "terrorism" in Syria, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Thursday [13 Feb].

Moscow's calls for a resolution condemning acts of "terrorism" are in tune with

rhetoric from Damascus, which uses the term to describe all those fighting to oust President Bashar al-Assad.

"Terrorism is certainly no less acute a problem (than the humanitarian crisis)," Lavrov told a news conference after talks with his Egyptian counterpart, saying it causes suffering among Syrians and in neighbouring countries.

"Russia presents draft U.N. resolutions on 'terrorism', aid in Syria," [Reuters](#), 04:23 EST, 13 Feb 2014.

RIA-Novosti reported:

Russia's new UN Security Council draft resolution on the crisis in Syria is centered around anti-terrorism efforts, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday [13 Feb].

"We have introduced to the UN Security Council — a draft document on anti-terrorism efforts in Syria," said Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

"This document is based on fundamental principles approved by the UN and other [international] bodies, and reflects the call from G8 leaders to the Syrian opposition and government to unite and eradicate terrorism in Syria," he said.

Lavrov accused Western countries of focusing "only on the task of creating a transitional government" to the detriment of other important provisions of the June 2013 Geneva Communique on Syria, such as "anti-terrorism, an end to violence and local ceasefires to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid."

The Russian resolution was written as an alternative to a proposal jointly submitted to the UN by Australia, Luxembourg and Jordan last week.

That resolution, supported by the UK, US and France, would have imposed sanctions on Syria if it did not comply with certain demands on supplying humanitarian aid within 15 days.

Russia denounced the text as a non-starter, calling it unacceptable and saying it contained one-sided accusations against the Syrian government.

"Russian Resolution Focuses on Fighting Terror in Syria — Minister," [RIA-Novosti](#), 13 Feb 2014.

See also [Al-Arabiya](#), 09:29 GMT, 13 Feb 2014.

Final Vote

During 17-21 Feb, the draft Resolution by Australia, Luxembourg and Jordan was modified by including some of the Russian draft. Diplomats at the United Nations negotiated quietly, without public hysteria about human rights abuses in Syria. A vote was scheduled for 22 Feb, but no one knew whether Russia would veto or abstain, and no one knew how China would vote. On 20 Feb, *The New York Times* reported:

The more difficult issues, Council diplomats have said, include references to the Syrian government's use of so-called barrel bombs in heavily populated areas; pressing for aid

convoys to come in by road from across Syria's border, including into opposition-held areas; and naming the specific communities that have been sealed off by fighting. The United Nations human rights chief, Navi Pillay, on Wednesday [19 Feb] [cited](#) cases of starvation deaths in towns that food and medicine had not reached.

The resolution, drafted by Australia, Jordan and Luxembourg, includes language that warns of unspecified consequences for those who do not comply. It does not make specific references to binding sanctions. Mr. Churkin [the Russian ambassador to the United Nations] would not discuss the details of the resolution, including specific language of enforcement, and where Russia stands.

"U.N. Security Council Members Propose Resolution on Syrian Aid," [NY Times](#), 20 Feb 2014.

On 20 Feb, Reuters reported:

The U.N. Security Council will vote on Saturday on a resolution to boost humanitarian aid access in Syria, where the United Nations says 9.3 million people need help, although it is unclear if Russia and China will support or veto the draft.

Australian U.N. Ambassador Gary Quinlan, who co-authored the text with envoys from Jordan and Luxembourg, told reporters the vote would be held at 11 a.m. (1600 GMT) on Saturday [22 Feb].

The text includes demands for cross-border aid access and an end to shelling and aerial bombardment, including barrel bombs, and threatens "further steps" in the event of non-compliance. These were among the main sticking points during almost two weeks of negotiations on the draft, said diplomats.

....

Western members of the Security Council have been considering a humanitarian resolution for almost a year. After months of talks, the council adopted a non-binding statement on October 2 [2013] urging more access to aid, but that statement produced only a little administrative progress.

"U.N. Security Council to vote on Syria aid resolution Saturday," [Reuters](#), 20:24 EST, 20 Feb 2014.

At 11:10 EST on 22 Feb, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the UN Security Council had unanimously passed the Resolution. At 11:15 EST, [Reuters](#) reported the same.

The Associated Press reported:

The U.N. Security Council united for the first time on a resolution on Syria's humanitarian crisis Saturday [22 Feb], demanding that President Bashar Assad's government and the opposition provide immediate access everywhere in the country to deliver aid to millions of people in desperate need.

The fate of the Western and Arab-backed resolution rested with Russia, Syria's closest ally, and China, another supporter.

After two weeks of negotiations and a watering-down of the original text, they decided to join the rest of the 15-member council in sending a strong message, especially to the Assad government, that food, medicine and other essentials must not be blocked to civilians caught in the three-year conflict.

"Today the council has finally shown that whatever its political differences over Syria, it was not entirely indifferent to the devastating humanitarian crisis," Britain's U.N. Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant said after the vote.

According to the United Nations, 9.3 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance and 6.8 million have fled their homes but remain in the country.

The resolution does not threaten sanctions — Russia insisted that this reference be dropped from the original text. Instead, it asks Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to report to the council every 30 days on implementation and expresses the council's intention to take "further steps" if the resolution's demands aren't fulfilled.

All Security Council resolutions are legally binding, but what remains to be seen is whether this resolution has an impact on the ground, especially since it doesn't have real "teeth."

....

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the council immediately after the vote that the resolution "should not have been necessary" because "humanitarian assistance is not something to be negotiated — it is something to be allowed by virtue of international law."

....

Russia and China had vetoed three previous resolutions backed by Western nations that would have pressured Assad to end the conflict, which according to activists has killed more than 136,000 people.

Edith M. Lederer, "UN Demands Humanitarian Aid For All Of Syria," [Associated Press](#) 15:59 EST, 22 Feb 2014.

Reuters reported:

The initial text was weakened during negotiations with references to the International Criminal Court and targeted sanctions removed. But other contentious points including a demand for an end to barrel bombs, a demand for cross-border access and the naming of besieged areas were included.

"This resolution goes further than we have been able to get in three years," U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power told reporters. "But a resolution is just words, it is implementation that matters and that's what we're starting measuring right now."

The resolution asks U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to report to the council in 30 days on implementation and "expresses its intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance." Diplomats say Russia is unlikely to agree to any action if Syria's government was found to be in non-compliance.

....

The United Nations says 9.3 million people need help — nearly half the population — and that well over 100,000 people have been killed. The opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has said that more than 136,000 have been killed since a revolt against President Bashar al-Assad began in March 2011.

"This resolution should not have been necessary. Humanitarian assistance is not something to be negotiated; it is something to be allowed by virtue of international law," Ban told the council after the vote. "Profoundly shocking to me is that both sides are besieging civilians as a tactic of war," the U.N. Secretary-General added.

Michelle Nichols, "U.N. Security Council unanimously approves Syria aid access resolution," [Reuters](#), 14:35 EST, 22 Feb 2014.

Note that the latest [figures](#), from 15 Feb, are that more than 140,000 people have died in the Syrian civil war. Both the Associated Press and Reuters use stale numbers from 31 Jan.

United Nations [press release](#), 22 Feb 2014.

See also reports in Arab news media: [Al-Jazeera](#), [Al-Bawaba](#), [SANA](#) in Syria, [Al-Arabiya](#) (Reuters).

How much of the problem is due to Assad's government and how much is due to the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda? The U.N. Secretary General said:

Some 200,000 people are under siege in government-controlled areas — and 45,000 in opposition-controlled areas.

"UN demands humanitarian aid for all of Syria," [Associated Press](#), 22 Feb 2014. Copy at [Washington Post](#).

Assad's government had besieged Homs, but rebel forces in Homs still caused difficulties in the ceasefire negotiations, and rebel forces in Homs repeatedly violated the ceasefire. (For details about Homs, see [below](#).) So it is not simple to proportion the blame between Assad and the opposition.

Ban said there are a quarter-million people (i.e., 200,000 + 45,000) in besieged cities in Syria. To put Homs in perspective, about 3000 people were living in Homs before the evacuations on 7-12 Feb, which is about 1% of the total population in besieged cities in Syria.

On Monday, 24 Feb, the U.N. website posted the official [text](#) of UN Security Council Resolution Nr. 2139.

My comments

Notice the cumulative failure of the parties in Syria to respect the United Nations:

- Assad's government, the rebels, the jihadists, and Al-Qaeda each have a long history of atrocities in Syria, which are potential war crimes, which shows their contempt of international law.
- The parties in Syria ignored two United Nations Security Council Resolutions in April 2012 and one in July 2012, regarding a ceasefire in Syria.
- The parties in Syria have ignored United Nations Security Council Presidential Statement Nr. 2013/15, dated 2 Oct 2013.
- The parties in Syria have ignored United Nations General Assembly Resolution/68/182 passed on 18 Dec 2013.
- Since early Dec 2013, Syria seems to be defying its agreement with OPCW for delivery of Syrian chemical weapons to the port of Latakia. Assad completely ignored a 31 Dec 2013 deadline to deliver all of his most dangerous chemicals for destruction, actually delivering nothing before 7 Jan. Assad had promised to deliver *all* of his chemical weapons not later than 5 Feb. But by 22 Feb, Assad had failed to deliver 89% of his previously declared chemical weapons.

Given this long history of ignoring the United Nations, another United Nations Resolution would be futile. *If* the rebels, jihadists, Al-Qaeda, and Assad wanted to respect the United Nations, they would have already obeyed past UN resolutions. The situation in Syria is evidence of a general failure of leadership by rebels, jihadists, Al-Qaeda, and the Assad government.

If the United Nations wants to be taken seriously by parties in Syria, the UN will need to find a way to coerce them. No one wants the United Nations to send a half-million heavily armed "peacekeepers" to Syria, where they would be stuck for the foreseeable future. So coercion is out-of-reach of the United Nations, which means the UN will continue to spew meaningless words and release insignificant documents.

Western Civilization has focused on the one problem of providing humanitarian aid (e.g., food and medicine) to people in Syria, while Syria and Russia focus on the root cause of "terrorism" (i.e., the military insurrection against the lawful government of Assad).

Passing "toothless" Resolutions is basically a futile move, an accomplishment that is only symbolic. But, as UN Secretary General Ban said, humanitarian aid to civilians should not need to be negotiated, but should be provided automatically by virtue of international law.

24-28 Feb 2014

Parties in Syria Ignore Resolution 2139

UN Security Council Resolution 2139, §3, says:

Demands that all parties immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial

bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs, and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering, and recalls in this regard the obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances, and further recalls, in particular, the obligation to distinguish between civilian populations and combatants, and the prohibition against indiscriminate attacks, and attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such;

On 24 Feb, just two days after Resolution 2139 was passed, journalists reported that Assad's air force bombed rebel-held towns, killing 26 people, including women and children. More barrel bombs were dropped on Aleppo on 24 Feb. [Reuters](#). Worse, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports a total of 222 people were killed in Syria on 24 Feb, including 46 civilians. [SOHR](#).

UN Security Council Resolution 2139, §5, says:

Calls upon all parties to immediately lift the sieges of populated areas, including in the Old City of Homs (Homs), Nubl and Zahra (Aleppo), Madamiyet Elsham (Rural Damascus), Yarmouk (Damascus), Eastern Ghouta (Rural Damascus), Darayya (Rural Damascus) and other locations, and demands that all parties allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance, cease depriving civilians of food and medicine indispensable to their survival, and enable the rapid, safe and unhindered evacuation of all civilians who wish to leave, and underscores the need for the parties to agree on humanitarian pauses, days of tranquillity, localized ceasefires and truces to allow humanitarian agencies safe and unhindered access to all affected areas in Syria, recalling that starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited by international humanitarian law;

Two days after this Resolution was passed by the Security Council, *all* of the sieges continue, no civilians have been evacuated from any of seven mentioned cities (except 1400 people evacuated from Homs during 7-12 Feb), and no food has been delivered to five of the seven mentioned cities. Food was delivered to Yarmouk, where aid deliveries began weeks *before* Resolution 2139 was passed. Food was delivered in Homs during 7-12 Feb.

On 25 Feb at 16:59 GMT, [Reuters](#), published a story about how towns were still besieged, and humanitarian aid deliveries were still "stalled" in Syria (except for Yarmouk, where aid deliveries began weeks *before* Resolution 2139 was passed).

Five days after UN Security Council Resolution 2139 demanded "immediate" compliance, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported forty civilians died in Syria in one day, 27 Feb. [SOHR](#), 28 Feb 2014.

During 5-26 Feb, humanitarian aid deliveries to Syria have been delayed by rebels who control the Turkey-Syria border. [Al-Jazeera](#). Since 22 Feb, such blockage is prohibited by UN Resolution 2139. This is an example of how the rebels are violating international law and showing contempt for U.N. Resolutions.

It appears that the parties in Syria are ignoring Resolution 2139, a result that was easily predictable.

2-6 Feb 2014
Iran politely rebukes Kerry

The Voice of America published a story on 6 Feb that tells how Iran politely rebuked Kerry, because Kerry arrogantly forced Ban to disinvite Iran from the Montreux conference last month.

When Secretary of State John Kerry met his Iranian counterpart in Munich last weekend [2 Feb], Kerry raised Syria's refusal to permit humanitarian aid to reach the embattled city of Homs and failure to relinquish its chemical weapons on schedule.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, however, kept the meeting focused on upcoming negotiations over a comprehensive nuclear agreement with the United States, the other permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany. Zarif did not "have authority" to discuss Syria, he told Kerry, according to the State Department. [cite [AFP](#)]

Zarif, as a top adviser to President Hassan Rouhani and a member of Iran's Supreme Committee on National Security, had ample authority to talk about Syria's spreading crisis if he so chose, say well-informed individuals. Zarif's deflection of Kerry's overtures had more to do with Iran's pique at being excluded from multinational peace talks on Syria held in Switzerland the previous week. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon invited Iran and then disinvited it when the Iranian government refused to publicly state that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must step down as part of a political solution to the Syrian war.

....

In testimony this week before Congress, James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, said that Assad's hold on power is stronger now than a year ago [cite [NY Times](#), 4 Feb] and that it was possible that the war would continue indefinitely in a "perpetual stalemate where neither the regime nor the opposition can prevail."

In such a dire situation, the Obama administration should be encouraging outside powers to work together to halt the fighting and to provide urgently needed relief to civilians caught in the cross-fire.

Barbara Slavin, "No Solution for Syria Without Iran," [Voice of America](#), 6 Feb 2014.

It is worth preserving how the spokesperson for the U.S. State Department mentioned this topic in a daily press briefing.

QUESTION: Did the Secretary discuss the Syrian issue with the Iranian foreign minister when he met him in Munich?

MS. PSAKI: The Secretary did voice his concerns and the concerns of the United States about the pace of moving chemical weapons in Syria, about the humanitarian situation on the ground, and about the need to move towards a transitional governing body. Foreign Minister Zarif made clear that he did not have the authority to discuss or

negotiate on Syria, so it was not a — the focus of the meeting was on the nuclear talks.

QUESTION: What does it mean that he doesn't have the authority to discuss Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any analysis on that for you. I would point you to the Iranians to give you more details on that.

QUESTION: But do you find that disappointing? Do you find that disappointing, because you now have a relationship building between Secretary Kerry and the Iranian foreign minister after decades of not having any access or very limited access to Iranian officials? Is it disappointing that you find that the foreign minister, so Secretary Kerry's counterpart, is unable to talk to you about the crisis in Syria in which you believe that they have had a significant hand?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I wouldn't characterize it that way, Jo. I think we also have a significant process underway that will resume with comprehensive talks coming up in a couple of weeks. That was the main purpose of their meeting and that was the thrust of what the meeting was about. Certainly, this was the first time that the Secretary's [sic] had the opportunity to raise in this level of detail our concerns about Syria, but I wouldn't characterize it that way. We continue to focus on the implementation and the negotiations around the comprehensive agreement and that was the purpose of why we requested the meeting.

....

QUESTION: But isn't it strange, do you think, that a foreign minister doesn't have the authorization to talk about Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I would point you to the Iranians for how they structure their portfolios.

QUESTION: So this means [Zarif is] not qualified to be invited to a Geneva conference?

MS. PSAKI: Our position hasn't changed on that. Obviously, we've long said support for the Geneva communique, the implementation of that, including the creation of a transitional governing body. I don't have anything new to tell you on that particular issue.

QUESTION: Maybe he meant General Soleimani is authorized to discuss Syria?

MS. PSAKI: I would point you them. Perhaps they have more information for you. [State Dept.](#), 4 Feb 2014.

See also Laura Rozen, "Iran FM Zarif, meeting Kerry, says not authorized to discuss Syria," [Al-Monitor](#) on 2 Feb 2014.

My comments: The details of Ban's invitation to Iran, followed by rescinding that invitation, are described in my previous [essay](#). In my view — and I am no champion of Iran,

a rogue nation — Iran clearly belonged in Montreux. But, if Iran attended, then the Syrian National Coalition would not have attended, and — simply put — the Coalition was more essential than Iran. This kind of pettiness indicates the immaturity of the Coalition, and is yet another reason why they are not suitable to lead Syria.

Ms. Psaki at the State Department may not know why Zarif refused to talk to Kerry about Syria, but the analysis of Barbara Slavin is plausible and reasonable. More likely, Ms. Psaki knew, but her job is to speak for Kerry, *not* to speak for Zarif.

6 Feb 2014
Agreement in Homs,
but don't celebrate

The United Nations and Syria appeared to reach an agreement for the evacuation of women and children from Homs.

In an apparent move forward, however small, the Syrian government said Thursday [6 Feb] it had reached an agreement with the United Nations to secure the evacuation of hundreds of trapped civilians from besieged parts of the central city of Homs.

Syrian TV said the evacuation would take place "very soon."

Ryan Lucas, "Activists: Syrian Rebels Free Hundreds From Prison," [Associated Press](#), 15:49 GMT, 6 Feb 2014.

The Syrian news agency (SANA) reported:

Governor of Homs Talal al-Barazi and UN Resident Representative in Syria Yacoub El-Hillo reached Thursday [6 Feb] an agreement to secure the departure of innocent civilians from the old city of Homs and bringing in humanitarian aid to the civilians who would choose to stay inside the city.

A statement by the Foreign and Expatriates Ministry, which SANA got a copy of, said Homs Governor and the UN Resident Representative reached an agreement that "gives the innocent civilians besieged in the neighborhoods of the old city of Homs, including children, women, the injured and elderly people, the chance to leave the city as soon as necessary arrangements are secured."

The statement added that according to the agreement the Syrian authorities will provide the necessary humanitarian aid of shelter, food and medical treatment to the innocent civilians willing to leave the old city.

The Ministry clarified that the agreement also stipulates for allowing in humanitarian assistance and supplies to the civilians who would choose to stay inside the city.

H. Said, "Homs-UN agreement on departure of innocent civilians from old city of Homs," [SANA](#), (no time), 6 Feb 2014.

See also: [RIA-Novosti](#); [Al-Jazeera](#), 15:35 GMT; [Houston Chronicle](#)(AP), 16:52 GMT; [BBC](#), 17:30 GMT; [Reuters](#), 17:52 GMT; [United Nations](#) Press Release, (no time); all on

6 Feb 2014.

Just in case someone was planning to celebrate the evacuation of Homs or celebrate the delivery of food to starving people in Homs, the U.S. State Department put the situation in proper perspective:

We welcome the news that a deal has been reached between the opposition forces inside Homs and the region — and the regime, which would allow humanitarian access into Old City of Homs and allow evacuations of those civilians who want to do so. We understand the operations will begin tomorrow, Friday morning [7 Feb], and will include a local humanitarian pause while the evacuations take place and while the food and other humanitarian assistance is delivered.

The regime must follow through on its commitment to allow UN humanitarian relief convoys to enter Homs. As we have said, an evacuation is not a substitute for the safe, regular, and unfettered delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need wherever they are. Civilians should be allowed to come and go freely, and humanitarian access should not be a political bargaining chip.

Civilians are leaving their homes in Homs because they are in desperate need of food and medical attention. It is a tragedy that they should feel that they have to abandon their homes and split up their families just to eat and get care. This issue should never have been a problem in the first place. The issue of Homs is just one small piece of this. There's a broader issue which is that the regime continues to block humanitarian assistance and violate basic principles as laid out in the October 3rd statement [United Nations Security Council Presidential Statement Nr. 2013/15, dated 2 Oct 2013], which says the regime must provide unhindered access to humanitarian workers.

So we should not be giving credit to a regime just for providing food for a few days to people who are starving, given that's the right moral thing to do and this is something they should have been doing all along.

Jen Psaki, [State Dept.](#), 6 Feb 2014. (I added a citation in brackets for the "Oct 3rd statement", because Ms. Psaki got the date wrong and she never specified the document.)

Some of what Ms. Psaki said was quoted by the [BBC](#); [AFP](#); [CNN](#); and the [Associated Press](#).

My comments: Diplomats should *not* celebrate this achievement. It is ridiculous that it took so long — 12 days from the 26 Jan agreement in Geneva to the beginning of the evacuation on 7 Feb — to do something so simple as evacuate approximately 1400 civilians from a combat zone in six days.

As Ms. Psaki suggests, this situation with starving people would never have occurred except for the stubbornly belligerently Syrians — including Assad's government, rebels, and jihadists — who created blockaded cities and then refused to negotiate any relief. Ms. Psaki, like Kerry, blames Assad for everything, but the Truth seems to be that the rebels and jihadists are just as vicious, intransigent, and tenacious as Assad.

Relief for Homs: 7-12 Feb 2014

7 Feb 2014

On Friday, 7 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

The Syrian government on Friday [7 Feb] began evacuating civilians trapped in rebel-held parts of a battleground city under a rare deal struck between the government and the opposition that also included a three-day cease-fire allowing humanitarian aid convoys to the besieged areas.

The first two buses carrying at least 35 women, children and elderly men accompanied by Syrian Red Crescent paramedics in red uniforms arrived at the frontline separating government and opposition-held territory in Homs. Syrian TV said 200 people were expected to leave during the day, and dozens of others over the next three days.

According to estimates by activists, there are about 2,500 people in the city's old quarters. They have endured a crushing blockade and severe food shortages for more than a year.

....

Homs governor Talal Barrazi told Syrian state TV that the evacuation excludes men between the age of 15 and 55, who were likely to be fighters.

....

In New York, U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said the U.N. and humanitarian organizations have food, medical aid and other basic supplies on the outskirts of Homs ready for immediate delivery as soon as "the green light" is given for safe passage.

"The atmosphere is positive" Barrazi said, adding that the first batch of food supplies will be sent to rebel-held areas on Saturday [8 Feb].

Bassem Mroue "Syria Begins Evacuating Civilians Trapped In Homs," [Associated Press](#), 16:48 GMT, 7 Feb 2014.

Reuters reported:

Syria evacuated three busloads of civilians from a besieged area of Homs on Friday, the first stage of a planned three-day humanitarian ceasefire in the city which has suffered some of the worst devastation of Syria's three-year conflict.

....

The deal is the first positive result of peace talks which were launched two weeks ago between Syria's warring foes and resume on Monday in Geneva, with little prospect of resolving core grievances behind a war which has killed 130,000 people.

Under the Homs deal, women, children and old men are allowed to leave the Old City

which has been under siege by President Bashar al-Assad's forces for a year and a half, while humanitarian supplies will be allowed in to those who remain.

The World Food Programme said it had trucks ready to take a month's supply of food on Saturday to the estimated 2,500 hungry and malnourished people who have been trapped for months in the rebel-held heart of the city.

Syrian authorities and aid groups said they expected around 200 people to leave the rebel-controlled neighbourhoods. By Friday afternoon about 80 people had been evacuated, a U.N. official told Syrian television. It was the first time the Red Crescent had gained access to the centre of Homs since the siege began, the aid agency said.

....

Moscow, which has supported and armed Assad throughout the civil war, hailed the Homs deal as a "landmark agreement", but Western officials gave a skeptical response, saying Syria had an unconditional obligation to civilians trapped by conflict, arguing the issue should not have required weeks of negotiation to allow aid to enter.

Khaled Hariri, "Syria starts evacuating civilians from besieged Homs centre," [Reuters](#), 17:20 GMT, 7 Feb 2014.

A total of 83 people, mostly elderly, were evacuated from Homs on Friday, 7 Feb. [Al-Jazeera](#); [BBC](#); [Al-Jazeera Blog](#); and [Reuters](#). Given the estimated 2500 to 3000 people said to be in Homs, this is a surprisingly small fraction, only about 3%.

Not only was Friday's evacuation tiny, but also unknown people in Homs shot at a bus carrying people being evacuated. Reuters reports:

Television footage of one bus which brought the evacuees out appeared to show several bullet holes in the back of the vehicle, though it was not clear when the damage occurred.

Khaled Hariri, "Syria evacuates civilians from besieged Homs centre," [Reuters](#), 21:36 GMT, 7 Feb 2014.

My comment: It takes a really depraved barbarian to shoot at a bus carrying unarmed elderly civilians who are being evacuated from a war zone. Reuters leaves open the possibility that the bullet holes in the bus were from a previous encounter with barbarians, as if chartered civilian buses in Syria commonly have bullet holes.

8 Feb 2014
Violations of Ceasefire
Food Delivery

Well, the so-called "three-day ceasefire" lasted one day, Friday, and apparently ended on Saturday. The Associated Press reports:

Renewed fighting broke a cease-fire in the embattled central Syrian city of Homs and halted a plan to evacuate civilians and bring supplies into rebel-held areas under siege, an official and activists said Saturday [8 Feb].

The official said the fighting included a mortar [shell] that landed near U.N. personnel. An activist said combat began when government forces fired 11 rockets toward the rebel-held Hamidiyeh quarter. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief reporters.

The mortar [shell] did not cause any injury to U.N. officials. The U.N. had no immediate comment.

Diaa Hadid, "RENEWED SYRIA FIGHTING BREAKS CEASE-FIRE IN HOMS," [Associated Press](#), 14:54 GMT, 8 Feb 2014.

A mortar is a weapon used to fire a mortar shell. A mortar is just a tube with a bipod, what does the damage is the shell.

Reuters had more details:

An aid convoy trying to reach a besieged rebel district of the Syrian city of Homs came under fire on Saturday [8 Feb], threatening a humanitarian operation which aimed to deliver medicine and food to around 2,500 trapped people.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent said mortar fire landed close to its convoy and shots were fired at its trucks, wounding one of its drivers and violating a three-day ceasefire in the city.

Syrian media said four Red Crescent workers were wounded in the incident which it blamed on rebels. Opposition activists accused President Bashar al-Assad's forces of staging the attack, as well as earlier mortar fire which delayed the start of the operation on Saturday morning.

The violence threatens to unravel a humanitarian deal for Homs which was the first concrete result of talks launched two weeks ago in Geneva to try to end the country's civil war.

Dominic Evans, "Aid convoy hit trying to reach Syria's besieged Homs," [Reuters](#), 17:45 GMT, 8 Feb 2014.

Al-Jazeera reported:

United Nations-led efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to a rebel-held, besieged district of central Homs have been hampered after an aid convoy came under fire and parts of the devastated city were bombarded by mortar fire.

The Syrian Red Crescent tweeted that one of its drivers had been injured after its cars were shot at, forcing them to turn back. Syrian state television later said that four aid workers were wounded in the attack.

The aid agency did not hold anyone responsible for the incident while state television blamed rebels.

There were conflicting reports about whether any aid had reached people in the rebel-held Old City, the most in-need area, after the violence erupted and violated a humanitarian ceasefire.

Al Jazeera's Nisreen El-Shamayleh, reporting from neighbouring Lebanon, said further attempts to deliver food and medical supplies were not expected on Saturday and that the ceasefire, which began on Friday, may be extended to compensate for the volatile situation.

"Mortars and gunfire in Homs delay aid mission," [Al-Jazeera](#), 14:55 GMT, 8 Feb 2014.

See also [Al-Arabiya](#); [BBC](#).

Later, Reuters reported:

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) said mortar fire landed close to its convoy and shots were fired at its trucks, wounding one of its drivers.

At least nine Red Crescent and U.N. vehicles were holed up in the city for several hours after dark when the explosions struck, but the team managed to pull out shortly before 10 pm (2000 GMT), leaving two damaged trucks, the Red Crescent said.

"Although the team was shelled and fired upon we managed to deliver 250 food parcels (and) 190 hygiene kits and chronic disease medicines," it said.

Syrian authorities blamed the attacks on rebels but opposition activists accused President Bashar al-Assad's forces of carrying them out, as well as earlier mortar fire which delayed the start of the operation on Saturday morning.

....

[In the context of humanitarian aid to Yarmouk, but presumably the same for Homs:]
"One food parcel feeds a family of up to eight for 10 days," UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] spokesman Chris Gunness said.

Dominic Evans, "U.N. aid convoy struck in Syria's besieged Homs," [Reuters](#), 21:25 GMT, 8 Feb 2014.

See also [Al-Jazeera](#), 22:41 GMT, 8 Feb 2014.

The final Associated Press story of Saturday, 8 Feb said:

Two trucks carrying food and medical supplies into rebel-held neighborhoods in the central Syrian city of Homs turned back under heavy fire Saturday [8 Feb], leaving four paramedics wounded as a cease-fire faltered, Syrian officials said.

Talal Barrazi, the governor of Homs province, told the Lebanon-based Al-Mayadeen TV that the attack occurred late in the afternoon and that the trucks were targeted by two roadside bombs and a mortar shell from the rebel side.

Homs activist Ahmad al-Qusair however denied there had been roadside bombs and said the convoy was attacked by mortar shells fired by government forces.

Barrazi later told Syrian state TV that two trucks were able to reach opposition-held neighborhoods earlier in the day. Al-Mayadeen also reported that two trucks, carrying 250 food parcels, were able to cross into rebel-held areas Saturday.

The state TV said four members of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent were wounded by rebel fire in the area, but gave no further details.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent said on its Facebook page that its members were able to deliver 250 food parcels and 190 parcels containing detergents and medicines to the central neighborhood of Hamidiyeh despite begin targeted by several mortar rounds. It added that one of its members was lightly wounded and two trucks were damaged.

It was not immediately clear why state media said four paramedics were wounded and the Red Crescent said only one.

Diaa Hadid & Bassem Mroue, "Cease-Fire In Syrian City Falters, Aid Halted," [Associated Press](#), 01:49 GMT, 9 Feb 2014.

Saturday, 8 Feb, was the first day of the Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. Journalists gave the Games much more coverage than the blatant violation of the ceasefire in Homs.

My comments: On Friday, 7 Feb, the barbarians were shooting at civilian buses carrying unarmed elderly evacuees. On Saturday, 8 Feb, the barbarians had escalated to firing mortar shells and rifles at Red Crescent trucks, and wounding at least one paramedic. This problem is much deeper than a lack of military discipline, and much deeper than a lack of military professionalism. This problem shows a depraved, criminal disregard for values of decent human people. Can anyone reasonably expect these barbarians to honor a ceasefire or to respect a humanitarian aid corridor? This is yet another reason why peace in Syria is an illusion in the foreseeable future.

Each of the 250 food parcels delivered to Homs will "feed a family of ... eight for 10 days". Assuming children eat the same amount as adults, the 250 food parcels will feed the estimated 2500 people in Homs for only 8 days. So the one-time food delivery on Saturday is *not* a solution to malnutrition of civilians in Homs.

9 Feb 2014

More Evacuations From Homs

On Sunday, 9 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

Syrian aid workers evacuated more civilians from the embattled city of Homs on Sunday [9 Feb] despite continued gunfire, state media said, a day after convoys were halted when trucks carrying food and medical supplies came under fire.

....

State news agency SANA said 65 people were evacuated Sunday after the Syrian Red Crescent returned to the central city, under a U.N.-brokered truce allowing some people to leave and food supplies to enter.

State TV said gunfire echoed around rebel-held areas in the city center as aid workers helped women, children and elderly men leave.

Barbara Surk, "Syria: Aid Workers Resume Evacuations From Homs," [Associated Press](#),

14:19 GMT, 9 Feb 2014.

[Reuters](#) had a similar report at 13:26 GMT.

Al-Jazeera reported:

Aid teams have helped 611 people to flee the besieged city since Friday, with the majority exiting on Sunday [9 Feb], and delivering much needed food and medical supplies to those preparing to leave or wishing to stay.

But the evacuation has come at a cost, with the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights saying that five people were killed by mortar shells and two from gunfire in the Old City on Sunday.

....

The ceasefire has been extended for another three days, the governor of Homs[,] Talal Barzai[,] told Al Jazeera.

....

According to its Twitter feed, [Syrian Arab Red Crescent] workers were able to get 60 food parcels and 1500 kg of flour inside the Old City on Sunday. Its workers also provided medical assistance and food to evacuees.

"Homs evacuation allows hundreds to leave city," [Al-Jazeera](#), 17:16 GMT, 9 Feb 2014.

This *Al-Jazeera* story says the total number of evacuees for Friday and Sunday is 611, while other journalists say the number on Sunday alone is 611. This discrepancy is not resolved on Sunday.

Later on Sunday, 9 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

Hundreds of civilians were evacuated Sunday [9 Feb] from the besieged Syrian city of Homs, braving gunmen spraying bullets and lobbing mortar shells to flee as part of a rare three-day truce to relieve a choking blockade. Dozens were wounded as they fled.

....

More than 600 people were evacuated from Homs on Sunday, said Governor Talal Barrazi. The operation was part of a U.N.-mediated truce that began Friday between the government of President Bashar Assad and armed rebels to allow thousands of women, children and elderly men to leave opposition-held parts of the city, and to permit the entry of food and supplies.

Forces loyal to Assad have blockaded rebel-held parts of Homs for over a year, causing widespread hunger and suffering.

Dozens of people were wounded when they came under fire as they waited at an agreed-upon evacuation point in the rebel-held neighborhood of al-Qarabis, according to three activists based in Homs, who spoke to The Associated Press by Skype.

Despite the gunfire and exploding mortar shells, hundreds of women, children and elderly men ran toward a group of Red Crescent workers waiting less than a mile (kilometer) away, said an activist who gave his name as Samer al-Homsy. The Syrian activists said the gunfire came from a government-held neighborhood.

The Syrian news agency SANA also reported that civilians came under fire, but blamed "terrorists," the government term for rebels.

At least four busloads of civilians were shipped out, according to footage broadcast on the Lebanese television station al-Mayadeen. Wide-eyed children, their prominent cheekbones suggestive of malnutrition, tumbled out of a bus, assisted by aid workers. Barbara Surk & Daa Hadid, "600 Evacuated From Blockaded Syrian City Of Homs," [Associated Press](#), 19:57 GMT, 9 Feb 2014.

Later on Sunday, 9 Feb, Reuters reported:

Video footage from inside Homs showed scores of residents, carrying a few bags of possessions, rushing across an open expanse of no-man's land towards 10 white vehicles with U.N. markings. Gunshots could be heard as they raced to the cars.

"The last vehicle has arrived and the total is 611 people," Homs governor Talal Barazi told regional Arab broadcaster Al Mayadeen at a meeting point for evacuees outside the city.

The Red Crescent confirmed that around 600 people were evacuated and said 60 food parcels and more than a tonne of flour were delivered to the Old City.

Barazi and Red Crescent officials said they were working to extend the operation beyond Sunday, the final day of a fragile and frequently violated three-day ceasefire in the city.

....

And in a sign of deep skepticism towards peace talks shared by the opposing parties inside Syria, neither the authorities nor the activists in Homs credited the Geneva talks for the weekend evacuations and aid deliveries.

Homs governor Barazi said the operation had been planned months ago but had been hit by delays, while several Homs activists — angered by a second day of bombardment which killed five people — bitterly criticised the Geneva negotiations. Dominic Evans, "Six hundred Syrians flee besieged Old Homs in aid convoy," [Reuters](#), 20:13 GMT, 9 Feb 2014.

Early Monday, 10 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

[Khaled] Erksoussi [head of Syrian Red Crescent] told The Associated Press Monday that 690 people — mostly women, children and elderly men — have been evacuated from the rebel-held districts of Homs since Friday, when a U.N.-brokered truce went into effect. Aid workers also delivered food parcels, medicines and flour despite heavy

shelling that targeted the aid convoys.
Diaa Hadid & Barbara Surk, "Rebel Attack On Syrian Alawite Village Kills 40,"
[Associated Press](#), 13:10 GMT, 10 Feb 2014.

My comments: On Friday, 83 people were evacuated from Homs and an additional 611 were evacuated on Sunday, for a total of 694. There were an estimated 2500 to 3000 people in Homs, so at least 23% of the total people in Homs were evacuated. This number of evacuees is approximately half of the number of eligible people, because men between 15 and 55 y of age were *not* eligible for evacuation, since they are presumed to be rebel or jihadist fighters.

Note that, despite the evacuation of 611 civilians, the barbarians in Homs continued to shoot mortars and rifles at unarmed women, children, and elderly men during a ceasefire. No one seems to be collecting forensic evidence, so these barbarians will never be held responsible in any court for their crimes. Parts of Syria, like Homs, have become lawless regions, like Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan.

I have a dim suspicion that both sides in Homs — both rebels and Assad's military — are engaged in ceasefire violations in Homs, which is why neither side is calling for a forensic investigation and criminal prosecution. This is just a conjecture. Compare the recent silence about investigating ceasefire violations with the United Nations forensic investigation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria during 2013.

10 Feb 2014
More Evacuations From Homs
Ceasefire Extended for 10-12 Feb

On 10 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

Aid officials rushed to evacuate more women, children and elderly from rebel-held areas that have been blockaded by government troops for more than a year in Syria's third-largest city, Homs, after a U.N.-brokered cease-fire in the city was renewed for three more days Monday [10 Feb].

The truce, which began Friday [7 Feb], has been shaken by continued shelling and shooting that prevented some residents from escaping and limited the amount of food aid officials have been able to deliver into the besieged neighborhoods.

U.N. humanitarian chief Valerie Amos sharply criticized the two sides, saying U.N. and Syrian Red Crescent workers were "deliberately targeted."

The drama in Homs, where Amos said around 800 civilians have been evacuated so far,

.....

[Amos] said around 800 had been evacuated since Friday, though the governor of Homs province put the number at around 1,070, including 460 evacuated on Monday.

Under the U.N.-brokered truce, the government refused to allow males between the ages of 15 and 55 to leave, presuming them to be fighters. Those leaving are women, children and elderly.

Amos said the truce had been extended for three days. The original truce ran from Friday to Sunday, but the continued shelling and shooting between the two sides severely limited efforts. Eleven people were killed by the fighting.

Over the weekend, some women and elderly tried to leave but were unable to make their way through checkpoints to evacuation buses, according to Khaled Erksoussi, the head of operations of the Syrian Red Crescent.

He said some food aid was brought into the areas over the weekend — "but not the quantity we had hoped for" — and none made it in on Monday.

Diaa Hadid & Barbara Surk, "A Rush To Evacuate As Truce Extended In Syria City," [Associated Press](#), 19:08 GMT, 10 Feb 2014.

See also:

- "Red Crescent says 300 evacuated from Syria's Old Homs," [Reuters](#), 15:57 GMT, 10 Feb 2014;
- [BBC](#), 18:57 GMT, 10 Feb 2014. (300 evacuated from Homs on 10 Feb.);
- "Second round of Syria talks makes faltering start," [Reuters](#), 11:52 GMT, 11 Feb 2014 ("The Syrian Red Crescent said 450 more people had been evacuated on Monday [10 Feb], taking the total to leave the city ... to around 1,100").

My comment: It seems that a total of 694 people were evacuated from Homs during 7-9 Feb: 83 people on 7 Feb and 611 people on 9 Feb. Either 300 or 460 people were evacuated from Homs on 10 Feb, which brings the total to either 994 or 1154. But Amos says the total is 800, and the governor of Homs says the total is 1070. It is clear that the authorities have lost count. The governor's total of 1070 is essentially 611 + 460, which means the 611 count is a total for 7-9 Feb. But both the Associated Press and Reuters were clear that the 611 count was only for those evacuated on 9 Feb. There is no resolution for this discrepancy.

11 Feb 2014 Nothing in Homs

On Tuesday, 11 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

Aid workers failed to evacuate anyone from blockaded rebel-held neighborhoods in the central Syrian city of Homs on Tuesday [11 Feb] or deliver any food, increasing pressure on them to complete the ambitious humanitarian operation before a fragile truce expires, activists and Syrian Red Crescent officials said.

Over 1,000 civilians have already left the embattled districts, which have been under siege for 20 months by government forces and suffer from widespread hunger. The three-day truce that allowed the U.N-Red Crescent operation was extended to six days, now expiring at midnight Wednesday [12 Feb].

But hundreds of civilians are still inside, and continued shelling and shooting between the two sides severely limited efforts.

....

Tuesday's delay was for technical reasons, said Khaled Erksoussi, the head of operations at the Syrian Red Crescent. He said meetings between U.N. and Syrian officials in the city took more time than expected, forcing them to postpone all their activities until Wednesday.

"There were no operations at all today [11 Feb]. The U.N. and Red Crescent cars did not move," Erksoussi said by telephone from Syria.

The holdup came after U.N. officials wrangled a hard-won extension of a three-day truce, which first went into effect Friday and which ended on Sunday evening, allowing for the evacuation of 1,130 civilians, mostly women, children and the elderly, according to a tally by the international organization [U.N.].

Barbara Surk, "Despite Homs Truce, No Evacuations, No Food Entry," [Associated Press](#), 20:55 GMT, 11 Feb 2014.

Copy at [Washington Post](#).

Reuters and Al-Jazeera each report a total of 1151 evacuees. [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#).

There was no explanation of what the "technical reasons" were for zero operations in Homs on 11 Feb.

My comment: The United Nations count of 1130 evacuees is close to my higher total yesterday of 1154. Reuters' count of 1151 is even closer. The governor's count of 1070 is approximately 83 too low. Note that 83 was the count on 7 Feb. It appears that the correct number of evacuees is approximately 1150.

12 Feb 2014
More Evacuations from Homs
More Food to Homs

As of 18:00 GMT on 12 Feb, both the Associated Press and Reuters reported little about either evacuations from Homs or delivery of food to Homs on 12 Feb, the last day of the six-day ceasefire.

Arab News reprinted an AFP story:

"At 11:00 a.m. (0900 GMT), food aid was able to enter the Old City of Homs," the provincial governor Talal Barazi told AFP.

"The vehicles that are taking in the aid will bring out a number of civilians, including 20 Christians from the Bustan Al-Diwan neighborhood," he added.

....

The evacuations have also been marred by violence, despite a tenuous cease-fire, with shelling killing 14 people and aid convoys coming under fire.

"Homs evacuations resume as Syria peace talks falter," [Arab News](#), 12 Feb 2014.

Later, *Al-Jazeera* tersely reported:

Meanwhile, in the central city of Homs, more than 200 civilians were evacuated from besieged rebel-held districts, governor Talal al-Barazi said.

"The operation went well and smoothly," Barazi told the AFP news agency.

"Fighting rages in Syria despite peace talks," [Al-Jazeera](#), 13:28 GMT, 12 Feb 2014.

At 17:13 GMT, the [BBC](#) reported: "Nearly 200 parcels containing flour, rice, vegetable oil and other foodstuffs were sent in, while more than 200 civilians left."

Agence France-Presse reported:

A total of 217 civilians, who wanted to escape more than 18 months of tight army blockade, were evacuated from the rebel enclave on Wednesday [12 Feb], after the relief operation was suspended the previous day, provincial Governor Talal al-Barazi told AFP.

"The operation went well and smoothly," Barazi said.

The evacuations bring to more than 1,400 the total number of people given safe passage out since Friday [7 Feb].

They came hours after 190 food parcels and 4,700 kilogrammes (10,340 pounds) of flour were taken into the besieged rebel enclave, the Syrian Red Crescent's head of operations Khaled Erksoussi said.

"Homs evacuations resume as Syria peace talks falter," [Global Post](#) (AFP), 21:32 GMT, 12 Feb 2014.

At 12:30 GMT on 13 Feb, Reuters summarized: "[Talal al-Barazi, the governor,] added that a total of 1,400 people had been evacuated from the besieged Old City since last Friday [7 Feb], when the U.N.-brokered ceasefire began." [Reuters](#).

My comments: It appears that the correct number of evacuees is 1150 plus 217, a total of 1367, or approximately 1400.

There were 250 food parcels delivered on 8 Feb, 60 parcels delivered on 9 Feb, and 190 parcels delivered on 12 Feb, for a total of 500 parcels. As reported above, one parcel feeds 8 people for 10 days. Before the evacuations there were between 2500 and 3000 civilians in Homs. After evacuating 1400 of them, between 1100 and 1600 remain. The 500 food parcels will feed 1600 people for only 25 days.

13 Feb 2014

Ceasefire in Homs Extended Again

The first ceasefire in Homs was on 7-9 Feb, the second ceasefire in Homs was on 10-12 Feb.

On 13 Feb, the ceasefire in Homs was extended for another three days, 13-15 Feb, "to allow the evacuation of the remaining civilians". [Reuters](#).

But there were no reports of evacuation from Homs on 13 Feb.

The Associated Press reported:

An official at [Homs governor] Barrazi's office said there were no evacuations from Homs on Thursday [13 Feb], adding that officials were working on clearing some 70 men of fighting age who left over the past days.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said evacuations are expected to resume on Friday [14 Feb]. It was the second extension since the truce went into effect last week.

Hundreds of civilians have been evacuated from Homs since Friday [7 Feb] when a rare cease-fire went into effect. Aid workers took advantage of the temporary truce that was implemented by the warring sides before the second round of peace talks started in Geneva this week. The [second] cease-fire expired on Wednesday night [12 Feb].

U.N. spokesman Martin Nesirky said the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA, reported that 1,370 people have been evacuated from the Old City of Homs since last Friday and that food, medical supplies and essential household and hygiene items have been delivered for 2,500 people, with enough food for one month.

John Heilprin & Barbara Surk, "Syria Strikes Kill 400 So Far This Month In Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 22:13 GMT, 13 Feb 2014.

14 Feb 2014

On 14 Feb, there were no evacuations from Homs, as the Syrian government continued to screen men of fighting age (15 to 55 y) who had previously been evacuated from Homs. [Associated Press](#), 19:00 GMT, 14 Feb 2014.

I notice there was almost no mention by journalists on 14 Feb of the humanitarian relief for Homs. Perhaps the joy of Valentine's Day pushed this dismal news about Homs out of the news media.

A United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees [press release](#) on 14 Feb mentions a total of 1366 people had been evacuated from Homs. This UN total is essentially identical to my total of 1367 on the night of 12 Feb.

15 Feb 2014 Ceasefire Ends in Homs

On 15 Feb, Reuters reported on the general failure to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria:

Syria's government and opposition still do not honor basic tenets of international humanitarian law despite the evacuation of besieged Syrians from the Old City of Homs, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross said on Saturday [15 Feb].

ICRC President Peter Maurer said the evacuation did not herald any wider improvement in humanitarian access in Syria, where the United Nations says it cannot access up to 3 million people in need.

The deal to get civilians out of the Old City was initially seen as an ice-breaker that would kickstart peace talks in Geneva, but their second six-day round concluded on Saturday still deadlocked on all other issues beside the evacuation.

....

"Negotiations with the Syrian authorities and opposition groups have not resulted in meaningful access or a firm commitment to respect the basic principles of international humanitarian law," [Maurer] said. "This pattern has again played out in Homs over the last week."

"Homs move doesn't improve humanitarian situation in Syria: ICRC," [Reuters](#), 13:01 GMT, 15 Feb 2014.

Later on 15 Feb, Reuters reported:

ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] President Peter Maurer said in a statement that the Syrian government and opposition still did not honour basic tenets of international humanitarian law despite the evacuation of besieged Syrians from Homs.

There were many other besieged areas besides Homs, he said, with more than a million people living in very difficult conditions.

"Negotiations with the Syrian authorities and opposition groups have not resulted in meaningful access or a firm commitment to respect the basic principles of international humanitarian law," he said. "This pattern has again played out in Homs over the last week."

Oliver Holmes & Tom Miles, "Mediator apologises to Syrians for ineffectual peace talks," [Reuters](#), 16:56 GMT, 15 Feb 2014.

Note that the ICRC President did *not* blame Assad's government alone, instead he blamed *both* the opposition *and* Assad's government. In contrast to this evenhanded, factual approach, Obama/Kerry and other anti-Assad diplomats solely blame Assad for everything that is wrong in Syria.

The Daily Star in Lebanon published an Agence France-Presse story on the evening of 15 Feb:

[Provincial governor] Barazi said Saturday [15 Feb] that "most of the humanitarian aid has been distributed", but was unable to specify whether aid distribution or evacuation of civilians would continue.

[Daily Star](#), 15:15 GMT, 15 Feb 2014.

It seems pointless to extend the ceasefire in Homs on 13 Feb, but then do zero evacuations and zero food deliveries during 13-15 Feb.

On 16 Feb, *Al-Bawaba* reported:

Meanwhile, the evacuation of civilians from Syria's Homs city has halted with no new efforts to extend a truce with governor saying "armed groups" prevented operations a day earlier.

"The evacuation of civilians was not carried out yesterday [15 Feb] because some of the armed groups prevented the citizens inside from moving to the transit point to leave," Talal Barazi said in a statement.

....

The work was made possible by a deal that included a ceasefire that was extended twice, but expired on Saturday [15 Feb] night with no word of attempts to extend it further.

"Kerry blames Assad regime 'obstruction' for Syria talks breakdown," [Al-Bawaba](#), 19:01 GMT, 16 Feb 2014.

19 Feb 2014

I found no news about Homs on 17-18 Feb. But on 19 Feb, the Associated Press reported: Inside Syria, meanwhile, an official with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent said aid workers have evacuated 11 more people, mostly Christians, from besieged areas in the central city of Homs.

Khaled Erksoussi, head of operations for the Red Crescent, said the 11 left rebel-held districts in Old Homs that have been under government blockade for more than a year. Government and rebel fighters are battling for control of Homs, Syria's third largest city.

Ryan Lucas, "Syria Rebel Commanders Reject Leadership Shakeup," [Associated Press](#), 19:27 GMT, 19 Feb 2014.

[Al-Arabiya](#) also reported this story.

Al-Jazeera cited an Agence France-Presse story:

Nearly a dozen civilians were evacuated from besieged parts of the Syrian city of Homs before the operation was halted because of shots fired by "armed men", the governor has said.

"The operation allowed the evacuation of 11 civilians from Bustan al-Diwan and Al-Hameidiya," Governor Talal Barazi said Wednesday, but it was halted because of "obstruction by armed men who opened fire at the crossing".

He added that the evacuation had not been coordinated with the United Nations but with "elders and clerics".

Barazi had earlier told state TV that most of those evacuated were women, children and the elderly.

[Al-Jazeera](#), 03:14 GMT, 19 Feb 2014.

The negotiations with "elders and clerics" (instead of with the United Nations) continues the pattern of local ceasefires mentioned on [17 Feb](#).

10 Feb 2014 Geneva2 Resumes

At the end of the previous Geneva2 negotiations on 31 Jan, the Coalition promised to return, but the Syrian government delegation said they would need to check with Assad before agreeing to return. On Friday, 7 Feb, the Syrian government announced they too would return to the Geneva2 negotiations that resume on 10 Feb.

[Reuters](#) reports: "A letter from Brahimi given to the delegates over the weekend said the new round aimed to tackle the issues of stopping violence, setting up a transitional governing body, and plans for national institutions and reconciliation." The letter had a length of eight pages.

On Monday, 10 Feb, Brahimi met with each delegation separately. The level of anger is so high that there will be no face-to-face negotiations during the next two or three days.

The parties are angry about:

1. Islamic jihadists who attacked Maan, Syria (an Alawite town) and killed approximately 45 residents (including massacring between 21 to 25 civilians) on 9 Feb — angering Assad's delegation
2. violations of the ceasefire in Homs on 8-9 Feb — angering both delegations, each of whom blames the other
3. Assad's military dropping barrel bombs on Aleppo — angering the Coalition

The Associated Press reported:

The two sides' first face-to-face meetings adjourned 10 days ago, having achieved little. This time, the two appeared even further apart, with no immediate plans to even sit at the same table. U.N.-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi was holding separate talks with each side.

Diaa Hadid & Barbara Surk, "A Rush To Evacuate As Truce Extended In Syria City," [Associated Press](#), 19:01 EST, 10 Feb 2014.

References:

- "2nd-Round Syria Peace Talks Bog Down In Bitterness," [Associated Press](#), 13:12 GMT, 10 Feb 2014;
- "Second round of Syria talks makes faltering start," [Reuters](#), 15:20 GMT, 10 Feb 2014;
- Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Exclusive — Brahimi to meet Syria sides separately, demands peace commitment — document," [Reuters](#), 15:19 GMT, 10 Feb 2014;
- [Al-Arabiya](#), 21:01 GMT, 10 Feb 2014.

Brahimi did *not* hold a press conference on 10 Feb.

11 Feb 2014
More Talk — No Results

At a press conference in the evening of 11 Feb, Brahimi said:

... the beginning of this week is as laborious as it was the first week. We are not making much progress. One of your colleagues said that I needed tons of patience. I have them. So, we will do our very best to make this process take off. Of course, for it to really take off we need cooperation from both sides here and lot of support from outside.

Transcript at [UN Geneva](#) website, 11 Feb 2014.

Brahimi's call for "lot of support from outside" seems to welcome his meeting on 14 Feb (later accelerated to 13 Feb) with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov and U.S. Under-Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

After the negotiations and Brahimi's press conference on 11 Feb, Reuters reported:
Peace talks between the Syrian government and opposition are not making much progress, international mediator Lakhdar Brahimi said on Tuesday [11 Feb] after a face-to-face meeting of the warring parties in Geneva.

....

"The beginning of this week is as laborious as it was in the first week. We are not making much progress," he told a news conference at United Nations headquarters [in Geneva].

Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad said Tuesday [11 Feb] was a "lost day" while opposition spokesman Louay Safi said "no progress" had been made.
Oliver Holmes & Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Syria peace talks not making much progress, says envoy," [Reuters](#), 18:00 GMT, 11 Feb 2014.

On 10 Feb, it appeared that the two delegations would *not* meet face-to-face until 13 or 14 Feb. But somehow the two delegations did meet face-to-face on 11 Feb.

The Associated Press reported:

The meeting broke up after three hours, and both sides said the session failed to produce an agreement even on the agenda.

Barbara Surk, "Despite Homs Truce, No Evacuations, No Food Entry," [Associated Press](#),

20:55 GMT, 11 Feb 2014.

Journalists said the the evacuations in Homs and small food delivery in Homs were the only results of the Geneva2 negotiations. While the parties in Geneva did agree to these humanitarian measures on 26 Jan, the negotiations in Syria between the United Nations, Assad's government, and the rebels had begun *before* Geneva2 began. So the humanitarian measures in Homs are *not* a result of Geneva2. Note that the first day of the humanitarian measures in Homs, 7 Feb, was one week *after* the end of the first week of negotiations in Geneva on 31 Jan.

While the two delegations in Geneva were spewing propaganda and behaving intransigently, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov made a specific, constructive proposal. According to RIA-Novosti:

Russia expects the Geneva-2 peace conference to put an end to illegal arms supplies to Syria, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday [11 Feb].

The conference in Switzerland on the war-torn Middle Eastern country should also help to permit delivery of humanitarian aid through "local ceasefires," Lavrov told a press conference in Moscow.

Russia is supplying arms to the embattled Syrian regime of President Bashar Assad, but insists it does so legally. Meanwhile, Western and Arab countries have been accused of providing military equipment to the Syrian insurgency.

"Russia Wants Ceasefires, End of Arms Supplies to Syria," [RIA-Novosti](#), 11 Feb 2014.

11 Feb 2014: Obama's Remarks

During 24 August 2013 to 9 Sep 2013, U.S. president Obama was contemplating an air strike on Syria to punish Assad for the alleged chemical weapons attack on 21 Aug 2013. On 10 Sep 2013, Obama abandoned a military strike in favor of international diplomacy. At that time, Obama handed the Syria problem to John Kerry, the U.S. Secretary of State. (See my [first](#) essay on Syria.) Subsequently, Kerry handed many of the details on the Syrian problem to Wendy Sherman, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. On 11 Feb 2014, five months later, Obama answered a question about Syria during a joint press conference with President Fran ois Hollande of France:

We still have a horrendous situation on the ground in Syria. I don't think anybody disputes that. And what is absolutely clear is that, with each passing day, more people inside of Syria are suffering. The state of Syria itself is crumbling. That is bad for Syria. It is bad for the region. It is bad for global national security, because what we know is, is that there are extremists who have moved into the vacuum in certain portions of Syria in a way that could threaten us over the long term.

So this is one of our highest national security priorities, and I know that Fran ois feels the same way, and many of our European partners as well as our partners in the region feel the same way.

The Geneva process recognizes that if we're going to solve this problem, then we have

to find a political solution. And the first Geneva conference [in June 2012] committed to a transition process that would preserve and protect the state of Syria, would accommodate the various sectarian interests inside of Syria so that no one party was dominant, and would allow us to return to some semblance of normalcy and allow all the people who have been displaced to start moving back in. We are far from achieving that yet.

I would not completely discount the fact that in this latest round of negotiations what you saw was a coherent, cohesive, reasonable opposition in the same room for the first time negotiating directly with the regime.

Now, the regime — Assad's regime wasn't particularly responsible. And I think even some of their patrons were disturbed by their belligerence. But we are going to continue to commit to not just pressure the Assad regime, but also to get countries like Russia and Iran to recognize that it is in nobody's interest to see the continuing bloodshed and collapse that's taking place inside that country.

Now you ask tangible steps that we can take. Both France and the United States continue to support a moderate opposition. We are continuing to provide enormous amounts of humanitarian aid. One of the problems we have right now is humanitarian access to deliver that aid. And as we speak, today in the U.N. Security Council, we will be debating a resolution that would permit much greater access for humanitarian aid workers to get food, water, shelter, clothing, fuel to people who need it.

Now, there is great unanimity among most of the Security Council on this resolution. Russia is a holdout. And Secretary Kerry and others have delivered a very direct message to the Russians that they cannot say that they are concerned about the well-being of the Syrian people when there are starving civilians, and that it is not just the Syrians that are responsible; the Russians, as well, if they are blocking this kind of resolution. So that is an example of the kinds of diplomatic work that we are engaging in right now.

... nobody is going to deny that there's enormous frustration here. And I think the underlying premise to the question may be is there additional direct action or military action that can be taken that would resolve the problem in Syria. I've said throughout my presidency that I always reserve the right to exercise military action on behalf of America's national security interests. But that has to be deployed wisely. And I think that what we saw with respect to the chemical weapons situation was an example of the judicious, wise use of possible military action.

In partnership with France, we said we would be prepared to act if Syria did not. Syria and Russia came to the conclusion that they needed to for the first time acknowledge the presence of chemical weapons and then agree to a very extensive deal to get those chemical weapons out.

[The questioner is] right that so far they have missed some deadlines. On the other hand, we've completely chronicled all the chemical weapons inside of Syria. A portion

of those chemical weapons have been removed. There's been a reaffirmation by the Syrians and Russia that all of it has to be removed, and concrete steps are being taken to remove it. And we will continue to keep the pressure on. But we now have a U.N. mandate with consequences if there's a failure — something that we did not have before.

Whether we can duplicate that kind of process when it comes to the larger resolution of the problem, right now we don't think that there is a military solution, per se, to the problem. But the situation is fluid, and we are continuing to explore every possible avenue to solve this problem, because it's not just heartbreaking to see what's happening to the Syrian people, it's very dangerous for the region as a whole, including friends and allies and partners like Lebanon or Jordan that are being adversely impacted by it.

Obama, [White House](#), 11 Feb 2014.

Stephen Collinson, writing for Agence France-Presse, has a story headlined "Obama: Russia to blame if UN Homs resolution fails". [Global Post](#) (AFP), 11 Feb 2014. Copy at [Google](#).

My comments: Obama has a very one-sided view of the January meeting in Montreux and the negotiations in Geneva. Obama praises the Syrian National Coalition ("coherent, cohesive, reasonable opposition") in contrast with the belligerent delegation from Assad. Obama omits that it took *eight months* of arm-twisting by the USA and Western Europe to get the Coalition to agree to attend the negotiations in Geneva, while Assad was willing to send a delegation in May 2013. Obama omits all of the pre-conditions and ultimatums that the Coalition demanded.

Obama supports the negotiations in Geneva, but those negotiations are futile, because (1) the Coalition demands Assad resign while Assad wants to remain in power, and (2) the Coalition has little influence with rebel fighters in Syria, no influence with jihadists in Syria, and absolutely no influence with Al-Qaeda in Syria. The first problem is an irreconcilable difference, the second problem means any agreement in Geneva will not be honored by the opposition fighters in Syria.

It was particularly unfortunate that Obama criticized ("Russia is a holdout") Russia's promise to veto a [draft](#) United Nations Security Council Resolution on delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria. Obama needlessly angered the Russians (e.g., [Voice of Russia](#)), with whom we should be cooperating in a resolution of the problems in Syria.

As I have said previously, I believe that Obama is wrong to demand Assad's resignation, because Assad is the best leader that Syria has in the fight against jihadists and especially against Al-Qaeda. The Obama-Kerry position of blaming every bad thing in Syria on Assad is naive and ignores factual evidence that rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda are also committing atrocities and war crimes. If Obama were to abandon his anti-Assad goal, then the goals of the USA would align more closely with the goals of Russia, as we might see some genuine progress at the United Nations Security Council and also in Geneva.

Obama is insufferably pleased with himself for threatening air strikes on Assad, thereby motivating Assad to promise to deliver *all* of his chemical weapons for destruction. But the

delivery is currently about two months behind schedule, there are suspicions that Assad will not deliver all of his chemical weapons, and no one knows how to motivate Assad to keep his promises.

Obama mentions "the right to exercise military action on behalf of America's national security interests", which is offensive saber rattling. I'm not sure the USA has a genuine "national security interest" in Syria, aside from annihilation of Al-Qaeda, which would create martyrs of them and make the situation worse. As Obama said earlier in his answer, this is a matter of "global national security". For that reason, the United Nations, *not* vigilante individual nations (e.g., USA and France), should solve this problem.

Obama is pleased that, since Sep 2013, there is United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 "with consequences if there's a failure". Technically, Resolution 2118 is *not* self-enforcing. When Resolution 2118 is violated by Syria, then the Security Council would need to pass a new Resolution that imposes sanctions, and the Russians would veto that new Resolution. So Obama is wrong — there are no consequences for failure of the Syrians to deliver *all* of their chemical weapons by the deadline. Perhaps Obama is remembering the U.S. proposal in Sep 2013, instead of the actual Resolution.

12 Feb 2014

At noon Boston time on 12 Feb, the Associated Press had posted no story today about either the Geneva negotiations or aid to Homs. Reuters reported that the Coalition made a proposal in Geneva:

The Syrian opposition called on Wednesday [12 Feb] for a transitional governing body to be set up that would oversee a total ceasefire under U.N. monitoring, and be empowered to drive out foreign fighters deployed on both sides of the civil war.

The confidential paper, seen by Reuters, was presented to international mediator Lakhdar Brahimi and a Syrian government delegation at a joint session held at peace talks in Geneva.

It made no mention of the fate of President Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, but opposition forces said that he had been ignored on purpose to make clear he had no role.

The Syrian government delegation said on Wednesday that negotiations must focus first on fighting terrorism and rejected parallel track talks on the opposition's priority of a transitional government as a "fruitless" idea.

....

The Damascus delegation did not reply to the proposal, opposition spokesman Louay Safi told reporters. "At this point we have not heard any response...I would like to hear some positive response."

"Exclusive: Syrian opposition presents plan for post-war Syria," [Reuters](#), 13:39 GMT, 12 Feb 2014.

Later, Reuters reported:

The opposition document says the transitional body would "prepare and oversee a total ceasefire by taking immediate measures to stop military violence, protect civilians and stabilise the country in the presence of U.N. observers."

It urges all parties to cooperate in stopping the violence, withdrawing all troops and working to decommission weapons of armed groups and demobilising their members or integrating them into the army or civilian public sectors.

The transitional authority will seek to halt violence by all armed groups on both sides, including those which "follow political, religious or sectarian ideology", it said, referring to Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim militants fighting in Syria.

The body would seek to "guarantee the protection and participation" of all Syrian groups, including Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Syrians, Assyrians and others, in the transition.

Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Exclusive: Opposition plan for post-war Syria ignores Assad," [Reuters](#), 17:10 GMT, 12 Feb 2014.

A copy of the Coalition's 24-paragraph Proposal is posted by [Al-Arabiya](#), 15:54 GMT, 12 Feb 2014. I have posted an HTML copy of the Coalition's [Proposal](#) at my personal website to preserve it from linkrot.

Apparently, Assad's government refused to discuss the Coalition's Proposal, but would be willing to discuss evicting foreign fighters from Syria, *after* fighting terrorism is discussed. [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Bawaba](#); all on 12 Feb 2014.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that since the peace talks began on 22 Jan, people in Syria have been dying at the highest rate since the civil war began in March 2011: 4959 dead/21 days, an average of 236 dead/day. [Reuters](#). See [above](#).

The Associated Press reported:

A second round of talks that started in Geneva Monday is mired in acrimony as government and opposition delegates hurl accusations back and forth, unable to agree on a common agenda.

During a meeting with U.N. mediator Lakhdar Brahimi Wednesday [12 Feb], the opposition delegation submitted a paper containing their vision for a political transition. The proposal calls for the expulsion of all foreign fighters from Syria and a U.N. monitored cease-fire in Syria — but the Syrian deputy foreign minister dismissed it as a "show" and refused to discuss it.

The U.N. said that a meeting between senior U.S. and Russian officials — who are backing the process — with Brahimi will be held in Geneva Thursday [13 Feb], a day before it was originally planned.

....

A trilateral meeting involving [Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Gennady Gatilov, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman and Brahimi is scheduled to be held in Geneva on Thursday to discuss the deadlock. The meeting was brought forward by one day although no explanation was given. Barbara Surk & Zeina Karam, "Syrian Planes Pound Rebel Town Near Lebanon Border," [Associated Press](#), 21:33 GMT, 12 Feb 2014.

The meeting between the two sides lasted only two hours on 12 Feb, according to the UN website in Geneva. Brahimi did *not* hold a press conference on 12 Feb.

My comments: Removing foreign fighters from Syria would weaken Assad by removing Hezbollah, removing Iraqi Shiites, and possibly removing some fighters from Iran, but also weakens Al-Qaeda (i.e., both the Nusra Front and ISIL).

A general ceasefire would be difficult to enforce, as shown by the recent so-called six-day ceasefire in Homs (where barbarians killed at least 14 people, wounded at least one Red Crescent paramedic, damaged several UN or Red Crescent trucks, and put bullet holes in civilian buses carrying unarmed civilians). The Coalition has no authority over the jihadists or Al-Qaeda, and little authority over the rebels in Syria, so any ceasefire negotiated by the Coalition will probably have no effect. While the Coalition's proposal is basically meaningless — Assad will not resign, and any agreed ceasefire will *not* be implemented in Syria — the Coalition's proposal looks constructive.

Lavrov's suggestion, mentioned [above](#), about stopping the flow of illegal military supplies into Syria would probably hurt the jihadists and Al-Qaeda more than it would hurt the moderate rebels. Note that Lavrov wants to continue sending munitions to the Syrian government. Choking off the military supplies to the opposition, while heavily arming Assad's government is a recipe for annihilation of the opposition, hardly a good end to the civil war. Annihilation would also create martyrs, and convert neutral people into anti-Assad fighters, thereby prolonging the civil war.

I calculate during the six-day cease fire in Homs approximately 1367 people were evacuated, while the SOHR average suggests that approximately 1415 people died in Syria. (With the poor quality of the data from Syria, 1367 is essentially identical to 1415.) This calculation shows either the small effect of the rescue in Homs or the large carnage in the Syrian civil war, perhaps both. In a very real sense, Homs is one step forward, and the recent carnage in Syria is one step backwards.

I fear that the negotiations in Geneva are collapsing (already have collapsed?), which may be why Russian and U.S. diplomats will arrive on 13 Feb, one day earlier than planned. Given the continued killing in Syria, there is a popular demand for quick results from the negotiations in Geneva. But informed observers and diplomats have been clear from the beginning that significant results are likely to take *many months*, perhaps years.

Writing on 25 Nov 2013 in my [second](#) essay on Syria, I said: "Does anyone want to see the death toll in the Syria civil war go past a quarter-million people? (This is not hyperbole: we

are already half-way to a total of a quarter-million dead.)" Until *both* the opposition *and* Assad begin real leadership, with genuine concern for the urgent plight of suffering citizens in Syria, the negotiations in Geneva will continue at a glacial pace.

13 Feb 2014

In the late afternoon on 13 Feb, Brahimi met for two hours with Gennady Gatilov and Wendy Sherman. Afterwards, at 16:30 GMT, Brahimi held a press conference.

At 16:33 GMT, Agence France-Presse reported:

The UN's mediator on the Syria conflict met high-level Russian and US diplomats in Geneva on Thursday [13 Feb] in hope of breathing new life into the flagging peace talks.

Lakhdar Brahimi met with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov and US Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman in an attempt to unblock the process.

Both the US and Russian diplomats looked tense as they arrived at the UN Thursday afternoon, although Sherman mustered a short wave to the sea of waiting cameras.

After three days spent trading blame for the violence wracking Syria, representatives of President Bashar al-Assad's regime and the opposition National Coalition had no scheduled meetings in Geneva Thursday [13 Feb].

....

Opposition spokesman Louay Safi meanwhile told reporters that Washington and Moscow "should and can play a constructive role in pushing the negotiations forward."

If that fails though, he insisted Brahimi would have to report to the Security Council that the talks have broken down.

"We don't know whether there will be a third round at this point," he said.

....

But while the first round was seen as a relative success for getting the sides to meet face-to-face, the current round, which began Monday and is expected to last into Saturday, has achieved little beyond a restating of positions.

In Switzerland, the opposition National Coalition laid out a transition plan, including evicting foreign fighters and a process towards elections.

But the government refused to discuss it, insisting the battle against what it calls rebel "terrorism" had to be completely resolved before politics could be discussed.

"Russia, US move centre stage at Syria talks," [Global Post](#) (AFP), 16:33 GMT, 13 Feb 2014.

At 17:31 GMT, Reuters reported:

"They have kindly reaffirmed their support for what we are trying to do and promised that they will help both here and in their capitals and elsewhere to unblock the situation for us because until now we are not making much progress in this process," Brahimi told a news conference after holding a two-hour meeting with senior U.S. and Russian officials in Geneva.

"U.S., Russia pledge to unblock Syria talks, Brahimi says," [Reuters](#), 17:31 GMT, 13 Feb 2014.

Later, Reuters reported that the Geneva negotiations were failing:

Warning that "failure" was staring him in the face, the Syria peace talks mediator said on Thursday that the United States and Russia had promised renewed support to keep their rival Syrian allies talking.

U.N. diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi met senior diplomats from Washington and Moscow in Geneva, hoping the co-sponsors of the three-week-old negotiating process could bury their own deep differences over Syria and prevail respectively on the opposition and government to move ahead and compromise.

"They have kindly reaffirmed their support for what we are trying to do and promised that they will help both here and in their capitals and elsewhere to unblock the situation for us, because until now we are not making much progress in this process," Brahimi told a news conference.

....

However, a senior member of Syria's main opposition group quoted Sherman as saying that the talks with Brahimi and Gatilov had not gone well. "She just told us about the meeting with the Russians and Brahimi and it was not successful," Badr Jamous, secretary general of the National Coalition, told reporters after meeting Sherman. He did not elaborate.

....

Western diplomats also said they hoped Moscow could apply pressure on the Damascus government to do more to compromise. If not, some feared a third round of talks might not follow for at least some time after this week's discussions wind up.

Brahimi will meet the two Syrian delegations separately for a further round of talks on Friday [14 Feb] morning, the United Nations said.

Stephanie Nebehay & Tom Miles, "Syria 'failure' looms, mediator seeks US, Russian help" [Reuters](#), 23:50 GMT, 13 Feb 2014.

My comments: The Coalition's delegation and Assad's delegation did *not* meet face-to-face on 10 Feb, because they were angry. The two delegations met for three hours on 11 Feb. The two delegations met for only two hours on 12 Feb. The two delegations did *not* meet on 13 Feb. When a for-profit company flies an executive to a business meeting, they typically expect the executive to attend at least 7 hours/day of meetings, not including lunch and

dinner. Here two teams of negotiators flew to a meeting, but only met for a total of five hours in four days. This is a waste of hotel expense and air fare.

Remember that the only reason that the Syrian National Coalition is attending the Geneva negotiations is arm-twisting by the USA and Western Europe, as documented in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria. The rebels, jihadists, Al-Qaeda, and Assad each appear to believe that a military victory is still possible. It is generally agreed that Assad seems to be in the dominant position in Syria, and a military victory for Assad *might* be possible, but at a terrible cost to the civilians in Syria. So, from Assad's perspective, there is currently no reason for Assad to resign and abandon his militarily dominant position.

Obama's criticism of Russia at Obama's 11 Feb press conference ("Russia is a holdout") may have contributed to the failure of the meeting between Brahimi, Gatilov, and Sherman on 13 Feb.

14 Feb 2014
Geneva2 Limps Along

The UN Geneva website says Brahimi met separately with the two delegations this morning. Brahimi did not speak to journalists today.

Reuters reported:

International mediator Lakhdar Brahimi plans to take Syrian peace talks into a third round, an opposition official said on Friday [14 Feb], as negotiations neared the end of a second round with no sign of progress.

"Brahimi just told us the talks will continue and there will be a third round, but he did not set a date," opposition negotiator Ahmad Jakal told Reuters.

Brahimi told the opposition that there would be a further session of talks on Saturday [15 Feb], but he did not say if he would meet the two delegations together or separately, Jakal added.

"Syria talks to go into third round, opposition says," [Reuters](#), 12:18 GMT, 14 Feb 2014.

On 14 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

The United States and Russia blamed each other Friday [14 Feb] for the failure of Syrian peace talks to take off, while an opposition spokesman said negotiations have reached a "dead end" but may continue for at least another day.

A second round of peace talks in Geneva has yielded little more than acrimony. Violence has escalated on the ground and delegates have not agreed on an agenda for the talks.

....

There has been no response, Safi said, to the proposal his side submitted Wednesday [12 Feb] for ending the civil war, but the two sides might meet again Saturday

[15 Feb].

....

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the United States of using Syrian the talks for the sole purpose of "regime change," while U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry suggested Moscow was backtracking on earlier commitments.

"The only thing they want to talk about is the establishment of a transitional governing body," Lavrov said.

"Only after that are they ready to discuss the urgent and most pressing problems, like terrorism," he added, speaking after meeting with the German foreign minister in Moscow.

The Syrian government delegation says halting "terrorism" should be the priority, and rules out talks on transition while the violence rages.

Zeina Karam & John Heilprin, "Opposition: Syria Talks At 'Impasse' But Not Over," [Associated Press](#), 13:33 GMT, 14 Feb 2014.

A later version of this Associated Press story says:

Peace talks aimed at forging a path out of Syria's civil war have reached an impasse — with no guarantee of continuing — after five days of sparring over responsibility for mounting violence back home and President Bashar Assad's future, government and opposition delegates said Friday [14 Feb].

Echoing the position of the rival camps, senior U.S. and Russian officials traded accusations over who was to blame for the stalemate, adding to the polarization of a war that has killed 130,000 people, displaced millions, destroyed a country and threatens to engulf the Middle East in religious conflict.

It was unclear Friday how long the weary sides were willing to continue with the talks, which have been on the verge of collapse since they were convened last month. Despite the rancor, both sides left the door open for more negotiations, including a possible final session Saturday [15 Feb] before breaking up.

A senior U.S. official acknowledged that "talks for show make no sense" but told reporters there was still "enormous" energy for a political solution, adding that perhaps what was needed was "a few days of recess" for people to reflect. The official spoke only on condition of anonymity in keeping with rules established by the U.S. administration.

Both the U.S. and Russia have kept the talks going, knowing that it was the only option on the table — at least for now.

....

The opposition, which holds little sway among the dozens of rebel groups on the ground, is under pressure to come away with a deal rather than risk Assad holding on to power in a grinding war of attrition.

....

[The negotiations in Geneva] yielded little more than acrimony. That's largely because the Syrian delegates have a fundamentally different interpretation of what the talks are about.

The Western-backed Syrian National Coalition agreed to the Geneva talks only if the focus were on an end to the Assad dynasty through the establishment of a transitional governing body. The Damascus contingent zeroed in on fighting terrorism before anything else.

Instead of hard bargaining behind closed doors, the two sides did most of their haggling in public, finger-pointing and repeating long-standing positions over and over again to reporters.

Zeina Karam & John Heilprin, "Syrian Peace Talks Reach Impasse; US, Russia Spar," [Associated Press](#), 19:06 GMT, 14 Feb 2014.

Al-Jazeera reports delegates to Geneva2 said the negotiations were at an "impasse" and were "deadlocked". [Al-Jazeera](#).

My comments: Obama and Kerry are obsessed with regime change in Syria (i.e., getting Assad to resign, and replacing Assad with the Syrian National Coalition until elections can be held). This is a repeat of 2003, when George W. Bush and Colin Powell were obsessed with regime change in Iraq (i.e., getting rid of Saddam Hussein), something that wrecked Iraq, where sectarian violence continues today. This is a repeat of 2011, when Obama and Hillary Clinton were obsessed with regime change in Libya (i.e., getting rid of Gaddafi), something that plunged Libya into anarchy, which continues today.

The Geneva2 negotiations remind me of two children arguing. When they can not resolve their argument, they call their parents. Unfortunately, the parents here (Russia and the USA) disagree as strongly as the children (Assad's government and the Coalition). Russia and the USA have a 40 year history of disagreeing during the cold war from 1950 to 1990.

Worse, both the children and parents say it is entirely the other party's fault, in an arrogant and *unrealistic* appraisal of the situation.

Before Geneva2, the parties could argue about who was responsible for the violence in Syria. Now the parties can argue about both (1) who is responsible for the violence in Syria *and* (2) who is responsible for the failure of the Geneva2 negotiations.

During the January 2014 Geneva2 negotiations, the Coalition insisted that the June 2012 Geneva Communiqué was the basis for the negotiations. During 10-14 Feb 2014, Assad's delegation has adopted that theme and demanded to discuss each item in the Geneva Communiqué in sequential order. It was a mistake for the Coalition and Brahimi to mention

this Communiqué, which was drafted without participation from anyone in Syria, reflects the situation in Syria almost two years ago, and — most importantly — requires a transitional government for Syria that will scuttle any negotiations with Assad.

15 Feb 2014

Early on 15 Feb, *Al-Jazeera* reported:

Syria's government and opposition have agreed on an agenda for a third round of peace talks in Geneva, despite disappointment at the little progress achieved as the second round came to an end.

No date was set for the the negotiations to resume, and dispute overshadowed the potential talks as the two sides debated the order in which the agenda's four topics will be discussed: combating violence, transitional government, national institutions and national reconciliation.

....

Al Jazeera's James Bays, reporting from Geneva, said the government delegation and opposition spoke for less than 30 minutes before talks ended on Saturday [15 Feb]. "Syria peace talks end in deadlock," [Al-Jazeera](#), 10:21 GMT, 15 Feb 2014.

On 15 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

U.N.-Arab League mediator Lakhdar Brahimi ended direct talks between the Syrian government and opposition Saturday [15 Feb] without finding a way of breaking the impasse in peace talks.

Saturday's talks, which lasted less than half an hour, left the future of the negotiating process in doubt and no date was set for a third session.

Brahimi told a news conference that both sides agreed that the agenda for the next round should focus on four points: ending the violence and terrorism, creating a transitional governing body, building national institutions, and reconciliation.

....

"I am very, very sorry, and I apologize to the Syrian people that their hopes which were very, very high that something will happen here," Brahimi said. John Heilprin, "SYRIA PEACE TALKS IN DOUBT AFTER 6TH DAY IN GENEVA," [Associated Press](#), 14:10 GMT, 15 Feb 2014.

Reuters reported on the end of the second week of negotiations in Geneva:

International mediator Lakhdar Brahimi apologised to the Syrian people on Saturday for the lack of progress at peace talks in Geneva after their second round ended with little more than an agreement to meet again.

The Algerian-born diplomat said the agreement to evacuate people from the besieged

city of Homs had raised hopes that had not been satisfied at the Geneva talks, involving opposition groups and representatives of President Bashar al-Assad.

The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also stressed how meagre the results had been, saying an evacuation from Homs did not herald any wider improvement in humanitarian access to Syria's civil war zones, where the United Nations says up to 3 million people in need are beyond its reach.

"I am very, very sorry and I apologise to the Syrian people that their hopes, which were very, very high here, that something will happen here," Brahimi told journalists after the talks.

....

[Brahimi] said both sides would need to reflect on their responsibilities before round three, and that the government in particular had to accept that the main objective of talks was transition.

The three-year-old Syrian conflict has killed more than 140,000 people — more than 7,000 of them children — according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, and is destabilising the country's neighbours.

....

Opposition National Coalition spokesman Louay Safi said there was "nothing positive" to take from round two, which lasted a week. The final session [on 15 Feb] lasted around half an hour.

Oliver Holmes & Tom Miles, "Mediator apologises to Syrians for ineffectual peace talks," [Reuters](#), 16:56 GMT, 15 Feb 2014.

On Monday morning, 17 Feb, the United Nations Office in Geneva posted a "near verbatim transcript" of Brahimi's press conference on Saturday, 15 Feb:

Good day to you all, thank you for coming on a Saturday. We've just held our last meeting for this session. It was as laborious as all the meetings we have had but we agreed on an agenda for the next round, when it does take place. The agenda is of four points that we have been discussing forever now — but I had proposed before the beginning of the second round, in writing to the two parties, and that is that: one, violence and terrorism; two, the TGB [*Transitional Governing Body*]; three, national institutions; and four, national reconciliation and national debate.

I also proposed, as you are aware, the government side considers that the most important issue is the issue of terrorism; the opposition side considers that the most important issue is the TGB. We suggested right from the beginning that the two sides should reassure one another that their pet subject, and both are very, very important subjects, will be discussed. So we suggested that we agree now — so that we don't lose another week or ten days as we have this time — we suggested that the first day will be reserved, will be set for discussion on violence, ending violence and combating

terrorism; and the second day would be reserved to a discussion on the TGB, it being extremely clear that one day will not be enough to finish the discussion on violence and terrorism, and one day will not be enough on discussing the TGB. Unfortunately the government has refused, which raises the suspicion of the opposition that in fact the government doesn't want to discuss the TGB at all.

In that case, I have suggested that it's not good for the process, it's not good for Syria that we come back for another round and fall in the same trap that we have been struggling with this week and most of the first round. So I think it is better that every side goes back and reflect and take their responsibility: do they want this process to take place or not? I will do the same, I will go and speak to the Secretary General. I think that we need also to discuss with our partners in the trilateral, hopefully through a meeting between Ban Ki-moon, John Kerry and Serguei Lavrov. And also I think I will, at some point, I will also brief the P5 and the Security Council as a whole.

I am very, very sorry, and I apologize to the Syrian people that their hopes which were very, very high that something will happen here — I think that, you know, the little that has been achieved in Homs gave them even more hope that maybe this is the beginning of the coming out of this horrible crisis they are in — I apologize to them that on these two rounds we haven't help them very much.

I very, very much hope that the two sides will reflect and think a little bit better and come back ready to engage seriously on how to implement the Geneva Communiqué. The Geneva Communiqué is not an end in itself. The Geneva Communiqué helps the two sides, and us sitting between them, to start the long road towards ending this crisis. So I hope that this time of reflection will lead the government side in particular to reassure the other side that when they speak of implementing the Geneva Communiqué they do mean that a TGB exercising full executive powers will be the main objective to follow. Of course ending violence, combating terrorism is extremely important, indispensable. But I think that every side has to be convinced that yes, we are going to implement all the elements in the Communiqué.

As I told you, I'll see with the Secretary General when is the best time for me to go and see him. And I am sure that the parties are going to see their respective principals and leaders and we will hear from one another in a not too distant future I hope. Thank you very much for your attention.

Introductory Remarks of the Joint Special Representative on Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, [UN](#), 15 Feb 2014 press conference.

My comments: The Coalition's delegation and Assad's delegation did *not* meet face-to-face on 10 Feb, because they were angry. The two delegations met for three hours on 11 Feb. The two delegations met for only two hours on 12 Feb. The two delegations did *not* meet on 13 Feb. The two delegations met separately with Brahimi on the morning of 14 Feb. The two delegations met together for "less than half an hour" on the morning of 15 Feb. That is a total of less than six hours of face-to-face meetings in six days. As I said on 13 Feb, this is a waste of hotel expense and air fare.

I still believe the main focus of Geneva2 should be on a ceasefire and then delivery of humanitarian aid to people in Syria. Syria does *not* need the so-called "transitional governing body" that is mentioned in the June 2012 Geneva Communiqué — Syria already has a functioning government with Assad in charge. The people of Syria should choose their leader in elections, which are scheduled for later in 2014, instead of having foreign meddlers impose the Syrian National Coalition on the people of Syria. Having foreign meddlers impose a government on Syria reminds me of colonialism and imperialism from the 1800s, up to about the 1960s.

No one from Syria — neither Assad's government nor the Coalition — were present at the Geneva1 conference in June 2012 that declared the "transitional governing body". However, the Coalition subsequently endorsed Geneva1, with the interpretation favored by the "Friends of Syria" that the transitional government does *not* include Assad. The Coalition endorsed the transitional government because that gave them the victory that they were unable to achieve in the civil war in Syria.

In my [second](#) essay on Syria, I proposed an agenda for negotiations that would avoid the unnecessary transitional government quagmire. (See my 25 Nov 2013 comment with the heading: Abandon Transitional Government. Also see my 20 Oct 2013 comments on the need for a ten year limit on presidential terms, and the need for three equal branches of government (executive, legislative, judiciary), each with the power to overrule the other two branches in some circumstances.)

Meanwhile, now we listen to politicians and diplomats in the USA, France, and the UK spew their simplistic rhetoric that the collapse of Geneva2 negotiations is solely the fault of Assad, while ignoring many problems with the Coalition. The Coalition has no influence over the jihadists and Al-Qaeda, and little influence over the moderate rebels in Syria, making any agreement in Geneva unenforceable in Syria. The Coalition has been disorganized and indecisive during its entire history. And the Coalition has zero experience in governing, although the Coalition has experience in issuing exasperating ultimatums and preconditions.

my analysis of Geneva2

Coalition does *not* control fighters in Syria

In World War I and II, when the armistice was signed, the German military immediately stopped fighting. That was because the German military was professional and disciplined. That means the German soldiers obeyed their officers, and the lower-ranking officers obeyed the higher-ranking officers.

The situation in Syria is strikingly different.

1. There are literally hundreds of rebel and jihadist groups in Syria. Their soldiers are unprofessional and have had little or no formal training. Many of these groups appear more similar to a criminal gang in the USA than to a professional army of a major nation. In contrast to the unified command structure of a professional army, the rebels and jihadists are mostly disorganized and fragmented.

2. Most of these rebel or jihadist groups are purely military, and are *not* part of some governmental or political organization. (One exception is the Free Syrian Army, which is loosely affiliated with the Syrian National Coalition, but the FSA has been growing weaker since Sep 2013.) This means there is no one who can negotiate for each of these rebel or jihadist groups, except for their local commander.

We saw this disorganization play out when the parties in Geneva agreed on a ceasefire in Homs on 26 Jan. But then no ceasefire happened for 11 days, while United Nations officials continued to negotiate with local commanders of rebel or jihadist groups in Homs. When a ceasefire in Homs was finally agreed at the local level to begin on 7 Feb, the ceasefire was repeatedly violated with mortar and rifle fire, especially during 8-9 Feb. This example shows that a ceasefire and humanitarian aid will need to be negotiated separately for each city and town in Syria, owing to the hundreds of rebel and jihadist groups and the absence of a central opposition government organization that is obeyed by all of the rebels and all of the jihadists. This example also shows that any ceasefires will be violated by unprofessional, undisciplined barbarians amongst the armed groups in Syria.

The USA, Western Europe, Russia, and the United Nations seem to pretend that the Syrian National Coalition speaks for *all* of the rebel and jihadist groups in Syria. This fiction makes the Coalition the proper party to negotiate with Assad's lawful government. But, as we saw in Homs, agreement in Geneva did *not* translate to results in Homs.

Some commentators and journalists said the the evacuations from Homs and the small food delivery in Homs were the *only* tangible results of the Geneva2 negotiations. This claim is wrong. The humanitarian relief in Homs was *not* a result of negotiations in Geneva, but was a result of local negotiations in Homs. While the parties in Geneva did agree to these humanitarian measures on 26 Jan, the negotiations in Homs between the United Nations, Assad's government, and the rebels had begun months *before* Geneva2 began. So the humanitarian measures in Homs were *not* a result of Geneva2. Note that the first day of the humanitarian measures in Homs, 7 Feb, was one week *after* the end of the round of negotiations in Geneva on 31 Jan, and three days before the second round of negotiations in Geneva began on 10 Feb. Incidentally, this clarification about Homs means there were absolutely *zero* tangible results from the first two rounds of negotiations in Geneva.

Transitional Governing Body

United Nations Security Council Resolution Nr. 2118 is primarily concerned with disposal of chemical weapons in Syria. However, part of this Resolution endorses the ill-considered Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012:

16. Endorses fully the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012 (Annex II), which sets out a number of key steps beginning with the establishment of a transitional governing body exercising full executive powers, which could include members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups and shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent;
17. Calls for the convening, as soon as possible, of an international conference on

Syria to implement the Geneva Communiqué, and calls upon all Syrian parties to engage seriously and constructively at the Geneva Conference on Syria, and underscores that they should be fully representative of the Syrian people and committed to the implementation of the Geneva Communiqué and to the achievement of stability and reconciliation;

United Nations Security Council Resolution Nr. 2118, §§16-17, 27 Sep 2013.

My comments: By endorsing the "transitional governing body", this UN Resolution guaranteed that the Geneva2 negotiations would fail, because Assad's government will *not* agree to have itself replaced by the transitional governing body. How the Syrian people resolve their civil war should be a matter for the Syrian people to decide, *not* something for foreign meddlers (i.e., "Friends of Syria" group of nations, or the United Nations) to impose on Syria. My [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria are highly critical of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, largely because *no one* from Syria participated in the June 2012 Geneva conference, and because the situation in Syria has changed since June 2012.

Conclusion

The inevitable conclusion of this analysis is that negotiations with the Syrian National Coalition are futile, because:

1. The Coalition controls neither the rebels nor the jihadists who are fighting in Syria, as explained above.
2. The consistent demand of the Coalition that Assad and his henchmen resign, which is an irreconcilable difference with Assad's government.
3. *Neither* Assad's government, the rebels, the jihadists, *nor* Al-Qaeda desires an end to the civil war. Despite strong evidence of a military stalemate in Syria, each of the parties in Syria clings to the notion that they can win a military victory, and thus they should not compromise in negotiations. (However, note that Assad is currently in a strongly dominant position in most of Syria, and Assad has besieged many of the cities that he does not control.)
4. The leaders in Syria — the rebels, the jihadists, *and* Assad's government — appear concerned only with control, power, and authority, which are expressed by demanding pre-conditions, guarantees, and other formalities. These leaders completely lack any sense of urgency concerning suffering people. We are seeing a total failure of leadership on all sides, while innocent people suffer.

The reason that the Coalition attended negotiations in Geneva was that the USA and Western Europe pressured the Coalition to attend, as documented in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria. After arriving at Geneva, the Coalition and Assad's delegation each pretended (as propaganda) they were seeking peace, while portraying the other party as either war criminals or terrorists.

This analysis ignored the Nusra Front, the authorized Al-Qaeda group in Syria, and also ignored the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), an Al-Qaeda inspired group of terrorists. Each of these two groups have an associated governmental/political organization. There is a possibility that one or both of these two groups could eventually control part of

Syria, a result that could be extraordinarily bad for Syria and its neighbors.

17 Feb 2014

General Idris sacked as head of FSA

A common response to a disaster is to sack the leader(s) of some organization. On 17 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

The Western-backed Free Syrian Army has appointed a new military chief, opposition groups announced Monday [17 Feb] as they try to restructure a rebel movement that has fallen into disarray as it faces rampant infighting and declining international support for its fight to topple President Bashar Assad.

Brig. Gen. Abdul-Ilah al-Bashir replaces Gen. Salim Idris, who was criticized by many in the opposition for being ineffective and lost the confidence of the U.S. and its allies particularly after Islamic extremists [on 7 Dec 2013] seized a weapons depot from moderate rebels. The move was announced Monday [17 Feb] in a statement by the FSA's Supreme Military Council.

Al-Bashir, who previously headed the group's operations in the province of Quneitra on the border with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, is considered a moderate Islamist. In speeches, he has said he supports a democratic Syria but also cites heavily from the Quran, the Islamic holy book.

His appointment, which was made by consensus among the FSA's 30-member military council late Sunday [16 Feb], is seen as part of attempts to revamp and restructure the Free Syrian Army after a series of embarrassing setbacks and to try to convince the West to provide more powerful weaponry. It also seeks to show rival rebels that the group is re-energizing with a new, credible leadership.

The FSA — a loose coalition of mainstream rebel groups — has seen its influence sharply wane and has suffered a series of setbacks in the past year, including an embarrassing raid on its weapons warehouse by Islamic extremists last year, which led to a temporary suspension of U.S. non-lethal aid to the rebels. The FSA has been further weakened in the past few months by deadly infighting with an al-Qaida breakaway group, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

The moderate opposition hopes to show that the coalition is strengthening the drifting, chaotic and ever-weakening groups that comprise the coalition. Western donors have refrained from providing weapons, fearing they will fall into the hands of hard-line militants.

....

The switch comes after two recent rounds of failed peace talks in Switzerland between Assad's government and exiled opposition activists. The FSA also has lost influence amid fierce infighting with hard-line groups that appear to have better funding and

training and are playing an increasingly prominent role in the uprising, particularly in northern and eastern Syria.

A spokesman for the coalition's military council, Col. Qassem Saadeddine, said the turning point was when Islamic extremists seized warehouses belonging to the group near the Turkish border in December. The raid prompted a sudden cutoff of Western supplies to the rebels, leaving fighters without arms and scattering already weakened opposition forces.

Diaa Hadid, "Syrian Opposition Appoints New Military Chief," [Associated Press](#), 15:26 GMT, 17 Feb 2014.

On 17 Feb, Reuters reported:

The Western-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) has sacked its leader after he fell out with the Saudi-supported head of the moderate opposition to President Bashar al-Assad, opposition sources said on Monday.

General Selim Idriss, whose relations with Saudi Arabia deteriorated after he opened channels with Qatar, was replaced by Brigadier General Abdelilah al-Bashir, head of FSA operations in Qunaitera province bordering the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, the sources said.

....

A statement by the opposition National Coalition, which includes 15 members of the FSA, said news of Bashir's appointment came as a "relief". Ahmad Jarba, [president of the Syrian National Coalition and] a tribal figure close to Saudi Arabia, became president of the coalition last July after an expansion last year that diluted the influence of Qatari-backed members. "Idriss appears to have gotten too close to the Qataris, prompting Jarba to move against him," one of the opposition sources said.

Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Free Syrian Army sacks chief, appoints replacement," [Reuters](#), 17:19 GMT, 17 Feb 2014.

It is interesting that the Associated Press sees the issue as one of competence of Idris, while Reuters sees the issue of political rivalries between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the two major Arab sources of munitions for the rebels. [Al-Jazeera](#) reports that "the Supreme Military Council said Idriss ... 'lacked the military experience to run operations on the ground.'" Strangely, no one noticed his alleged lack of experience *before* or during the 13 months that Idris led the FSA. [Agence France-Presse](#) and [Al-Arabiya](#) report that Idris was removed for ineffective leadership, although the AFP quoted one commentator that "Idriss may have been blocking a Saudi-backed plan".

At night on 17 Feb, the McClatchy news service issued the following analysis that shows there are also policy implications for the USA in the replacement of General Idris:

Caught off guard by the abrupt dismissal of the U.S. point man for moderate Syrian rebels, the Obama administration is now searching for new clients to aid in an insurgency that's dominated by Islamist factions, including groups with connections to al Qaida.

The downfall of Gen. Salim Idriss, the rebel leader the State Department once described as "a key component of the future of the Syrian opposition," leaves the United States once again with no clear partner in the nearly 3-year-old civil war.

....

Privately, however, [Obama administration] officials acknowledge that the SMC's [Supreme Military Council's] future is shaky at best and so they're evaluating a new crop of potential battlefield partners. They even hadn't excluded the Islamic Front, a powerhouse rebel coalition whose fighters range from conservative Islamists to extremists with ties to the Nusra Front, an al Qaida affiliate and U.S.-designated terrorist group.

Roy Gutman And Hannah Allam, "U.S. left with no point man in Syria after 'moderate' rebels fire their commander," [Miami Herald](#), [Kansas City Star](#), [Sacramento Bee](#), 17 Feb 2014.

My comments on 17-18 Feb: Replacing General Idris is largely symbolic. It is not clear to me that General Idris was a bad leader, the problem could have been either disobedient rebel groups, lack of supplies, or poorly trained rebel groups. However, this change of leadership is too little, too late. Sending more munitions to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) is like pouring gasoline on a fire. If we want a ceasefire in Syria, sending more munitions is counterproductive. If the USA and Western Europe does send munitions to rebels/jihadists, it will be because Western hatred of Assad is greater than the Western desire for a ceasefire in Syria.

Obama and Kerry need to be careful that their hatred for Assad does not lead the USA into supporting jihadists (e.g., Islamic Front) who are intolerant of other religious groups. I believe a prudent strategy would be for the USA *not* to give military aid to any rebel or jihadist group in the Syrian civil war.

History teaches us that when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan during 1979-89, the USA reacted by giving military aid to the Taliban, because the Taliban was the enemy of our enemy (i.e., Soviet Union). After Al-Qaeda hijacked airliners and flew them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 Sep 2001, the USA responded by fighting against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Similarly, when Iraq and Iran were at war in the 1980s, the USA gave military aid to Saddam Hussein because he was the enemy of our enemy (i.e., Iran). But in 2003, the USA invaded Iraq and deposed Saddam Hussein. These two examples show that a simplistic method of choosing recipients of U.S. military aid can come back to haunt the USA later.

While there are people who still advocate increased military aid to the rebels (e.g., [Fox News](#)), a realistic appraisal is that the civil war has already destroyed Syria: more than 140,000 dead, cities in ruins, economy in shambles, millions of refugees, etc. Nearly three years of war has only produced a stalemate in Syria. Why would any rational person want *more* war in Syria? What Syria really needs is ceasefires, reintegration of moderate rebels into Assad's army, and rebuilding of Syrian towns and cities.

On 19 Feb, Reuters reported:

Regional unit commanders of the main Western-backed Syrian rebel faction have rebuffed the dismissal this week of their chief by the group's foreign-based command council and pledged to keep fighting under his command.

The order to remove Selim Idriss was further evidence of damaging splits within Syria's fragmented opposition movement that have weakened the nearly three-year uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

....

But in a video posted online late on Tuesday [18 Feb], commanders representing relatively secular rebels in Syria's five main battle theatres denounced the decision and accused officials in the National Coalition of exacerbating rebel divisions.

"(We) consider the dismissal of the head of the General Staff, General Selim Idriss, null and illegitimate," Fateh Hassoun, FSA commander for central Syria, said in the video. He added Idriss's backers would keep fighting under his command.

"No group that is not present on the country's soil has the right to take a crucial decision that does not represent the views of the forces working on the ground," he said, reading from a statement.

....

An FSA leader who did not want to be named said a lack of resources, not Idriss' leadership, was to blame for setbacks under his command, such as an incident in December when the FSA lost a border crossing with Turkey to rival Islamist insurgents, which embarrassed the organisation and prompted the United States and Britain to suspend non-lethal aid.

"It's not about the person. It's about the resources," he said. "The corruption is very bad and it's destroyed the coalition."

Dasha Afanasieva & Alexander Dziadosz, "Western-backed Syrian rebel commanders reject leader's sacking," [Reuters](#), 14:13 GMT, 19 Feb 2014.

Al-Jazeera reported:

General Salim Idriss has rejected his dismissal as military chief of the rebel Free Syrian Army, saying the whole chain of command needed a "total restructuring" — highlighting deep divisions in the opposition.

Speaking in a video statement on Wednesday [19 Feb], flanked by several top field commanders of the FSA's Supreme Military Council, the sacked rebel chief said: "We... have been asked to start working on a total restructuring of the SMC."

Idriss lashed out at the opposition Syrian National Coalition defence minister, Assaad

Mustafa, who reportedly backed his replacement on Sunday by Brigadier General Abdel Ilah al-Bashir.

He described Mustafa's decisions as "improvised and individual".

....

"We consider the removal of... Idriss an invalid, illegitimate decision," said a statement issued by all five top field commanders of the SMC, which Idriss had led from December 2012.

"Syrian rebels split over FSA leader's sacking," [Al-Jazeera](#), 17:18 GMT, 19 Feb 2014.

On 19 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

The former leader of the Western-backed Syrian opposition's military wing on Wednesday [19 Feb] rejected his recent dismissal, and along with more than a dozen senior insurgent commanders severed ties with the political opposition-in-exile, further fragmenting the notoriously divided rebel movement.

The statement from Gen. Salim Idris comes two days after the opposition Syrian National Coalition announced that Idris had been sacked as head of the Supreme Military Council and replaced by Brig. Gen. Abdul-Ilah al-Bashir — an experienced, moderate field commander from southern Syria. The move was widely seen as an attempt to restructure the military council and to persuade Western allies to boost their support for mainstream rebels trying to oust President Bashar Assad.

Moderate opposition fighters have been eclipsed over the past year by ultraconservative Islamic groups and extremist factions that have emerged as the most powerful brigades on the rebel side.

But the move also holds the potential to further fracture rebel ranks and sap what little strength the military council currently has.

In a video posted online Wednesday, Idris said that after consulting with forces inside Syria, he and the 15 other signatories of the statement were breaking ties with the council and the opposition's political leadership.

....

Idris was named the head of the Supreme Military Council shortly after it was formed in late 2012. During his time in command, Idris, a secular-leaning moderate, was criticized by many in the opposition for being ineffective and lost the confidence of the U.S. and its allies, particularly after Islamic extremists seized a weapons depot from moderate rebels.

Ryan Lucas, "Syria Rebel Commanders Reject Leadership Shakeup," [Associated Press](#), 19:27 GMT, 19 Feb 2014.

At 13:11 EST on 19 Feb, there was a press briefing by Marie Harf, deputy spokesperson at

the U.S. State Department:

Q. Within the current reorganization and realignments within the military wing of the Syrian opposition, it seems that Salim Idris, who was forced out of his position a few days ago, is coming back and saying no, that he's — he wants his position back, that the other faction doesn't — is not allowed to fire him. Is there any reaction?

MS. HARF: So we do — we have, of course, seen the news that General Idris has been replaced. We're still gathering information about the February 16th vote. We do believe that the SNC and the SOC are effective advocates for the political and armed opposition, and we remain supportive of them. So I don't really have much more analysis of what this means at this point, nor do I have details of the opposition's internal discussions. We are following developments very closely. We're gathering information. We're in touch with relevant contacts. But I would say that our support has not changed.

[State Dept.](#), 19 Feb 2014. (SNC is an abbreviation for Syrian National Coalition, the opposition group in Geneva². SOC is probably a transcription error for Supreme Military Council.)

On 23 Feb, *The New York Times* reports that:

... 14 months after its creation [in December 2012], the body, known as the Supreme Military Council, is in disarray.

....

The chaos within the opposition's military council reflects the wider mistrust and internal rivalries between Syria's rebels and their powerful foreign backers that have consistently undermined their ability to form a united front against Mr. Assad.

....

The new chaos in the rebel leadership comes as internationally backed talks aimed at ending the war have failed to make progress and as the Obama administration searches for new ways to pressure Mr. Assad.

But the disorder within the council, the umbrella group for moderate, Western-backed rebels, leaves the United States and its allies with one fewer reliable partner to work with to try to affect the course of the war.

Ben Hubbard & Karam Shoumali, "Top Military Body Against Syria's Assad Is in Chaos, Undermining Fight," [NY Times](#), 23 Feb 2014.

My comments on 19 Feb: When civilian leaders sack their military commander, the military commander is supposed to become a civilian and quickly fade away. For example, when U.S. President Truman sacked Gen. Douglas McArthur in April 1951, McArthur returned to the USA. The Truman/McArthur dispute was not an issue of who was correct, but rather an illustration of the principle that the civilian government absolutely controls the military. Further, the U.S. military does *not* become involved in domestic politics. The alternative is the military controls the government (e.g., after a coup d'état by the military).

The fact that Idris defied the Supreme Military Council and the Syrian National Coalition shows that the leaders of the rebels ignore civilian control. The fact that Idris continues his military role after he was relieved of command, shows that the rebels in Syria do *not* respect the principle of civilian control of the military. This is yet another reason *not* to give foreign aid to the rebels in Syria.

Further, the continuation of Idris as leader of some rebel groups adds to the fragmentation and chaos of military opposition to Assad. This is harmful to having a coordinated military strategy to defeat Assad.

Syria can solve its own problems (?)

The Syrian government news agency posted a story containing propaganda:

With faithful popular efforts, the locals of Babila, Beit Sahim, Yalda and Aqraba towns in Damascus countryside have put an end to a painful period during which the armed terrorist groups wreaked havoc in their neighborhoods.

The misled residents of these towns have turned themselves in to the authorities after they recognized the terrorists have only one goal in mind which is destroying the Syrian state.

Feelings of happiness overwhelmed the families who returned to the area after they ran away in fear of the terrorists' acts, and the maintenance workshops continued removing garbage and opening roads for the children to go back to school.

Governor of Damascus countryside, Hussein Makhoul, said in a statement to reporters from outside the Judicial Council building in Babila that the reconciliation in these towns is the fruit of the faithful efforts exerted by the people of the homeland and with genuine partnership with the army.

He stressed that all service departments are ready to offer the requirements of the residents of Babila, Beit Sahim and Yalda, including electricity, health and cleanliness as well as the delivery of relief aid.

"Locals of Babila, Beit Sahim, Yalda, Aqraba, put an end to painful period, vow to be one hand with the army," [SANA](#), 17 Feb 2014.

On 18 Feb, *Al-Jazeera* reported this SANA story:

Syrian state news agency SANA has reported local reconciliations in the rebel held towns of Babila, Beit Sahm, and Yalda, all located in the Damascus governorate.

The governor of Damascus governorate visited the towns and said all the facilities will be restored.

The reconciliation includes a cease fire and the opening of corridors for humanitarian aid.

Another provision is the forming of joint committees between the government and the rebel groups in the towns.

Anti-government activists say that people and rebels in the towns were forced to accept the reconciliation after Syrian government followed a strategy of starvation by laying siege to the areas for over a year.

The reconciliation effort has been used by the Syrian government to show the international community that it is able to solve the conflict internally without negotiating with the Syrian opposition.

[Al-Jazeera](#), 00:16 GMT, 18 Feb 2014.

[Reuters](#) reports that both rebels and Assad supporters are angry that ceasefires have occurred. These angry people wanted to avenge past atrocities by the other side, an attitude that will *never* end the civil war.

The [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon and [Al-Bawaba](#) reported on these local agreements, based on an Agence France-Presse story that says:

Syria's army and rebels have agreed local truces in key flashpoints around Damascus, despite regime and opposition representatives failing to make any progress in Geneva peace talks.

In the southern suburb of Babbila, AFP journalists on Monday [17 Feb] saw rebels and soldiers — all armed — in conversation, which would have been unthinkable just days ago.

The local truces come 18 months into fierce fighting in and around the capital that has led rebels and President Bashar al-Assad's forces to compromise, with neither side able to clinch victory.

In addition to Babbila, deals have been struck for Qudsaya, Moadamiyet al-Sham, Barzeh, Beit Sahem, Yalda and Yarmuk Palestinian refugee camp.

Negotiated by public figures, the accords involve a truce, a siege being lifted and food allowed in to rebel-held areas, with opposition fighters handing over heavy weapons and the regime raising its flag.

....

Armed rebels were still present, as the terms of the accord also included an amnesty, a security source said.

Rebels in military fatigues stood idly around, chatting with soldiers. There was no shooting or shelling.

Rim Haddad, "Syria army, rebels agree new Damascus area truce," [Google](#), 17 Feb 2014. Copy at [GlobalPost](#).

On 19 Feb, 11 civilians were evacuated from Homs without any negotiations with the United Nations, instead the Syrian government negotiated with "elders and clerics". See [above](#).

On 20 Feb, harmony came to an end in one of the towns. Agence France-Presse reports: Three days after rebels and the Syrian army agreed a truce at Babbila near Damascus, jihadists said they rejected the deal and hauled down and trampled on Syria's flag Thursday [20 Feb].

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) — the most radical group in Syria's revolt — "announced their rejection of any armistice" with the authorities.

Video footage showed ISIL members tearing down regime flags hoisted above the Babbila municipality building during the truce and replacing them with the black banner of the jihadists. They then trampled on and set fire to the country's flag.

On Monday [17 Feb], the army and rebels agreed a truce in the capital's southern suburb, the latest in a series of local ceasefires in Damascus flashpoints. "Syria jihadists raise rebel banner in truce suburb," [GlobalPost](#) (AFP), 20 Feb 2014.

On 20-23 Feb, the Syrian Red Crescent distributed "6650 food rations" in Beit Sahem, Babbila and Yalda. [GlobalPost](#)(AFP).

On 1 March 2014, the Associated Press reported:

In one besieged neighborhood after another, weary rebels have turned over their weapons to the Syrian government in exchange for an easing of suffocating blockades that have prevented food, medicine and other staples from reaching civilians trapped inside.

The local cease-fires struck in at least four neighborhoods in and around the Syrian capital in recent weeks have brought an end to the shelling and most of the fighting in the affected areas. While deep distrust lingers on both sides, in some neighborhoods the lull has prompted residents displaced by earlier violence to return.

The government touts the truces as part of its program of "national reconciliation" to end Syria's crisis, which has killed more than 140,000 people since March 2011. But activists and rebels describe the deals as the final stage of a ruthless tactic President Bashar Assad's government has employed to devastating effect: shelling and starving fighters and civilians alike in opposition-held areas into submission.

With two rounds of United Nations-brokered peace talks with the political opposition in exile failing to make any substantial progress, and neither side able to clinch a military victory, Assad may be counting on such local truces to pacify flashpoint areas around the capital.

The deals carry two additional benefits for Assad: they free up troops in his

overstretched military to be shifted to fighting fronts elsewhere in the country; and they allow the government to present itself abroad as a responsible actor actively trying to broker peace at home.

....

The first major deal was struck in the Damascus suburb of Moadamiyeh, where residents raised the two-starred government flag over the city in late December. The latest truce took hold last week in the capital's Babila neighborhood, where news cameras captured footage of armed opposition fighters with full beards standing next to government soldiers in camouflage uniforms.

In between, cease-fires also have been struck in Beit Sahim, Yalda, Barzeh, as well as a shaky agreement in the Palestinian camp of Yarmouk in Damascus. A pause in the fighting also allowed aid shipments in and civilians out of the Old City of Homs.

Rebels in Barzeh, a strategically located neighborhood in northeast Damascus where fighters had battled the military to a stalemate, wrangled the most favorable terms. Fighters there have kept most of their weapons, and now man joint checkpoints with government forces.

Ryan Lucas & Diaa Hadid, "In Syria, Government Pursues Local Cease-Fires," [Associated Press](#), 17:16 GMT, 1 Mar 2014.

My comments: I am certainly not thrilled with starving people into submission to Assad's government. But these local ceasefire agreements do avoid the problems with futile negotiations in Geneva with the Coalition (see [above](#)). If these local agreements end the fighting with moderate rebels, then everyone should accept this result and move forward to reconciliation.

With the exception of Reuters and Agence France-Presse, this story on 17-18 Feb was *not* reported in Western newsmedia and — according to Google News — did not appear in any newspapers in the USA. I wonder if the strong propaganda in the original SANA story offended professional journalists. Or maybe Western journalists have such a strong anti-Assad bias, that they ignore good news about Assad's government.

Obama wants new options on Syria

On 14 Feb, U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, said that Obama had asked his advisors for new options on how to deal with the crisis in Syria. [Washington Post](#), [NY Times](#). Clearly, Obama was frustrated by the failure of the negotiations in Geneva and the dramatically worsening situation in Syria.

The Saudi government had proposed to give Chinese-made, shoulder-launched, anti-aircraft missiles to rebels, to shoot down Syrian air force airplanes. The U.S. government remains opposed to supplying rebels with these missiles, because terrorists could use those missiles against civilian airliners. [Reuters](#).

At 13:10 EST on 18 Feb, there was a press briefing at the White House, where the president's press secretary, Jay Carney, said:

Q. The Geneva talks between the Syrian government and the opposition seem to have officially broken down over the weekend with no plans at this point for them to resume. Does the Geneva process remain the administration's main focus in terms of a resolution on Syria, or are you looking — even if it's diplomatic — for another process at this point?

MR. CARNEY: Well, the talks are in recess, that's correct. The international community needs to use this time to determine how to use — or rather, needs to move forward in determining how to use this time most effectively in order to bring about a political solution.

So to answer your question, it is still our view, absolutely, that **there is not a military solution to this conflict** and that a negotiated political settlement is the only path forward for Syria, and the Geneva process is the process by which that is pursuable and achievable at this time. But there's no question that there has not been a great amount of progress. It is important that the two sides sat down across from each other, but the international community needs to focus on how we can move this process forward.
[boldface added by Standler]

....

Q. And what would be some of the things that the U.S. might look to do in this period in order to try to make those talks more effective?

MR. CARNEY: I don't have any announcements to make in terms of policy steps. We, as a rule, are always looking at all of our options and reviewing old options and new options when it comes to a situation like we find in Syria. It should not be forgotten that the obstacle to progress here has been the regime. The opposition attended the Geneva talks and conducted themselves appropriately. The regime, however, has made clear that it's throwing up obstacles to moving forward and making progress.

Q. But would you disagree then with U.S. officials who say that the discussion around some of these options has taken on if not increased urgency but there's sort of a renewed focus on looking at options that maybe have been shelved previously?

MR. CARNEY: We got this question last week. I think that it is a standing proposition that the President is always looking for options available to him.

Q. So there's nothing different about that process currently than there was a month ago?

MR. CARNEY: Correct. There's not a new review of policy underway, because the assessments of where we are and the options that we have available to us to get where we need to be is ongoing. The fact of the matter is the situation in Syria is horrendous,

as the President has said. And we are going to continue to work with our international partners to try to push this process forward.

We should note that when it comes to the urgent need to allow for the provision of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, we have been working with partners on the United Nations Security Council to move forward on a resolution that would advance that cause, and Russia has been a holdout. And it is notable that if you're going to proclaim your concern about the fate of the Syrian people, one way to act on that concern is to not block progress in the United Nations Security Council on a resolution that would provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people who so desperately need it.

....

Q. Short of military action, what can be done to pressure Assad to make concessions?

MR. CARNEY: We are providing, as I said, assistance to the opposition. We have a lot of partners in that effort. We are also working with our international partners on pressing the Assad regime to engage constructively in a negotiated political settlement, and that includes our partners on the Security Council and our partners elsewhere.

The most important part of your question, I think, Steve, is the "short of military engagement," and I think that while everyone is enormously concerned about and frustrated by the situation in Syria, it should be on everyone's mind that when we look at the situation we're in, we have to examine what the alternatives some might be proposing are and whether they're in our national security interests, and whether a desire to do something about it could lead us, the United States, to take action that can produce the kind of unintended consequences we've seen in the past.

....

Q. Can you, today, remind us, is the U.S. goal to unseat Assad from control in Syria, or is the goal to end the civil war?

MR. CARNEY: The United States policy and position is that Syria's future cannot include Bashar al-Assad because the Syrian people have so clearly shown that he cannot be a part of future or transitional government in Syria. That's not a decision that we make here in the United States. That's a decision that the Syrian people have made and have suffered for in the past several years at the hands of Assad and at the hands of his brutal regime.

There's no possibility, in our view — and this is simply a reflection of the view of the Syrian people and certainly of the opposition — that a transitional government or governing authority in Syria could include Assad as part of it. The purpose of the talks that have started, albeit without significant progress, is to find a path forward and a transitional governing authority that can be agreed upon. And the only way that can be agreed upon is that it not include Assad, as far as the opposition is concerned, and we

certainly support that view. Our goal is an end to the conflict through a negotiated political settlement, and that, again, settlement cannot be possible with Assad remaining in power.

[White House](#), 18 Feb 2014.

Late on 18 Feb, Reuters reports:

Despite a forthcoming review of options in the deteriorating Syria crisis, the White House on Tuesday signaled that President Barack Obama remains wary of any direct U.S. involvement in the three-year-old civil war.

U.S. policy toward Syria appears to be approaching a crossroads, with peace talks between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government and his armed opponents having failed for now and Russia unwilling or unable to pressure its ally Assad to cede power.

The White House is beginning to take a new look at options in Syria, a process that could take several weeks, U.S. officials have said.

But spokesman Jay Carney suggested Obama is skeptical about any proposed step that draws the United States into the Syrian civil war, an outcome Obama has studiously avoided.

"We have to examine what the alternatives some might be proposing are, and whether they're in our national security interests, and whether a desire to do something about it could lead us, the United States, to take action that can produce the kind of unintended consequences we've seen in the past," Carney told a news briefing.

He didn't elaborate but appeared to refer to Obama's desire to avoid getting caught up in another war in the Islamic world.

Steve Holland & Lesley Wroughton, "Looking for Syria options, U.S. remains cool to using force," [Reuters](#), 22:48 EST, 18 Feb 2014.

On 19 Feb, the Associated Press reports:

Peace talks between the Syrian government and opposition are faltering. President Bashar Assad's military is on the offensive and the rebels are in disarray. Most distressing to the Obama administration, U.S. officials say al-Qaida-linked militants are squeezing moderates out of the insurgency and carving out havens for potential terrorist plots against the United States.

The accelerating U.S. national security threat is leading the administration to take a fresh look at previously shelved ideas, including more robust assistance to Western-backed rebels.

They are also looking at newer, more far-reaching options, including drone strikes on extremists and more forceful action against Assad, whom President Barack Obama told to leave power 30 months ago.

Obama's top aides plan to meet at the White House before week's end [22 Feb] to examine options, according to administration officials. They weren't authorized to talk publicly on the matter and spoke only on condition of anonymity.

....

For all the talk about policy changes, American officials remain hampered by the same constraints that have stymied the U.S. response throughout the three-year civil war, including concern that lethal assistance could end up in the hands of extremists. And then there also is Obama's own distaste for military action.

After more than a decade of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, Obama has desperately sought to avoid embroiling the U.S. in another deadly and inconclusive war. He backed away last year from his threat to take military action in response to a Syrian chemical weapons attack when it became clear Congress would not vote its approval.

Even options short of direct strikes pose difficulties.

Grounding Assad's air force by enforcing a no-fly zone in Syria would most likely require a large-scale attack on the military's advanced air defense systems. Military support for the opposition continues in the form of small weapons and ammunition. But proposals for sending more powerful weaponry raise fears that it could fall into the hands of extremist rebel groups, which are melding with moderate rebels.

The U.S. remains opposed to Saudi Arabian deliveries of shoulder-launched, anti-aircraft missiles because of the potential risk to commercial aircraft.

Bradley Klapper & Julie Pace, "As Syria Threat Expands, Obama Mulls Options," [Associated Press](#), 03:26 EST, 19 Feb 2014.

At 13:11 EST on 19 Feb, there was a press briefing by Marie Harf, deputy spokesperson at the U.S. State Department:

[Question about the internal U.S. government discussions about Syria]

MS. HARF: Yep. Yeah. Absolutely. Well, and it's not surprising that there would be many, many meetings going on about Syria, given the gravity of the situation and the urgency of the situation. As I think I said — I don't remember the last time I actually briefed in person — but this is a constant policy review process. It's a situation that we know isn't getting better, as the President and the Secretary have said, and we need to continue considering all options to help the situation for the Syrian people.

I know it probably won't surprise anyone that on specific ideas that have been reported or rumored, I'm obviously not going to get into the specifics of internal deliberations inside the U.S. Government. But as we've said, we're constantly looking at what options we can take. One of those, of course, is a [UN] Security Council resolution that we are committed to, but there are a range of options that we're talking about right now. The Secretary has been very engaged in this topic, as have other senior officials. I don't have any specific meetings to announce for you or participation in them, but as

we do and we can share that, we can try to.

....

QUESTION: And it was basing this analysis on Press Secretary Carney's comments in his briefing that, quote, "We have to examine what the alternatives some might be proposing are and whether they're in our national security interests and whether a desire to do something about it could lead us, the United States, to action that could produce the kind of unintended consequences we've seen in the past." Do you think that analysis is overzealous or do you think it's accurate that the U.S. is — still remains cool on using force in Syria?

MS. HARF: Well, I think I'd say a few things. We have said, the President has said, that all policy options remain on the table here, obviously, except for boots on the ground. And what I think my colleague at the White House was saying, and what **we've said many, many times is there is no military solution to this conflict**, that this conflict requires a negotiated diplomatic solution in the form of a transitional governing body, and that people or critics who would say and assert that if the U.S. just got militarily involved, somehow we would solve the crisis in Syria is, quite frankly, intellectually dishonest and not borne out by the facts on the ground.

[State Dept.](#), 19 Feb 2014. (boldface added by Standler)

John Kerry has been blaming Assad and/or Russia for the failure of Geneva2, as if Kerry just realized for the first time that Assad is really serious about continuing to be the head of Syria's government, and as if Kerry just realized for the first time that Russia supports Assad. This propaganda from Kerry is too superficial — and too embarrassing — to quote here. Commentary in *The Washington Post* says:

Secretary of State John Kerry would do well to cut out the exasperated tone at the inevitable results from the administration's policy miscues. The indignation merely confirms he has no idea what he is doing.

.... [The New York Times](#) reports: "Secretary of State John Kerry on Monday [17 Feb] sharpened the Obama administration's mounting criticism of Russia's role in the escalating violence in Syria, asserting that the Kremlin was undermining the prospects of a negotiated solution by 'contributing so many more weapons' and political support to President Bashar al-Assad." Did he just notice?

[Kerry] still propounds empty declarations about Assad's behavior. His conduct is "barbaric." It must cease immediately! Or else. . . . [ellipses in original] well, Kerry will be forced to condemn Assad again. Don't these tyrants want to join the "international community"? Uh, no.

The premise of the Obama-Kerry foreign policy is apparently that if rogue regimes would behave like Belgium, the Russians wouldn't take advantage of us and [if] despots weren't despotic everything would go according to plan. But of course a foreign policy based on fantasy is bound to fail; and so it has.

Jennifer Ruben, "John Kerry: Always blindsided by reality," [Washington Post](#), 19 Feb 2014.

My Comments on 19 Feb

Obama and Kerry have repeatedly said there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria and that negotiations are the *only* way. (See Mr. Carney's 18 Feb remarks, and Ms. Harf's 19 Feb remarks, each quoted above.) But, inconsistently, Obama seems willing to consider increasing military aid to the rebels, or maybe even U.S. military strikes in Syria. As I said above, a realistic appraisal is that the civil war has already destroyed Syria: more than 140,000 dead, cities in ruins, economy in shambles, millions of refugees, etc. Nearly three years of war has only produced a stalemate in Syria. Why would any rational person want *more* war in Syria?

It is disingenuous for Mr. Carney to pretend that the president is *always* seeking options. The collapse of the Geneva2 negotiations on 15 Feb should have precipitated a crisis in the White House, when they realized that their method of solving the Syrian problem had failed. The president ought to be embarrassed that his partner in the Syrian civil war, the Syrian National Coalition, agreed in Geneva to a ceasefire in Homs on 26 Jan, but was unable to deliver that ceasefire for humanitarian aid and evacuation of civilians. Even after United Nations officials on the ground in Homs negotiated a ceasefire on 7 Feb, the ceasefire in Homs was repeatedly violated. And then General Idris, the principal recipient of American military aid, was sacked on 17 Feb, worsening the crisis for the Americans. The Truth is that Obama and Kerry have a crisis with their disintegrating Syrian strategy, which is why Obama needs new options now.

I am sad to see that the White House is still obsessed with removing Assad from power, and that they attribute that decision to the Syrian people, despite the fact that there has been no election in Syria since 2007, so *no one* knows what the Syrian people want. I suspect that most of the people in Syria want their civil war to end, and the quickest end would be to have Assad remain in power. Elections in Syria are due in mid-2014 to determine whether Assad remains in power.

The one new option that makes sense is for the USA to support Assad's fight against terrorists, specifically including Al-Qaeda. But that option is one that Obama will *never* consider, because Obama has been obsessed with regime change in Syria for almost three years. Obama can *not* admit he was wrong.

20-23 Feb 2014

On Friday, 21 Feb, there was a press briefing at the White House:

Q. On Syria, there was a principals meeting here yesterday [20 Feb], and there is a general sense that either new options are being considered or the President has asked for some brand new — or at least newly creative thinking about what to do now that Geneva appears to be a dead end. The violence continues; human rights and human suffering escalates. Give us the latest thinking, and what was the either agenda or culmination, or did anything come out of that principals meeting yesterday?

MR. CARNEY: Well, I'd say a couple of things. It is simply a fact that the President has for a long time been tasking his team with coming up with options available to him

on Syria. So there's not a new review or a new process that has been started or is being completed. This is an ongoing assessment of options with the President urging his team to make sure that we're exploring all possibilities.

I know there's been a lot of speculation about what ideas we're considering, but I don't have any details to read out to you. I think that, again — except to rebut the notion that this is a new review of some sort, because there has been an ongoing assessment and reassessment of what is obviously a horrendous situation in Syria, and an assessment of what steps we can take in addition to the highest level of humanitarian assistance, and in addition to the assistance that we provide to the opposition.

Q. Is it fair to say this is an assessment under a different backdrop, meaning that Geneva now looks less likely to produce something positive, and new thinking must be applied because that's a new reality?

MR. CARNEY: We've made clear in the run-up to and in the wake of the first meetings in the Geneva process that the prospect for success there was far from guaranteed, that this was going to be a long and hard road. We've also made clear that there is no other alternative — whether you call it Geneva or something else — to a negotiated political settlement.

So the options we look at in terms of U.S. policy start from the premise that in the end, Syria's future has to be decided through a negotiation, and that **there's not a military solution to this conflict**. We are also obviously looking at ways that we can provide as much help as possible to a Syrian population that is suffering tremendously. We are aggressively at work in New York at the United Nations Security Council on a resolution to open humanitarian aid corridors. And that work continues today and this week, and I think we will see a vote soon on a resolution.

We are also looking at with our partners and allies how we provide assistance to the opposition. And I can tell you that yesterday we completed delivery of non-lethal assistance to Supreme Military Council commanders through the north. Remember, it had been suspended because of an issue with custody and making sure that the assistance we're providing was getting into the right hands, and we were able to complete a delivery yesterday of non-lethal assistance. So that process continues, and we work not just unilaterally, but with our partners in assessing what needs are and what assistance is most helpful, and in assessing who the aid is going to.

[White House](#), 21 Feb 2014. (Boldface added by Standler.)

Strangely, there was very little about Syria in the news media on 20 Feb 2014, and even less on 21 Feb. However, [Reuters](#) published a story about Iran expanding its military assistance to Assad. I hope that Obama does *not* follow Iran's lead, motivating Obama to send munitions to rebels in Syria.

On 22 Feb, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution Nr. 2139, which may partly satisfy Obama.

Agence France-Press reported on 23 Feb that Saudi Arabia is considering purchasing anti-aircraft missiles from Pakistan to give to rebels in Syria. [GlobalPost](#)(AFP); [Al-Bawaba](#); [Gulf News](#). On 25 Feb, Russia announced it was "troubled" by providing such missiles to the rebels, which would "alter the balance of power" in Syria. [Voice of Russia](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Global Post](#)(AFP).

I searched Google News on 22-23 Feb for the query "Obama Syria options", but found nothing on Obama's new options. However, President Obama's National Security Advisor, Susan Rice, was a guest on NBC television's Meet the Press program, where she said about Syria:

.... Nobody is content with the situation in Syria. From a humanitarian point of view, it's horrific. From a national security point of view, it's deteriorating. There's no question. We're constantly reviewing our options. We're constantly looking at ways to accomplish our objective.

And let me be clear about what that objective is. First of all, we don't want to see terrorists and the terrorist threat emanate from Syria. We're concerned about the growing extremist presence there. We believe it's critical that Assad leave power and that there be a transitional government formed by mutual consent, and that the institutions of the Syrian state remain intact. We don't want to see the state fragment.

Which is why — David, it's important to understand this, and I think folks need to understand — which is why we have tried to pursue a diplomatic resolution. Not because we're naive and we think that there isn't a real hot war on the ground. But at the end of the day, unless and until there's a political solution, this thing is not going to be resolved. It's not going to be resolved on the battlefield.

Susan Rice, [Meet the Press](#), 23 Feb 2014.

Note that Ambassador Rice gives the first objective is to stop the terrorist threat in Syria, which seems to be a new position for the U.S. Government. She reiterates the U.S. position that Assad must resign, but she wants "the institutions of the Syrian state remain intact". Both fighting terrorism and keeping Syria intact would be easier to accomplish if Assad remained in power. Finally, note that Ambassador Rice reiterates the U.S. Government position that there is no military solution to the civil war in Syria, and the war will be resolved in political negotiations.

Now let's consider three significant editorials that were first published on 20 Feb 2014.

Los Angeles Times editorial

On 20 Feb, the *Los Angeles Times* published an editorial titled "Obama's least bad options on Syria":

But those who believe Obama is on the verge of military intervention are likely to be disappointed. Now, as before the Geneva conference, the most widely discussed scenarios for U.S. military action offer no guarantee of ending the violence, and could exacerbate the suffering of the Syrian people.

....

Apprehension about another military commitment in the Middle East is why some prominent critics of Obama's Syria policy propose measures short of intervention: a no-fly zone enforced by U.S. air power or a dramatic increase in aid to "responsible" rebel forces. But a no-fly zone would require attacking Syria's air defenses, and an infusion of military assistance could end up prolonging the violence and empowering anti-Assad groups sympathetic to al-Qaida.

If military action is untenable, what "policy tools and options" might Obama pursue? The most effective tools may be diplomatic. Obstructionist as it has been so far, Russia still might be persuaded to support a Security Council resolution calling on Assad to allow the delivery of food and medicine.

So far diplomacy has not delivered either a political breakthrough or relief for the men, women and children who have been brutalized by the conflict. No wonder Lakhdar Brahimi, the special U.N. envoy for Syria, apologized to the Syrian people as the negotiations adjourned. But diplomacy is still preferable to the alternative.

"Obama's least bad options on Syria," [Los Angeles Times](#), 20 Feb 2014.

Reprinted in [MetroWest Daily News](#), Framingham, Massachusetts, 00:30 EST, 24 Feb 2014.

My comments: Two days after this editorial, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2139, but (as of 28 Feb) the parties in Syria ignored this Resolution. Nonetheless, I agree with the *Los Angeles Times* that diplomacy is preferable to military action in Syria.

Gerson's editorial

There is an interesting editorial by Michael Gerson of *The Washington Post* in which he proposes U.S. military action and/or U.S. military aid to Syria:

One of the largest challenges related to Syria is strategic despair. It is easy to argue that any given policy change would be inadequate, late or risky. This has led some to propose a radical option: tacitly concede defeat and engage Assad in a counterterrorism strategy. But this would not only reward mass atrocities, it would be the acceptance of Russian and Iranian dominance in the Mideast and the betrayal of our friends.

Obama's alternatives are difficult but not nonexistent. Additional help to acceptable rebels? This is beginning to happen. Leaders of aid organizations in Jordan report seeing trucks with Saudi aid driving into Syria each night. The U.S. fear has been that arms and assistance will fall into the wrong hands. But it seems a more urgent problem that radical groups have resources while moderate forces have little to offer.

....

Create humanitarian safe havens within Syria to relieve refugee pressures on neighboring countries? Again, the Saudis are moving in this direction, providing tents for encampments in southern Syria. But refugee magnets can become targets. Effective

safe havens would require military protection and a flow of supplies — a major, sustained commitment. Yet several regional powers might be persuaded to join an effort similar to the creation of safe havens during the Bosnian conflict.

Take out Syrian planes and helicopters? President Barack Obama was on the verge of aerial strikes — a final option and a risky escalation. But he might decide that the final option has been reached, to stop the barrel bombs from being dropped on neighborhoods and to push back the range of regime attacks.

With Russia blocking decisive action at the United Nations, any mix of these approaches would require a coalition of the willing. But there are a number of nations — Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, France — that seem willing. America is not alone; it has simply not led. And a paralyzing fear of unintended consequences, it turns out, can result in massive unintended consequences.

Michael Gerson, "Syria's uncontainable threat," [Washington Post](#), 20 Feb 2014.

Reprinted as: Michael Gerson, "Shake off the fear, and options for Syria emerge," [San Antonio Express](#), 24 Feb 2014.

My comments on 25 Feb: I disagree with Mr. Gerson that changing course and supporting Assad would be a "betrayal of our friends". Our friends — the moderate rebels in Syria — are fragmented and disorganized, and are now generally militarily inferior to jihadists and Al-Qaeda. Our friends — the Syrian National Coalition — do not represent the people in Syria, do not control the rebel fighters in Syria, have zero experience in operating a government, and took eight months to decide to attend Geneva2 (which shows the Coalition is unable to make decisions). I argue that these developments since May 2013 have made "our friends" unworthy of our continued support. When Mr. Gerson calls them "our friends", he *assumes* the conclusion that they are worthy of our support.

I also disagree with Mr. Gerson that engaging Assad would "reward" Assad for his atrocities. Assad could still be investigated and prosecuted for war crimes, which would end any reward Assad might expect. Or we could accept the unpleasant reality that winners of wars are *not* prosecuted for war crimes, only losers. Further, did our support of Stalin during World War II "reward" Stalin for the genocide of the Kulaks? No, we supported Stalin because Stalin was the enemy of our enemy (i.e., Hitler). Similarly, we could support Assad because Assad is the enemy of our enemy (i.e., Al-Qaeda and jihadists).

I also disagree with Mr. Gerson about "Russian and Iranian dominance". That is cold-war thinking to see the world divided into two camps, one Russian/Chinese and the other USA/NATO. The fact is that the Russians and Iranians picked the winner — Assad — before the USA, Western Europe, and the Sunni Islam nations in the middle east.

Supporting Assad might be the quickest end to the civil war in Syria, and might be the best way to stop the flow of terrorists out of Syria. Stopping the civil war is in the best interests of the people in Syria. Fighting and defeating terrorists is in the best interests of global civilization, including Russia, Western Europe, the USA, and the neighboring Arab nations.

Furthermore, more military aid to rebels in Syria is likely to prolong the civil war, kill more

people, prolong the humanitarian crisis, and create more refugees. As Obama and Kerry have said many times — and they are correct — there is no military solution to the civil war in Syria.

Gardner's editorial

There is an interesting editorial in the *Financial Times*, which says in part:

After the US clutched gratefully at the Russian-proffered plan to destroy Syria's chemical weapons arsenal in September, the [Assad] regime has behaved as though it had no further need to listen to empty threats from Washington and its allies. True, the White House is now reviewing its Syria policy options — plainly aware that whatever the present policy is, it is not going well. Yet it still keeps on talking about the need to avoid unintended consequences that have already started happening.

The consequences of current policy, presumably also unintended, are plain. It is not that the West simply stood back and kept out of Syria. With a lethal cocktail of adventurism and hesitancy, the US and Europe have cheered on the rebels against the regime, promising but not delivering them the means to bring it down. Instead, they subcontracted the arming of the opposition forces to Gulf allies such as Wahabi Saudi Arabia, inevitably tilting the rebel camp towards Islamist extremism.

....

However much Obama repeats that all options remain on the table, the overwhelming perception is that the threat of force — essentially against the regime's lethal mastery of the skies — has been removed. Nothing will change in Syria, and the conflict's capacity to poison the region and threaten the world will only grow, until the incentives are changed for the regime.

David Gardner, "US calculus on Syria must change again to press Assad," [Financial Times](#), 20 Feb 2014.

Reprinted as "Nothing will change in Syria unless US acts," [Gulf News](#), 23 Feb 2014.

My comments on 23 Feb: I don't understand why people believe that it is the responsibility of the USA to intervene militarily to fix problems with Islamic nations (e.g., Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, etc.). The U.S. record in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya is pretty dismal, which strongly suggests that the situation would be better if the USA would stop meddling in foreign nations. During 2003-2011, the USA wasted more than one trillion dollars of U.S. taxpayer's money — and more than 4400 American military personnel died — in Iraq. When the U.S. military departed from Iraq in Dec 2011, the Iraqis hated us and their nation was in shambles. The U.S. government needs to learn from its mistakes.

Nonetheless, I agree with David Gardner in the *Financial Times* that "whatever the present [U.S.] policy [in Syria] is, it is not going well".

24-28 Feb 2014

I searched Google News on 24-28 Feb for the query "Obama Syria options", but found

nothing significant on Obama's quest for new options. During the week of 24-28 Feb, people seemed to forget about Obama's quest for new options on Syria. The topic of options for Obama in Syria did *not* arise in the White House press conferences of 24, 25, 27 Feb.

In the 24 Feb press briefing at the U.S. State Department, there was a hint that U.N. Security Council Resolution Nr. 2139 was considered by the U.S. Government to be a significant development:

QUESTION [by Said]: I'd like to know where you stand now [on Syria]. Where do you see the effort, let's say, post-Geneva II, is going?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Said, a couple of things. As you are well aware — and I would point you to, of course, the statement that we issued from — we released from Secretary Kerry this weekend about the passing of the UN Security Council resolution. We felt that was certainly a significant step. It is a resolution that has many specific requirements, which is why we felt so positively about it. It breaks — the resolution breaks new ground. It's demanded that the Syrian regime allow access for UN humanitarian agencies and their partners across borders. Our estimates are that this cross-border access will enable the UN and its implementing partners to reach an additional one million people in need of assistance. What's important now, of course, is the implementation of this, and that is what we are working and pressing our partners to work with us on as well.

In terms of Geneva, the Geneva conference — I think we talked about this, or perhaps Marie talked about this last week — they took a recess and that is not a surprise and is something that often happens in these cases. And we've long said, or we've said over the past couple of weeks that the international community needs to use this recess in Geneva — in the Geneva talks to determine how to use the time most effectively in order to bring about a political solution.

You heard National Security Advisor Rice yesterday [on Meet the Press, quoted above] reiterate that there is no military solution here; there is only a political solution. I spoke with the Secretary about this this morning, and his view is that Geneva helped create a framework for the international community to work together and coordinate moving forward. You had more than 40 countries and organizations stand together and reiterate the need for the implementation of the Geneva communique and the creation of a transitional governing body.

What the next step is, I can't tell you at this point. And we'll take it day by day and work with our international partners to determine that.

QUESTION [by Said]: You don't think they are, at least the Russians, suggesting that the UN resolution is more consistent with their position and less consistent with yours? Do you feel that way, too?

MS. PSAKI: Can you say it more time, Said?

QUESTION: Is the UN resolution more consistent with the Russian position all along,

or is it more consistent with your position?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think we're not trying to have fisticuffs here. We're trying to work towards what we feel is morally right, which is determining a way to provide humanitarian assistance to the people in Syria — the men, women, and children who are literally starving to death every day. So every process is a negotiation, but we did pass the UNSCR this weekend, and we feel that's a positive step because it lays out concrete steps that need to be taken.

QUESTION: And finally, on the issue of chemical weapons, do you feel that Syria is balking on its commitment?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'd point you to what was said — I believe it was last week or the week before — by our ambassador [to OPCW], who said that it is very possible for — is possible and feasible for Syria to meet its deadline or the timeline that was set out initially if they get to work now. The experts in the OPCW's planning group also agreed last week that completion of removal and destruction by June 30th is certainly possible.

So we continue to press the regime. We continue to ask our partners to press the regime. They have all of the tools they need. The international community is poised and ready to destroy the chemical weapons, and that's where we stand.

[State Dept.](#), 24 Feb 2014.

My comments on this State Department position are that (1) U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 will be ignored by the parties in Syria, (2) the negotiations in Geneva are futile as long as the Coalition and Brahimi insist on the transitional governing body, (3) Assad is stalling on delivering his chemical weapons. Taken together, the U.S. Government does not have a clue about how to resolve the crisis in Syria.

There was no significant mention of Syria in the U.S. State Department's daily press briefings for 25 Feb. On 26 Feb, a question was asked about the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139:

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, it was just passed this weekend. I would point you to the UN for an update on the status of implementation. Certainly that's something that we're also watching closely, and we share the focus on the importance of moving this humanitarian access and aid forward as quickly as possible.

[State Dept.](#), 26 Feb 2014.

My comment is that, despite the word "immediately" in the Resolution that was passed on 22 Feb, there is still no implementation of that Resolution in Syria on 28 Feb. Jen Psaki deflected the question with platitudes and referring the questioner to the United Nations. If the U.S. Government is "watching closely" the implementation, then the U.S. Government should be able to comment on the implementation. There was a similar dialogue in the [28 Feb](#) press briefing at the U.S. State Department.

There was no mention of U.S. policy options about Syria during the U.S. State Department's daily press briefings for 27 Feb.

On 25 Feb, the [NY Times](#) had an article about Obama's rejection in 2011 of a U.S. cyberattack on Syria, which could be discussed again as a new option. In my opinion, a cyberattack on Syria is silly, because the USA is highly vulnerable to a retaliatory cyberattack.

On 26 Feb, I began to suspect that Obama's search for new options had two purposes. First, it is intended to make Obama appear as a leader who is in control of the Syrian situation. Second, *if* Assad believed that the U.S. might cripple Assad's air force, it might frighten Assad into being more reasonable. Neither purpose was achieved. First, the frantic scramble for new options made it obvious that the Syrian policy of Obama and Kerry had failed. Second, Assad is winning militarily in Syria, Assad surely knows from journalists in the USA that the U.S. military will *not* intervene in Syria, and so Assad is in no mood to compromise.

On 28 Feb, Obama still had not announced any new policy on Syria, which apparently indicates that his two-week search for new policy options had returned zero new options that were acceptable to Obama.

Ignatieff's editorial

Michael Ignatieff, a professor at Harvard University, wrote an op-ed in *The New York Times*:
Any realist needs to face two facts. First, absent the credible application of force against the Syrian regime, a negotiated transition leading to Mr. Assad's departure is not going to happen. Despite the efforts of the United Nations envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, the peace talks in Geneva between the Syrian government and the opposition coalition have become a waste of time. The opposition forces have been weakened by military defeats, and Mr. Assad's strategic advantage gives him no incentive to concede anything.

Second, if Mr. Assad is allowed to prevail in this conflict, he will reimpose his tyranny, and his forces will surely exterminate the remaining Sunni insurgents who make up most of the opposition. Obliterating his enemies, however, will not bring lasting peace. It will only further inflame hatreds. Sooner or later blood will flow again.

Though nominally committed to Mr. Assad's overthrow, the United States, in doing so little to bring it about, is becoming complicit in his survival. Is there a realistic alternative?

Arming the rebels is not the answer. Providing weapons, as nations like Saudi Arabia and Qatar have done with their fundamentalist proxies in Syria, appears to have only increased civilian suffering without shifting the conflict in favor of the insurgents.

Neither is the solution to create humanitarian corridors or safe zones to protect civilians. Doing so will not succeed unless Western governments commit ground forces, and that won't happen.

The only remaining option is to use force to deny Mr. Assad air superiority. Planes,

drones and cyber operations could prevent his forces from using barrel bombs, cluster munitions and phosphorus weapons on civilian targets. An air campaign should not be used to provide support for rebel groups whose goals the West does not share. The aim would be to relieve the unrelenting pressure on the civilian population and force Mr. Assad to return to Geneva to negotiate a cease-fire.

Last year, the threat of force persuaded Mr. Assad to get rid of his chemical weapons. Applying force now could deny him the chance to bomb his way to victory. Mr. Assad can endure only if he crushes the insurgents. If he is denied victory, his eventual departure into exile becomes a matter of time.

A cease-fire in Syria would likely unleash a chaotic struggle for power, but it is better than slaughter. Syria is bound to look like Libya. International peacekeepers will be needed to prevent revenge killing by the opposition and former Assad allies alike.

....

Given the near certainty that Russia would veto any United Nations Security Council authorization of air power, and that the United States Congress, if asked to authorize force, would likely turn President Obama down, stopping the war in Syria will stretch domestic and international legality. But if legality is not stretched, the killing will go on indefinitely.

Michael Ignatieff, "With Syria, Diplomacy Needs Force," [NY Times](#), 25 Feb 2014.

My comments: Prof. Ignatieff says "Last year, the threat of force persuaded Mr. Assad to get rid of his chemical weapons." But Assad only *promised* to deliver his chemical weapons for destruction. As of 26 Feb 2014, after missing two OPCW deadlines (including the deadline for delivering *all* of his chemical weapons), Assad still has 89% of his chemical weapons. Clearly, we need more than the "threat of force" to persuade Assad.

Prof. Ignatieff proposes to use U.S. military to ground Assad's air force. But Ignatieff admits the U.S. Congress will *not* approve such military action. Prof. Ignatieff also admits that the United Nations will not approve U.S. military intervention in Syria, because of Russia's veto. So Ignatieff admits "stopping the war in Syria will stretch domestic and international legality." Eeeek! Respect for the law is what makes us civilized, instead of barbarians. Stretching legality should be a non-starter amongst options.

And Prof. Ignatieff admits that Syria will descend into anarchy like Libya, and U.N. peacekeepers will be needed, hardly a good result from removing Assad.

Despite my strong criticisms of Prof. Ignatieff's proposal for the U.S. to intervene militarily in Syria, I do fully agree with Ignatieff that:

- Geneva2 is futile, because of the Coalition's (and the U.N.'s) insistence on a transitional governing body in which Assad and his associates are absent. Because Assad is winning militarily, he has no reason to either compromise or resign.
- If Assad annihilates the rebels and jihadists, it will polarize moderates into joining the

- fight against Assad, and thereby continue the civil war.
- Providing munitions to the moderate rebels will only prolong the suffering of civilians in Syria.
 - Removing Assad will create anarchy in Syria, requiring U.N. peacekeepers in Syria.

Instead of continuing to demand that Assad resign, why not accept the fact that Assad is the best leader that Syria or its exiles have? Instead of focusing on regime change in Syria, let's focus on defeating Al-Qaeda and jihadists, and keep a stable government in Syria, by allowing Assad to be president as long as the people of Syria re-elect Assad. By working *with* Assad, we might hope to control some of Assad's undesirable qualities. Instead, by demanding Assad's resignation, the USA and Western Europe have caused Assad to ignore the pleas of the USA and Western Europe for humanitarian aid to civilians, evacuations of civilians from combat zones, an end to besieging cities, etc. Attempting to marginalize or isolate Assad was a serious mistake by the USA and Western Europe, and it is not clear that we can recover from this nearly three-year old mistake in Syria.

Miscellaneous Items

The Syrian National Council, a group of exiles from Syria, was formed on 23 Aug 2011 to oppose Assad. On 31 Oct 2012, Hillary Clinton criticized the Council as being *unrepresentative* of the people currently living in Syria. In response to Clinton, the Syrian National Coalition was quickly formed, which included members from the Council. (See my [second](#) essay on Syria, under the heading "Replacing Bashar Assad? absence of a strong alternative leader".) On 20 Jan 2014, the Council resigned from the Coalition, in protest over the Coalition deciding to attend Geneva2. (See my [third](#) essay on Syria.) In early February 2014, I noticed that the [website](#) of the Syrian National Council had been removed from the Internet. However, when I looked again, on 25 Feb 2014 the Council's website had reappeared. The Council's website claims the Council "seeks international recognition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people", which puts it in competition with the Coalition. This goal is probably an old statement from before Oct 2012. Also on 25 Feb 2014, the most recent "daily news" mentioned on the Council's homepage is dated 21 Aug 2012, 18 months ago!

Brahimi, the mediator of the Geneva2 negotiations, disappeared from the news after the second round of negotiations ended on 15 Feb. Brahimi was expected to report to UN headquarters in New York City for meetings with Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. On 27 Feb, it was announced that Brahimi would brief the U.N. Security Council on 13 March. [ITAR-TASS](#); [Voice of Russia](#).

On 22 Feb, after several days of violent protests by citizens in Kiev, the president of Ukraine fled from the capital, and on 23 Feb the Ukraine legislature named an interim president. This event gives Obama and Kerry a new foreign policy crisis, as Russia — which shares a border with Ukraine — supported the deposed president and the USA and Western Europe supported the protesters. Time that Obama/Kerry spend on the crisis in the Ukraine is time not spent on the crisis in Syria. On 1 March, the Russian legislature authorized the Russian

military to use force in Ukraine, which *really* got the attention of Obama and Kerry. On 2 March, it appears that Russia will invade Ukraine, and the USA is already threatening economic sanctions against Russia. This means that further cooperation between Russia and the USA on the civil war in Syria is temporarily *unlikely*.

After the UN Security Council passed Resolution Nr. 2139 on the morning of 22 Feb, Syria seemed to disappear from the news. The crisis in the Ukraine dominated the foreign news in the USA. Even Arab news sources had little coverage of Syria on 23-25 Feb. Plenty of news was happening about Syria: U.N. Resolution 2139 failed to have an effect on the civil war in Syria, the USA and Saudi Arabia were formulating new policies on Syria, Gen. Idris was trying to stay in command, Journalists resumed reporting news from Syria on 26 Feb, when Hezbollah killed at least 175 fighters from the Nusra Front, the Syrians delivered their fourth shipment of chemical weapons, and the Syrians and OPCW agreed to a new schedule for delivery of chemical weapons. Again on 1-2 March, there were few reports of news from Syria.

A member of the Syrian National Coalition delegation to Geneva² called those negotiations "absurd, pointless and fruitless." The delegate also said: "I expect a third round of talks in Geneva, as Brahimi is facing pressures to continue the talks." [Asharq Al-Awsat](#), 28 Feb 2014.

For at least the past six months, government officials in many nations have expressed the fear of jihadists in Syria returning to their native country and committing terrorist acts. Recently, there have been specific examples of such terrorism by returning jihadists. The Associated Press reports:

The social fabric of towns and villages across the country [in Lebanon] is being torn by conflicting loyalties and a wave of bombings carried out by Sunni extremists in retaliation for the Iranian-backed Shiite group Hezbollah's military support of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

In the past few months, at least five Sunni men have disappeared from Bisariyeh, an impoverished, predominantly Shiite village in south Lebanon, and are believed to have gone to fight in Syria.

Two of them — Nidal Mughayar and Adan al-Mohammad — returned and blew themselves up outside Iranian targets in Beirut. The blasts, by Mughayar on Feb. 19 and al-Mohammad on Nov. 18, killed scores.

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Many Saudis have been easy recruitment targets for jihadist organizations. Osama bin Laden and 15 of the 19 hijackers on 9/11 were Saudi. The oil-rich kingdom was among several nations that backed the anti-communist mujahedeen forces fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and Saudi fighters have traveled to other Muslim hotspots around the world since then.

More recently, at the urging of Saudi preachers and even judges, thousands of fighters from Saudi Arabia — home to a strict, puritanical strain of Sunni Islam — have joined

the 3-year-old uprising against Assad, whose government is dominated by members of his Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Saudi officials said fewer than 3,000 Saudis are believed to be fighting in Syria, but analysts and other estimates put the figure as high as 15,000.

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Thousands of Muslims worldwide who went off to Afghanistan during the 10-year Soviet occupation [in the 1980s] returned home fired with the fervor of jihad and sought to overthrow their own, sometimes secular-leaning governments. Many established radical groups in Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Caucuses and elsewhere.

Bassem Mroue & Aya Batrawy, "From Riyadh To Beirut, Fear Of Syria Blowback," [Associated Press](#), 21:07 GMT, 28 Feb 2014.

Conclusions

Here is what 35 months of military conflict in Syria have accomplished:

- Approximately 140,000 dead people by 14 Feb 2014, increasing at approximately 5000/month.
- Approximately 2,500,000 refugees have fled from Syria. ([AP](#))
- More than six million refugees have been displaced inside Syria.
- Syrian economy in shambles. The Syrian gross national product (GNP) contracted by 39% during 2012-13. ([AP](#)) Many buildings are in ruins. The United Nations estimates "nearly half" of people in Syria now need humanitarian assistance. ([Reuters](#), 6 Feb 2014; also [above](#).)
- Exacerbated religious differences between Alawites (branch of Shiite muslims), Sunni muslims (e.g., Sunni jihadists and Al-Qaeda), and Christians in Syria. This has wrecked a secular Syrian nation, created a religious civil war, and may possibly lead to a future Islamist government in Syria with Sharia law.
- No clear military victory for either Assad, the rebels, or the jihadists.

Here is what diplomats have accomplished on the Syrian crisis:

- **almost nothing** — There was a successful evacuation of approximately 1400 women, children, and elderly men from Homs during 7-12 Feb. On 8 Feb there was a first delivery of humanitarian aid to Homs that was agreed in Geneva 13 days earlier, on 26 Jan. At the end of the food delivery on 12 Feb, the remaining people in Homs had enough food for only one month. Further, there is absolutely no relief for other besieged cities in Syria. To put Homs in perspective, the United Nations [estimates](#) that there are a quarter-million people in besieged cities in Syria, of whom only 3000 were in Homs before the evacuation.
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On 20 Jan 2014, the Associated Press eloquently summarized the Syrian civil war:

Both the government and the opposition have suffered enormous losses, but even now, neither side appears desperate enough to budge from its entrenched position. At this point, just getting the antagonists into the same room to start what is expected to be a long process that could drag on for years would be perceived as a success.

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Syria's crisis began in the heyday of the Arab Spring uprisings that swept away authoritarian leaders in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. Unlike the others, Syria's leadership responded to largely peaceful protests for political reform with a withering crackdown. That slowly forced the opposition to take up arms and gave birth to a civil war that has also spawned a proxy battle between regional Shiite Muslim power Iran and Sunni heavyweight Saudi Arabia.

The cumulative effect of the war has been disastrous. Syria lies in ruins, its economy shattered, its rich social fabric shredded.

Zeina Karam & Ryan Lucas, "UN Rescinds Invitation To Iran To Attend Talks," (previously titled: "Syria Talks Set To Open Amid Low Expectations"), [Associated Press](#), 18:48 EST, 20 Jan 2014.

Despite Assad's significant delay in delivering his chemical weapons to OPCW, and despite Assad being suspected of violations of international law, I still believe that Assad is the strongest leader that Syria — or the Syrian exiles — have. Moreover, Assad is ruthless, a good quality to have in the pursuit of jihadists and Al-Qaeda terrorists. It seems to me that Assad is the least worst leader of Syria, particularly compared with either (1) the indecisive Syrian National Coalition, (2) the Al-Qaeda terrorists, or (3) the jihadists. Perhaps some of Assad's undesirable qualities could be controlled by a more effective legislature and judiciary in Syria, with checks and balances. I admit Assad appears to be growing more contemptuous of the United Nations, which makes it more difficult to continue supporting Assad. Also Assad hurts his own cause by remaining in hiding and operating a nasty military campaign. Assad could — and should — appear more like a statesman, by making more public speeches, and by taking the initiative in both ceasefires and delivery of humanitarian aid.

My conclusions are similar to those in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria:

1. The USA and Western Europe *should* have supported Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorists. Moreover, Assad's government is secular, with toleration for other religions, unlike the jihadists and unlike Al-Qaeda. Assad is certainly better than Al-Qaeda.
2. The Syrian National Coalition has no credibility as a leader of a nation, because it is unable to make simple decisions (e.g., unable to decide to attend Geneva2 without preconditions), and because it has no influence with opposition fighters in Syria (e.g., the failure of rebels and jihadists in Homs to respect the 26 Jan 2014 agreement in Geneva until 7 Feb).

3. The Geneva2 conference was proposed by Russia and the USA in a meeting on 7 May 2013, but began on 22 Jan 2014. The eight-month delay cost approximately 40,000 deaths in the continuing civil war, estimating at 5000 dead/month. That is a horrendously expensive delay by the Syrian National Coalition.
4. As discussed in my [second](#) essay on Syria, the Geneva2 primary goal is seriously flawed in that it seeks to impose a transitional government on Syria, instead of allowing the people of Syria to vote for a leader in free elections. I suggest the goal of Geneva2 should be a ceasefire, *not* a transitional government.
5. As shown by the failure to implement the 26 Jan 2014 agreement in Homs until 7 Feb — and by the failure to agree to any other ceasefires, the failure to agree to any other delivery of humanitarian aid, or the failure to agree to any release of prisoners — *neither* Assad's government, the rebels, the jihadists, *nor* Al-Qaeda desires an end to the civil war. Despite strong evidence of a military stalemate in Syria, each of the parties in Syria clings to the notion that they can win a military victory, and thus they should not compromise in negotiations. However, note that Assad is currently in a strongly dominant position in most of Syria, and Assad has besieged many of the cities that he does not control.

The reason that the Coalition attended negotiations in Geneva was that the USA and Western Europe pressured the Coalition to attend. After arriving at Geneva, the Coalition and Assad's delegation pretended (as propaganda) they were seeking peace, while portraying the other party as either war criminals or terrorists.

6. The leaders in Syria — the rebels, the jihadists, *and* Assad's government — appear concerned only with control, power, and authority, which are expressed by demanding pre-conditions, guarantees, and other formalities. These leaders completely lack any sense of urgency concerning suffering people. We are seeing a total failure of leadership on all sides, while innocent people suffer.
7. The violations of the ceasefire in Homs on 8-9 Feb 2014 illustrated basic problems by the barbarians in Syria: a lack of military discipline, a lack of military professionalism, and — worse — a depraved, criminal disregard for values of decent human people. These remarks appear to apply to the rebels, jihadists, Al-Qaeda, *and* Assad's military — although we often do *not* have accurate information on who is responsible for each individual barbaric act. No one seems to be collecting forensic evidence, so these barbarians will never be held responsible in any court for their crimes. Parts of Syria (e.g., Homs) have become uncivilized, lawless regions, like Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan.

For the above reasons, I believe the USA and Western Europe have been following a flawed foreign policy in Syria. However, even if we were to support Assad, it will be a tough job to defeat the jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria. As of 28 Feb 2014, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

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begun 1 Feb 2014, last modified 4 March 2014

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