

Syria: March 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
- Geneva2 negotiations 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.

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

- removal of 26% of chemical weapons from Syria
- Syria now promises to deliver *all* its chemical weapons before 27 April
- U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139
- relief for Homs: 7-12 Feb 2014
- Geneva2 second round of negotiations: 10-15 Feb 2014
- my analysis of why Geneva2 is futile
- truce in six Syrian towns, without U.N. involvement
- Obama's quest for new options in Syria, but finds none

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. Beginning 9 March, the USA was on Daylight Savings Time, Eastern Daylight Time in Boston is -4 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 March 2014: Destruction of Chemical Weapons And Some Atrocities in Syria

4 Mar 2014

New Schedule for Delivery of Syrian Chemical Weapons

On 4 March OPCW issued a press release describing the new schedule for delivery of Syrian chemical weapons that journalists described on 26 Feb 2014 (see my [fourth](#) essay). The OPCW press release says:

The Syrian Arab Republic has submitted to the OPCW a revised proposal that aims to complete the removal of all chemicals from Syria before the end of April 2014.

The OPCW-UN Joint Mission also verified that two more consignments of chemicals have left the port of Latakia, including a quantity of mustard gas — a Priority 1 chemical — which was previously reported last Wednesday [26 Feb]. Another movement, a significant consignment of other Priority 1 chemicals, is scheduled to arrive in Latakia during this week, which will bring the total number of movements thus far to six.

As of today [4 Mar], the total amount of chemicals removed from Syria stands at 26%. When the sixth movement is completed this week that total will rise to 35%, including 23% of Priority 1 chemicals and 63% of Priority 2 chemicals. In addition, the OPCW has verified that Syria has destroyed in situ more than 93% of its stock of isopropanol.

In his report to the opening session of the Executive Council, Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü said that all materials and equipment required by Syria are now in place for the expeditious removal of its remaining chemicals, including armoured jackets for the protection of containers.

"Given delays since the lapse of the two target dates for removal, it will be important to maintain this newly created momentum," the Director-General told the Council. "For its part, the Syrian Government has reaffirmed its commitment to implement the removal operations in a timely manner."

The Special Coordinator for the OPCW-UN Joint Mission, Ms Sigrid Kaag, also briefed the Council on recent progress in the Syria mission.

"Nearly one third of Syria's chemical weapons material has now been removed or destroyed," the Special Coordinator told the Council. "This is good progress and I expect further acceleration and intensification of effort."

Prior to initiating operations in January to remove its chemicals, in late 2013 Syria completed the functional destruction of its chemical weapons production facilities, mixing and filling equipment, and all of its munitions that were designed for use with chemical warfare agents.

"Syria Submits Revised Proposal to OPCW for Removal of Chemicals and Accelerates Pace of Deliveries to Latakia," [OPCW](#), 4 Mar 2014. Copy at [OPCW/UN](#).

The Associated Press published an interview with Sigrid Kaag, the diplomat from the Netherlands who is leading the United Nations chemical weapons effort in Syria:

In an interview with The Associated Press, Sigrid Kaag said Syria has agreed a 60-day timetable to accelerate and intensify efforts toward removal of the chemicals that will be destroyed outside the country.

"We anticipate a lot of action in the month of March," Kaag told the AP after briefing the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' executive council in a closed-door meeting.

"But of course our message is always one of continued expectation to achieve more, to do more and to do it safely and securely."

OPCW spokesman Michael Luhan called the new timeline "very welcome news." Mike Corder, "AP Interview: Syria Chemicals Deadline Achievable," [Associated Press](#), 12:15 GMT, 4 Mar 2014.

The Associated Press reported that Kaag said the 30 June 2014 deadline for destruction of *all* Syrian chemical weapons "is still achievable."

The fourth shipment of chemical weapons by Syria was on 26 Feb, and a fifth shipment was on 28 Feb. These five shipments delivered about 26% of the Syrian chemical weapons, a significant beginning, but more than one month behind the original schedule.

While the fourth shipment was reported in the mainstream newsmedia, the fifth shipment was reported mainly in an obscure [Chinese](#) source, which was also reported by [Al-Jazeera](#). I was not able to find the Associated Press story mentioned in the *Al-Jazeera* blog, although I twice looked at the Associated Press website and I also searched Google News.

On careful reading of the OPCW press releases, apparently OPCW has *not* accepted the new schedule proposed by Syria, but also has not rejected the new schedule.

5 Mar 2014
Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria in 2013
War Crimes Prosecution?

Prof. Sellström's team of United Nations inspectors who visited Syria in 2013 had the task of determining *if* chemical weapons had been used at specific sites in Syria, but *not* determining who used those weapons. Prof. Sellström issued reports on 16 Sep 2013 and 12 Dec 2013, in

which he concluded that chemical weapons had been used in Syria. On 5 Mar 2014, United Nations Human Rights investigators issued a report concluding that in three incidents (Khan al-Assal on 19 March 2013, Saraqib on 29 April 2013, and the Damascus suburb of al-Ghouta on 21 August 2013) the weapons came from the Syria army. The UN Human Rights [Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#) is led by Paulo Pinheiro, from Brazil.

The Commission's Seventh Report says:

In Al-Ghouta, significant quantities of sarin were used in a well-planned indiscriminate attack targeting civilian-inhabited areas, causing mass casualties. The evidence available concerning the nature, quality and quantity of the agents used on 21 August indicated that the perpetrators likely had access to the chemical weapons stockpile of the Syrian military, as well as the expertise and equipment necessary to manipulate safely large amount of chemical agents. Concerning the incident in Khan Al-Assal on 19 March, the chemical agents used in that attack bore the same unique hallmarks as those used in Al-Ghouta.

Other allegations of chemical weapons use investigated displayed markedly different circumstances and took place on a significantly smaller scale. In no incident was the commission's evidentiary threshold met with regard to the perpetrator.

[Seventh Report of U.N. Human Rights Commission of Inquiry on Syria, A/HRC/25/65, ¶128-129, 12 Feb 2014 \(published 5 March 2014 in Microsoft Word format\).](#)

In the second paragraph of the above quotation, "in no incident" might refer to the "other allegations" (i.e., neither Al-Ghouta nor Al-Assal). However, the summary on page two of the Report says the same conclusion without any limitations:

Chemical weapons, specifically sarin, were found to have been used in multiple incidents during the conflict. In no incident was the commission's evidentiary threshold met with respect to the perpetrator.

Ibid. summary on page 2.

Reports by journalists:

- Stephanie Nebehay, "Chemical weapons used in Syria appear to come from army stockpile: U.N.," [Reuters](#), 14:15 GMT, 5 Mar 2014.
- John Heilprin, "UN Panel Extends Syria Blame To World Powers," [Associated Press](#), 14:45 GMT, 5 Mar 2014.
- [Al-Jazeera](#) blog, 09:50 GMT, 5 Mar 2014.
- "UN: Syria chemical weapons appear to come from army stockpile," [Al-Arabiya](#) (Reuters), 13:05 GMT, 5 Mar 2014.
- "UN: Syria chemical arms came from army," [Arab News](#) (Reuters), 00:51 GMT, 6 Mar 2014.

My comments: The fact that the chemical weapons came from the Syrian army does *not* mean that the army fired them. The weapons could have been stolen from a Syrian army

depot (perhaps by troops defecting to the rebels), and fired by rebels or jihadists. The rebels probably knew that the international community would blame Assad for the use of the chemical weapons.

Note that the Commission's Report concludes "In no incident was the commission's evidentiary threshold met with regard to the perpetrator." In plain English, that means the prosecution can *not* prove who fired the chemical weapons in any of the incidents. That means war crimes trial for charges of use of chemical weapons are unlikely with the current evidence.

The trial of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic for war crimes committed during 1992-95 had already consumed 49 months and was continuing, when he died of a heart attack in March 2006 at age 65 y. The International Court of Justice is, in March 2014, just now hearing the case of *Croatia v. Serbia*, which involves genocide committed in the years 1991-95, and a case filed in July 1999. The process of the International Court is glacially slow. Assad could die of old age before he is convicted by the International Court, assuming the Court has jurisdiction over Assad.

6 Mar 2014 Syria will miss another deadline

As chronicled in my [third](#), and [fourth](#) essays on Syria, Assad's government has been moving at less than a snail's pace in delivering its chemical weapons to OPCW. Syria completely missed a 31 Dec deadline for delivery of all of its priority one chemical weapons. Syria missed a 5 Feb deadline for delivery of *all* its chemical weapons. Furthermore, Syria violated a promise by Russia to deliver *all* of Syria's chemical weapons by 1 March.

On 6 March, Reuters reports that Syria will also miss a deadline for destroying its chemical weapons manufacturing plants:

Syria will miss a major deadline next week in the programme to destroy its chemical weapons production facilities, sources at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said on Thursday [6 Mar].

Syria declared 12 production facilities to the OPCW and has until March 15 to destroy them under a deal agreed with the United States and Russia. Damascus has already missed several deadlines laid out in the agreement.

"That will definitely be missed," said an official involved in discussions with Syria, referring to the March 15 deadline.

The official, who asked not to be identified, said there were seven "hardened" aircraft hangars and five underground facilities. "None of them have been destroyed at the moment," the official said.

Syrian officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

....

Syria is not taking the deadline for the destruction of production facilities seriously, another source at the OPCW said on Thursday [6 Mar].

"They are not doing things in the timeframe they promised they would," the source said. "The process is in volatile waters."

The latest comments in The Hague, where members of the OPCW are meeting until Friday [7 Mar], came after sharp criticism of the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday [5 Mar] by the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Powers. [See [Reuters](#).]

A Syrian request to convert for peaceful use some of the facilities declared under its weapons programme has already been rejected, because Western governments fear they could easily be re-converted for military use.

Anthony Deutsch, "Exclusive — Syria to miss deadline to destroy 12 chemical arms sites — sources at OPCW," [Reuters](#), 21:14 GMT, 6 Mar 2014.

U.S. puts Syrian Ambassador to U.N. on short leash

At the end of February 2014, the U.S. State Department restricted the travel of the Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations to a 25-mile (40 km) radius of New York City. Syria joins Iran and North Korea in having their ambassadors to the U.N. on geographically restricted travel. At the U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing, the Spokesperson said:

We have delivered a diplomatic note to the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Mission to the United Nations in New York informing him that he is restricted to a 25 mile travel radius. I'm not in a position to comment any further on it. As you know, and probably do know, UN delegates of certain countries are required to notify us or obtain permission prior to travel outside of a 25 mile radius. So this is not something that is out of the realm of what we've done before.

[U.S. State Dept.](#), 5 March 2014.

The word "Syria" did not appear in the 6 March press briefing.

See also: [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); both on 5 March 2014.

My comments: Syria has become a rogue nation. Syria's failure to deliver its chemical weapons according to the schedule agreed on 15 Nov 2013 is a breach of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, §7. Syria has also failed to obey United Nations Security Council Resolution 2139 (passed on 22 Feb 2014 and effective "immediately"). Putting the Syrian U.N. ambassador in the same class as the ambassadors from Iran and North Korea is appropriate.

7 Mar 2014

One more consignment of chemical weapons delivered

On 7 March 2014, OPCW issued a press release:

The Executive Council concluded its 75th Session today with a consensus report that

"positively noted" the progress that has been made with respect to eliminating the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and also noted delays that have occurred about which concerns were expressed.

The Council report noted the "increasing pace" of removal of Syria's chemical stockpile and requested the Syrian Arab Republic to continue "systematic, predictable and substantial movements". It also requested Syria to accelerate its efforts, where possible and in collaboration with the Joint Mission, to complete removal in the shortest possible time.

The Joint Mission has verified that another consignment of Priority 1 chemicals arrived in Latakia and was removed from the port aboard a cargo ship. The consignment brings to nearly 29% the amount of Syria's chemical stockpile that has now been removed for destruction outside the country. Previous to the Council session this week, the Syrian Government informed the Joint Mission of a revised plan for removing all relevant chemicals from its territory by 27 April 2014.

With regard to certain structures that had housed chemical weapons production equipment, the Council requested the OPCW Director-General to facilitate the preparation of a destruction plan and to dispatch a team of experts from the Technical Secretariat to Syria for this purpose.

"Executive Council Notes 'Increasing Pace' in Moving Chemicals out of Syria, Requests Accelerated Efforts to Complete Their Removal," [OPCW](#), 7 Mar 2014.

My comment: The original deadline for removal of *all* of Syria's chemical weapons was 5 Feb. In reality, on 7 March, OPCW is happy that Syria has delivered almost 29% of its chemical weapons 30 days after the original deadline.

9 Mar 2014 Dozen kidnapped nuns released

On 2 Dec 2013, al-Nusra Front kidnapped a dozen Christian nuns from the Greek Orthodox Mar Takla convent in the village of Maaloula, Syria. (See my [second](#) essay on Syria.) On 10 Feb 2014, al-Nusra Front attempted to bargain for release of the dozen nuns held hostage in exchange for the release of 500 Nusra personnel from prisons. (See my [fourth](#) essay on Syria.)

On 9 March 2014, the nuns were released and were now traveling to Damascus. Reuters reports the nuns were released in exchange for the release of 138 women (later: 153 women) from Syrian prisons. On 10 March, journalists reported a total of 13 nuns and 3 helpers were released and had arrived in Damascus. [Al-Jazeera Blog](#), 07:04 GMT; [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, 13:45 GMT; [Al-Bawaba](#), 15:00 GMT; [Reuters](#), 17:58 GMT; [Al-Jazeera](#), 22:22 GMT; all on 9 March 2014. [Associated Press](#), 00:11 GMT; [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, 13:02 GMT; [Al-Jazeera](#), 15:48 GMT; [Reuters](#), 16:55 GMT; [Daily Star](#), 17:50 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 20:24 GMT; [Fides](#) in Vatican; [NY Times](#); all on 10 March 2014.

My comment: Does this news story need a comment? Only a despicable barbarian would kidnap nuns and hold them hostage for 97 days.

On 10 March, the [Associated Press](#) published a list of prominent people who are currently missing in Syria:

- two christian bishops have been missing since 22 April 2013
- one Jesuit priest has been missing since July 2013
- "Syria's leading human rights lawyer, Razan Zaytouni, was abducted along with her husband and two other prominent activists from a rebel-held Damascus suburb Dec. 10 [2013]."
- "Abdullah Khalil, also a human rights lawyer, has been missing since [18 May 2013]."
- "The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists estimates about 30 international and local reporters are currently in captivity. Most of the kidnappings over the past six months have occurred in opposition-held parts of northern and eastern Syria."

Back on 13 Oct 2013, six Red Cross workers were kidnapped in Syria, but three were released the following day. The other three Red Cross workers seem to have been forgotten. (See my [second](#) essay on Syria.)

13 Mar 2014 Death toll exceeds 146,000

On 13 March, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) announced that the death toll in the Syrian civil war was at least 146,065. "Syrian death toll exceeds 146,000 as fourth year begins — group," [Reuters](#), 19:34 GMT, 13 Mar 2014.
See also: [Al-Jazeera](#) Blog, 13:37 GMT, 13 March 2014.

The Associated Press did not report this story on 13 March. My search of Google News at 14:50 EDT on 14 March — about 24 hours after Reuters broke the story — for the query "Syria 146,065" found only 22 news articles, most of them reprints of the Reuters story. Agence France-Press reported "at least 146,000 people dead" without citing a source. [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 02:50 GMT, 15 March 2014.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is sometimes very slow to update their English-language website, preferring to post information only in their native Arabic. For example, on the night of 16 March, the most recent English-language information at the SOHR website is four news stories, each dated 13 March. The next-most-recent news story is dated 11 March.

On 21 March, this story about the 146,065 death toll still had not appeared on the English-language SOHR website.

18 Mar 2014 More Delay in Delivering Chemical Weapons

On 17 March, I searched Google News for the queries `syria "chemical weapons"` delivered and `syria 'chemical weapons' consignment` but found only one news story about deliveries of chemical weapons during 7-17 March. The Italian news agency ANSA reported on 12 March:

Rocket-launching from a considerable distance hit the Syrian coastal city of Latakia on Sunday [9 Mar], on the day of a transfer to its port of a chemical weapons consignment slated for destruction, reported Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) sources to ANSA on Wednesday [12 Mar]. Another consignment has been postponed for security reasons. The quantity of chemical agents handed over on Sunday, March 9, was limited. So far only 23% of the total Priority 1 (the most dangerous) ones have been loaded onto the Danish cargo ship Ark Futura, which will take them to the southern Italian port of Gioia Tauro to be transferred to the US ship Cape Ray and destroyed in the open seas. Some 55% of Priority 2 chemical materials have been loaded onto the Norwegian cargo ship Taiko. The consignments are being handed over very slowly — though the pace has picked up recently — and many deadlines set by the OPCW in November for the dismantling of the Syrian regime's chemical arsenal have already passed. The Syrian authorities have repeatedly been urged to speed up the transfer of the chemical agents from several storage sites in the country to the Latakia port.

"Rockets hit Latakia, delay in Syrian gas consignment," [ANSAMED](#), 12 March 2014.

On 18 March, Reuters reported more excuses from the Syrian government:

Five rockets were fired at the main transit point for Syria's chemical weapons this month, with one landing near to where experts overseeing the destruction of the toxic stockpile were staying, sources said on Tuesday [18 March].

One rocket in the March 9 strike on the Mediterranean port town Latakia landed about 500 meters (yards) from the hotel used by the joint mission of the United Nations (U.N.) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons mission (OPCW), the sources told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based monitoring group, said three rockets hit the city of Latakia, killing a taxi driver and wounding six others.

The anti-Assad observatory said it was the first attack by insurgents on the area held by Syrian government forces.

Launched from several kilometres away, four of the rockets hit land and one fell in the sea, the sources said, citing a confidential report on the incident. The chemical transports were not hit.

Anthony Deutsch, "Syria chemical weapons store attacked by rockets — sources," [Reuters](#), 14:45 GMT, 18 Mar 2014.

19-20 Mar 2014
More chemical weapons delivered

Some 42 days after the 5 Feb deadline for removal of *all* chemical weapons from Syria, OPCW announced on 19 March that 45.6% of the chemical weapons had been removed from Syria. The latest consignments were delivered on 14 and 17 March. [RIA-Novosti](#); [TASS](#); [Associated Press](#), 18:31 GMT; [GlobalPost](#)(AFP); [news24](#)(AFP) in South Africa; all on 19 March 2014.

On 20 March, an OPCW press release said there had been one more delivery on 20 March: The OPCW-UN Joint Mission has verified the delivery of another consignment of Priority 1 chemicals today [20 Mar] to Latakia and their removal from the port on a cargo ship, raising the amount of Syrian chemicals that are now out of the country to nearly half of the total stockpile.

The confirmation came on the heels of an announcement late yesterday by the Joint Mission of two other consignments of chemicals that were delivered to Latakia and removed during the past week. A total of 11 consignments of chemicals have now been transported out of Syria for destruction outside the country. The updated cumulative figures are as follow:

Priority 1 chemicals removed:	34.8 %
Priority 2 chemicals removed:	82.6 %
Total chemicals removed:	49.3 %

[A footnote says the Priority 1 chemicals "includes all sulfur mustard, the only unitary chemical warfare agent in Syria's arsenal".]

When all of the Syrian chemicals from all storage sites have been loaded aboard the Danish and Norwegian cargo ships, they will be transported to various locations for destruction under the verification of OPCW inspectors.

The majority of Priority 1 chemicals will be neutralised at sea aboard the U.S. vessel MV Cape Ray, while a smaller amount will be neutralised at a land-based facility in Ellesmere Port, UK. The Priority 2 chemicals will be destroyed at commercial facilities in the U.S. and Finland. A facility in Germany will dispose of part of the effluent from the Cape Ray operations.

As the removal process continues, a team of OPCW experts is currently in Syria to facilitate the formulation of a plan to destroy certain structures that housed Syria's chemical weapons production facilities. The Executive Council is expected to consider the plan at its next meeting.

"More Movement of Chemicals Out of Syria Boosts Removals to Half of Stockpile," [OPCW](#), 20 Mar 2014.

My comment: OPCW is delighted that approximately half of the total chemical weapons have been removed from Syria, 43 days after the 5 Feb deadline to remove *all* chemical weapons from Syria. More troublesome is that only about 35% of the priority one chemical weapons have been removed from Syria, 79 days after the 31 Dec deadline to remove all of the priority one chemicals. While journalists trumpet the fact that nearly half of the chemical weapons have been removed, the real message is that the removal of chemical weapons is

seriously behind schedule.

24 Mar 2014

OPCW finally admits 30 June deadline might be missed

OPCW has been full of unbounded optimism that they will meet the 30 June 2014 deadline in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118 for the destruction of *all* Syrian chemical weapons. (Resolution 2118 requires "complete the elimination of all chemical weapons material and equipment in the first half of 2014".) On 24 March, Reuters reports:

The head of the organization overseeing the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile said he still hoped Damascus could meet a final deadline of June 30 but it might miss that target.

.....

"I think that some targets have not been met, but the deadline of 30 June still remains our target, and we think we can finish the destruction by that time, or close to that time," Ahmet Uzumcu, head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, said.

An official at the OPCW, which won the Nobel Peace Prize last year, said Uzumcu meant the process could run past the June 30 deadline Damascus had agreed to. This was the first official indication it might not be met.

"Syria may miss final deadline for chemical weapon destruction," [Reuters](#), 17:42 GMT, 24 Mar 2014.

Also at: [Al-Arabiya](#).

26 Mar 2014

Slow Delivery of Chemical Weapons

On 26 March 2014, the [Associated Press](#) cited a recent report of OPCW to the United Nations Security Council, saying "Syria pledges to remove all chemicals by April 13, except for those in areas 'that are presently inaccessible,' which face an April 27 deadline." The amount of weapons removed is the same as in the 20 March OPCW press release. This story was also reported by [Al-Jazeera](#).

On 29 March, I found U.N. Secretary General Ban's cover letter for the OPCW Report, which says:

The movements occurred within the framework of a sequenced plan of activities adopted by the Syrian Arab Republic, which stipulates that all chemical weapons material will be removed from its territory by 13 April 2014, aside from material located at two sites that are currently inaccessible owing to the security situation. All material is scheduled for removal or in-country destruction by the end of April 2014, contingent upon safe and secure access. The Syrian authorities at the highest level have

reconfirmed their commitment to the elimination of the country's chemical weapons programme and to the further acceleration of the pace of removal wherever possible to meet its obligations under Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and relevant decisions of the OPCW Executive Council.

....

During the month of April, and in accordance with the revised plan, all remaining chemical weapons material should be removed from the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, including chemical materials stored in sites that are currently inaccessible. The remaining quantities of isopropanol and empty containers with sulphur mustard residue should be destroyed. In addition, I expect that further progress will be made concerning the destruction of chemical weapons production facilities.

Ban Ki-moon, "Letter dated 26 March 2014 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council," [cover letter](#). Document also includes the five-page OPCW Report as an Annex.

My comment: The first delivery of chemical weapons by Syria was on 7 Jan 2014. On 26 March, 78 days later, the Syrians had delivered a total of 49% of their declared chemical weapons. Does anyone seriously believe that in the next 19 days (i.e., by 13 April) the Syrians will deliver the other half of their chemical weapons? To meet that deadline would require delivering weapons at a rate four times the previous rate.

1 April 2014
Death Toll passes 150,000

On 1 April 2014, Reuters reported:

At least 150,000 people have been killed in Syria's three-year-old civil war, a third of them civilians, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Tuesday [1 April].

The UK-based Observatory, which monitors violence in Syria through a network of activists and medical or security sources, said that real toll was likely to be significantly higher at around 220,000 deaths.

....

The Observatory said it had registered the deaths of 150,344 people since March 18, 2011, when Assad's security forces first fired on protesters calling for reform. "Death toll in Syria's civil war above 150,000: monitor," [Reuters](#), 12:26 GMT, 1 April 2014.

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

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

Ukraine

- On 22 Feb 2014, 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. The Ukraine gives Obama and Kerry a new foreign policy crisis, as Russia — which shares a border with Ukraine — supported the deposed president, while the USA and Western Europe supported the protesters.
- 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.
- By 3 March, Russia has seized control of Crimea, a peninsula in eastern Ukraine.
- On 6 March, Crimea's parliament decides to secede from Ukraine and join Russia. A referendum is scheduled for 16 March. Such a local referendum is improper according to Ukraine's constitution, which requires the entire Ukraine vote on changes, but that does not bother either Crimea or Russia.
- On 16 March, 96.8% of the voters in Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine. [Washington Post](#). A Russian television journalist said Russia is "capable of turning the United States into radioactive ash", in an example of inflammatory rhetoric. [Reuters](#); [AFP](#).
- On 17 March, the USA and Europe imposed personal sanctions on senior Russian politicians and officials (but *not* including Russian president Putin), as well as Crimea-based separatist leaders.
- On 18 March, Russian President Putin signed a treaty with Crimea, in which Russia annexed Crimea.
- On 20 March, Obama announced more sanctions against Russians.
- On 21 March, Crimea formally became part of Russia, after the Russian legislature ratified the treaty annexing Crimea. VISA and MasterCard have stopped processing transactions on credit cards issued by four Russian banks on the sanctions list.
- On 27 March, the United Nations General Assembly declared the referendum was *not* valid, and did not recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea. The vote in the

General Assembly was 100 to 11, with 58 abstentions.

Why is the Ukraine crisis relevant to the civil war in Syria? Time that Obama/Kerry spend on the crisis in the Ukraine is time not spent on the crisis in Syria. The threats during the Ukraine crisis mean that further cooperation between Russia and the USA on the civil war in Syria is temporarily *unlikely*.

On 7 March, Raed Omari, writing in [Al-Arabiya](#), points out that Putin's defiance of the USA/Europe on the matter of Ukraine surely emboldens Assad.

On the night of 7 March, Liz Sly, writing in [The Washington Post](#), explained that Assad was taking advantage of the crisis in Ukraine to: (1) intensify his military campaign against rebels and jihadists and (2) prepare to be re-elected for another seven-year term.

Liz Sly wrote:

It is in Syria, however, where strains between the United States and Russia are likely to have the most immediate impact. For most of the three years since the Syrian uprising began, the Obama administration's Syria policy has been predicated on the assumption that Russia would be a willing partner in efforts to persuade Assad to relinquish power.

That policy, perhaps unlikely ever to have worked, has now been exposed as unrealistic, said Amr Al Azm, a professor of history at Shawnee State University in Ohio. Putin's defense of Yanukovich means "three years of Syrian diplomacy has gone down the toilet," he said. "It's a huge failure for the White House."

....

Two other areas of U.S.-Russia cooperation in Syria will now also be put to the test: [1] last summer's [Sep 2013] agreement to destroy Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons, and [2] the recent U.N. resolution calling on Syria to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and halt attacks such as the deadly barrel bombings that have claimed hundreds of lives in the past two months.

There are no indications that Assad is in a hurry to comply with either. Syria has already missed two deadlines for the removal of chemical weapons, and officials at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons indicated this week that it is likely to miss a third, on March 15. The barrel bombings have continued unabated, and there has been no discernible progress toward relieving the crippling sieges of rebel-held towns, which have put thousands of people at risk of starvation.

Liz Sly, "Assad taking advantage of U.S.-Russia split over Ukraine, observers say," [Washington Post](#), 7 March 2014.

Part reprinted at [Sydney Morning Herald](#) and [Arab News](#).

On 12 March, Reuters reported:

The head of the United Nation's refugee agency said on Tuesday 11 Mar] it must be ready in case Ukraine's crisis causes refugees to flee Crimea, but his biggest worry is that "a total disaster" could occur if the international community diverts its attention away from Syria's conflict.

Antonio Guterres, the head of the U.N.'s High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), said in an interview that little progress was being made in efforts by the United States and Russia, now at loggerheads over Ukraine, to bring Syria's warring sides together after the collapse of talks in Geneva last month.

"In the moment in which we need the most relevant countries in the world to be able to come together to narrow their differences and to try to find a way to move into peace for Syria, this tension around Ukraine will obviously not help," Guterres told Reuters while visiting Washington to discuss Syria's refugee crisis. "I hope that those that have the most important responsibility in world affairs will be able to understand that forgetting Syria will be a total disaster," he said.

Lesley Wroughton, "U.N. refugee chief warns world powers not to forget Syria conflict," [Reuters](#), 02:00 EDT, 12 Mar 2014.

Reprinted in [Gulf News](#).

My comments:

Obama's foreign policy on Syria was essentially an obsession with the removal of Assad. When Assad did not resign in 2011 or 2012, the U.S. foreign policy was divorced from reality. Now Obama and Kerry clamor for the "transitional governing body" in Syria, which is just a slogan for replacing Assad. In this way, the Coalition — and its supporters — hope to achieve in Geneva2 negotiations what the rebels were unable to accomplish militarily.

Meanwhile, multiple crises in the world (e.g., Ukraine, Syrian civil war, negotiations with Iran about its nuclear program, negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, slaughter in the Central African Republic, ...) mean that diplomats in Western Europe and the USA ignore the Syrian civil war.

I find the controversy over Crimea to be highly symbolic and *not* worth the fuss that nations are making over this issue. Crimea was part of Russia from 1783 until 1954, and the majority (58%) of the current inhabitants of Crimea are ethnic Russians. Arguably, Crimea should have remained part of Russia, rather than becoming part of Ukraine, and then an Autonomous Republic in Ukraine. Crimea is small: only 26,000 km² (between the area of Vermont and Massachusetts in the USA). See the editorial by Ron Paul, former (1979-1985, 1997-2013) conservative member of the U.S. House of Representatives, "Ron Paul: Crimea secedes. So what?" [USA Today](#), 17 March 2014.

2 Mar 2014

U.S. Ambassador to Syria gives speech

Robert S. Ford was formally appointed U.S. Ambassador to Syria in January 2011. Two months later, in March 2011, the Syria civil war began. On 6 Feb 2012, the U.S. Embassy in Damascus was closed because of poor security. From Feb 2012 until his retirement on 28 Feb 2014, Ambassador Ford spent much of his time in Turkey, consulting with opponents of Assad. On 1 March 2014, Ambassador Ford gave a speech at Tufts University, which was reported by the *Christian Science Monitor*:

Speaking at a conference at Tufts University last night [1 Mar], his outlook was bleak,

warning that a fractured rebellion, the presence of Al Qaeda inspired fighters on the battlefield, and the fears of the country's minorities are a recipe for prolonged conflict.

....

His remarks had seven key takeaways.

1. **It's the regime's [Assad's] fault.** Ford: "Most of the discussions behind closed doors [in Geneva Jan/Feb 2014] were the regime throwing out insults at the opposition delegation, basically saying they weren't representative."
2. **But the opposition isn't helping its cause.** Ford: "The Syrian opposition itself has done a miserable job distinguishing itself from the Al Qaeda elements. There are some really bad people in Syria right now, on the opposition side. Can the opposition show that it is willing to reach out and figure out a way security-wise and politics-wise to reunify across that sectarian divide?"
3. **Armed groups will have to be at the table — even jihadis.** [Ford wants the Islamic Front (jihadists), Hezbollah, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps represented at Geneva2.]
4. **Iran, too.** The handling of Iran's invitation to Geneva II was "a mess," Ford acknowledged,....
5. **Could the US use military force in Syria?** [If the USA uses military force, and that does not end the civil war, then we will need to escalate the force. And Obama is unwilling to escalate.]
6. **Assad should not run in June presidential elections.** [The rebels, jihadis, and Al-Qaeda all hate Assad. As long as Assad remains president of Syria, there will be fighting.] "Syria is not ready for elections this summer, period, [Ford] said. With 9 million displaced and no history of free elections, they would have no credibility."
7. **The end game is a bunch of cantons controlled by armed local factions.** "The most likely end game? De-facto cantons, some of them controlled by local armed factions. Certainly nothing like the Syria Ford saw when he arrived in Damascus in 2010."

Ariel Zirulnick, "US Ambassador Ford on what's gone wrong in Syria and where it's headed," [Christian Science Monitor](#), 2 Mar 2014. (text of seven points condensed by Standler)

My comments: (1) It is true that the Coalition is *not* representative of the Syrian people. The Coalition is a bunch of Syrian expatriates living in Turkey, who have never been elected by the Syrian people. Further, the civil war is now *not* entirely Assad's fault, as the rebels/jihadists are just as stubborn as Assad, and all parties are being unreasonable.

(2) I agree with Ambassador Ford that the Coalition is doing a "miserable job" of public

relations.

(3-4) I agree wholeheartedly that the Geneva2 negotiations should include jihadists, Hezbollah, and the financial supporters of the fighters on both sides (e.g., Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar). *All* of the involved parties need to be present. This inclusiveness is especially important because the Coalition does *not* currently represent the rebel/jihadist fighters on the ground in Syria. The problem is that some of the parties will refuse to be in the same room with other parties (e.g., the Coalition [refuses](#) to negotiate with Hezbollah).

(5) We need less military force in Syria, not more.

(6) I think Assad is the strongest — and most experienced — leader that the Syrian people and the Syrian exiles have.

(7) I agree with Ambassador Ford that Syria will become fragmented, and that radical Islamist terrorists will control some parts of former Syria. My hope is that the USA and Western Europe will accept Assad as president of Syria, and support Assad's fight against Islamic terrorists.

This important speech by Ambassador Ford was almost ignored by journalists. The speech was reported in neither the *Boston Globe* nor the *Boston Herald*, although he spoke at Tufts University, which is in a suburb of Boston. Not even *The Tufts Daily* student newspaper covered Ford's speech. I searched Google News for the query "Syria Ford Tufts" and found only a one-paragraph mention in a 10 March diatribe published by [Pravda](#) in Russia.

3-8 Mar 2014: Developments in Saudi Arabia

Foreign fighters must leave Syria!

On Monday, 3 March 2014, during a dearth of news about Syria, the Associated Press reported:

Saudi Arabia's Cabinet has called for the withdrawal of all foreign fighters from Syria and is demanding they face international justice if they committed war crimes there.

Riyadh is concerned that Saudi militants in Syria could turn their weapons on the kingdom.

Minister of Information and Culture Abdelaziz Khoja said in a statement Monday on behalf of the Cabinet that the kingdom "renews its firm position condemning terrorism in all its forms."

Last month, Saudi King Abdullah decreed it a crime for Saudi nationals to fight in foreign conflicts. The move was largely aimed at curbing extremist Saudis fighting alongside Syrian rebels.

Volunteers from across the Sunni Muslim world have joined Syrian rebel groups, in

particular an al-Qaida breakaway faction.
"Saudi Calls On All Foreign Fighters To Leave Syria," [Associated Press](#), 15:30 GMT, 3 Mar 2014.

Reprinted in The [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon.

I looked at the website of the Saudi Press Agency to find the details of this story. On 26 Feb there was a speech by the Saudi Ambassador to the United Nations:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterated its position on condemning terrorism in all its forms, manifestations, and everywhere in the world, whatever might be its motives, causes and objectives, as a crime not linked to religion, people or race.

The Kingdom's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Abdullah bin Yahya Al-Mo'allemi said in his speech yesterday before the special session of the United Nations General Assembly to discuss the situation in Syria, that the Kingdom unreservedly condemns all acts of terrorism wherever they are committed, which is evidenced by its record domestically and internationally in the fight against terrorism which is clearly visible to everyone.

He demanded that the international community and the United Nations Organization apply fully, immediately, and unconditionally the Security Council resolution No. 2139 and the Council shoulder its responsibilities towards taking necessary actions in case of non-compliance with that resolution, and immediately make public the reasons for the failure of the Geneva Conference 2 and identify the responsibility for this.

Ambassador Al-Mo'allemi also called on the United Nations Security Council to take necessary steps to ensure implementation of the resolution No. 2118, which provided for the adoption of the outcomes of the Geneva conference 1 and foremost the establishment of the executive transition authority, determining of the responsibility for the crimes against humanity and war crimes and referring them immediately to the international justice, the withdrawal of all foreign fighters from Syria including Hezbollah, the legion of Abu Al-Fadhel Al-Abbas, Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the Quds Force belonging to it, in addition to creating safe zones for Syrian civilians, and protected corridors to facilitate humanitarian access to those in need.

"Saudi Arabia Renews Its Condemnation of Terrorism in All of Its Forms and Everywhere," [Saudi Press Agency](#), 08:44 GMT, 26 Feb 2014. (website does not permit linking to specific news stories)

A Saudi Cabinet session on 3 March discussed Syria. Afterwards, the chairman made a statement to the Saudi Press Agency:

The Minister [of Culture and Information, Dr. Abdulaziz bin Mohiuddin Khoja] said that the Council then reviewed a number of reports on the developments of events and developments in the region and the world, reiterating the positions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, everywhere in the world, whatever might be its motives, causes and objectives as a crime not linked to a doctrine, people, race or gender, stressing in this context what was included in the statement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia before the Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations to discuss the situation in Syria on the

condemnation of terrorist acts committed by the regime in Damascus against the Syrian people, demand to determine responsibility for such crimes against humanity and war crimes and refer them to international justice, withdrawal of all foreign fighters from Syria, and the creation of safe zones for Syrian civilians and corridors to facilitate humanitarian access to those in need.

"Second Deputy Premier Chairs Cabinet Session 2 Riyadh," [Saudi Press Agency](#), 13:20 GMT, 3 Mar 2014. (website does not permit linking to specific news stories)

This story was not reported in the English-language *Arab News*.

My comments: This is a hopelessly futile gesture by the Saudi government. The foreign fighters in Syria — especially Hezbollah from Lebanon, plus Shiites from Iraq or Iran — are *not* going to obey the Saudi government. The call for prosecution in an international court for war crimes is also futile, because (1) no one is collecting evidence, and (2) it is more important to prosecute leaders than mere foot soldiers.

Arab governments shun Qatar

On 5 March, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates all withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar. These three nations were unhappy with Qatar's support of Islamic groups (e.g., Muslim Brotherhood) in the Arab Spring revolts since 2011, and with Qatar's support of Islamic jihadists in Syria. The official reasons were different, as one can see in the journalist's reports. [Al-Jazeera](#) in Qatar; [Gulf News](#) in UAE; [Al-Arabiya](#); [Arab News](#) in Saudi Arabia; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#), [NY Times](#).

Back on 30 July 2013, the Egyptian military deposed the government that had been elected by the people of Egypt and was composed of a majority of Muslim Brotherhood members. The Egyptian government withdrew its ambassador from Qatar in early Feb 2014. On 6 March 2014, Egypt issued a statement saying its ambassador to Qatar "will not return" to Qatar. [Ahram](#) (Reuters) in Egypt; [Al-Jazeera](#) in Qatar; [Al-Arabiya](#); [Arab News](#); .

On 8 March, the prime minister of Iraq accused both Saudi Arabia and Qatar of financial support of terrorists in Iraq. [France24](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Reuters](#); [BBC](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

My comments: This may be the beginning of a revolt of some Arab nations against Qatar's financial support of Islamic jihadist groups. Notice that this is essentially a sectarian dispute: Saudi Arabia and Qatar are both Sunni nations, while Iraq has a Shiite majority.

Saudi Arabia bans Islamic terrorist organizations

On 7 March, Saudi Arabia named the Muslim Brotherhood — plus Al-Qaeda's branches in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq — as terrorists organizations. Anyone in Saudi Arabia who either joins, endorses, or supports a terrorist organization (including those fighting in a foreign country like Syria) can be imprisoned for at least five years. I looked at the Saudi Press Agency website to find the definitive statement:

The Ministry of Interior issued today the following statement:

"In reference to Royal Order A/44 dated on 3/Rabi' Thani, 1435H [3 Feb 2014], item (Fourth) which authorizes the formation of a committee with members from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Call, and Guidance, Ministry of Justice, Court of Grievances, and Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecution, the task of which is to file a list (to be updated periodically) of the factions and groups identified in item 2 of the First Article of the Royal Order and process the list for final endorsement.

The Ministry hereby seeks to make known that the said committee has met and discussed the issue, and has sent the list of recommendations to the Royal Court. The following rulings criminalize citizens and residents:

1. The promotion of atheistic ideologies in any form as well as any attempt to cast doubt on the fundamentals of Islam, the religion on which this country stands.
2. Whoever betrays one's oath of allegiance to the leaders of this country or swears allegiance to a party, organization, group, faction, or individual whether inside or outside the country.
3. Taking part in, calling for, or promoting the fighting in conflicts in other countries, or issuing fatwa supporting the matter.
4. Whoever is a member of or endorses those parties, organizations, groups, factions, or gatherings; or is sympathetic towards or promoting their ideologies or holds meetings under their umbrella whether inside or outside the Kingdom. This includes taking part in all audio-visual and written media, internet, social communication networks and promotion of their contents in anyway; included also are their emblems, mottos and any signs that show support.
5. Financial or material donations to or funding of the extremist and terroristic organizations, factions, and groups, or sheltering their members or their promoters inside or outside the Kingdom.
6. Contacting or communicating with groups or factions or individuals who harbor enmity for the Kingdom.
7. Being loyal to, in liaison with, or communicating with another country, with the intention of exploiting the secure unity and stability of the Kingdom and its people.
8. The pursuit of unsettling the social and national fabric, or the call for, participation in, or promotion of sit-ins, demonstrations, gatherings, collective statements, or any actions that touch the unity and stability of the Kingdom under any reason and in any form.
9. Attendance of conferences, forums, or gatherings inside or outside the Kingdom that target the Kingdom's security and stability, and instigate social disorder.
10. Committing offenses against other countries and/or their leaders.
11. Soliciting the help of States, international organizations or bodies against the Kingdom.

The Ministry of Interior notes that these recommendations have been endorsed by Royal Order 16820 dated 5, Jumadi Alawla, 1435H and will be enforced, effective Sunday 8, Jumadi Alawla, 1435H (March 9, 2014). Whoever violates these will be held accountable for one's all former and later violations. The King has further ordered that those who took part in any way in the fighting outside the Kingdom be given an extra

extension period of 15 days as of the issuance of this statement to rethink their position and return immediately home, hoping that they will heed reason and come to their better senses.

Along with this, the Ministry of Interior attaches here the first list of parties, groups and factions addressed by this statement:

- Al-Qaida Organization
- Al-Qaida Organization in the Arabian Peninsula
- Al-Qaida Organization in Yemen
- Al-Qaida Organization in Iraq [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)]
- Da'ish
- Al-Nusra Front [in Syria]
- Hezbollah in the [Saudi] Kingdom
- the Muslim Brotherhood
- Alhuthi Group [in Yemen]. [formatting as an indented list added by Standler]

It should be noted that included also are any similar organizations with similar ideologies, discourses, and actions along with all those groups and factions noted on the lists of the Security Council and international bodies and are identified as terroristic and committed to violence.

The Ministry will update this list periodically in accordance with the mandate of the Royal Order. It also calls on all to fully abide by its directives, and warns at the same time that the Ministry will not be lenient or tolerant in enforcing its terms."

"Ministry of Interior: Injunctions on Security and Ideology for Citizens and Residents; and An Extra Grace Period of 15 Days for Those Taking Arms outside the Kingdom to Rethink Their Position and Return Home," [Saudi Press Agency](#), stories 29-32, 17:36-40 GMT, 7 Mar 2014. (website does not permit linking to specific news stories)

Also see: [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Arab News](#); [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#)(AP).

My comments: I support criminal penalties for terrorism, including financial support of terrorist organizations. But I am troubled by one part of this new law: "will be held accountable for one's all former ... violations". Establishing criminal penalties for conduct *before* the law became effective is known as an *ex post facto* law, and is unconstitutional in the USA. I am also troubled by Nr. 1 of 11 prohibited items, as a violation of freedom of religion. Nr. 3 of 11 may be overbroad in that it prohibits *any* "fighting in conflicts in other countries", even in support of either (A) a legitimate government favored by the Saudi government or (B) rebels supported by the Saudi government.

I especially welcome the statement of the head of the Saudi religious police about the banned terrorist organizations: "They are groups that fight moderate Muslims and are causing troubles around the world. This is what we consider against Islamic principles and has given a negative impression about Muslims in the West." [Al-Arabiya](#). Indeed, Islamic terrorism has not only killed many innocent people — in Israel, the USA, and Europe, as well as in predominantly Islamic nations — but also gives a bad public image of the Muslim religion.

subsequent developments in Saudi Arabia

On 19-20 March, a court in Saudi Arabia sentenced 28 men to prison "for security offences including material support to wanted Islamist militants, aiding terrorism and helping young men go to Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan to fight." [Reuters](#).

In an interview on 23 March, a spokesman for the Saudi Interior Minister estimates that 25% of Saudi citizens fighting in Syria have returned home. [Asharq Al-Awsat](#).

3 Mar 2014

U.N. Secretary General wants to restart Geneva2

On 3 March 2014, while speaking at a press conference in Geneva, at a meeting of the Human Rights Council, U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, said in his introductory remarks:

On Syria, I had a long conversation with Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi yesterday [2 Mar]. The only way to end the crisis is through a negotiated solution. We are determined to bring the parties back to the table here in Geneva. But for the moment it is our sense that there is an urgent need for the parties, and those with influence over them, to reflect on how the talks can achieve the progress the Syrian people and the region so urgently need.

Ban Ki-moon, [UN](#), 3 Mar 2014.

Later in the press conference:

Q: Mr. Ban Ki-moon, you mentioned that you were speaking with Mr. Brahimi yesterday. Do you see more clearly now when can we expect the third round of inter-Syrian talks here in Geneva and which are the main obstacles in the way for the third round?

Mr. Ban: We have had two rounds of negotiations here in Geneva. In the first round, we were just encouraged when two parties who have been fighting for almost three years, they just sat down face to face together. With that we were encouraged, we were satisfied, we thought it was a good beginning. And the international community was rather understanding all this situation. The second round didn't bring much. We hoped that there should be much more progress than the first one. Of course they continued to talk; that was understandable, that was encouraging. But at least we needed to have more progress. That is why Lakhdar Brahimi, in this place, he apologized to the people of Syria for the lack of progress. It is important that this Geneva conference should continue. And it is important that the third round of the Geneva conference should be held again as soon as possible. That is what I discussed with Lakhdar Brahimi yesterday [2 Mar]. He is coming to the United Nations next week and we will continue to discuss. I know that he is going also to meet with key leaders while he is there.

Now, then why there has not been much progress? Because the two parties, particularly

the Syrian delegation, government delegation, they have not been constructively engaging in the dialogue. As you may know, Lakhdar Brahimi has set out four agendas. Two of the agendas are: the first, the initiative of the Syrian Government of addressing international terrorism; then the second agenda is, most importantly, what was agreed in the first Geneva Conference of June 30th 2012, of establishing a transitional governing body with full executive powers upon mutual consent. That is the way we have to agree, and through this agreement we can bring peace and stability and dignity to many Syrian people. Lakhdar Brahimi has shown his flexibility, let us discuss these two issues alternatively. It is important that the two parties, particularly I urge the Syrian authorities to come with a constructive position. And I am urging again those countries, particularly the Russian Federation and the United States and other members, the permanent members of the Security Council and regional powers who have influence on the government as well as opposition forces to exert their influences, so that all parties will come to Geneva as soon as possible with a sincere and constructive position.

press conference in [Geneva](#), 3 March 2014.

14 Mar 2014

On 14 March, Ban spoke to journalists after he briefed the U.N. General Assembly:

I have just briefed the General Assembly on the situation in Syria. The political process is in crisis. It is not enough to have brought the parties to the conflict into the same room. What matters most is what they do there.

Yet after two rounds of talks, neither side is displaying any will to compromise or any true awareness of the suffering of the Syrian people.

I strongly urge the Syrian Government and opposition to show the leadership, vision and flexibility needed to end this conflict.

I appeal to the Russian Federation and the United States, as the initiating States of the Geneva Conference on Syria, to take clear steps to re-energize the political process.

And I call for an end to the flow of arms and fighters that continues to fuel the violence. All those who persist in seeking a military solution are making a political solution even more distant and elusive.

Ban Ki-moon, "Opening remarks to the press following informal briefing to General Assembly on Syria," [UN](#), 14 March 2014.

My comments: On 3 March, Ban made a mistake to say that Assad's government has "not been constructively engaging in the dialogue". Even if this statement is true, it is *not* diplomatic. Furthermore, it shows that the U.N. — supposedly a neutral host for Geneva2 negotiations — is taking sides in the dispute. The Syrian National Coalition can be criticized for its eight-month delay in accepting an invitation to Geneva2, its lack of control of rebels fighting in Syria, and for other acts documented in my previous essays.

There might be more progress in the Geneva2 negotiations if Ban and Brahimi would back

away from the first Geneva Communiqué in June 2012, and specifically abandon its requirement for a transitional government in Syria. (I explain my reasoning in my [second](#), [third](#), and [fourth](#) essays on Syria.) Ban's call on 3 March for "all parties" to "come to Geneva as soon as possible with a sincere and constructive position" could also apply to Ban himself.

No one is mentioning that U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139, passed on 22 Feb, required that Syria immediately stop dropping barrel bombs on cities, yet the Syrian government continues to drop barrel bombs. The same Resolution required humanitarian aid be provided to residents of besieged cities, but that is also *not* happening. The U.N. is clearly impotent, and the parties in Syria are continuing to ignore the U.N.

On 14 March, Ban is absolutely correct to say "neither side is displaying any will to compromise or any true awareness of the suffering of the Syrian people." Looking at the Coalition:

1. The one goal that unites the Coalition is their demand that Assad resign. They have been unable to achieve that result militarily, so now they demand that result in negotiations. The Coalition can not compromise on that demand.
2. The Coalition is a group of expatriates who live in Turkey. The Coalition is *not* personally involved in the fighting by the rebels, as there is only a tenuous connection between the rebel fighters and the Coalition. The Coalition has no influence over the jihadists and Al-Qaeda. Naturally, the Coalition has little concern with the "suffering of the Syrian people." If the Coalition were to negotiate a surrender to Assad, that would
 - A. extinguish the dreams of the Coalition for political power in Syria,
 - B. the rebels would break their tenuous relationship with the Coalition, and
 - C. all of the opposition fighters would ignore the surrender.

Looking at Assad:

1. Assad is determined to cling to power, and continue his family's rule of Syria since 1971. Assad is the lawful ruler of Syria and he is fighting an insurrection by rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda. Assad appears to be [winning](#) the civil war, so he is in no mood to compromise with the insurgents and terrorists.
2. Assad appears to have no concern for the "suffering of the Syrian people." That is characteristic of hereditary rulers of a nation, who do not need to worry about themselves or their party being re-elected.

With this understanding, continuing the negotiations in Geneva would be futile.

Ban is right on 14 March to "call for an end to the flow of arms and fighters" into Syria. But the United Nations lacks a way to enforce a ban on Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and others nations that are supplying munitions to the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda. And the Sunni nations who are supplying Assad's opponents in the sectarian war would surely want a ban on Hezbollah and Iran from supplying munitions and fighters to Assad's government, but there is no way the United Nations could enforce that ban.

6 March 2014 General Idriss

On 16 Feb 2014, General Idriss was sacked as head of the Free Syrian Army. On 19 Feb, Idriss refused to resign. (See my [fourth](#) essay on Syria.) On 6 March, the dispute was finally settled by the Syrian National Coalition. *Al-Arabiya* reports:

Syrian rebel commanders have reached a deal with their political leadership whereby FSA army chief General Salim Idriss will resign to be appointed as military advisor to President Ahmed al-Jarba, an *Al Arabiya* source revealed on Thursday [6 March].

According to the deal, rebel Defense Minister Asa'ad Mustafa and his deputies would abandon their posts as well.

The agreement came following disputes last month over a decision by President Jarba to dismiss General Idriss.

....

Meanwhile, unit commanders representing the relatively secular rebels in Syria's five main battle zones also had denounced the decision to fire Idriss, accusing National Coalition leaders 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 [on 18 Feb]. He added Idriss's backers would keep fighting under his command, [Reuters](#) reported.

"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.

"Syrian opposition ends dispute over rebel chief's dismissal," [Al-Arabiya](#), 17:04 GMT, 6 Mar 2014. [Link to Reuters story on 19 Feb added by Standler.]

See also: [Global Post](#)(AFP) also at [Google](#); [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon; [Al-Bawaba](#); [SOHR](#).

My comments:

Because Jarba initially supported sacking Gen. Idriss, the two of them may have a strained working relationship.

The claim by the Free Syrian Army that "No group that is not present on [Syria's] soil has the right to take a crucial decision that does not represent the views of the forces working on the ground [in Syria]" means that the Free Syrian Army will *not* respect decisions of the Syrian National Coalition, which is based in Istanbul, Turkey. The Coalition has even less control over the jihadists, making the Coalition almost irrelevant in the Syrian civil war. (The quotation is in an 18 Feb statement. [Reuters](#); [Arab News](#).)

6 Mar 2014

Coalition refuses to negotiate with Hezbollah

On 6 March, *Al-Bawaba* reported a little noticed story about the refusal of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) to negotiate with Hezbollah:

The Syrian opposition rejected a proposal by former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford for the rebels to negotiate with Hezbollah and other factions fighting alongside President Bashar Assad's troops as part of a political solution to the civil war.

In remarks published Thursday [6 March], the spokesman of the Syrian National Coalition, Louay Safi, said: "We only negotiate with the Syrians and we won't accept the participation of foreign militias that kill the Syrian people in the political solution."

The opposition won't surrender to the status-quo after three years of struggle, he said.

Ford, who stepped down on Friday [28 Feb], has recently said that the negotiations to resolve the civil war should include armed groups, including Hezbollah, which has sent its fighters to Syria in support of Assad.

"Syrian opposition rejects offer to negotiate with Hezbollah," [Al-Bawaba](#), 12:05 GMT, 6 Mar 2014.

The complete statement at the Coalition website says:

Louay Safi, spokesman for the Syrian Coalition, said that the Coalition refuses remarks by Robert Ford, former U.S. ambassador to Syria, who said that negotiating with the Hezbollah militia and sectarian factions imported by the Assad regime to kill the Syrian people is part of a political solution. "We adamantly refuse to negotiate with foreign militias, nor do we accept sitting at the negotiating table with the sectarian-driven militias who are involved in the atrocities committed against the Syrian people. Moreover, we reject considering engaging the foreign militias in the political process as part of the status quo." In light of the many sacrifices made by the Syrian people over the past three years, it is impossible for us to surrender to the status quo, as we rose up to change it in the first place. The involvement of the sectarian foreign militias in the crimes against the Syrian people is happening under the eyes of the international community, thus violating all terms of the international law." Furthermore, Safi stresses that part of the suffering of the Syrian people can be ascribed to the political complications which are in turn a result of the inaction of the international community towards the crimes of the Assad regime and its allies. The absence of an outright condemnation of the Russian support for the Assad regime and overlooking Assad's importing of terrorism from neighboring countries are the direct reason of the militarization of the Syrian revolution, which could have been entirely avoided from the onset of the revolution." Safi concluded his statement calling on the revolutionaries need to coordinate and unify, as it is the only way to avoid division, which was predicted by Robert Ford when he said: The most likely end game? De facto cantons, some of them controlled by local armed factions.

[SNC](#), 11:25 GMT, 6 March 2014. (mismatched quotation marks present in original)

My comments: The refusal of the Syrian National Coalition to negotiate with Hezbollah means the civil war will be decided militarily, *not* by negotiations. This stubborn refusal by the Coalition means more people will die in fighting.

The mention of "inaction of the international community" by the SNC should be irrelevant to the SNC's decision not to negotiate with Hezbollah.

The mention of the need of the rebels "to coordinate and unify" — while true — is also irrelevant to the SNC's decision not to negotiate with Hezbollah. The rambling in this SNC statement shows that the SNC does not think clearly.

Recall that on 19 Jan 2014, the SNC refused to attend Geneva2 if Iran appeared in Montreux on 22 Jan and delivered a 10-minute speech. (See my [third](#) essay on Syria.) Earlier, it took *eight months* to convince the Coalition to negotiate with the Syrian government. Refusal to speak to one's opponents is a childish decision that frustrates a civilized, negotiated solution to a problem.

9 Mar 2014

Syrian National Coalition "not yet ready" for Arab League

On 9 Mar 2014, Agence France-Presse reported:

Syria's seat at the Arab League will remain vacant until the opposition completes the formation of its institutions, the pan-Arab group's secretary-general Nabil el-Araby said on Sunday [9 Mar].

"The last Arab summit in Doha in March 2012 adopted the principle of granting Syria's seat within the League to the opposition, but it has not yet established its institutions and must take further steps in this regard," el-Araby said after a meeting of the Arab Ministerial Council.

....

Last November, Syrian National Coalition chief Ahmad Jarba said the opposition was claiming his country's seat in the organisation.

The Istanbul-based Coalition — which includes several opposition groups — is considered to be one of the most important representatives of the Syrian opposition. But it has yet to present a united front, and is struggling to impose its legitimacy on the ground.

"Syria opposition 'not yet ready for Arab League seat'," [GlobalPost](#) (AFP), 9 March 2014. Part quoted in "Syria opposition 'not yet ready' for Arab League seat," [Al-Jazeera](#) Blog, 13:11 GMT, 9 March 2014.

See also: [Al-Arabiya](#); [Gulf News](#)(AFP).

9 Mar 2014

Syrian National Council wants to play again

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.)

On 20 Feb 2014, the Coalition formally notified the Council that the Council was no longer part of the Coalition — "We didn't order them out. We just declared they are no longer a part of the coalition," a member of the Coalition's political committee told a [McClatchy](#) journalist.

In early February 2014, I noticed that the [website](#) of the Syrian National Council had been removed from the Internet, and I then concluded that the Council was extinct. However, when I looked again, on 25 Feb 2014 the Council's website had reappeared. Also on 25 Feb 2014, the most recent "daily news" mentioned on the Council's homepage is dated 21 Aug 2012, 18 months ago!

On 28 Feb, Agence France-Presse reported the Council wanted to rejoin the Coalition:

The opposition Syrian National Council said Friday [28 Feb] it will rejoin the umbrella coalition from which it withdrew in protest at the Geneva peace talks with the regime.

The SNC, the biggest bloc in Syria's opposition-in-exile, quit the National Coalition on January 20 because of its participation in the talks.

"Syria opposition National Council to rejoin Coalition," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 22:17 GMT, 28 Feb 2014.

Note that the Council wants to return to the Coalition, but it is *not* said whether the Coalition wants the Council to return.

On 9 March 2014, Reuters reported that the Council wanted to rejoin the Coalition.

(Strangely, the Reuters story does *not* mention the name of the group, but calls them "a large Qatar-backed bloc".)

A large Qatar-backed bloc that left Syria's opposition National Coalition has reversed its decision and wants to rejoin, setting the scene for a clash with the group's Saudi-backed president, opposition sources said on Sunday [9 March].

The 40-member bloc, which quit the 120-member coalition before Syrian peace talks began in Geneva in January, said it had returned to confront what it saw as its unfair exclusion from decision-making.

Infighting within the opposition coalition has undermined rebel efforts to take on forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and has also played into the hands of rival, more hardline Islamist outfits which include foreign militants.

Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Qatar-backed bloc says to rejoin Syrian opposition coalition," [Reuters](#), 21:21 GMT, 9 Mar 2014.

Notice that the Council now speaks of "its unfair exclusion from decision-making", when the Truth is that the Council voluntarily walked out of the meeting of the Coalition in January, and then the Council voluntarily resigned.

On 19 March, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported that the Council was supported by Qatar, while the majority of the Coalition was supported by Saudi Arabia. [Daily Star](#). In this way, the Syrian National Coalition is being dragged into the ongoing dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which was described [above](#).

On 29 March, I attempted to read the Council website to see if there was any information on their rejoining the Coalition, but the Council website was again offline. I also did a search of Google News for this topic, but found nothing since the above-mentioned stories.

10 Mar 2014 Coalition renounces Geneva2

On 10 March 2014, the president of the Syrian National Coalition delivered a speech at the Arab League meeting. The summary posted at the Coalition website says:

Ahmad Jarba, president of the Syrian Coalition, said the speeches delivered by countries who claim they support the Syrian people are futile, stressing that they cannot respond to the daily massacres committed against the Syrian people. "These speeches cannot end the ongoing massacres committed by the butcher of our time, aided by sectarian mercenaries and covered by his regional backers," Jarba told the opening session of a two-day meeting of the Arab foreign ministers in Cairo. "We have to move on from the description of the case to discuss our needs, especially in light of the ongoing massacres against the Syrian people, because the talk is no longer enough to address our demands. We went to Geneva II bypassing countless obstacles and backed by international guarantees and Arabic cover, and relying on our oppressed steadfast people. Everyone saw the practices of the Assad regime on the ground and during the negotiations to sabotage the peace conference." Jarba went on: "We accepted to negotiate even though Assad's forces were raining barrel bombs down on Syrian cities and the rising number of victims and mercenaries who have been flocking from Lebanon, Iraq and Iran to Syria. Those sectarian mercenaries are invading Yabroud from all sides in one of the most impudent sectarian invasions driven by long-lived feud of Iran's Ayatollahs." Furthermore, Jarba denounced the ineffective Arab and international positions towards the atrocities committed in Syria. "How long will we continue to limit ourselves to the fruitless speeches, and hide behind the walls of the blame and complain?" Jarba calls on everyone to "support the Syrian people with the advanced weapons that we have long promised to receive. Had the scourge of Hezbollah been dealt while it was budding in Lebanon, they would not have plagued us the way they are doing now." Jarba concluded his speech to the Arab foreign ministers saying that "time for diplomacy is over after the setback at Geneva II and the vindictive invasion of Yabroud. The Assad regime responded to our positive attitude of Geneva II by sending a clear message rejecting a political solution through intensifying the indiscriminate and brutal shelling on the unarmed civilians across Syria" Jarba asked

the Arab states to adopt a unified, not necessarily unanimous decision to deter aggression on us, starting from Syria.

"Syrian Coalition: Time for Diplomacy is Over after Setbacks at Geneva II," [SNC](#), 09:23 GMT, 10 Mar 2014.

My comments: The most shocking thing is that Jarba renounces Geneva2 negotiations: "time for diplomacy is over after the setback at Geneva II...." and the title of the press release says the same thing.

Note the hysterical propaganda by Jarba: "massacres committed by the butcher of our time", "invasions driven by long-lived feud of Iran's Ayatollahs", and "the scourge of Hezbollah".

Jarba is committed to a military solution by demanding that the rebels be given "the advanced weapons that we have long promised to receive."

10-14 Mar 2014 **Assad seems to be winning the civil war**

On 12 Mar 2014, Agence France-Presse reported:

As Syria's conflict enters its fourth year, ravaging the country and creating a massive humanitarian crisis, President Bashar al-Assad's regime is on the offensive to regain territory from a divided opposition.

Diplomatic efforts by Russia and the United States are all but on hold with the two powers now divided over the crisis in Ukraine, while the fighting continues on the ground in Syria.

....

After watching its territory shrink, the regime launched a counter-offensive in the spring of 2013, shored up by Lebanon's Shiite Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite fighters trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

It was bolstered by having avoided threatened Western military action in the wake of a deadly chemical weapons attack in August 2013 that activists blamed on the government.

And its strategy now has become to protect "useful Syria": the coast, the major towns of the north and south and key roads.

The opposition now controls more territory than the regime, but the regime controls the more densely populated regions of the country.

It is advancing on three fronts, south of the capital Damascus, in the strategic Qalamun region near the Lebanese border, and in the city of Aleppo in the country's north.

Near the capital, it has negotiated limited ceasefires with neighbourhoods under army sieges, where populations have suffered from dwindling food and medical supplies.

....

At the same time, the opposition is more divided than ever, fighting both the regime and its former ally, the jihadist Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Both moderate and Islamist rebels, and even Al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate Al-Nusra Front, are engaged in the bloody battle against ISIL that began in January [2014] and shows no sign of waning.

Despite its recent advances, experts say the regime lacks the manpower to retake all its lost territory.

Experts believe the opposition numbers around 100-150,000 fighters, among them between 10-20,000 foreign fighters.

There are an estimated 2,000 rebel battalions, with the Islamic Front coalition the most important.

The army numbers some 300,000, half of them conscripts, and can also count on the support of thousands of pro-regime militiamen.

But the regime has suffered heavy losses: 50,000 of its fighters have died in the past three years, the Observatory says.

"Neither side is winning," said Volker Perthes, director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, told AFP.

"Assad could, perhaps, retain the majority of the territory and apply a scorched earth policy to the areas beyond his control, but he'll never be able to restore all of the country under his regime," he added.

Perthes, the author of "Syria under Bashar," the disintegration of the country "is not a possibility, but a reality, and if the war ended tomorrow, it would take more than a decade for the country to recover."

"As Syria war enters fourth year, regime eyes victory," [Google](#), 12 Mar 2014.

Reprinted at [Global Post](#), 10 March and [SOHR](#).

On 14 March, *The Washington Post* published a story by Liz Sly:

Three years into the revolt against his rule, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is in a stronger position than ever before to quell the rebellion against his rule by Syrians who rose up to challenge his hold on power, first with peaceful protests and later with arms.

Aided by the steadfast support of his allies and the deepening disarray of his foes, Assad is pressing ahead with plans to be reelected to a third seven-year term this

summer while sustaining intense military pressure intended to crush his opponents.

The strategy is not new, but in recent months it has started to yield tangible progress in the form of slow but steady gains on several key fronts on the battlefield that call into question long-held perceptions of a stalemate.

Most notably, the government has pushed the rebels back or squeezed them into isolated pockets in large swathes of the territory surrounding Damascus, diminishing prospects that the opposition will soon be in a position to seriously threaten the capital or topple the regime.

....

Saturday [15 March] marks the third anniversary of the initially tentative anti-government demonstrations that spiraled into civil war, and many Syrians are wondering whether the 140,000 deaths and the displacement of millions of people were worth the price, [Abu Emad, a student activist who uses a pseudonym,] said.

....

Meanwhile, the poorly armed and highly disorganized rebels have not launched a significant offensive or captured an important military facility since the fall of Menagh air base in northern Aleppo province in the summer.

A much-anticipated rebel offensive in southern Syria, widely reported to be imminent after the collapse of peace talks in Geneva last month, has not materialized. Nor have new supplies of weapons from foreign backers that the Syrian opposition coalition said were promised last month.

Liz Sly, "On third anniversary of Syrian rebellion, Assad is steadily winning the war," [Washington Post](#), 14 March 2014.

See also: Patrick McDonnell, "Syrian war is slipping from the hands of battered rebels," [Los Angeles Times](#), 15 March 2014.

Underscoring Assad's victories, the Syrian Army and Hezbollah captured the strategic town of Yabroud on 16 March. Reuters reports that a total of 2400 rebels, jihadists, and the Nusra Front fled from Yabroud. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Arab News](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

See also: Patrick J. McDonnell, "As Syria civil war enters fourth year, rebels are clearly losing," [Los Angeles Times](#), 28 March 2014. ("As the Syrian conflict enters its fourth year, one thing is clear: The U.S.-backed rebels are losing the war.")

My comments: Ban, Obama, Kerry, and others repeatedly say that the military situation in Syria is a stalemate. This means no one can win, and the parties should negotiate a settlement. But, increasingly, journalists are reporting that Assad is winning the civil war in Syria. This may mean that talk of a "stalemate" may be propaganda intended to encourage a negotiated solution to the civil war.

Liz Sly quotes Abu Emad as wondering whether the civil war was worth the price. We can say now that the civil war was *not* worth the price of more than 146,000 dead, many buildings in ruins, destroying the economy of Syria, *and* Assad still firmly in power. But when the rebels began fighting in March 2011, they did not know they would *both* pay this terrible price *and* lose the civil war.

13 Mar 2014
Brahimi afraid of elections in Syria

On 13 March, Reuters reports that Brahimi was at the United Nations headquarters in New York City, where Brahimi opposed holding elections in Syria:

If Syria goes ahead with an election that would likely secure a new term for President Bashar al-Assad, the opposition will probably not be interested in pursuing further peace talks with the government, peace mediator Lakhdar Brahimi said on Thursday [13 March].

.....

"There is to my knowledge no official declaration yet in Damascus that this election is going to take place, but there are a lot of activities that seem to indicate that there is an election," Brahimi told reporters after briefing the U.N. Security Council.

"If there is an election, then my suspicion is that the opposition, all the oppositions, will probably not be interested in talking to the government," he said.

A Western diplomat inside Brahimi's closed-door briefing for the Security Council said Brahimi told its 15 member nations that he doubted another 7-year term for Assad would put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

Louis Charbonneau, "Mediator Brahimi says Syria election now won't aid peace talks," [Reuters](#), 19:34 GMT, 13 March 2014.

See also:

- "Amid Preparations, Mediator Says Syria Vote Would Doom Talks," [NY Times](#).
- "Brahimi warns Syria election could torpedo talks," [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon.
- "Brahimi: Syria vote would jeopardize peace talks," [Al-Arabiya](#) ("The poll must be held between 60 and 90 days before Assad's term ends on July 17.").
- "Syrian vote would threaten peace talks," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 19:32 GMT, 13 March.
- "Syrian opposition leaders threaten to walk away from talks if Assad runs for third term," [Al-Bawaba](#), 19:11 GMT, 14 March.

In November 2009, there was an election in Afghanistan, with president Karzai running for re-election and being challenged by Abdullah. When Abdullah withdrew as a candidate, the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, famously said that an election with only one candidate could still be a legitimate election. Her exact words were:

With respect to Afghanistan and Dr. Abdullah's decision, I think that it is his decision to make. Whatever went into that determination is obviously his choice. But I do not think it affects the legitimacy. There have been other situations in our own country as well as around the world where, in a runoff election, one of the parties decides, for whatever reason, that they are not going to go on. I do not think that that in any way affects the legitimacy. And I would just add that when President Karzai accepted the second round without knowing what the consequences and outcome would be, that bestowed legitimacy from that moment forward, and Dr. Abdullah's decision does not in any way take away from that.

Hillary Clinton, "Remarks With Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu," [State Dept.](#), 31 Oct 2009.

See also: Simon Tisdall, "The Afghan election: a five-star debacle," [The Guardian](#), 1 Nov 2009.

My comments: Hillary Clinton provided a regrettable precedent for the U.S. Government to endorse a fraudulent election with only one candidate. A nonfraudulent election with only one candidate is akin to nominating someone by acclamation.

However, one hopes that both (1) Assad will permit credible opposition candidate(s) and (2) the Syrian election will *not* be rigged to automatically re-elect Assad.

One wonders why the rebels and Brahimi are so afraid of an election in Syria. An election is the essence of the democratic process. An election could avoid the folly of foreign meddlers imposing on the people of Syria the Syrian National Coalition as a transitional government.

Brahimi's concern about elections torpedoing Geneva2 negotiations seems pointless after the Coalition has already [renounced](#) Geneva2. Nevertheless, it is *not* clear why an election should torpedo Geneva2. Even with a transitional government off the table, the parties still need to negotiate ceasefires, prisoner exchanges, integrate moderate rebels into the Syrian army,

[Above](#), I commented on the lack of coverage by journalists for the 13 March death toll announcement from Syria. I wonder if people are becoming frustrated with bad news from Syria. No one knows how to compel Assad to deliver his chemical weapons to OPCW for destruction. No one knows how to motivate the parties in Syria — many of whom refuse to meet other parties face-to-face — to negotiate an end to their civil war. The stubborn, belligerent nature of *all* of the parties defies a rational solution to the civil war. In this dismal situation, is the least worst solution simply to abandon Geneva2, let Assad be re-elected, and let Assad eventually win the civil war? If diplomats at the United Nations continue to be ineffective, we may learn the answer to this question later this year, as Assad continues his assault.

Syrian election law

Agence France-Press reports on the new election law passed by the legislature in Syria:

A new electoral law approved by parliament Thursday [13 March] says any candidate must have lived in Syria for the past 10 years and not hold any other nationality.

That effectively bars any member of the Istanbul-based National Coalition, an umbrella opposition group.

The only other candidates who appear eligible would be those from the tolerated opposition in Damascus, who have little popular support and no connection to the rebels.

"New law paves way for re-election of Syria's Assad," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 21:46 GMT, 14 March 2014.

Reuters reported:

"Section 30 of the draft law stipulates that candidates for the office of president of the republic must ... have maintained continuous, permanent residence in the Syrian Arab Republic for a period of no less than 10 years at the time of seeking nomination," the Syrian state news agency SANA said.

No one in the opposition has announced an intention to challenge Assad in elections that are due to be held by July. Many have lived outside of Syria since before the revolt began in March 2011, and more left in the ensuing security crackdown.

The Western-backed opposition Syrian National Coalition, whose leaders are outside Syria, maintains a provisional government for rebel-held areas based in Istanbul.

The legislation sets further conditions requiring candidates to be at least 40 years old, to hold Syrian citizenship only, to be a child of Syrian citizens and married only to a Syrian citizen, and to be free of criminal convictions.

Many of these terms, including the residency requirement, were introduced as amendments to the constitution approved in a referendum two years ago.

Stephen Kalin, "Syrian presidential election law excludes most opposition leaders," [Reuters](#), 00:55 GMT, 15 Mar 2014.

On 15-29 March, I looked at the English-language website of SANA to obtain the official translation of this new election statute, but found nothing at the English-language SANA website, although an English-language translation of the 17 March amendment to the Traffic and Vehicles Law was promptly posted to this website.

15 Mar 2014 Syrian National Coalition belligerent

On 15 March, the Associated Press reported:

The main Western-backed opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, vowed in a statement Saturday [15 March] marking the conflict's third anniversary "to bring down the Assad regime that is the main source of the Syrian people's suffering." The coalition's chief Ahmad al-Jarba attacked Assad's main backer Iran, as well as Lebanon's Hezbollah and Shiite fighters who came from Iraq to fight with government forces. He urged countries backing the opposition "to commit to their promises of

giving sophisticated weapons" to rebels.

"We are fighting a brutal war and facing enemies who have no values or morals such as the gangs of (Hezbollah leader Sheik) Hassan Nasrallah ... mercenaries of hypocrisy coming from Iraq all the way to the head of the snake in Tehran," al-Jarba said in a speech in Istanbul. "Oh Syrians: Our revolution will be victorious and the chemical terrorist regime will go. The battle is not long because we have passed the most difficult part."

State media in Syria did not mention the anniversary.

....

"I think we have to be honest. The situation in Syria is getting worse, not better, and it hasn't got better since the security council resolution [on 22 Feb 2014]," said Justin Forsyth of Save the Children. "More people have been killed, more people have fled. In terms of on the ground, changing lives, saving children, we are not even close to getting impact."

Bassem Mroue & Daa Hadid, "Syria Conflict Has 3rd Anniversary Amid Offensive," [Associated Press](#), 16:36 GMT, 15 Mar 2014.

On 15 Mar, *Al-Arabiya* reported:

The head of main opposition group the Syrian National Coalition urged allies on Saturday [15 March] to supply rebel forces with weapons to beat President Bashar al-Assad's regime, on the day of the Syrian uprising's third anniversary.

"We are renewing our call to our friends for an immediate supply of arms, which they cut before Geneva," Ahmed Jarba told reporters during a televised press conference.

....

Vowing that his side would be "victorious" in the conflict, the opposition head said "we have made a promise to God to continue the battle even if we are alone."

"Jarba urges Syrian opposition 'friends' for arms," [Al-Arabiya](#), 15:09 GMT, 15 Mar 2014.

Agence France-Presse reported:

Leader of the Syrian opposition Ahmad Jarba called on the "free world" to provide "the means to fight" the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and jihadist rebels, as the conflict entered its fourth year on Saturday [15 March].

An article attributed to Jarba on the website of French newspaper *Le Monde* said: "Nothing and no one was able — or willing — to save the Syrian people, either from Assad's missiles and bombs, or from torture and death in his dungeons, or from suffocation and asphyxiation by chemical weapons."

Despite the loss of 146,000 lives and the millions displaced, Jarba said Assad had "failed to crush the revolution" and "would never succeed".

He called on the international community to finally provide the military backing to oust the regime.

"Syrian opposition leader calls for 'means to fight' Assad," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 18:00 GMT, 15 Mar 2014.

See also: [Al-Bawaba](#).

The website of the Syrian National Coalition was offline during 15-28 March, so I could not immediately access the official version of Jarba's speech at their website. I quoted above from three different journalists' reports on the speech, in case the speech was deleted from the Coalition's website before the Coalition's website was again online. Briefly, Google showed a cached copy of the Coalition's homepage, which contained a link to a [press release](#), on 15 Mar 2014. However, I have not been able to access this press release. On 29-31 March, the Arabic-language website of the Coalition was again online, but there was no English-language version.

On 10 March, Jarba was similarly belligerent in a speech to the Arab League, which was reported [above](#).

On 25 March, Jarba spoke at a meeting of the Arab League and asked for "sophisticated weapons" for the rebels. [GlobalPost](#), 12:18 GMT, 25 March 2014; [Al-Jazeera](#).

My comments: As mentioned above, the Syrian National Coalition website was offline during 15-28 March. In my opinion, an organization who can not operate a reliable website should *not* be entrusted with operating a government. There is no need to take an entire website offline for almost two weeks, when developing a new website.

The belligerence of the Coalition is really stupid. The rebels have been unable to defeat Assad — not even with the assistance of the jihadists and Al-Qaeda — during three years of civil war. The rebels are weaker now than in the past, so there is no rational reason to believe the rebels will defeat Assad. The Syrian civil war has already destroyed much of Syria (see [Conclusion](#) of this essay). However, it is certain that continued fighting will kill more people, and destroy more buildings.

Giving more munitions to the Coalition is like giving a big box of matches to a pyromaniac child who has already burned down one building.

18 Mar 2014 USA closes dead Syrian Embassy in USA

On 28 Feb, Robert Ford, the U.S. Ambassador to Syria, retired. On 17 March, Daniel Rubinstein was appointed U.S. Special Envoy for Syria. [State Dept](#).

The website of the Syrian embassy in Washington, DC had the following statement since 10 March 2014:

Please Note that Embassy of Syria would not be able to proceed any consular services starting Tuesday March 18, 2014. Thank you for understanding [Syrian Embassy](#). (no final period in original)
No reason was given for this suspension of consular services by the Syrian government.

Just before noon Boston time on 18 Mar, the U.S. State Department issued a press release by Daniel Rubinstein:

This week marks the three-year anniversary of the Syrian revolution. For three years, Bashar al-Assad has refused to heed the call of the Syrian people to step aside. He has directed a war against his own people and created a humanitarian catastrophe in order to hold on to power and protect his narrow interests.

Following the announcement that the Syrian Embassy has suspended its provision of consular services, and in consideration of the atrocities the Assad regime has committed against the Syrian people, we have determined it is unacceptable for individuals appointed by that regime to conduct diplomatic or consular operations in the United States.

Consequently, the United States notified the Syrian government today [18 March] that it must immediately suspend operations of its Embassy in Washington, D.C. and its honorary consulates in Troy, Michigan, and Houston, Texas. Syrian diplomats at the embassy and Syrian honorary consulates are no longer permitted to perform diplomatic or consular functions and those who are not U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents must depart the United States.

Despite the differences between our governments, the United States continues to maintain diplomatic relations with the state of Syria as an expression of our longstanding ties with the Syrian people, an interest that will endure long after Bashar al-Assad leaves power.

The United States will continue to assist those seeking change in Syria, to help end the slaughter, and to resolve the crisis through negotiations — for the benefit of the Syrian people.

Daniel Rubinstein, "Statement by Special Envoy for Syria Daniel Rubinstein," [State Dept.](#), 18 Mar 2014.

John Kerry gave four interviews to journalists on 18 March. Two of those interviews asked about the closure of the Syrian Embassy:

QUESTION: I want to turn now to Syria. We learned today that the U.S. is suspending diplomatic relations with Syria here in the United States. Why now and why not sooner, considering we're three years into this crisis?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, I think that everybody had high hopes that there would be a transformation at some point in time, but given their intransigence in the diplomatic process through the negotiations, given the fact that they've stopped their consular services here and they're not providing any, and given the illegitimacy of the regime, when you add it all together it just seemed inappropriate to have that continue

here.

John Kerry, "Interview With Nikole Killion of Hearst Television," [State Dept.](#), 18 March 2014.

QUESTION: Syria, the Embassy today. What happened there?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, the Embassy of Syria, first of all, is not doing what an embassy is supposed to do, which is consular work and activities. They're not engaging in that. So there's fundamentally no purpose in being here. But beyond that, we believe Assad and his regime have lost any kind of legitimacy in terms of governance, and if they're not doing what their embassies are supposed to do locally, there's no reason to have it open, period.

John Kerry, "Interview With Jaime Costello of Scripps Howard News Service, WMAR," [State Dept.](#), 18 March 2014.

At the State Department Daily Press Briefing, on 18 March, Spokesperson Jen Psaki said:

MS. PSAKI: [reiterating Rubinstein's statement] And as was noted in the statement, the Syrian Embassy in Washington just last week — so March 10th — on its website announced it would no longer provide consular services. That's, of course, different from closing an embassy, but we felt, as the statement noted, that given that, this was a necessary step for us to take.

....

QUESTION: Okay. All right. But the net effect is that the Syrian Embassy in Washington, which had been operating without an ambassador —

MS. PSAKI: Correct.

QUESTION: — and under very —

MS. PSAKI: Limited staffing. Yes.

QUESTION: — very limited staffing and services to anybody —

MS. PSAKI: Yes. Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: — is now closed?

MS. PSAKI: Correct.

....

MS. PSAKI: Let me just give you a specific — just in case this is someone's next question. Diplomats and their families will have until March 31st to get their affairs in order and depart. Administrative staff will have until April 30th to appropriately shutter the mission before they must depart. Typically, it's 30 days for administrative staff, so

obviously it's longer than that, and typically 10 days for diplomatic staff.

....

["less than a dozen" people work at the Syrian embassy in Washington, DC.]

....

MS. PSAKI: They announced on March 10th on their website that they would no longer provide consular services.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 18 March 2014, beginning at 12:52 EDT.

See also:

- [Reuters](#), 11:54 EDT, 18 Mar 2014 ("Efforts by the United States and Russia to broker a peace settlement now appear to have faded further amid worsening tensions between Moscow and Washington over Ukraine.").
- [Associated Press](#), 12:25 EDT, 18 Mar 2014.
- [Agence France Presse](#), 12:44 EDT, 18 Mar 2014.
- [Arab News](#).
- [Al-Arabiya](#), 18 March.
- [Reuters](#), 18:04 EDT, 18 March.
- [Al-Jazeera](#), 19 March.

19 Mar 2014

On the morning of 19 March, Jen Psaki posted a press release that clarifies several items at the press briefing on 18 March:

Question: Now that Syrian Embassy personnel have been instructed to leave the United States, what happens to their buildings/facilities? Who is responsible for securing them? When did the Syrian Ambassador depart and can you provide information about how many Syrian diplomats this will impact? Were there American citizens employed by the Syrian Embassy?

Answer: The State Department is prepared to consider, on the basis of reciprocity, the appointment of a third State to which the Syrian government may entrust the custody of the premises of its mission, together with its property and archives, and the protection of its interests. Alternatively, the Syrian government may seek the Department's approval of its assignment of these responsibilities to a member of its locally employed staff, who is either a citizen or legal permanent resident of the United States.

If such arrangements have not been finalized or approved by the Department before March 31, 2014, in accordance with Article 43 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the Department will assume responsibility for ensuring the protection and preservation of the premises of the Syrian Mission, together with its

property and archives.

The Syrian Ambassador departed Washington in December 2011. Yesterday's action will impact foreign mission personnel at the Syrian Embassy. Other than the Honorary Consuls, located in Michigan and Texas, the Department is unaware of any U.S. citizens working at the Syrian Embassy.

[State Dept.](#), 19 March 2014.

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement:

America's measures arouse concern and run counter the Moscow-Washington agreement on the peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis based on the Geneva communique of June 30, 2012 that envisages holding talks with the Syrian government and the opposition.

"Russia concerned over US decision to suspend activity of Syrian embassy, consulates," [TASS](#), 08:09 EDT, 19 March 2014.

See also [Voice of Russia](#).

On 20 March, the English-language website of the Russian Foreign Ministry posted the entire statement:

On the 18 March, the United States officially announced their decision to suspend operations of the SAR [Syrian Arab Republic] Embassy in Washington and the honorary consulates in Troy (Michigan) and Houston (Texas), having requested that the diplomatic employees of these missions leave the country. Daniel Rubinstein made this statement as a debut in his new position as the US Special Envoy for Syria. His statement highlighted that Washington considered it "unacceptable for individuals appointed by that regime to conduct diplomatic or consular operations in the United States". Nevertheless, the United States will not break diplomatic relations with Syria, because (as he emphasises) they are interested in maintaining their longstanding ties with the Syrian people, "an interest that will endure long after Bashar al-Assad leaves power". This decision does not affect the issue of the stay of the Permanent Mission of Syria to the UN in New York.

The step undertaken by the United States cannot but cause concerns and disappointment. In fact, it is contrary to the agreement reached earlier between Moscow and Washington, to lead the case to a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis, on the basis of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, jointly and energetically, through insistent work with the Syrian government and the opposition. By making such a unilateral decision, our US partners in fact deprive themselves of the role of co-sponsor in the process of political settlement in the SAR and intentionally or unintentionally play on the inexorable Syrian opposition, which also includes terrorists from al-Qaeda.

It is evident that such an approach does not contribute to the efforts to implement unanimously adopted UN Security Council resolutions 2118 and 2139. It looks like a recurring social engineering policy, which demonstrated its inferiority in the example of several Middle Eastern countries. It turns out that the goal of overthrowing the regime in Damascus prevails over the tasks of assisting in the chemical demilitarisation of the SAR and assisting millions of Syrians, who have suffered in the armed conflict.

These tasks cannot be solved without immediate interaction with the Syrian government.

We appeal to our US partners to look at the situation in Syria in a more balanced and objective way, as the interests of stopping the armed conflict faster and achieving a peaceful political settlement in this country through the continuation of the Geneva negotiation process require.

"Comment by the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the decision of the US authorities to suspend operations of the Embassy and honorary consulates of Syria in the United States," [Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), 19 March 2014.

The Russian position is strange, because it was the Syrian government who first suspended all consular activity at their embassy and two consulates in the USA. Perhaps the Russians are responding to — but not citing — Kerry's inflammatory reason about the "illegitimacy" of Assad's government.

At the State Department Daily Press Briefing, on 19 March, Spokesperson Jen Psaki said:

QUESTION: The Russians are saying that this means that you're renouncing your role as a co-sponsor, because you're effectively — although you said yesterday that you're still having diplomatic ties with Damascus, you're effectively cutting off an avenue to have those ties through.

MS. PSAKI: That is absolutely false. We are — continue to be committed to and focused on seeing a political solution reached here through the Geneva process, through a diplomatic process. As we've said many times, a political solution is the only solution that will end the crisis on the ground in Syria. And this is an issue that Secretary Kerry has been speaking with, of course, not only the Russians but his counterparts around the world on, and we remain an active and committed partner in that process.

QUESTION: Have you actually seen the Russian Foreign Ministry statement?

MS. PSAKI: I have not —

QUESTION: Because it seems — at least the one that I saw, and maybe it's been corrected since, but it was a bit confused. It was — it's talking about the suspension of operations of the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, not about the suspension of —

MS. PSAKI: I haven't seen the specifics of it.

....

QUESTION: There's some suggestion out there that by maintaining that you still have diplomatic relations with Damascus, that that's a tacit recognition of Bashar al-Assad as the head of state.

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely not. I think we haven't been more clear about our belief that

there's no future for Bashar al-Assad in Syria, that anyone who brutalizes their people, as he has, has no future in their country.

....

QUESTION: But you can't — you don't deny that he is the head of state, do you?

MS. PSAKI: No, but that wasn't the question that was asked.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, it kind of was. I mean, you never said that he's not the legitimate — I mean, you never said he is not the head of state of Syria, have you? You've just said his days are numbered and you don't think that he should be.

MS. PSAKI: We have said he's lost his legitimacy, that anyone who brutalizes their people, like he has, has no future in Syria.

....

QUESTION: How can you say you are cooperating with Russia on Syria with today's statements from Moscow shows that you have extreme contradiction between your position and the Russian position on what's happening in Syria, especially after the Syrian army took over the city of Yabroud. You know they are praising the regime and Hezbollah for that action.

MS. PSAKI: Well, as has been the case for weeks if not months, there are cases where we have disagreements with the Russians, and we're happy to speak publicly about those as they come up. But there are still cases where we are working with them, including the implementation of the chemical weapons process, including seeing if there's a diplomatic path forward. It doesn't mean we agree on every piece. We don't and we haven't throughout the process.

....

MS. PSAKI: This is a case where I think if you ask the Russians, I think they'd pretty clearly tell you they don't want to see chemical weapons ... across Syria. They worked with us on that end. They agree and they've said publicly they see a political solution and a political end to the crisis in Syria. They're not working with us on Syria, or Iran for that matter, as a favor to the United States. They have their own interests in those regions and seeing an end to that — the conflict in Syria as well as seeing an end to Iran taking steps to acquire a nuclear weapon.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 19 March 2014, beginning at 13:06 EDT.

Agence France-Presse reported:

Secretary of State John Kerry said the decision was taken because "the illegitimacy of the Assad regime is so overwhelming".

"So we just felt the idea that this embassy is sitting here with representation that we

could take seriously is an insult, and we closed it. It's that simple."

....

Moscow also criticised the US decision, viewing it with "concern and disappointment."

"By making such a unilateral move, our American partners in essence are depriving themselves of the role of cosponsor of the process of political regulation in Syria," the foreign ministry said.

Russia accused Washington of "playing into the hands of the hard-core Syrian opposition", and said it went against a 2012 international accord on a political transition in Syria.

It also said Washington was prioritising regime change over the tasks of destroying Syria's chemical weapons and helping the country's people.

"Resolving these without direct cooperation with the Syrian government is impossible," the statement said.

Syria's embassy had been operating for some time without its ambassador, who left the country in December 2011.

"Syria, Russia criticise US over embassy closure," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 14:07 EDT, 19 Mar 2014.

My comments: The USA closed Assad's embassy and two consular offices in the USA, partly because Assad refused to resign — as demanded by Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Kerry. The other initial reason for the U.S. decision was that the Syrian government, for unknown reasons, had suspended all consular services in the USA. On 18 March 2014, the U.S. Government did *not* mention that there was no Syrian ambassador to the USA since Dec 2011.

The U.S. decision to close the Syrian Embassy is reasonable, given that both (1) there has been no Syrian ambassador to the USA for 27 months (since Dec 2011), and (2) the Syrian government decided to stop providing consular services in the USA. Given these two good reasons, there was absolutely no need for the U.S. Government to spew various other reasons that were unnecessary, inflammatory, and undiplomatic. For three years, the U.S. Government has been obsessed with demanding Assad's resignation, which is an infringement of the sovereign right of the Syrian people to choose their own leader. The U.S. Government has repeatedly declared that Assad lacks "legitimacy" to lead Syria, a comment that is also *not* appropriate.

Note that the USA has *not* ended diplomatic relations with Syria, although the U.S. Embassy in Damascus has been closed since 6 Feb 2012 and now the Syrian Embassy in Washington is closed. One wonders how much "diplomatic relations" remain when neither nation has an embassy in the other nation, there is zero routine diplomatic contact between the two nations, and the USA persists in demanding Assad's resignation. In effect, Syria now joins

North Korea, Cuba, and Iran as nations with whom the USA has no diplomatic relations.

Sometimes, U.S. politicians wonder why the USA has so little diplomatic clout in the world. Could it be because the Americans arrogantly appoint themselves as policeman of the world, threatening unilateral military action against sovereign nations (e.g., like Obama threatened against Syria in August 2013), declaring which leaders have "legitimacy", and demanding regime change when U.S. politicians don't like a foreign leader? And then the U.S. Government gives unnecessarily inflammatory reasons for closing the Syrian Embassy, when the USA had *two* perfectly good reasons.

18 Mar 2014
Syria frustrated with Geneva2

On the night of 18 Mar, *The Wall Street Journal* reported:

The Syrian regime sees no point in further peace talks in Geneva if the opposition and its Western backers keep insisting that President Bashar al-Assad relinquish power, the deputy foreign minister said.

In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* on Tuesday [18 March], Faisal al Mekdad indicated his regime had the backing of longtime ally Russia in its stance on the Geneva talks. The stalled negotiations are one of the major Middle East initiatives now clouded by uncertainty as a standoff escalates between Russia and the U.S. over Moscow's plan to annex Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. The bitter fallout has raised doubts about the viability of recent U.S.-Russian diplomatic cooperation on Syria.

"The issue of [Assad] relinquishing power is now behind us and this is a flagrant interference in Syria's internal affairs," Mr. Mekdad said from his office at the Foreign Ministry in Damascus. "This is completely finished and we are not ready to discuss it at all, at all."

Sam Dagher, "Syrian Official Casts Doubts on Geneva Talks, Says Assad Won't Go," [Wall Street Journal](#), 22:36 GMT, 18 Mar 2014.

My comments: The Syrian civil war began as an insurrection against the lawful government of Assad. Neighboring nations with a Sunni majority began sending weapons to the rebels, in the hope of ending the Shiite government of Syria. Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon — each Shiite dominated — poured weapons and troops into Syria to support Assad. The civil war in Syria then became a sectarian proxy war between Shiites (e.g., Iran and Hezbollah) and Sunnis (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, ISIL). Additionally, jihadists and Al-Qaeda essentially hijacked the civil war from the moderate rebels. The jihadists and Al-Qaeda not only want to overthrow Assad, but also want to establish a Sunni Islamic caliphate in Syria.

After three years of fighting, much of Syria is in ruins, and the rebels have been unable to oust Assad from office. Assad has no reason to resign, as he is in a militarily dominant position, as described [above](#).

In my opinion, diplomats — especially Ban, Brahimi, and Kerry — need to abandon the "transitional governing body" in the Geneva1 Communiqué. That transitional government *may* have been reasonable in June 2012, but the current reality in Syria is that the rebels have no hope of deposing Assad. With the transitional government off the table, Geneva2 could focus on productive discussions about ceasefires, prisoner exchanges, integrating moderate rebels into the Syrian army, humanitarian relief, etc.

In my opinion, Assad is reasonable to oppose negotiations as long as the focus of the negotiations is to create a transitional government in Syria. The problem is the Syrian National Coalition will likely refuse to negotiate with Assad's government, unless there is the promise that Assad will soon resign.

The intransigence of the Coalition has been encouraged by Obama and Kerry, with the frequent U.S. declarations that Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of the Syrian government. But the reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, and the rebels are unable to force Assad to resign.

20-21 Mar 2014

Humanitarian aid trucks from Turkey to Syria

Both Assad and the opposition fighters have been besieging cities in Syria, denying food and medical supplies to civilians trapped inside those cities. It should *not* be necessary to say this is an unacceptable form of warfare.

On 26 Feb, *Al-Jazeera* reported that rebels controlled most of the border crossings between Turkey and Syria. At that time, there was a long line of U.N. chartered trucks full of aid waiting in Turkey to enter Syria, some waiting for three weeks (i.e., since 5 Feb). [Al-Jazeera](#).

To solve this problem, the 22 Feb U.N. Resolution says:

Demands that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders, in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches people in need through the most direct routes;

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2139, § 6, 22 Feb 2014.

Finally, on 20 March, some U.N. trucks were allowed into Syria. Reuters reports:

U.N. aid trucks crossed from Turkey into Syria for the first time on Thursday [20 March], in a move relief officials hope will pave the way for greater humanitarian access to civilians hardest hit by three years of war.

But with the convoy heading to a region controlled by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, doubts remained whether those in rebel-held areas most urgently in need would benefit.

The trucks rolled through the largely deserted frontier at the Nusaybin border post

taking food supplies, bedding and medicine towards the ethnic Kurdish city of Qamishli in Syria.

"It is the first time in three years of this brutal conflict that the U.N. has been able to carry aid across into Syria from Turkey," Nigel Fisher, the United Nations' regional humanitarian coordinator, said in a statement.

Umit Bektas, "First U.N. aid trucks cross from Turkey into Syria," [Reuters](#), 18:29 GMT, 20 Mar 2014.

But less than 24 hours after it entered Syria, the first convoy of U.N. aid trucks was halted. Reuters reports:

The first U.N. convoy carrying aid from Turkey into Syria was halted on Friday [21 March], less than 24 hours after the long-awaited humanitarian mission began, with one aid official blaming "administrative hurdles" thrown up by the Syrian government.

The convoy only became possible last month after the U.N. Security Council reached a rare moment of unity on Syria, calling on all sides to provide humanitarian access.

Eight out of a total of 79 trucks carrying medicine, food and bedding to civilians in the Kurdish city of Qamishli were able to cross before the delay, as co-ordinators sought permission from the Syrian government to clear customs during the Syrian weekend, the United Nations said.

"We have overall agreement from the Syrian government but today it's the weekend and the Syrian part of the border is closed," U.N. regional humanitarian coordinator Nigel Fisher said.

"Thursday [20 March] was Mother's Day — a public holiday in Syria so the government sent a special letter to customs to open the border and we are working to see if the same would be possible on Saturday [22 March] but movement on Friday is very unlikely," he said.

Dasha Afanasieva, "Aid officials frustrated as Syria convoy halted on second day," [Reuters](#), 17:12 GMT, 21 Mar 2014.

My comments: This kind of problem created by the Syrian government is *not* the "rapid ... and unhindered humanitarian access" demanded by the U.N. Security Council. But there will be no sanctions by the U.N. for violation of the U.N. Resolution, because Russia would surely veto any sanctions.

With the exception of Reuters, most journalists ignored this story. The Associated Press did not report this story during 20-23 March. *If* news media would prominently report violations of U.N. Resolutions, maybe some nations would be embarrassed or humiliated into obeying the Resolutions.

23 Mar 2014
Ban realizes U.N. Resolution 2139 failed

On the night of 23 Mar, Reuters broke the story that Ban Ki-moon had reported that U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 was being ignored by parties in Syria:

The United Nations accused Syria's government and rebels of hindering aid access, suggesting both sides could be violating U.N. Security Council demands that emergency relief reach civilians caught in the crossfire of the three-year civil war.

A month after the 15-member council achieved rare unity to unanimously approve a resolution demanding rapid, safe and unhindered aid access, including across borders, U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon said the situation "remains extremely challenging."

In Ban's first report to the council on the implementation of the February 22 resolution — obtained by Reuters on Sunday [23 March] — he said 175,000 people remain besieged by government forces and 45,000 people trapped by opposition groups in several areas.

No new ceasefires were brokered to gain access to these areas and there were breaches of existing ceasefires, Ban said.

....

The Security Council expressed "its intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance" with the resolution. But diplomats say Russia is unlikely to agree to any action, such as sanctions, if Syria's government was found to be at fault.

The Security Council is due to discuss Ban's report on Friday [28 March], diplomats said.

Russia, supported by China, has shielded its ally Syria on the Security Council during the three-year war. They had previously vetoed three resolutions that would have condemned Syria's government and threatened it with possible sanctions.

In the 13-page report, Ban said there were significant challenges to the delivery of aid in Syria. "Including: the need for multiple requests for approval of inter-agency convoys, which often go unanswered; the Government's lack of internal communication of approvals to those on the ground, resulting in denial of access or delays at checkpoints; and continued insecurity," Ban said. "Increased fighting between armed opposition groups, including between Free Syrian Army (FSA)-aligned and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq), has complicated the delivery of assistance including the cutting off of key access routes in some locations in the northern parts of the country," he said. Michelle Nichols, "Despite U.N. resolution, Syria's war foes hinder aid access: Ban," [Reuters](#), 22:54 EDT, 23 Mar 2014.

See also: Edith M. Lederer, "UN Chief Says Both Sides Block Aid To Syrians," [Associated Press](#), 20:25 EDT, 24 Mar 2014.

In reading Ban's 13-page Report on the failure of Resolution 2139, I think the following excerpts are particularly significant:

¶4. During the reporting period [22 February to 21 March 2014], indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, including aerial bombings, shelling, mortars and car bombs in populated areas, caused mass civilian death and injuries and forced displacement. Publicly available reports indicate that clashes between government and opposition forces continued in most parts of the Syrian Arab Republic. There were continued reports of artillery shelling and air strikes, including the use of barrel bombs, by government forces. Car bombings and suicide attacks, including against civilian targets, resulted in civilian deaths and injuries. Many such attacks were claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Nusrah Front. Clashes also took place between armed opposition groups and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, mainly in the north. Government-controlled cities and towns, including Damascus, were subject to mortar attacks by armed opposition groups. Reported daily death tolls were on average in excess of 200 people, including civilians.

....

¶9. During the reporting period, the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic presented the findings from its report (A/HRC/25/65) to the Human Rights Council. The report, which covers investigations from 15 July 2013 to 20 January 2014, states that government forces and pro-government militia have committed crimes against humanity and war crimes, including massacres. Armed opposition groups have also committed war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law, including massacres.

....

¶13. Also according to the oral update [on 18 March 2014, which covered violations from 20 January to 10 March, the commission of inquiry reported that], non-State armed groups have increasingly resorted to suicide bombings and the use of improvised explosive devices. On 11 March, three fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant wearing explosive vests detonated themselves at a municipal office in Quamishli, Al-Hasakeh governorate. Five people were killed and eight wounded. There were no military targets in the area. The primary purpose of the attack was to spread terror among civilians, a violation of international humanitarian law.

¶14. During the reporting period, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights received reports that, in Ar-Raqqa governorate, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant imposed discriminatory measures on the Christian community, including prohibiting the building or repair of churches and monasteries, the display of crosses and bibles in a visible manner, the ringing of church bells and the practising of rituals unless in a church. It further called for Christian adult men to pay a special tax for non-Muslims (*jizyah*).

¶15. Hospitals, ambulances and medical staff continued to come under attack. For example, the commission of inquiry stated in its oral update that, on 23 February, a car bomb targeted the Orient Medical Clinic in the opposition-controlled town of Atmeh, near the Syrian-Turkish border, killing at least nine people. The Islamic State in Iraq

and the Levant claimed responsibility for the attack. According to United Nations field sources, 5 civilians were killed and 13 injured in an explosion near Al-Zaem hospital in the government-held Akrama neighbourhood of the city of Homs on 27 February. Medical facilities also continue to be used for military purposes. At least 20 hospitals remain occupied by armed forces and armed opposition groups with no respect for their civilian character.

....

¶19. As the conflict intensifies and fighting between armed groups increases, more people are slipping out of the reach of humanitarian organizations. Around 3.5 million people are now estimated to be in need of assistance in hard-to-reach areas, an increase of 1 million since the beginning of 2014.

....

¶23. Around 220,000 people remain besieged in the old city of Homs, Nubul and Zahra, Madamiyat Elsham, eastern Ghouta, Darayya and other locations (see map 1). Around 175,000 people are besieged by government forces and 45,000 by opposition groups.

¶24. No new ceasefires were reached in besieged areas during the reporting period [22 February to 21 March 2014]. In Madamiyat Elsham, as well as in Bwayda village and Qudsaya, ceasefire negotiations were unsuccessful. In Zahra and Hosn (rural Homs), parties to the conflict did not agree upon proposals for a ceasefire by local councils.

....

¶26. In Homs, following the ceasefire that allowed the evacuation of 1,366 people from the old city in early February, shelling and bombing returned to pre-ceasefire levels during the reporting period. Since 15 March, an additional 200 people, including 35 adult men, have been evacuated from the old city following an agreement between the parties and the Governor of Homs. It is estimated that 2,000 people remain trapped in the old city.

¶27. In Aleppo governorate, opposition groups are demanding that the siege of eastern Ghouta be lifted before they lift the siege of Zahra and Nubul, where around 45,000 people remain besieged. However, 5,088 children were vaccinated against polio in March.

....

¶43. As the conflict enters its fourth year, indiscriminate and disproportionate violence and brutality continues unabated. More than 9.3 million people in the Syrian Arab Republic are in need of humanitarian assistance, 6.5 million of whom are internally displaced. Nearly 2.6 million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries and

North Africa.

¶44. Cities and villages have been reduced to rubble, communities are threatened and attacked and millions have been forced to flee. Poverty is on the rise. Weapons continue to flow into the country and are used indiscriminately against civilians. Health facilities and schools and other civilian infrastructure continue to be used for military purposes. Grave crimes go unpunished and thousands remain in captivity without recourse to due process.

¶45. I am extremely concerned at the continuing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in the Syrian Arab Republic and the culture of impunity that has developed. All sides in the conflict must adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law. I strongly condemn the continued heavy shelling, including the use of barrel bombs by government forces in residential neighbourhoods, in addition to the terror acts committed by extremist groups who are seeking to impose radical ideologies in some parts of the country. I remain deeply concerned at the participation of foreign elements and groups in the fighting. I reiterate my firm opposition to the transfer of arms and fighters from outside the Syrian Arab Republic to either side inside the country and call upon all States, organizations and groups to immediately cease supporting the violence and to use their influence to promote a political solution instead.

¶46. One month since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), humanitarian access in the Syrian Arab Republic remains extremely challenging for humanitarian organizations. Delivering lifesaving items, in particular medicines, remains difficult. The assistance reaching people continues to fall far short of what is required to cover even their basic needs.

.....

¶49. The Syrian Arab Republic is now the biggest humanitarian and peace and security crisis facing the world. It requires an immediate end to the violence and a negotiated political solution to the conflict.

Ban Ki-Moon, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2139 (2014)," [Report](#) of 24 March 2014.

Although the Report by Secretary General Ban is explicit that *both* sides in Syria are hindering the delivery of humanitarian aid — Ban even cites specific examples of rebels besieging cities — the U.S. Government puts the blame *only* on Assad's government. See, e.g.,

- "U.S. says U.N. report lays blame on Syria government for hindered aid," [Reuters](#), 02:01 GMT, 26 March 2014. ("... the government of President Bashar al-Assad shoulders most of the blame, a U.S. official said on Tuesday [25 Mar]. 'What the report shows is that the magnitude and frequency of violence committed by the Assad regime far outstrips that of the armed groups in Syria,' a U.S. official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.")

- [Associated Press](#), 15:28 EDT, 28 March. ("Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., ... said the Syrian government has 'utterly failed to comply' with the resolution.")
- [Al-Jazeera](#), 28 March. ("The United States [Samantha Power] said the Syrian government had 'utterly failed' to comply with the UN Security Council resolution and remained the biggest obstacle to the delivery of aid.")
- [NY Times](#), 29 March.

My comments: The failure of Resolution 2139 was easy to predict. The problem is what to do about the failure of parties in Syria to obey this Resolution. Almost any conceivable remedy will hurt the Syrian people worse than the perpetrators. And, as Reuters says, Russia will probably veto any economic sanctions against Assad and his government. The debacle exposes the United Nations as a toothless dog, unable to enforce its demands. Meanwhile, Syria joins North Korea and other rogue nations who ignore U.N. Resolutions.

The U.S. Government position of blaming only Assad continues the fiction that rebels are noble fighters for democracy and Assad is pure Evil. The Truth is that *both* sides in the Syrian civil war are violating international law and violating Resolution 2139. It may appear that Assad's violations are worse, because Assad is head of the legitimate government that is desperately trying to suppress a rebellion, and because Assad controls more assets. By pretending that the opposition is not violating Resolution 2139, the U.S. Government perpetrates a fantasy that enables the U.S. to continue to support the rebels and to continue to condemn Assad.

24 Mar 2014

Brahimi admits more negotiations unlikely soon

After the Syrian National Coalition [renounced](#) Geneva2 on 10 March, and on [15 March](#) the Coalition belligerently said they would pursue a military solution to the civil war, it was obvious that the Geneva2 negotiations would *not* soon resume. Further, Syria is [frustrated](#) with the emphasis on a transitional government in the Geneva2 negotiations. So it was no surprise when Reuters reported:

The United Nations peace mediator for Syria has said it is unlikely talks in Switzerland between the Syrian government and opposition will resume soon, Lebanon's state news agency reported on Monday [24 Mar].

....

Speaking in Kuwait ahead of an Arab League summit, Brahimi said the conditions were not currently there for a return to the talks, according to the Lebanese National News Agency. "It is unlikely at the current time that dialogue will resume between the Syrian regime and the opposition in Geneva," the agency quoted him as saying. "U.N. Syria envoy says new Geneva peace talks unlikely for now — report," [Reuters](#), 14:29 GMT, 24 Mar 2014.

The Daily Star in Lebanon repeated the Reuters story under the headline that "Brahimi doubts peace talks will resume soon":

The United Nations peace mediator for Syria said Monday [24 March] it was unlikely that talks in Switzerland between the Syrian government and opposition would resume soon, amid few signs that one of the opposition's chief backers intends to change its approach to the conflict.

....

Speaking in Kuwait ahead of an Arab League summit, Brahimi said conditions were not currently there for a return to the talks, according to Lebanon's National News Agency. "It is unlikely at the current time that dialogue will resume between the Syrian regime and the opposition in Geneva," the agency quoted him as saying.

"Brahimi doubts peace talks will resume soon," [Daily Star](#), 10:43 GMT, 25 Mar 2014.

At 19:00 GMT on 25 March, I looked at the website of the Lebanese National News Agency, but I could not find the original story there.

Agence-France Presse reported:

The international mediator on Syria said on Monday [24 Mar] a resumption of peace talks in Geneva between Damascus and the opposition was "out of the question" for the moment.

"A return to Geneva is out of question for the time being because the criteria have not been met," U.N. and Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi said in Kuwait.

"U.N. envoy rules out new Syria talks 'for time being'," [Al-Arabiya](#), 11:57 GMT, 24 Mar 2014.

Also posted at: [Al-Bawaba](#).

This important story was ignored by news media in the USA. The Associated Press did *not* report this story.

My comments: After the huge amount of effort that diplomats spent in arranging Geneva2, it is disappointing that the negotiations fizzled and are now abandoned. There are at least three reasons for the failure of Geneva2:

1. The belligerence of the Coalition on pursuing a military solution to the civil war, when it is clear that the rebels can not win.
2. The foreign meddlers in Geneva1 in June 2012 — where no one from Syria was present — and their requirement for a transitional government in Syria.
3. Brahimi for rigidly following Geneva1, in putting the formation of a transitional government on the agenda of Geneva2. (In defense of Brahimi, that process is *required* by U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118.)

Even if these three mistakes had not occurred, there is still the problem that the Coalition does not control the rebels, and the Coalition represents *neither* the jihadists *nor* Al-Qaeda, so any agreement by the Coalition does not affect the anti-Assad fighters in Syria.

Further, we must not forget that this is not just a war between Assad's legitimate government and the rebels who want to remove Assad. The Syrian civil war is also a religious war between Sunni muslims (e.g., the majority in Syria, and their supporters in Saudi Arabia and Qatar) and Shiite muslims (e.g., Assad, and his supporters in Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon). Foreign support, including munitions, is keeping this civil war alive long after it should have concluded. Indeed, the Coalition is recently [asking](#) for *more* foreign support, including sophisticated weapons.

Obama's new options on Syria

On 14 Feb 2014, Obama had asked his advisors for new options on how to deal with the crisis in Syria. (See my [fourth](#) essay on Syria.) This topic faded from the news around 24 Feb. Apparently, the search for new options had returned zero new options that were acceptable to Obama.

On 28 March, the Associated Press reported an anonymous U.S. Government official said Obama was again considering allowing rebels in Syria to have shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles. [AP](#).

Conclusions

Here is what 36 months of military conflict in Syria have accomplished:

- At least 150,000 dead people by 31 March 2014, increasing at approximately 6000/month.
- Approximately 2,500,000 refugees have fled from Syria. ([AP](#); [UN](#))
- 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.)
- 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. But 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. 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.

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.

....

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](#), [third](#), and [fourth](#) 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 in March 2014, journalists began to report that Assad appears to be winning the civil war, although opposition forces still control some regions of Syria and parts of some cities.

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.
8. [Above](#), I commented that people in Western Europe and the USA are becoming

frustrated with bad news from Syria.

- No one knows how to compel Assad to quickly deliver his chemical weapons to OPCW for destruction. Assad has violated U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118, §7.
- *All* of the parties in Syria are ignoring U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139.
- No one knows how to motivate the parties in Syria — many of whom refuse to meet other parties face-to-face — to negotiate an end to their civil war. The stubborn, belligerent nature of *all* of the parties defies a rational solution to the civil war.

The United Nations, Western Europe, and the USA are trying to help the people of Syria — in particular, help the Syrian National Coalition — but are met again and again with irrational positions, preconditions, demands, and belligerence. The reaction should be to abandon the Syrian National Coalition. In this dismal situation, I suggest that the least worst solution is simply to abandon Geneva2, let Assad be re-elected, and let Assad eventually win the civil war.

For the above reasons, I believe the USA and Western Europe have been following a flawed foreign policy in Syria. Obama's foreign policy on Syria is essentially an obsession with the removal of Assad. When Assad did not resign in 2011 or 2012 or 2013, the U.S. foreign policy was increasingly divorced from reality. The intransigence of the Coalition has been encouraged by Obama and Kerry, with the frequent U.S. declarations that Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of the Syrian government. But the reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, and the rebels are unable to force Assad to resign. During the Geneva2 negotiations in Jan-Feb 2014, the clamor for the "transitional governing body" in Syria was just a slogan for replacing Assad. In this way, the Coalition — and its supporters — hoped to achieve in Geneva2 negotiations what the rebels were unable to accomplish militarily. The Geneva2 negotiations have collapsed for multiple reasons, one of which is the refusal of Assad to resign.

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 31 March 2014, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

this document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria7.pdf>
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