

# Syria: April 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.

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

- removal of 49% of chemical weapons from Syria
- recognition that Assad seems to be winning the Syrian civil war
- failure of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139,
- unlikely to be more negotiations in Geneva in foreseeable future.

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*. However, sometime around 15 April, *Al-Arabiya* changed its website so it would no longer

display on webbrowsers that I use, so I stopped looking at that website. 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, Beginning 9 March, the USA was on Daylight Savings Time, Eastern Daylight Time in Boston is -4 hours from GMT. Beginning 30 March, England was on British Summer Time (BST), which is +1 hour 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.

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

### 1 April 2014

### Death Toll more than 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. Final U.K. [Reuters](#) story on this topic at 12:19 GMT.

This announcement attracted attention by a number of news sources: [Associated Press](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Daily Star](#)(AP) in Lebanon; all on 1 April 2014. [Gulf Times](#)(AFP) in Qatar, [Al-Bawaba](#); both on 2 April.

On 4 April, the English-language website of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was updated to include the text of their death toll announcement:

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented the death of 150,344 persons as of 18/03/2011 which witnessed the fall of the first martyr in Dera'a, and until 31/03/2014.

The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 51,212 civilians including 7,985 children and 5,266 women
- Rebel and islamic fighters: 24,275
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2,286
- Arab, European, Asian, American and Australian fighters from the ISIS, al-Nusra front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund al-Aqsa battalion, Jund al-Sham movement and al-Khadra' battalion: 11,220
- Regular soldiers and officers: 35,601
- Combatants from popular defence committees, national defence forces, shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 21,910
- Fighters from the Lebanese Hezbollah: 364
- Arab and Asian pro-regime militants: 605
- Unidentified casualties (documented by pictures and footages): 2,871

It is worth noting that the numbers do not include more than 18,000 detainees in regime prisons and thousands of those who disappeared during regime raids and massacres. It also doesn't include more than 8,000 regular soldiers and pro-regime militants and hundreds of "regime supporters" captured by the ISIS, islam fighters, al-Nusra front and rebel fighters and hundreds of those kidnapped by pro-regime militants.

The numbers also do not include more than 1500 fighters from the YPG, ISIS, al-Nusra front, islamic battalions and rebel battalions who were kidnapped during clashes between the mentioned sides.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimate the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the ISIS, al-Nusra front, islamic factions, Jund al-Aqsa battalion, Junoud al-Sham, al-Katiba al-Khadra', Jund al-Sham, rebel battalions, regular forces and pro-regime militants to be approximately 70,000 more than the documented number due to the extreme discretion by all sides on the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

Despite our loss of hope in an international community capable and willing to put an end to the ongoing atrocities in Syria, we in the Syrian Observatory call upon all sides that claim to defend the freedoms of the people and their rights, to take a serious and responsible stance in order to end the bloodshed in Syria amid the increasing violence and the escalating number of casualties. We also call upon all sides to support the Syrian people in their aspirations towards freedom, equality and democracy and to exert all effort in guaranteeing that the perpetrators and their wrongdoings will not go unpunished, through the International Criminal Court or through establishing a special court for Syria.

"More than 150,000 were killed since the beginning of the Syrian uprisings," [SOHR](#), 4 April 2014.

**My comments:** On 31 Jan 2014, the death toll was 136,227. (See my [third](#) essay on Syria.) During February and March, the death toll has increased by 14,117 — for an average of

7058/month.

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## 1-5 April 2014

### 3 April 2014

#### Warfare delays deliveries of chemical weapons

Beginning around 20 March 2014, jihadists attacked towns in the province of Latakia, Syria, near the border with Turkey. The fierce military campaign has delayed shipments of chemical weapons to the port city of Latakia. On 3 April, Reuters reports:

Syria has packed 40 percent of its chemical weapons arsenal into containers to be taken outside the country and destroyed, and convoy security has been deployed to deal with violence around the port city of Latakia, the head of the mission overseeing the operation said on Thursday [3 April].

Syria's U.N. envoy warned that the government may be forced to delay its transports due to the security situation and might miss another deadline for moving the ingredients of its poison gas program out of the country.

Sigrid Kaag, head of the joint mission of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, told the U.N. Security Council the toxins had been loaded into 72 containers at three different sites, said council diplomats who attended the meeting, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Once those 72 containers are shipped out of war-torn Syria, some 90 percent of the country's declared chemical weapons stockpile will have been removed for destruction, Kaag told a closed-door council briefing via video link from Damascus.

The United Nations said on Thursday that since March 20, no chemicals had been transported to Latakia, where they are to be shipped out of the country for destruction. So far almost 54 percent of Syria's declared chemicals have been removed.

....

"The [27 April 2014] deadline set up by the Syria government and Mrs Kaag and the OPCW will not be possible to be respected fully unless the security situation evolves in the right direction," Syrian U.N. Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari told reporters on Thursday.

Michelle Nichols, "About half Syria's chemicals packed for removal, violence halts convoys: U.N.," [Reuters](#), 20:03 GMT, 3 April 2014.

In the Reuters story, the sentence "So far almost 54 percent of Syria's declared chemicals have been removed" is *not* correct. The 54% number actually refers to the amount of chemicals either removed from or destroyed inside Syria. [OPCW-UN](#).

More reports of the delay are in:

- [Associated Press](#), 20:54 GMT, 3 April 2014.
- [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, 10:55 GMT, 4 April 2014.
- [Al-Jazeera](#), 4 April 2014.

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#### 4 April 2014 12th delivery of chemical weapons to OPCW

On 4 April, OPCW announced one shipment of chemical weapons to OPCW:  
The OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria has confirmed that a 12th consignment of chemicals has been transported to the port of Latakia and removed from the country.

Noting this latest consignment the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, expressed the hope that Syria will expedite the removal process. "This is the first shipment since 20 March. It is therefore important not only to follow this up with further rapid movements but also to make up for the lost time by increasing the volumes of chemicals to be removed", said the Director General.

"12th Consignment of Chemicals Removed from Syria," [OPCW](#), 4 April 2014.

**My comments:** Until now, it has been conventional to blame Assad for both the slow delivery of his chemical weapons and missing OPCW deadlines. Since 20 March, it appears that jihadists are responsible for creating a poor security situation in which the chemical weapons can not be transported. Only *one* shipment in 15 days from 20 March until 4 April is too slow to meet Assad's own deadline of 27 April.

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#### 4 April 2014 Future Disposal of Unwanted Munitions

John Zarocostas of McClatchy News reported on a grubby detail: the eventual disposal of mines and unexploded munitions in Syria.

"Remember," Agnes Marcaillou, the head of the United Nations Mine Action Service, said in an interview with McClatchy, "millions of refugees and displaced people must walk back on contaminated roads, and humanitarian helicopters will have to be used to deliver food aid if the roads are not cleared.

The U.N. mine agency, relying on news accounts for its information, has been plotting on a map all reported incidents where Syrian government and rebel forces have fought. The result is a "clash database," which will be used to search for unexploded ordnance if a peace arrangement is ever negotiated. "We have right now recorded 37,000 such clashes," she said.

....

The mine agency is now active in 30 countries, including Afghanistan, Colombia, the

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria. While its name emphasizes mines, it focuses on all explosive remnants of war — unexploded artillery shells, cluster bombs and improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

....

Marcaillou said that in Afghanistan, the ordnance disarming effort employs 15,000 Afghans, though she said the agency and its partners recently laid off 3,000 for lack of funds. "This is a really sad story. The monthly salary of one NATO soldier is roughly equal to 100 Afghan deminers," she said.

In Afghanistan, about 75 percent of people injured are victims of IEDs, while less than 5 percent are injured each year from traditional landmines. More than 662,000 landmines have been destroyed in Afghanistan, and the agency hopes it will be mine free by 2023.

Asked to comment on how her agency sees the upcoming challenge in Syria, Marcaillou did not hesitate. "Way bigger in our estimates than Afghanistan," she said. John Zarocostas of McClatchy News, "Syria ordnance disarming effort will be bigger job than Afghanistan, UN says," [Sacramento Bee](#), 19:47 GMT, 4 April 2014. Copy at: [Bellingham Herald](#); [Miami Herald](#), both on 4 April 2014.

I remind the reader that unexploded bombs from World War II — which ended in May 1945, 69 years ago — are still being found in Germany, and sometimes continue to kill people in Germany. [CNN](#); [BBC](#); [Deutsche Welle](#); all on 3 Jan 2014.

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## 6-10 April 2014

7 April 2014

### Catholic Priest Murdered in Homs

On 7 April, Fr. Frans van der Lugt, a 75 y old Jesuit priest from the Netherlands, was shot twice in the head by a lone gunman at the monastery in Homs, where the priest has lived since 1966. The priest died at the murder scene. The priest, who had earned a doctorate in psychology, helped both Christian and Muslim people, regardless of their religion. The priest spoke fluent Arabic. *The New York Times* reports that a guard from the Free Syrian Army at the monastery was shot in the chest and wounded. [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 14:39 GMT; [Reuters](#), 14:50 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 17:59 GMT; [NY Times](#); [Catholic News Service](#); [Vatican Radio](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); all on 7 April 2014.

*The New York Times* says:

Father Frans expressed doubts about the government's opponents in a letter to a Dutch news site in January 2012. "Most Syrians do not support the opposition," he wrote. "Therefore, you cannot say that this is a popular uprising." Brenda Stoter Boscolo, a Dutch journalist, said Father Frans still said he felt that way in 2013, after the government had bombarded the Old City for months.



Anne Barnard, "Dutch Priest Shot to Death in Syrian City of Homs," [NY Times](#), 7 April 2014.

**My comments:** Some barbarian, probably a jihadist who was intolerant of Christians, murdered this priest. The priest not only had devoted his life to serving people, but also refused to leave besieged Homs, so that he could continue to care for residents of Homs.

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**7 April 2014**  
**Seymour Hersh says al-Nusra Front**  
**responsible for 21 Aug 2013 use of Sarin**

Seymour M. Hersh is a famous investigative journalist who has previously exposed various scandals, for which he won awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1970. Hersh, in a story published in the 17 April 2014 [London Review of Books](#), says one confidential source told him that the Turkish government had trained the al-Nusra Front in the use of Sarin gas, which Nusra released in a Damascus suburb on 21 Aug 2013. As expected, there was prompt international blame on the Assad regime for the use of Sarin gas. As explained in my [first](#) essay on Syria, Obama almost unleashed air strikes against Assad's military, in retaliation for the alleged use of Sarin gas by Assad.

By mentioning Hersh's theory here, I am *not* endorsing it. Hersh may be correct. But we need more facts from credible sources — not an anonymous source — before making a determination.

That having been said, back in Sep 2013 I had my doubts, explained in my first essay, that professional soldiers in the Syrian army would release poison gas in a suburb of the capital city, near a hotel where U.N. chemical weapons inspectors were staying. So I am willing to believe that either jihadists, ISIL, or the Nusra Front released the chemical weapons. But before responsibility is assigned, we need more evidence.

Note that the U.N. weapons inspectors in 2013 were tasked with determining whether chemical weapons had been used in Syria, but were *not* asked to determine *who* used those chemical weapons. The UN Human Rights Commission of Inquiry on Syria released a report on 5 March 2014 that concluded "the perpetrators likely had access to the chemical weapons stockpile of the Syrian military", but was *not* able to conclusively identify the perpetrators to the legal standard necessary for prosecution. (See my [fifth](#) essay on Syria.) Therefore, the relevant authorities still have *not* identified the perpetrators of the 21 Aug 2013 Sarin attack in Ghouta, Syria. People who hate Assad may wish to blame Assad for use of chemical weapons in Syria, but that is *not* a rational reason to blame Assad.

Hersh reveals one tantalizing nugget of information:

British intelligence had obtained a sample of the sarin used in the 21 August attack and analysis demonstrated that the gas used didn't match the batches known to exist in the Syrian army's chemical weapons arsenal.

Seymour M. Hersh, "The Red Line and the Rat Line," [London Review of Books](#), Vol. 36, p. 21, 17 April 2014 (online, 7 April).

The White House denied Hersh's report that the Turkish government enabled the Nusra Front to release Sarin gas on 21 Aug 2013 in Ghouta. On 22 April 2014, I looked at the transcript of the Monday 7 April Daily Press Briefing, I looked at the "Statements and Press Releases" at the White House for 6-7 April, and I searched the White House website, but I could not find the text of the denial. A search of Google News found an English-language newspaper in Turkey:

The Turkish government has strictly ruled out Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh's claims that Ankara was behind the August 21 chemical weapons attack in Syria, while particularly referring to an earlier statement of denial on the issue by the White House.

....

Earlier, the White House had reacted. "We have seen Mr. Hersh's latest story, which is based solely on information from unnamed sources and which reaches conclusions about the Aug. 21, 2013 chemical weapons attack in Syria that are completely off-base," National Security Council (NSC) Spokesperson Caitlin Hayden said April 6. "Turkey, US dismiss Seymour Hersh report," [Hurriyet Daily News](#), 7 April 2014.

Similarly, the U.S. State Department denied Hersh's report:

QUESTION: Today [7 April], or yesterday, there was an article written by Seymour Hersh, and one of the main allegations in the piece that Turkey — Turkish intelligence was behind of the 21<sup>st</sup> August of chemical attacks in Damascus. Do you have any comment on that? White House already denied that.

MS. PSAKI: I know they did, and I would just echo what they said. We stand by our own reports, our own intel gathering, the view of the international community that was widespread that this is — there's no question that this was — these attacks last August 21<sup>st</sup> were done by the Syrian regime.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 7 April 2014.

*If Hersh is correct, then these denials add to the false information provided by the U.S. Government.*

Some published commentary:

- Robert Fisk, "Has Recep Tayyip Erdogan gone from model Middle East 'strongman' to tin-pot dictator?" [The Independent](#), 10 April 2014.
- Patrick Cockburn, "MI6, the CIA and Turkey's rogue game in Syria," [The Independent](#), 13 April 2014.
- Linda S. Heard, "Were chemical attacks in Syria false flags?" [Gulf News](#), 14 April 2014.
- "To believe, or not to believe? Seymour Hersh's Syria allegations," [Al-Arabiya](#), 14 April 2014.

- Gwynne Dyer, "Rebels had reason to unleash poison gas," [New Zealand Herald](#), 16 April 2014.

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### 10 April 2014

#### M.V. Cape Ray idle

#### 12th and 13th deliveries of chemical weapons to OPCW

The M.V. Cape Ray is a U.S. ship that is outfitted with equipment to transform chemical weapons to relatively harmless effluent. Since 13 Feb 2014, the Cape Ray has been sitting idle in the port of Rota, in southern Spain, waiting for Assad to deliver all of his chemical weapons. On 10 April, the U.S. Navy allowed journalists to visit the Cape Ray. [Reuters](#); [ANSAmед](#); [BBC](#); [Associated Press](#); all on 10 April 2014. [OPCW](#), 14 April.

On Friday, 11 April, Agence France-Press reported, that two consignments of chemical weapons had recently been delivered to OPCW: one on 4 April and one on 10 April. ([Al-Jazeera](#); [Oman Observer](#); [Voice of Russia](#); all on 11 April 2014.) The 4 April delivery was previously reported [above](#).

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### 13-19 April 2014

#### 14 April 2014

#### 13th and 14th deliveries of chemical weapons to OPCW

On Monday, 14 April, OPCW issued a press release that said:

The OPCW-UN Joint Mission has confirmed that the Syrian government has delivered the 13th and 14th consignments of chemicals to Latakia, both of which were removed from the port. The two consignments were delivered to Latakia on 10 and 13 April, respectively, and immediately boarded onto cargo ships.

The two consignments raised the overall portion of chemicals removed from Syria to 65.1% of the total, including 57.4[%] of the Priority 1 chemicals.

Noting the latest consignments, Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü said the removal of chemicals had fallen behind the revised schedule submitted to the OPCW by Syria under which the government committed to completing the process by 27 April, and that there is no margin for any further delays.

"Both the frequency and volumes of deliveries have to increase significantly to restore alignment of actual movements against the projected time frame," the Director-General said. "I stress this point because only 11 weeks remain before the expiry of the deadline for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme on 30 June 2014."

"13th and 14th Consignment of Chemicals Delivered to Latakia, Raising Overall Total of Removals to 65%," [OPCW](#), 14 April 2014.

An early version of this OPCW press release called the 13 April consignment the 13th delivery. [Reuters](#) and the [Associated Press](#) both agreed that the 13 April consignment was the 13th delivery.

While propagandists trumpeted the removal of 2/3 of Syria's chemical weapons (e.g., [SANA](#)), the real story is that Syria is seriously behind schedule in delivering its chemical weapons:

1. *All of the priority one weapons were supposed to have been delivered to OPCW by 31 Dec 2013, but Syria actually delivered nothing by that deadline, and on 14 April 2014 Syria still retains 43% of its priority one chemical weapons.*
2. *All of the chemical weapons were supposed to have been delivered to OPCW by 5 Feb 2014, but on 14 April 2014 Syria still retains 35% of its total chemical weapons.*

The Associated Press reported that Assad missed this 13 April deadline:

At U.N. headquarters in New York, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric acknowledged that Syria missed an April 13 deadline to ship out all chemical weapons that were in accessible locations.

"More Chemicals Shipped Out Of Syria," [Associated Press](#), 18:45 GMT, 14 April 2014.

The United Nations press release said:

Concerned that Syria has missed the 13 April deadline to remove most of its chemical agents, the Joint Mission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations (OPCW-UN) says that it expects "an intensification of efforts" towards meeting the goal of removing all the country's chemical weapons by the end of the month.

In New York, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric confirmed the Joint Mission's concerns about the missed [13 April] deadline and told reporters that it expects immediate action to initiate the high pace and scale of operations for the removal of all chemical weapons materials as safely as possible by 27 April.

"Missing the 27 April timeline could have serious impact on the completion of the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme by 30 June," said the spokesperson.

"Syria: UN-OPCW mission expects 'intensified efforts' as chemical weapons deadline slips," [U.N.](#), 14 April.

The Syrian government says "the activities of terrorists hindered the transport of chemicals to Latakia port from which they are shipped." (see SANA story cited above) However, that only explains some of the delay since 20 March. Security has been good enough to permit deliveries on 4, 10, and 13 April.

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### **16 April 2014**

#### **15th delivery of chemical weapons to OPCW**

On 16 April, the OPCW/UN website posted a terse press release:

The OPCW-UN Joint Mission confirms that the 15th shipment of chemical material

left the port of Latakia today [16 April]. The overall percentage of chemicals removed from the Syrian Arab Republic or destroyed in the country has now reached 72.3%.

Damascus, 16 April 2014

"72.3% of Syria's chemical materials are removed from or destroyed in country," [OPCW/UN](#), 16 April 2014.

**My comment:** Note the slight of hand in the press release. The relevant quantity is the percentage of chemical weapons *delivered* to OPCW at the part of Latakia. The number quoted is inflated by also including chemical weapons destroyed inside Syria.

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**17 April 2014**

### **Syria revises declaration of its chemical weapons**

On 17 April, Reuters reported:

Syria has submitted a "more specific" list of its chemical weapons to the global regulator overseeing the destruction of its stockpile after discrepancies were reported by inspectors on the ground, officials said.

....

A diplomat said questions had been raised by member states at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) about the details of its chemical arsenal submitted by President Bashar al-Assad's government last year.

The officials said the original list had been based on estimates, not exact amounts of toxic agents found in storage and production facilities across Syria.

The joint U.N./OPCW mission in Syria found "discrepancies between what they found, and what was on the original declaration", one diplomat told Reuters.

OPCW spokesman Michael Luhan confirmed a revised list had been submitted. "For some of the stockpile, ranges of quantities had been provided. Now they are being replaced with specific amounts," he said.

The exact amounts came to light after inspectors visited the sites, took inventory, and packaged the chemicals for transport to the port town of Latakia, he said. Official could not provide specific details about the discrepancies.

Syria initially reported to the OPCW having roughly 1,300 metric tonnes of toxic chemicals, including precursors for poison gas and nerve agents. Luhan said no new chemicals were added in the revised list.

....

An official at the OPCW, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed a new list had been submitted, but said it was part of a routine reporting process. "Sometimes

information is not complete, or not in a format we require. It's not extraordinary," the official said. "But what they have submitted needs to be seen to come to any conclusions and I better not speculate about what's in there."

Dominic Evans & Anthony Deutsch, "Exclusive — Syria submits more 'detailed' list of chemical weapons," [Reuters](#), 15:22 GMT, 17 April 2014.

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### **18 April 2014 16th delivery of chemical weapons to OPCW**

On 18 April, *The New York Times* reported:

As the deadline looms for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons, the international organization overseeing the process reported Friday [18 April] that the country had delivered another shipment of toxic agents for destruction abroad, bringing the program three-quarters of the way to completion.

The latest consignment, the 16th delivered to the Syrian port of Latakia, consisted of eight containers, including "priority one" precursor chemicals for making sarin gas, Christian Chartier, a spokesman for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, said in a telephone interview.

Nick Cumming-Bruce, "Program to Destroy Syria's Chemical Weapons Is 75% Complete, Group Says," [NY Times](#), 18 April 2014.

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### **20-26 April 2014**

#### **20 April 2014: OPCW announcement**

On Easter, 20 April, a terse press release from OPCW said:

The OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria confirmed yesterday that approximately 80 per cent of Syria's chemical weapons material has been removed or destroyed in-country.

This development will contribute to meeting the 30 June 2014 target set by the OPCW Executive Council for the completion of Syria's entire chemical weapon programme.

"OPCW confirms progress in eliminating Syria's chemical weapons," [OPCW](#), 20 April 2014.

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### **22 April 2014 17th delivery of chemical weapons to OPCW**

On Tuesday, 22 April, OPCW issued a press release:

The Director-General of the OPCW welcomed delivery of a further consignment of chemicals to the port of Latakia by the Syrian government today [22 April]. The chemicals were immediately boarded onto cargo ships upon arrival at the port and removed from the country.

This raises the overall portion of chemicals removed from Syria to 86.5% of the total,

including 88.7% of all Priority 1 chemicals. Today's consignment was the 17th to date and the sixth consignment since 4 April, marking a significant acceleration in the pace of deliveries to Latakia this month.

"This latest consignment is encouraging," the Director-General said. "We hope that the remaining two or three consignments are delivered quickly to permit destruction operations to get underway in time to meet the mid-year deadline for destroying Syria's chemical weapons."

"Removal of Syrian Chemicals Passes 86% of Total," [OPCW](#), 22 April 2014.

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### **24 April 2014**

#### **18th delivery of chemical weapons to OPCW**

On Thursday, 24 April, OPCW/UN issued a press release:

The OPCW-UN Joint Mission confirms delivery of a further shipment of chemical weapons material. Today's [24 April] operation brings the total of chemical material removed and destroyed in country to 92.5%.

"I welcome the significant progress of the last three weeks, and I strongly encourage the Syrian authorities to conclude the removal operations as part of their efforts to achieve the 30 June 2014 deadline. Particular thanks goes to Member States for their steadfast support," said OPCW-UN Joint Mission Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag.

In addition to the removal operations, the Syrian authorities have destroyed buildings, equipment and empty mustard gas containers, and decontaminated other containers in a number of chemical weapons storage and production sites. A majority of these sites are now closed.

"92.5% of Syria's chemical weapons material removed or destroyed in-country," [OPCW/UN](#), 24 April 2014.

Note that the OPCW deadline for destruction of *all* buildings and equipment was 15 March, but more than a month after that deadline "a majority of these sites are now closed." A majority means more than half, but *not all*.

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### **27-30 April 2014**

#### **27 April 2014**

#### **Syria misses its own deadline**

On 27 April, Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission, held a press briefing in Damascus. The OPCW/UN website had the following text:

The following are the key points made by Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission, at a press briefing in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic:

- The Syrian Arab Republic has now removed from its territory or destroyed in-

country more than 92% of its declared stockpile of chemical weapons material. Eighteen movements have been carried out so far with due regard for the environment and public health.

- Over the last months the Syrian Arab Republic has destroyed all declared production, mixing and filling equipment and munitions, as well as some buildings associated with its Chemical Weapons Programme. A majority of its chemical weapons storage facilities are now closed, and important progress has been made closing down production facilities.
- The OPCW-UN Joint Mission has assisted the Syrian Arab Republic carrying out its obligations according to UN Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and relevant OPCW Executive Council Decisions. Today, the Joint Mission has verified the removal and elimination of large parts of the Syrian Arab Republic's declared Chemical Weapons Programme.
- This is a significant achievement, which has been accomplished in a short period of time and in difficult security conditions.
- However, nearly 8% of Syria's declared chemical weapons material remains on its territory. This should be removed in the shortest possible timeframe, despite the difficult security situation. Should this material be removed soon, the Syrian Arab Republic will have successfully carried out a major obligation that is a focus of much international attention. I strongly encourage my Syrian interlocutors to complete the removal of remaining chemical weapons material as quickly as possible.
- A team from the OPCW Technical Secretariat has been working with officials from the SAR reviewing the original Declaration: to obtain clarifications, and address discrepancies and anomalies. The team has reported fruitful discussions and tangible progress.
- Twelve chemical weapons production facilities are under review by the OPCW Executive Council in The Hague regarding the modalities for their destruction. With the majority of other facilities now closed: an early decision is important if deadlines are to be achieved.
- It is the Joint Mission's hope and expectation that — having come this close to meeting the target date for the removal of chemicals weapons material — the Syrian Arab Republic will take the final step very soon. Every effort must be made towards achieving the 30 June 2014 deadline set by OPCW Executive Council Decisions and the UN Security Council.
- In recent weeks there have been renewed allegations of toxic chlorine gas attacks in several different parts of the country. All necessary steps should be taken to establish the facts surrounding these unsubstantiated allegations. According to the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria is now a State Party, the



OPCW is the appropriate body to assess these allegations. I understand that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has been in touch with the Syrian government in this regard. This will be conducted outside of the Joint Mission mandate.

- We are fully mindful of the human tragedy that has befallen on the people of Syria. We can only hope to make a modest yet meaningful contribution within the wider context of a peaceful resolution for Syria and the region.

"Press briefing by the OPCW-UN Joint Mission," [OPCW/UN](#), 27 April 2014.

Journalists reported this missed deadline:

- "Syria chemical deadline passes, 8% of arms remain," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 12:29 GMT, 27 April 2014. (quoting Kaag: "We are talking of the remaining 7.8 percent chemical weapon material that is currently still in country in one particular site.")
- "Syria 'still holds chemical weapons'," [Al-Jazeera](#) 13:29 GMT, 27 April 2014.
- Albert Aji & Barbara Surk, "Watchdog Says Syria Must Destroy Toxic Chemicals," [Associated Press](#), 15:16 GMT, 27 April 2014. ("An important (achievement) has been made in permanently closing down production facilities,' Kaag said, adding it came in 'a very short period of time and under difficult and challenging security conditions.' Another 12 chemical weapons production facilities are still being reviewed by the OPCW to see how they will be destroyed, she said.")
- "Syria misses self-imposed deadline for destroying chemical arms," [Reuters](#), 15:52 GMT, 27 April 2014.
- "As deadline passes, UN joint mission urges Syria to complete chemical weapons removal," [U.N. News](#), 27 April 2014.
- "Syria Misses New Deadline as It Works to Purge Arms," [NY Times](#) 27 April 2014.
- "Syria still has '8 percent of its chemical arms'," [Al-Arabiya](#) 27 April 2014.

On 29 April, OPCW/UN posted a copy of their seventh monthly [Report](#) on chemical weapons in Syria, with a cover letter by U.N. Secretary General Ban dated 25 April. This report mentions that the 18th consignment of chemical weapons, which was delivered on 24 April, brought the total delivered to "96.45% of declared Priority 1 chemicals and ... a combined total of 92.03% of Priority 1 and 2 chemicals". (¶4(a) on page 6 of 10)

My comment is simple. Of the approximately 1300 metric tons of declared chemical weapons, 8% remaining in Syria equals 104 tons — a significant quantity of chemical weapons. Further, the M.V. Cape Ray can not begin processing the priority 1 chemicals until the remaining 3.6% is delivered.

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28 April 2014

### U.S. State Dept. Daily Press Briefing

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 14:07 EDT on Monday, 28 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: In light of the failure of Syria to meet the deadline on Sunday [27 April], I just wanted to know if you had any reaction in general to that. And where do we go from here?

MS. PSAKI: Sure. As you noted, Syria has failed to meet the April 27 target date for the removal of all chemical weapons materials, one that it set for itself, just as it failed during the past three months to meet the milestones set by the OPCW for CW removal.

As of last week, approximately 92 percent of declared chemicals have been removed. While that is significant progress, we're not finished. There is more work, clearly, that needs to be done.

With our international partners, we're going to continue to press the regime to live up to its obligations, including by removing the remaining 8 percent. Syria has an obligation to complete packing and preparations at the remaining site and transfer those materials to Latakia. They have the capability to do this, and there should be no further delay.

QUESTION: And there have been comments by Western officials in recent days that there are doubts resurfacing that the declared weapons that are left are not all the declared — are not all the weapons that are there, that Syria is withholding information. So does the United States share these concerns that Syria is withholding information about chemical weapons they haven't declared?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we've never taken Assad, the Assad regime, at its word, and we will continue to approach this process with our eyes wide open. It's important to remember that the removal process is not the end of the OPCW's work, and the OPCW's inspection and verification teams' efforts will continue to ensure the accuracy and completeness of Syria's declarations that its CW production facilities are dismantled and that the entire CW program has been completely eliminated. The OPCW will, of course, have our full support. So it will continue, and we will take every step through the OPCW to ensure that that is all looked into.

QUESTION: You've never taken Assad at his word? Is that — that's what you said?

MS. PSAKI: That is what I said.

QUESTION: Okay. But you're willing to take his word that he's going to run for president?

MS. PSAKI: If he doesn't, if he's kind of joking us about that, then that's fine with us.

Go ahead.

QUESTION: Would there be any consequences for the failure of meeting the deadline or not?

MS. PSAKI: We're continuing to press through with our international partners for them to meet the deadline. I don't want to make any predictions. I know we'll keep talking about this in here.

QUESTION: Actually, it seems that Kaag in her press conference was quite positive in her assessment of Syria's cooperation. Do you feel that the Syrians are underhandedly keeping 8 percent, or they are just not able to meet the deadline?

MS. PSAKI: There is they have the capability to ensure that the declared chemicals are removed, so now they need to do so.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 28 April 2014.

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### **29 April 2014 More Atrocities in Syria**

I have been ignoring a relatively steady stream of attacks on civilians in Syria. But on 29 April there were two attacks by insurgents in Syria with significant loss of life that call out for recordation in history.

On 29 April, two mortar shells from insurgents hit a technical institute in Damascus, and two other mortar shells hit a civilian neighborhood in Damascus, killing at least 14 people.

Later on 29 April, there were two car bombings by the Nusra Front in the Zahra neighborhood (predominantly Alawite religion) in central Homs that killed at least 37 people. On 30 April, Agence France-Presse reported a death toll of 100 people.

#### References:

- [Al-Jazeera](#) Syria Blog, 04:14 GMT, 29 April 2014.
- [SOHR](#), 29 April 2014.
- "Car bombs kill at least 37 in Syria's Homs: monitoring group," [Reuters](#), 13:14 GMT, 29 April 2014.
- "At least 51 killed in Syrian government-held areas," [Reuters](#), 13:29 GMT, 29 April 2014.
- [Al-Jazeera](#) Syria Blog, 06:16 GMT, 30 April 2014. (51 dead in Homs, Nusra claims responsibility)
- Statement of U.N. [Secretary General](#), 30 April.

"Death toll from attacks in Syria's Homs now at 100: activists," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 11:31 GMT, 30 April.

- "Death toll from attacks in Syria's Homs now at 100," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 22:05 GMT, 30 April.

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## My Comments on Deadlines

After missing both of the OPCW deadlines (i.e., 31 Dec 2013 and 5 Feb 2014) for delivery of chemical weapons, Assad's government proposed on 21 Feb a new schedule for delivery of chemical weapons. On 26 Feb, there was agreement that Assad would deliver all of his chemical weapons by 13 April, except for weapons stored at two sites where security was precarious. Assad promised to deliver all of the weapons from the two sites by 27 April, which would complete the delivery of *all* of Assad's chemical weapons. (See my [fourth](#) essay on Syria, discussions on 21 Feb and 26 Feb; also see my [fifth](#) essay on Syria, discussion on 4 March.)

With hindsight, the 31 Dec 2013 OPCW deadline for delivery of all priority 1 chemicals was two months too early. The M.V. Cape Ray did not arrive in Spain until 13 February, so processing the priority 1 chemicals could begin only after 13 February. (See my [fourth](#) essay on Syria, discussions on 4-5 Feb and 13 Feb.) In retrospect, a deadline of 28 Feb for delivery of all priority 1 chemicals would have been more realistic.

Similarly, the 5 Feb OPCW deadline for delivery of all other chemicals was two months too early. In retrospect, a deadline of 31 March would have been more realistic.

Note that Assad substantially missed both of my suggested "more realistic" deadlines. See my [tables](#) of delivery dates and deadlines. Note that Assad also missed his own deadline of 27 April for delivery of *all* of his chemical weapons.

Once the Cape Ray begins destroying the chemical weapons, the task will require between 60 and 90 days to complete. To meet the 30 June deadline for the destruction of *all* Syrian chemical weapons with 90 days to destroy the chemicals, Assad must deliver all of his weapons before 1 April, a deadline that has already passed and was only half-met. Assuming everything goes perfectly (i.e., the chemicals take only 60 days to destroy), the 30 June deadline might be met if Assad delivers the other half of his chemical weapons before 27 April, a deadline that the Syrians themselves proposed.

Will there be consequences for missing the OPCW deadlines? Sure! The U.S. taxpayer gets stuck paying for the Cape Ray and its crew to remain idle for three months (i.e., Feb, Mar, April). And the Danish and Norwegian taxpayers get stuck with paying for their cargo ships to sit in the ocean for four months (i.e., Jan, Feb, Mar, April), waiting for Assad to deliver all of his chemical weapons.

On 24 March, OPCW publicly admitted that the destruction of all Syrian chemical weapons might not be completed by the 30 June deadline in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118.

(See my [fifth](#) essay on Syria.)

The Syrian government delivered a consignment of chemical weapons to OPCW on 24 April, leaving the Syrian government with approximately 8% of its declared chemical weapons. With the Syrian government's own deadline of 27 April just days away — so tantalizingly close to complete delivery — the Syrian government delivered no more consignments of chemical weapons in April. I think this delay probably shows the continuing contempt of Assad for the United Nations, OPCW, and international law. However, OPCW maintains tight security and confidentiality about the reason(s) for the delay in delivery of chemical weapons, so the public does *not* know all of the relevant facts and reasons for the delay.

In the grand scheme of events, what really matters is that all of Assad's chemical weapons are destroyed. A secondary consideration is that the delivery and destruction should happen as soon as possible, consistent with security and safety. Years from now, no one will care whether Assad met the deadline on 5 Feb or 27 April. But *during* the delivery of the chemical weapons, deadlines were important to motivate Assad to deliver quickly because of international pressure. With that understanding, it was desirable for OPCW to set early deadlines that Assad would not meet, so that Assad was constantly criticized for being behind schedule.

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## Assad still has chemical weapons?

### We did Assad a favor.

According to a U.S. Congressional Research Service Report:

... Egypt provided Syria with a small number of chemical weapons and delivery systems in the lead-up to the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Syria began to expand its program in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Declassified U.S. documents indicate that the Soviet Union supplied Syria with chemical agents, delivery systems, and training related to chemical weapons use. Syria is likely to have procured equipment and precursor chemicals from private companies in Western Europe. U.S. government documents indicate that Damascus has sought a self-sufficient chemical weapons program since the mid-1980s.

Nikitin, Kerr, & Feickert, "Syria's Chemical Weapons: Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service [Report](#) Nr. 42848, pp. 3-4 of 29, 30 Sep 2013.

In an Arabic-language interview with a newspaper in Lebanon, Assad called his old chemical weapons a "burden":

In another interview, with Arabic daily *Al-Akhbar*, Assad stated that "in Syria there are thousands of tons of chemical weapons that have become a burden to us, since their destruction costs a great deal of money and could take years to destroy."

....

Syria will suffer no great loss should the weaponry be removed from the country, Assad said. He pointed out that Syria has considerably more sophisticated weapons in

his arsenal. "We now possess deterrent weapons that are more important and more sophisticated than chemical weapons," he said.

"We created chemical weapons in the 80s as a deterrent against Israel's nuclear arsenal. Today, it is no longer a weapon of deterrence," Assad said.  
"Assad dubs chemical weapons 'burden'," [Russia Today](#), 26 Sep 2013.

The same interview in *Al-Akhbar* was also reported by the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*:  
Syrian president Bashar Assad said Thursday [26 Sep] that the chemical weapons in his arsenal have lost their effectiveness as a strategic weapon, and that Syria possesses "more advanced weaponry, which can serve as a deterrent, and blindside Israel within seconds."

In an interview with the Lebanese daily *Al-Akhbar*, Assad said Syria owns over 1000 tons of chemical material, which has become a burden for the beleaguered nation.

"It will cost large sums of money and take years of hard work in order to rid ourselves of these chemical materials, and there will be repercussions for the environment as well. So as far as we're concerned, it would best if these weapons were just taken from us.

During the interview, Assad claimed that Syria's chemical arsenal was assembled in the 1980s, to serve as a deterrent to Israel's alleged nuclear capabilities, but are no longer effective in that capacity.

Jack Khoury, "Assad: We have weapons that can blindside Israel in seconds," [Haaretz](#), 26 Sep 2013.

See also [Jerusalem Post](#); [Times of Israel](#); [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon; [Associated Press](#); each on 26 Sep 2013.

[New York Times](#), 9 Oct 2013. ("Walid al-Zoubi, a lawmaker in Mr. Assad's Baath Party, was quoted by The Associated Press on Tuesday [8 Oct 2013] as saying that chemical weapons 'have become a heavy burden on the state' and that Syria no longer needs them.")

Assad's claim to have a new and better deterrent than chemical weapons is probably empty boasting. But Assad is right that his chemical weapons have become a burden to him. Not only have the old chemicals degraded and lost some of their effectiveness, but also it will be expensive to safely dispose of these old chemical weapons.

So the United Nations, specifically OPCW, did Assad a favor by disposing of Assad's thirty-year old chemical weapons. And the USA and Western Europe paid most of the cost of disposing of these old weapons.

### **Assad failed to declare *all* of his chemical weapons**

On 26 April 2014, Reuters reported that Syria had *not* declared *all* of its chemical weapons: Syria maintains an ability to deploy chemical weapons, diplomats say, citing intelligence from Britain, France and the United States that could strengthen allegations Syria's military recently used chlorine gas in its bloody civil war.

The comments reflect a growing conviction among Western capitals that President Bashar al-Assad has failed to come clean about Syria's chemical weapons program despite his promises to end it, and they insist the United States and its allies will resist calls by Assad to shut down a special international chemical disarmament mission set up to deal with Syria.

....

But in a tacit acknowledgement of the original declaration's incompleteness, Syria earlier this month submitted a more specific list of its chemical weapons to the international disarmament mission after discrepancies were reported by inspectors on the ground, officials said.

....

Diplomats say Western governments have long suspected Syria did not declare all aspects of its chemical arms program. But the envoys say they have kept silent on the issue to avoid giving Assad an excuse to curtail cooperation with the U.N.-OPCW mission and slow down an already delayed timetable for shipping toxins out of the country.

With more than 90 percent of Syria's declared chemical stockpiles now out of the country, Western officials have started to break their silence.

"We are convinced, and we have some intelligence showing, that they have not declared everything," a senior Western diplomat told Reuters, adding that the intelligence had come from Britain, France and the United States.

When asked how much of its program Syria has kept hidden, the diplomat said: "It's substantial." He offered no details.

Louis Charbonneau, "Western intelligence suggests Syria can still produce chemical arms," [Reuters](#), 01:14 GMT, 26 April 2014.

The revised list of weapons is mentioned [above](#).

Note that Assad can never *prove* that he has no remaining chemical weapons. The best he can do is to cooperate with U.N. inspectors and let them visit any suspected weapon storage sites and see for themselves. Meanwhile, the enemies of Assad will blame Assad for any alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria.

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## **Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in Kfar Zeita on 11 April 2014**

The opposition says that Assad's government used chemical weapons at sunset on 11 April at

the village of Kfar Zeita in Syria. Assad's government says that the Nusra Front used chemical weapons. Both the opposition and Assad's government agree that two people died and "more than 100" were affected by the chemical weapon. Both sides claim that chlorine gas is the chemical weapon.

#### References:

- "Assad Regime Launches Second Toxic Attack in 24 hours," [Syrian National Coalition](#), 16:22 GMT, 12 April 2014 (press release).
- Anne Barnard & Ben Hubbard, "Damascus and Rebels Trade Blame in Gas Attack," [NY Times](#), 12 April 2014.
- "Claims of new poison gas attack in Syria," [BBC](#), 12 April 2014.
- "Claims of new poison gas attack in Syria," [Syrian Observatory Human Rights](#), 12 April 2014.
- "Syria rebels, government confirm poison gas attack," [Arab News](#), 20:13 GMT, 12 April 2014.
- Bassem Mroue, "Poison Gas Claims Complicate Syrian Civil War," [Associated Press](#), 00:40 GMT, 13 April 2014.
- "'Poison' attack on central Syria town," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 05:03 GMT, 13 April 2014.
- "Syrian sides trade blame over new gas attack," [Al-Jazeera](#), 18:24 GMT, 13 April 2014.

It is interesting how these news sources cite each other. There appears to be only three primary sources: (1) the Syrian National Coalition, (2) Syrian state television, and (3) the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The first two sources are obviously partisan, and the SOHR is intensely anti-Assad.

On 13 April, I was not able to find the news story on Syrian state television that was cited by the above sources, although I looked at the news stories posted at their English-language website back to 10 April. Similarly, the English-language website of the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) had no story about chemical weapons when I looked on 13 April.

As indicated by the headline in an Australian newspaper: "Syrian enemies trade blame over gas attack" ([The Australian](#)) — and also *The New York Times* and *Al-Jazeera* cited above — the real story is *who* is responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Kfar Zeita. Because reliable facts from unbiased observers are sparse, we can not know the Truth at this time.

On 13 April, the Associated Press reported the reaction of the U.S. Government:

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations said Sunday [13 April] that reports of a poison gas attack in a rural village north of Damascus were so far "unsubstantiated," adding that the United States was trying to establish what really happened before it considers a response.

Both sides in Syria's civil war blamed each other for the alleged attack that reportedly injured scores of people Friday [11 April] amid an ongoing international effort to rid the country of chemical weapons.



The details of what happened in Kfar Zeita, an opposition-held village in Hama province some 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of Damascus, remain murky. Online videos posted by rebel activists showed pale-faced men, women and children gasping for breath at what appeared to be a field hospital. They suggested an affliction by some kind of poison — and yet another clouded incident where both sides blame each other in a conflict that activists say has killed more than 150,000 people with no end in sight.

"We are trying to run this down," said Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, during an appearance Sunday on ABC's *This Week*.

"So far it's unsubstantiated, but we've shown, I think, in the past that we will do everything in our power to establish what has happened and then consider possible steps in response," she said.

Albert Aji & Barbara Surk, "Official: US Looking Into Syria Toxic Gas Reports," [Associated Press](#), 12:09 EDT, 13 April 2014.

### **My comments on 13 April**

This is the kind of story I want to ignore. Hysterical propaganda is thick, and reliable facts are few.

For some people, *any* use of chemical weapons is an intolerable outrage, and this attitude creates an environment for propaganda. The reality is that approximately 266 people died in the Syrian civil war on 11 April ([SOHR](#)). Of these 266 dead, 2 were allegedly killed by chemical weapons — 0.8% of those who died on 11 April were killed by chemical weapons.

Our time and resources are limited. I suggest focusing on ceasefires and delivery of humanitarian aid — to save approximately 7000 lives/month — and forgetting about an alleged use of chemical weapons that killed only two people.

Chlorine gas was used in World War I (year 1915), but was less effective than mustard gas. Modern chemical weapons include Sarin and VX, each possessed by Assad's government. It is not plausible that Assad would use an antique weapon like chlorine gas, when he has stockpiles of much more effective chemical weapons. On the other hand, chlorine gas is easier to manufacture than modern nerve gases, and so chlorine might be attractive to jihadists or Al-Qaeda.

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### **News on 14-17 April**

The Russian government expressed its "alarm" at reports that the Nusra Front had used chemical weapons in Syria:

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov voiced concerns Monday about reports of the recent use of chemical weapons in Syria, calling for an investigation into the matter.

"Reports that chemical substances have been used again and that there are several victims have alarmed us. We believe that any report or facts on the use of chemical

weapons or their components should be investigated immediately," Lavrov said.

Media reports indicated poison gas was used in an attack on Friday on the town of Kafr Zita, in northern Syria, killing two and injuring around 100 others.

The Syrian government implicated an al-Qaeda-affiliated rebel group, Nusra Front, in the attack. Opposition groups claimed, however, that government planes bombed the town with explosive barrels that produced thick smoke and led to cases of suffocation and poisoning.

"We put particular responsibility on the sponsors of the extremist opposition, which has not ceased attempts to disrupt the process of disarming Syria of its chemical weapons, or attempts to create yet another reason to demand military intervention, or in order to take control of chemical weapons or their components for terrorist activities," Lavrov said.

"Moscow Alarmed by Reports of New Poison Gas Attack in Syria — Lavrov," [RIA-Novosti](#), 11:03 GMT, 14 April 2014.

On 14 April, Reuters reported:

On Sunday [13 April], activists from the "Syrian Revolution in Kfar Zeita" posted video footage and pictures of an unexploded canister with the chemical symbol for chlorine, Cl<sub>2</sub>, on its side which they said was found in the village. Reuters could not verify the authenticity of the video or pictures.

Eliot Higgins, a respected UK-based researcher who trawls daily through online videos of Syria's civil war to verify weapons in them, could not verify the opposition's claims but said the videos did appear to show an industrial chlorine cylinder. "It looks like they (the government) have taken an industrial chlorine cylinder, put it in a improvised barrel bomb and dropped it out of a helicopter," he told Reuters. The yellow paint on the cylinder complies with international standards on industrial gas colour codes indicating it contains chlorine, he said.

"Syria opposition claims has evidence of chlorine gas attack," [Reuters](#), 09:12 GMT, 14 April 2014.

Copy at [Al-Arabiya](#).

*Time* magazine commented:

If past cases of alleged chemical attacks are anything to go by, there may never be definitive proof of culpability for the Kfar Zeita attack, or any subsequent attacks, for that matter. It may impossible to prove that any chemical agents were used it all. It took months for U.N. investigators to determine that a chemical weapons attack had actually taken place on Aug. 21 in the Damascus suburbs, even after hundreds had died from apparent symptoms of exposure to toxic substances. Even then investigators were not able to assign blame. Figuring out what happened in Kfar Zeita, about 200 km north of Damascus in contested territory, will be even more difficult given ongoing war, the region's inaccessibility and the unwillingness of either side to let go of the propaganda opportunities presented by continued ambiguity.

....

.... And the U.S. and its Western allies may not want to issue fresh threats against the Assad regime now that Syria is on the brink of reaching the goal of relinquishing its chemical weapons — today the organization overseeing Syria's compliance, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, announced that 65 percent of Syria's chemical stockpiles had been removed from the country. "All of these countries have a vested interest in seeing Syria disarmed," says chemical weapons expert Jean Pascal Zanders. "Right now that is the biggest priority, which is why I am thinking no one will want to rock the boat over this issue right now."

Aryn Baker, "The World Shrugs at Alleged Chemical Weapons Attack in Syria," [Time](#), 14 April 2014.

On 15 April, Reuters reported:

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal on Tuesday said the "grave news" that President Bashar al-Assad's forces had carried out two poison gas attacks last week was a challenge to "international will".

Rebels and the Syrian government have blamed each other for the alleged poison gas attacks on Friday and Saturday on rebel-held Kfar Zeita village in the central province of Hama. Both sides said chlorine gas had been used.

"These continuous violations by the Damascus regime require the international community to take firm action against the continuous defiance of international, Arab and Islamic will," Prince Saud said at a news conference in Riyadh.

The reported gas attacks posed a clear challenge to the Security Council decision to dismantle Assad's chemical arsenal, he said.

"Saudi Arabia — reported poison gas use by Syria is challenge to world," [Reuters](#), 17:24 GMT, 15 April 2014.

On 15 April the Syrian National Coalition reported:

1. Poison gas was used by the regime at least 9 times in recent months in:

- Jober, Rural Damascus (twice) on April 03, 2014 and on April 09, 2014.
- Harasta, Rural Damascus (twice) on March 11, 2014 and on March 27, 2014.
- Daraya, Rural Damascus (once) on January 13, 2014.
- Kafr Zita, Rural Hama (twice) on April 11, 2014 and on April 12, 2014.
- Tamanaa, Rural Idlib (once) on April 12, 2014.
- Atshan, Rural Hama (once) on April 14, 2014.

2. Syrian National Coalition (SNC) staff contacted local residents and took statements via Skype and satellite phone.

3. In almost all cases, the poison gas was contained in barrel bombs or other munitions dropped from the air. The Assad regime is the only side in the current conflict able to deploy aircraft.

4. In cooperation with SNC, trained medics in the targeted areas managed to collect blood and clothing samples, preserve, and then smuggle them out of Syria. The samples were handed over to Turkish authorities.

5. Turkish authorities are analyzing these samples and will make the results available to international investigators from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

....

"8 Facts about the Recent Poison Gas Attacks in Syria," [SNC](#), 15 April 2014.

On 17 April, [Al-Jazeera](#) reported allegations by residents of Kafr Zita that the Syrian military was continuing to drop chlorine gas cylinders. *Al-Jazeera* says: "The videos were created by Youtube users and collated by the Britain-based blogger, Brown Moses. They cannot be independently verified by Al Jazeera."

**My comments:** Note that the Russians (who support Assad) blame "sponsors of the extremist opposition", while the Saudis (who support the rebels) blame Assad. Neither offers any evidence for who is responsible for the use of chemical weapons, it is just propaganda.

My comment on the 14 April Reuters story is that it is not plausible that the Syrian military would create an improvised chemical weapon from an industrial chlorine gas cylinder and a barrel bomb, when the Syrian military has professionally manufactured chemical weapons containing nerve gas (e.g., VX). It is also not plausible that the professionals in the Syrian military would use a forbidden chemical weapon against a low-value target (i.e., the obscure village of Kfar Zeita). The video footage was created two days after the alleged chemical weapons use, which is enough time for evidence to be fabricated or altered.

The classic use of poison gas is either (1) to kill or incapacitate large numbers of enemy soldiers or (2) to take an enemy-occupied building without damaging the contents of the building. None of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria fits these traditional uses of chemical weapons. That makes me doubt that professional soldiers in the Syrian army are using poison gas.

I agree with *Time* magazine that the United Nations and OPCW should focus on removing all of Assad's chemical weapons, and ignore this minor incident at Kfar Zeita.

The Saudis were so angry with the United Nations that they declined a seat on the U.N. Security Council on 18 Oct 2013. (See my [second](#) essay on Syria.) The Saudis will probably be angry again that the United Nations ignores the chemical weapons use at Kfar Zeita.

The Syrian National Coalition has provided the best evidence so far of chemical weapons use at Kfar Zeita. Unfortunately, the blood and clothing samples that the Coalition smuggled out of Syria and gave to the Turkish government are probably worthless as legal evidence, because of chain of custody problems. Also, both the Coalition and the Turkish government are partisan: both are strongly opposed to Assad, so any so-called evidence that they have is suspect of fabrication, alteration, or contamination.

People in Kfar Zeita who hate Assad are probably willing to testify that they saw yellow canisters of chlorine dropped from Syrian government helicopters, even if they did not actually see either the yellow canisters or the helicopters. It is common for impartial people to disagree on eyewitness observations, and partisan observers often fabricate or falsely remember events.

### **No Comment from U.S. Government**

At the U.S. State Department press briefing, beginning at 12:56 EDT on Friday, 11 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: On Syria, the opposition has said that the regime has used the chemical weapons in the last few days. Do you have any confirmation?

MS. PSAKI: We've seen those reports you're referring to. We don't have any information to corroborate those claims at this time. We certainly take all reports of alleged chemical weapons use seriously, which is why we're working with the OPCW and UN to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons. But again, we have no information to corroborate those claims at this point.

QUESTION: And what does it mean if they are — if these reports are accurate?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to speculate on that. Obviously, we don't have information to corroborate them at this time.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 11 April 2014.

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 13:02 EDT on Monday, 14 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: .... The reports of chemical weapons use that you were asked about last week, the Russians have now — Foreign Minister Lavrov in this same press conference, I guess, with whoever it was today in Moscow, talked about the Russians being concerned about this.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Do you have anything more today?

MS. PSAKI: I don't.

QUESTION: All right.

MS. PSAKI: We're not able to corroborate the claims, same as we were on Friday [11 April].

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 14 April 2014.

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 13:16 EDT on Tuesday, 15 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: Were you able to confirm reports about the use by the regime of chemical weapons last weekend in the province of Hama?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any new updates. Obviously, as we've said for the last couple of days, we continue to look into these reports. We don't have any information to corroborate them at this point.

QUESTION: But you are looking into them?

MS. PSAKI: We continue to, yes.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 15 April 2014.

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 12:43 EDT on Wednesday, 16 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: And were you able to confirm reports about the use of chemical weapons

—

MS. HARF: No, we still —

QUESTION: — last weekend?

MS. HARF: We still can't corroborate them. We're obviously looking into it, but we can't corroborate those claims.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 16 April 2014.

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 13:29 EDT on Thursday, 17 April, the topic of chemical weapons use in Kfar Zeita did not arise. Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 17 April 2014.

It was the same on Friday, 18 April: no mention of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria at the Daily Press Briefing. [State Dept.](#), 18 April 2014.

## **20 April: France revives story**

On 20 April, the French President, Francois Hollande, revived the forgotten chlorine gas news story. *The Telegraph* in London, England reported:

Francois Hollande, the French president, on Sunday declared the Syrian leader had continued to use chemical weapons on the front line, though he added definite proof had not yet been established. Officials are examining attacks on at least three towns in the last week where credible reports point to the use of chlorine gas, leaving dozens of people seeking treatment for the symptoms of poisoning.

....

"We have a few elements of information but I do not have the proof," Mr Hollande said. "What I do know is what we have seen from this regime is the horrific methods it is capable of using and the rejection of any political transition."

Gas attacks are seen as a particularly effective tool in sparking panic and fear in rebel-held areas. On Sunday [20 April], Laurent Fabius, the French foreign minister, indicated intelligence reports on the attacks were being scrutinised, stating his officials received "indications" of recent chemical attacks that were still being verified. Damien McElroy, "Syria: Bashar al-Assad 'launching chemical weapons attacks with chlorine'," [Telegraph](#), 15:01 GMT, 20 April 2014. See also Agence France-Presse, [GlobalPost](#), 13:55 GMT, 20 April 2014. (same quotations from Hollande)

The original interview with Fabius — only in the French language — is at [Europe 1](#).

**My comment:** I do not doubt that someone released chlorine gas. But before we blame a specific person, we need more than scraps of "information". We need strong evidence that will establish guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The fact that Hollande hates Assad is *not* a rational reason to blame Assad for the use of poison gas. Hollande's mention of Assad's "rejection of any political transition" is irrelevant to whether Assad used poison gas, further there is no reason why Assad — who is winning the civil war — should resign.

To illustrate how irrelevant facts can create propaganda, consider that public opinion polls in France show Hollande is the least popular president in the history of French opinion polls. (See, e.g., [Expatica France](#), approval rating of 18% on 13 April 2014.) While Hollande's popularity is irrelevant to whether or not Assad used chlorine, the low popularity of Hollande might motivate Hollande to attempt to deflect attention to Assad. Furthermore, on 10 Jan 2014, it was revealed that Hollande had been spending nights with a movie actress instead of his current girlfriend who lived with Hollande until 10 Jan. On 25 Jan, Hollande publicly dumped his girlfriend. Again, Hollande's morality or his relationships with women are irrelevant to whether or not Assad used chlorine.

Further, with a monthly death toll in Syria exceeding 7000, I think it is an unnecessary diversion to spend time investigating 2 or 3 deaths from chlorine gas.

### **21-23 April: U.S. State Dept. Daily Press Briefings U.S. has "indications" that chlorine was used**

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 12:55 EDT on Monday, 21 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: .... I don't know if you have seen the reports on the use of chemical weapons in Syria in the last few days.

MS. PSAKI: I have seen those reports.

QUESTION: And can you confirm these reports?

MS. PSAKI: We have indications of the use of a toxic industrial chemical — probably

chlorine — in Syria this month in the opposition-dominated village of Kfar Zeita. We are examining allegations that the government was responsible. We take all allegations of the use of chemicals in combat use very seriously. We're working to determine what has happened, and we will continue consulting and sharing information with key partners, including at the OPCW.

QUESTION: And did you — do you think that the Assad regime has crossed the redline again by using this —

MS. PSAKI: Again, I'm not going to speculate here. Obviously, there needs to be an investigation of what's happened here. We're working with our partners to determine what the facts are on the ground.

....

MS. PSAKI: I understand what you're asking, Matt. We're still looking into the specifics. I just don't want to get ahead of the process.

QUESTION: Is this the same — this incident is the same that the French were talking about — is that your understanding — earlier today?

MS. PSAKI: I believe there have been reports that, as we've said, we've been looking into these reports. We continue to look into them. Obviously, we have a little bit more information.

....

MS. PSAKI: We're examining allegations. We're obviously looking at the facts on the ground. We shouldn't forget the context of what the regime has been capable of in the past, Said.

....

QUESTION: .... Do you consider the use of this gas as a breach for the UN resolution?

MS. PSAKI: Again, we're going to let the process see itself through to determine the facts on the ground about what this toxic industrial chemical was to confirm those details, and then we'll work with our international partners to determine if any issue was violated here.

QUESTION: What is that process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think first we need to determine what the facts are, what was the chemical, to make sure we have those all lined up. Then we'll work with the OPCW, who is obviously overseeing the implementation, and determine if any violation occurred.



QUESTION: But is it your understanding that the OPCW people who are on the ground, it's part of their mandate to go look at this?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not — again, this is very preliminary.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. PSAKI: So we will be working with the OPCW. I'm not suggesting there is a violation. We're still determining what the facts are on the ground.

QUESTION: Have you got any samples from the ground?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any additional details beyond what I've shared so far. Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 21 April 2014.

Incidentally, the question that mentions "the French were talking about ... earlier today" was referring to Hollande's statement on 20 April and Fabius' statement on 20 April, which were published in newspapers on the morning of 21 April.

The essence of the U.S. State Department position — even on 21 April — is that the US. Government continues to investigate, and no conclusions have been reached. The previous week the U.S. State Department said the USA is "not able to corroborate the claims". But on 21 April Ms. Psaki used the same word as Fabius (i.e., "indications"), which is a weak hint that some evidence exists. This minor change in U.S. position was widely reported in Arab newsmedia. [Al-Arabiya](#), 21 April. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Arab News](#); [Al-Bawaba](#); all on 22 April 2014.

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 13:13 EDT on Tuesday, 22 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: I just want to know if there's anything more you can say about the chlorine that apparently was used that you talked about yesterday.

MS. PSAKI: There's nothing new to update you on. We have been in touch with the OPCW. I should say our ambassador to the OPCW has been in touch. Beyond that, I know you asked a couple of questions yesterday, technical questions —

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: — outside of broadly — what's happening with this specific process, and I wanted to just give you a few answers on that, if that's useful.

QUESTION: Yes.

MS. PSAKI: So one is the Chemical Weapons Convention, which as you all remember is — was part of what Syria was required to join as part of the September [2013] agreement. It does — prohibits the use of any toxic chemical, including chlorine, with the intent to kill or incapacitate people, regardless of whether it's specifically listed or

not in the schedule of chemicals. So obviously, when people were asking yesterday about whether — if there was a use to be — if there was a use found of chlorine, whether it would violate — what it would violate, the use with intent to kill or intent to injure would violate the Chemical Weapons Convention, and obviously that was a part of what was agreed to in September. So that was one of the questions yesterday. I don't know if there were other technical ones, but if not —

....

MS. PSAKI: .... I know, again, we're of course looking into this — but the use of any toxic chemical with the intent to cause death or harm is a clear violation of the convention.

QUESTION: Right. But — so in other words, when — but you haven't yet determined whether or not it was chlorine and whether or not it — if it was, who used it. Is that correct?

MS. PSAKI: Correct. And as you know, but it's worth repeating, there are several possible mechanisms for investigating a possible violation. The OPCW Technical Secretariat's international group of experts on CW will almost certainly be involved in that. Point being, it wouldn't be the United States, as you all know, going in and investigating. There would be an international mechanism. There's a range of ways that could take place.

....

QUESTION: If I could go back to the actual chlorine incident itself, I mean, isn't it indications that this was delivered by a barrel bomb or some kind of canister by the air in which the opposition doesn't have access to that type of aircraft?

MS. PSAKI: There was indications, as I mentioned yesterday — I don't have new information to share with all of you from here — of the use of a toxic industrial chemical.

QUESTION: Delivered by the air?

MS. PSAKI: Probably chlorine. I don't have any other additional details in terms of how, why, if, by whom. That is, of course, what we will be continuing to look into. Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 22 April 2014. [some interruptions edited by Standler]

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 14:11 EDT on Wednesday, 23 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: And since there was a briefing on [toxic chemical usage in Syria] up at the UN today, I'm wondering what Secretary Kerry's awareness is. I mean, is he also being debriefed on this, and what kind of information do we actually have? Do we know anything more now than we did yesterday?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any new information. I can — one quick update. I mentioned this yesterday, but just to be more specific, our ambassador to the OPCW Bob Mikulak has met with OPCW — the OPCW director general, and we're continuing to consult and share information with key partners, including the OPCW. The Secretary is kept closely abreast on this — of the updates on this issue. He asks about it on a daily basis. But I don't have any other updates for you today.

QUESTION: So there's no confirmation yet on —

MS. PSAKI: Correct. I don't have any additional —  
Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 23 April 2014.

### **23 April 2014**

#### **More News About Chlorine Use**

On 23 April, the Associated Press reported that the United Nations Security Council — during a closed meeting with Sigrid Kaag, who heads the OPCW-UN mission to destroy chemical weapons in Syria — called for an investigation of alleged use of chlorine gas in Syria. The Associated Press reports that the president of the Security Council "said council members called for an investigation but did not discuss who should carry it out." Edith M. Lederer, "UN Seeks Probe Of Alleged Chlorine Gas In Syria," [Associated Press](#), 16:17 EDT, 23 April 2014.

On 23 April, Reuters reported the same U.N. Security Council meeting:  
Syria declared on Wednesday that it is looking ahead to the dismantling of the international mission overseeing the destruction of the conflict-torn country's chemical arsenal, though Western officials say they want the team to keep working.

The statement came after Sigrid Kaag, head of the joint mission of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), told the Security Council that the Syrian government should be able to meet an April 27 deadline to hand over all declared chemical agents.

But inside the council chamber, U.S. and European delegations told Kaag that they are concerned about fresh allegations that Syria's government has deployed chlorine gas and expressed their view that a full investigation was necessary, diplomats said.

....

But British Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant said in an interview with Reuters that he sees the U.N.-OPCW mission remaining in place for the foreseeable future due to concerns about the completeness of Syria's disclosure of its chemical arsenal.

"Our view is that there is a continuing role for the joint mission well beyond the removal of the chemicals, which could happen quite quickly now, and there's a number of tasks that are still to be carried out, including verification of the destruction of production facilities," Lyall Grant said.

"That means that the joint mission should continue," he added, noting that the Security Council decision to establish the mission did not give a deadline for its termination. Russia would therefore be unable to shut down the mission, even if it wanted to, Lyaall Grant said.

Louis Charbonneau, "Syria eyes end of chemical arms monitoring mission; West disagrees," [Reuters](#), 18:09 EDT, 23 April 2014.

The Associated Press also reported allegations of repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria during 2014:

Witnesses near Damascus and in a central rebel-held village told the AP of dozens of cases of choking, fainting and other afflictions from inhaling fumes that some said were yellowish and smelled like chlorine cleanser. Some of those interviewed said they believe the gas was responsible for at least two deaths.

....

The Violation Documentation Center, a Syrian group that tracks human rights violations, issued a detailed report last week in which it claimed to have documented the use of chemicals in 15 instances since the beginning of the year in suburbs of Damascus, in Hama and in Idlib. The main Western-backed opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, said it identified at least nine cases in recent months where the government used poison gas.

The most serious episode appears to have occurred in Kfar Zeita, a rebel-held village in Hama province some 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of Damascus.

....

OPCW spokesman Michael Luhan said the watchdog group could not get into verifying the claims without a formal request from a government entity with credible information. "So far, no state party has asked for an investigation," he said.

Zeina Karam & Daa Hadid, "Syrian Activists Accuse Assad Of New Gas Attacks," [Associated Press](#), 16:40 EDT, 23 April 2014.

**My comment:** The release of chlorine gas occurred on 11 April, and 12 days later the United Nations has not yet decided to begin an investigation! The crime scene has now been amply contaminated, and there have been abundant opportunities for fabrication or tampering with evidence. That is why competent detectives immediately secure a crime scene and then promptly begin collecting evidence.

*If the allegations are believed, the "most serious episode" caused only two deaths, truly *de minimis* in a civil war that has killed more than 150,000 people.*

The Associated Press article about alleged "new gas attacks" is lengthy (1281 words) but contains no details about the alleged attacks. The AP gives no dates of alleged use, and gives no locations of alleged use (except for Kfar Zeita).

## 24-25 April 2014 U.S. State Dept. & U.N. Daily Press Briefings

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 14:02 EDT on Thursday, 24 April, there was — astoundingly — no mention of chemical weapons use in Syria.  
Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 24 April 2014.

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 13:26 EDT on Friday, 25 April, there was again no mention of chemical weapons use in Syria.  
Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 25 April 2014.

On Thursday, 24 April, the Noon Daily Press Briefing at the United Nations did mention chlorine gas in Syria:

Question: Thank you, Farhan, .... And also, I wonder whether the Secretary-General supports the investigation of the new allegation of the use the chlorine gas in Syria.  
Thank you.

[Farhan Haq,] Deputy Spokesman [for the Secretary-General]: That's quite a few questions, alright. .... Regarding your question on chemical weapons, the Secretary-General is aware and very concerned about recent media reports on the use of chlorine in the Syrian Arab Republic. The international community has firmly rejected the use of toxic chemicals under any circumstances to inflict harm, as demonstrated by the overwhelming international support for the global ban on such weapons. Allegations of such use should be made subject to the procedures in terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which is under the purview of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Question: Follow-up on the chlorine issue; have they established that really chlorine was used in any place in Syria? Because yesterday what we heard at the stakeout is that chlorine has not been used, or it was not even discussed by the Security Council members.

Deputy Spokesman: Yes, Nizar, as I just mentioned, allegations of such use should be made subject to the procedures in terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and that, of course, is under the purview of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

....

Question [by Evellyn]: .... Yes, Farhan, on the chlorine attacks that are being reported by media — and it was raised in the Council but nothing was decided — can the [omission in transcript] is the Secretary-General, from what you've just read, going to ask anyone to look into this, because he has influence over the OPCW and there are some joint UN ventures with [omission in transcript]?

Deputy Spokesman: I believe [omission in transcript] First let's see what decisions the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its Director-General,

Ahmet Üzümcü, have to say. I believe that they might say something about this in the coming days in their own right, so we'll wait first to see what they intend to talk about. [U.N.](#), 24 April 2014. (edited by Standler to delete irrelevant material)

On Friday, 25 April, the Noon Daily Press Briefing at the United Nations again mentioned chlorine gas:

Question: Right, on the Syria chemical weapons, should there be intelligence, and there are some rumours that there might be, of undeclared stocks, as well as the to-ing and fro-ing on the chlorine attack. Can the SG ask the OPCW [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] to look into it because certainly the Security Council will find it impossible to pass any resolution on Syria ... without a veto?

[Stéphane Dujarric,] Spokesman [for the Secretary General]: You know, on what may or may not have been declared, we obviously expect all parties involved here to fully declare their stock. The update that we have is 92.5 per cent that Syria has removed and destroyed of its chemical weapons. On the issue of chlorine, I think, as we have mentioned, the Secretary-General is aware and very concerned about these recent media reports on the use of chlorine. The international community has firmly rejected the use of toxic chemicals under any circumstances to inflict harm, as demonstrated by the overwhelming international support for the global ban on such weapons. Allegations of such use should be made subject to the procedures in terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which is under the purview of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. And Syria is now a party to this, so there are mechanisms that need to be followed.

Question: It's not clear if the OPCW is going to do anything or not. They have to do it? Can the SG ask them to do it?

Spokesman: I think you know, there are all sorts of discussions going on now, but it is the responsibility of the OPCW and the States that are parties to this Convention. Yes, Nizar?

Question: This statement yesterday by the Secretary-General: does he consider chlorine about chlorine, does he consider it as poison gas or poisonous material? Given that this is a common material, which is sold in every shop everywhere....

Spokesman: I think... listen, I am not a equipped to say what exactly is covered under the chemicals weapon ban, but I think what common sense would dictate is that the use of chlorine gas by militaries, by paramilitaries, in a conflict should not happen. The fact that it's sold... that you could probably find at any convenience store doesn't make it tolerable, doesn't make it acceptable. Yes ma'am?

[U.N.](#), 25 April 2014.

Notice that both the journalist (i.e., Nizar) and the spokesman both confuse chlorine gas with a solution of sodium hypochlorite, used as bleach.

**25 April 2014**

## Lack of Evidence Makes a Farce

On Friday, 25 April, Russia announced it had evidence:

Russia has reliable information that accusations the Syrian army recently used poison gas are false, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Friday [25 April].

"Accusations that the Syrian Army allegedly used poisonous chemical gases continue to be fabricated. According to reliable information the Russian side has, such allegations are false," the ministry said.

Media reports have claimed that at least two people were killed and about a hundred injured in a chlorine attack on the militant-held village of Kafr Zeita in Syria's Hama province in mid-April.

"Russia Dismisses Claims of Syrian Army Poison Gas Attack," [RIA-Novosti](#), 25 April 2014.

There is a 26 April news report at the [Coalition](#) website that says the Coalition has "verified that the attack [in Kafr Zeita] was carried out by barrel bombs filled with toxic chlorine, leaving around 120 cases of suffocation among civilians in the town." But no evidence is mentioned by the Coalition.

**My comments:** Russia's claim to have "reliable information" is pure propaganda. To be credible, one needs to disclose the information. This comment also applies to the French and U.S. claims to have unspecified "indications" of the release of toxic chemicals in Kafr Zeita.

Imagine a criminal trial in which the prosecution declares it has "reliable information" that the defendant is guilty, but the prosecution will not show the evidence. Then the defense declares the defendant did not commit the crime, but if he did then he was insane. Neither side shows any evidence. Such a proceeding would be a farce.

For two weeks, we have watched the rebels and their supporters, the Syrian government, the French and U.S. governments, and the Russian government all make conclusory statements without showing any evidence. This farce should be condemned.

[Above](#), I quoted some evidence supplied by the Syrian National Coalition to the Turkish government. Twelve days later, there is no report of analysis of this evidence by authorities in Turkey. On 27 April, I looked at the Coalition website and I also searched Google News, but I found nothing about this evidence.

*If* convincing evidence exists, then I would expect the Coalition and anti-Assad governments to publicly display the evidence, instead of making weak assertions without any evidence. So I suspect that there is no credible evidence for who released chlorine gas at Kafr Zeita. And for that reason, we should stop wasting our time with allegations of chemical weapons use at Kafr Zeita. An additional reason is that all of the parties agree that only two or three people were killed by chemical weapons at Kafr Zeita, a truly *de minimis* injury compared to the more than 150,000 dead people in the Syrian civil war.

**28 April 2014**

## U.S. State Dept. & U.N. Daily Press Briefings

At the U.S. State Department press briefing beginning at 14:07 EDT on Monday, 28 April, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION: Okay. Just a quick follow-up on the chemical weapons aspect on the —

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: — the chlorine. Now, the Russians are saying that this is all a figment of somebody's imagination, it's not true, and it was — it's just a way to sort of — or an excuse to maybe strike Syria. Is that the thinking here?

MS. PSAKI: As we've said, we've seen indications, of course, of the use of a toxic chemical, probably chlorine. We're examining allegations, continue to examine allegations, that the Assad regime was responsible. We take all allegations of the use of chemicals in combat very seriously. So we're continuing to consult and share information with the OPCW and international partners as we work to determine what has happened, and that's the phase we're in at this point.

QUESTION: Are you independently examining these allegations on your own?

MS. PSAKI: We're obviously —

QUESTION: Are you doing it as part of the UN or —

MS. PSAKI: We're working closely with international partners, through the OPCW, with the UN as well.

QUESTION: Okay.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 28 April 2014.

At the United Nations Daily Press Briefing on Monday, 28 April, the Spokesman for the Secretary General said that the director of OPCW would make a decision about whether to investigate the chlorine use in Syria. [U.N.](#)

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### 29 April 2014 OPCW will investigate

On Tuesday, 29 April, OPCW decided to investigate the use of chlorine gas in Kafr Zeita, Syria.

At a meeting of the OPCW Executive Council held today, the Director-General announced the creation of an OPCW mission to establish facts surrounding allegations of use of chlorine in Syria.

The Syrian government, which has agreed to accept this mission, has undertaken to provide security in areas under its control. The mission will carry out its work in the



most challenging circumstances.

Delegations speaking at today's Executive Council meeting expressed their full support for this mission. The UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon has also expressed his support and assured the assistance of the United Nations in meeting the significant security and logistical demands of this mission.

The team is expected to depart for Syria soon.

"OPCW to Undertake Fact-Finding Mission in Syria on Alleged Chlorine Gas Attacks," [OPCW](#), 29 April 2014.

**My comments:** The first use of chemical weapons at Kafr Zeita was on 11 April. There was a bureaucratic delay of 18 days before OPCW decided to investigate. The crime scene has now been amply contaminated, and there have been abundant opportunities for fabrication or tampering with evidence. That is why competent detectives immediately secure a crime scene and then promptly begin collecting evidence. The delay by OPCW compromises their investigation.

**29-30 April 2014**  
**Daily Press Briefings**

Strangely, the topic of chemical weapons use in Syria did *not* appear in the U.S. State Department Daily Press [Briefing](#) for Tuesday, 29 April. At the United Nations on 29 April, the Secretary General's [Spokesman](#) mentioned the OPCW investigation, but there were no questions on recent chemical weapons use in Syria.

There was no mention of chemical weapons in Syria in the U.S. State Department Daily Press [Briefing](#) for Wednesday, 30 April. Journalists have a short attention span.

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**29 April 2014**  
***The Telegraph Investigated***

On 29 April, *The Telegraph* reported its own investigation of chemical weapons use at Kfar Zeita on 11, 12, 16, and 18 April.

"Dr Ahmad", whose proper name *The Telegraph* will not reveal for his own protection, was responsible for collecting the samples.

In a mission that ran the gauntlet of kidnapping by criminal gangs, arrest by Syrian government troops, targeted assassination, shelling, and air strikes, Dr Ahmad and two other volunteers — whose identities are also here being protected — travelled to the sites of each of the attacks to collect evidence.

"I wanted to show the world that chemical agents had been used," said the doctor, after arriving safely in Turkey clutching samples, all properly labelled and bagged.

"I did it methodically. I filmed everything. I wanted to be sure that I have the whole chain of custody without interruption [from collecting the samples to seeing them tested] so when the results come we know that they are accurate."

....

"In each of the samples we have found evidence of chlorine," said Mr de Bretton-Gordon [from Secure Bio, a UK-based consultancy], after analysing the results. "Also, the samples indicate that ammonia has also been used in Kafr Zita."

The sample from the April 11 attack in Kafr Zita yielded the strongest results. It tested strongly positive for both chlorine and ammonia. The mini-WARN detector gave a reading of 0.3 parts per million (ppm) for chlorine and 178 ppm for ammonia.

....

The samples were tested a full 16 days after the attack happened, and in that time, experts said, the evaporation will have decreased the chlorine and ammonia levels in the soil. This means, Mr Thomson [a technical expert from the UK company Secure Bio] said, that it is likely that the chlorine was originally delivered to that location in a very high dose.

Ruth Sherlock, "Syria chemical weapons: how the Telegraph found evidence of chlorine and ammonia gas bombs," [The Telegraph](#), 17:25 GMT, 29 April 2014.

**My comments:** The reports of physicians about patients experiencing respiratory problems after exposure to battle clearly indicates exposure to some kind of toxic chemical in the air. I think the medical evidence is quite clear that some kind of chemical was released in Kfar Zeita on 11 April and several subsequent days. Both the injuries and odor are consistent with chlorine. The important question is to determine *who* released this chemical.

As a result of the use of Sarin at Ghouta on 21 Aug 2013, Assad *knows* he will be blamed for any use of chemical weapons. Why would Assad risk international condemnation? Note that Kfar Zeita is a low-value target and only a small number of people were harmed — very low reward in exchange for severe international condemnation.

Further, if Assad really wanted to use chemical weapons, he has much more devastating chemical agents than chlorine.

I think it is more plausible that some insurgent group released the chlorine gas, knowing that Assad would be blamed. From the beginning, the Syrian government has blamed the Nusra Front for the chlorine release.

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

My [first](#), [second](#), [third](#), [fourth](#), and [fifth](#) essays on Syria explain why I believe peace negotiations are futile with the current conditions in Syria. The following information continues this history of frustrated negotiations.

### Diversions

Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the Ukraine, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. (See my [fifth](#) essay on Syria.) 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*.

Since July 2013, John Kerry has visited Israel and Palestine more than a dozen times in support of peace negotiations. On 1 April, the negotiations collapsed with zero achievements. Perhaps realizing that he had wasted his time, Kerry said at a press conference:

There are limits to the amount of time and effort that the United States can spend if the parties themselves are unwilling to take constructive steps in order to be able to move forward. .... This is not an open-ended effort, never has been, and the President said that from the beginning and I've said that many times, including in the last few days. So it's reality check time, and we intend to evaluate precisely what the next steps will be.

John Kerry, press conference transcript, [U.S. State Dept.](#), 4 April 2014.

See also: [Arutz Sheva](#) in Israel; [Jerusalem Post](#)(Reuters); [The Guardian](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#); [Global Post](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#); all on 4 April 2014.

After Kerry's angry outburst on 4 April, the U.S. Government decided to continue supporting the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine. However, by 9 April, the Palestinians and Israelis had each taken so many provocative acts that the negotiations were really dead. [Washington Post](#), 8 April 2014; [Jerusalem Post](#), 10 April 2014; [Jerusalem Post](#), 11 April 2014.

On 5 April, *The Boston Globe* said:

Failure [of the Israel-Palestine peace negotiations] would not only be a blow for Kerry, but also for Obama, who, like most second-term presidents, is looking to chalk up a diplomatic win for his foreign-policy legacy. Right now, Obama's foreign agenda is dominated by crises and frustration, from Ukraine to Syria to Iran.

Bryan Bender, "John Kerry losing patience on Mideast peace talks," [Boston Globe](#), 5 April 2014.

**My comments on *The Boston Globe* article:** The above-cited article in *The Boston Globe* mentions that Kerry wants peace more than either the Palestinians or Israelis. When the parties to the negotiations are unwilling to compromise, negotiations are futile. It seems to me that the same principle applies to the Syrian civil war.

Assad does not need a ceasefire, because he is slowly winning the civil war and because Assad has a comfortable life. The Syrian National Coalition refuses to recognize that Assad

is winning, because the Coalition is united only in their hatred of Assad. Further, the Coalition has a comfortable life in Istanbul, Turkey — away from the battles and sieges in Syria. So neither side compromised in the Geneva2 negotiations, and the negotiations collapsed in February 2014.

In contrast to the Syrian National Coalition, the residents of besieged towns in Syria are negotiating truces with the Syrian government, without involving the United Nations in the negotiations. (See my [fourth](#) essay on Syria, under "Syria Can Solve its own problems" in the Table of Contents.) Negotiations are obviously easier when there is a genuine desire of both parties to resolve a problem.

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On 7 April, *Deutsche Welle*, the German government's international radio service, posted the following news story:

The tension over Ukraine has all but buried the chance of peace in Syria. The Syrian people, still being massacred every day, are paying the price for the awkward stalemate between the West and Russia.

Despite its growing irrelevance, the Syrian National Council [Coalition] is still diligently going about its business. While the horrific daily massacres continue in the country and newer global crises take the world's attention, the Syrian opposition group, ensconced over a thousand kilometers away from Damascus in an Istanbul hotel, met over the weekend [5-6 April] and elected a new political body and named new health, education, and interior ministers.

These would presumably be for an interim cabinet that now seems less likely to govern anything than ever before. The Geneva II peace talks were abandoned without a resolution at the end of January [actually 15 Feb], and with the military escalation in Ukraine deepening the gulf between the US and Russia in the meantime, no one has raised the prospect of repeating the exercise any time soon.

....

The prospect of replacing Assad with an interim government that includes the SNC [Syrian National Coalition] (this is, after all, the official US ambition) is virtually non-existent. Meanwhile, the Syrian president is exploiting the SNC's weakness by apparently preparing a new presidential election to legitimize his hold on power. "No one in the West would take such a stunt seriously, but it could get support from Russia, if only for the sake of defying the West in another way," said Pierini [former EU diplomat in Damascus and visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe]. "And of course the price is being paid by the people of Syria," added Eyal [international studies director at the UK-based Royal United Services Institute].

Ben Knight, "US puts Syria on the back burner," [Deutsche Welle](#), 7 April 2014.

Despite a few minor factual errors, this German article accurately analyzes the problems. The crisis in Ukraine has diverted attention from Syria. The Syrian National Coalition is increasingly irrelevant, but there is no other alternative government for Syria.

### My comments on 10 April

U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, said "The Syrian Arab Republic is now the biggest humanitarian and peace and security crisis facing the world." (Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2139 (2014), ¶49, 24 March 2014.) Despite the importance of the Syrian civil war, the topic of Syria was almost absent from the news in the USA from 29 March through 30 April.

Assad is substantially missing deadlines for delivery of chemical weapons, putting him in violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118, §7. But no one proposes sanctions on Assad, because that might additionally slow Assad's delivery, and because Russia would veto any proposed sanctions. Since 20 March, jihadists began a military campaign that threatened the security of the delivery of chemical weapons, thereby interrupting the delivery of chemical weapons. But no one proposed any sanctions on the jihadists.

*All* of the parties in Syria are violating Resolution 2139. What did the U.N. Security Council do about this open violation? The Council held a one-day meeting on 28 March, and then took no further public action. Proposing sanctions against Assad would be futile, because Russia would veto any proposed sanctions.

The Geneva2 negotiations ended on 15 Feb 2014. Since then, the Syrian National Coalition, beginning on 10 March, have publicly refused to attend further negotiations. With Brahimi's insistence on discussing a transitional government, further negotiations would be futile, because Assad has no intention of resigning. But if Brahimi were to recognize the reality of Assad being firmly in control of most of Syria, and Brahimi were to stop discussing a transitional government, then the Coalition would have no reason to attend negotiations — because the Coalition hoped to remove Assad in negotiations, after failing to remove Assad in three years of civil war. That is *one* reason why the Geneva2 negotiations are futile.

So we have an unsatisfactory situation in which U.N. Resolutions are being ignored by parties in Syria, and the U.N. is powerless to compel compliance with its Resolutions. People are continuing to die in the Syrian civil war, now at the rate of approximately 7000 per month. And no one know how to end the Syrian civil war.

The problem is *not* lack of effort by the United Nations. The three big problems are:

1. the intransigence and stubbornness of *all* the parties in Syria, many of whom refuse to talk to other parties,
2. the continuing flow of munitions to insurgents in Syria from foreign meddlers (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE), and
3. the refusal of rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda to negotiate an end to the civil war.

The essential problem is that the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda *want* the civil war to continue, and their foreign supporters are continuing to supply these insurgents with munitions. Their eagerness to fight makes these insurgents a very dangerous threat to Russia, Western Europe, and the USA.

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### Finishing a 15 March 2014 story

In my [fifth](#) essay on Syria, in the table of contents under "Coalition belligerent", I mentioned a speech by Jarba on the third anniversary of the Syrian civil war. In March, I was unable to access a copy of the speech, because the entire website of the Syrian National Coalition was offline during 15-28 March, and the English-language part of the Coalition's website was offline from 15 March through 8 April.

It is a serious problem with public relations when the English-language Coalition website was unavailable for 25 days during a critical period when the Coalition was seeking support from Western nations that do not read the Arabic language. At noon Boston time on 9 April, there was nothing posted at the English-language Coalition website under "Media Center/Coalition News" for the 11 days beginning 14 March and ending 24 March. Worse, the URL of the English-language Coalition website before 15 March was <http://www.etalaf.org/en/> but beginning 9 April was <http://en.etalaf.org/> This change in URL means that links from before 15 March 2014 will no longer function, thereby frustrating readers of documents written before 15 March.

The 15 March speech by Jarba on the third anniversary of the Syrian civil war in my opinion is mostly pompous propaganda, of which the following are a few excerpts:

We pledged before God and our people to continue the struggle even if we are left alone. And today as you all have seen; we went to Geneva II to expose the absurdity and deception of the regime, and that we have done.

....

Today, we are fighting a fierce battle against an enemy who does not uphold any form of ethics or morals; an enemy backed by the gangs of Hassan Nasrullah, who is cheaply exploiting the youth of his party, and mercenaries coming from Iraq — not to mention the head of the snake in Tehran.

....

The Syrian Coalition renews its pledge to exert all efforts to provide unconditional and immediate support to our fighters. We call once again on friends of the Syrian people to honor their promises to provide advanced weapons. We remind them that as more time passes the closer the region gets to instability, which will damage international peace and security.

....

O Syrian people, our revolution is bound to succeed, and the Assad regime by using chemical weapons to terrorize and kill its own people will fall. We have passed the difficult part. We need to be patient and realize victory is near.

"President Jarba's Speech at the 3rd Anniversary of the Syrian Uprising," [SNC](#), 15 April 2014.

**My comments on Jarba's 15 March speech:**

1. The Coalition should have gone to Geneva to negotiate ceasefires and delivery of humanitarian aid, *not* "to expose the absurdity and deception of" Assad. The people of Syria need ceasefires and humanitarian aid.
2. Jarba's call for "advanced weapons" is unlikely to achieve a military victory for the rebels, but will continue the civil war and kill more people. Syria needs fewer munitions from foreign nations.
3. Jarba's claim that "victory is near" is hyperbole. Commentators agree that the rebels are weaker now than in August 2013. Assad appears to be winning the civil war. It is possible that the civil war will end with the jihadists and Al-Qaeda establishing an Islamic caliphate in parts of former Syria. Western commentators are predicting that the Coalition will control little, if any, of former Syrian territory.

I repeat what I wrote in March 2014: In my opinion, an organization who can not operate a reliable website should not be entrusted with operating a government.

**31 March 2014**

**Coalition will *not* attend Geneva negotiations**

In looking at other news items at the English-language Coalition website, I found a 31 March statement that the Coalition would *not* attend any more Geneva negotiations unless Russia changes its position:

Louay Safi, spokesman for the Syrian Coalition, said that if Lakhdar Brahimi managed to convince U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Wendy Chairman to put pressure on Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Bogdanov to change the Russian position towards the Syrian crisis, then we can consider the resumption of negotiations with the Assad regime. "However, the Russians must change their stance and help end the suffering of the Syrian people and achieve their goals in freedom and dignity." Safi's remarks came in response to reports about the intention of the joint international and Arab envoy Lakhdar Brahimi to hold a trilateral meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Wendy Chairman and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov in Geneva on April 10th to discuss the prospects of holding Geneva III conference in a final attempt from Brahimi before submitting his resignation. Safi also said that the Russians must take a clear position that includes ratcheting up pressure on the Assad regime to agree to a political solution and lifting the shield used by Russia to protect the Assad regime in the UN Security Council. "When we hear a clear statement from the Russians that prove their insistence on reaching a political solution, then we can discuss the participation in future peace talks in the meetings of the political committee. But it is unlikely that Russia change its position, based on the history of the Russian position towards the Syrian Revolution that has not changed in more than three years." ....

"Syrian Coalition: We Would Attend Geneva III If Russia Changed Its Stance," [SNC](#), 31 March 2014.

**My comments on this 31 March statement:** As chronicled in my first three essays on Syria, Russia and the USA proposed the Geneva2 negotiations on 7 May 2013, but negotiations began on 22 Jan 2014. Assad's government promptly agreed to attend negotiations, but the Coalition delayed its decision for eight months. The eight-month delay cost approximately 40,000 deaths in the continuing civil war, estimating at 5000 dead/month. That was a horrendously expensive delay by the Syrian National Coalition.

Now the Coalition again demands preconditions to continuing the negotiations, preconditions that are unlikely to be satisfied by Russia, and thus will again delay — or prevent — the continuation of the negotiations.

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### 1 April 2014 Preparing for Geneva3

U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, said during a press conference in Brussels on 1 April:  
**Question:** When you see what is happening in Syria and in Central African Republic, how can you say that we are better armed today than 20 years ago to prevent genocide?

**Ban:** It is tragic, it is very sad, that the international community has not been able to address this tragic situation such as the one in Syria. Three years have already passed, now this is the fourth year. We have to really mobilize political will of the international community. The Geneva II Conference has not yielded much prospect and we are working very hard to convene a Geneva III meeting. It is important that both the Government delegation and the opposition delegation, they should come with a strong commitment and engage in constructive dialogue, before many, many more people will be killed. There is no other viable option than political solution. This is what I am going to push and at the same time we need the support from key actors like the United States and Russia who have initiated this Geneva Conference. They should exercise, or impress upon, all the parties so that they will come with sincere and constructive minds.

Ban Ki-moon, [U.N.](#), 1 April 2014.

This appears to be the first mention of Geneva3. There is no explanation for why the future negotiations are called Geneva3, instead of the continuation of unfinished Geneva2.

On 1 April, the Russian News Agency TASS tersely reported:

The international community has launched preparation for the holding of a third conference on Syria ("Geneva-3"), UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced Tuesday [1 April].

He said the Geneva-2 process, started at the beginning of the year, did not bring the needed results.

Speaking at a press conference in Brussels, the UN chief said that the UN must mobilize the political will of the international community and that the Geneva-2 conference had not yielded much prospects. The UN is working hard on preparing a



Geneva-3 meeting, Mr. Ban pointed out.

"Ban Ki-moon: UN has launched preparation for the holding of a third conference on Syria," [TASS](#), 20:55 GMT, 1 April 2014.

On 4 April, *The Voice of Russia* reported:

Moscow wants negotiations in Geneva between Syria's government and opposition to resume as soon as possible. The bloody armed conflict in Syria has no military solution and can be settled exclusively through political and diplomatic methods, and in the absence of any alternative to this negotiating process, which was launched in Montreux on January 22 should be restarted as soon as possible, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said commenting the possible Geneva-3 international conference.

"Our firm position is that the bloody armed conflict in Syria has no military solution and can be settled exclusively through political and diplomatic methods. In the absence of any alternative to this negotiating process, which was launched in Montreux on January 22, we speak out in favor of its soonest possible resumption. We believe that the inter-Syrian talks, the first two rounds of which were held in Geneva, are still far from exhausting their potential and should be restarted as soon as possible," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said when commenting on a statement made by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon concerning the Geneva-3 international conference, as well as a possible Russia-US-UN meeting dedicated to the Syrian settlement process.

"In principle, the agenda for the third round has already been agreed upon. It paves the way for discussions on a whole set of issues: the need to stop violence and the fight against terrorism, the formation of a transitional ruling body involving representatives of the government of the Syrian Arab Republic and various segments of the Syrian political opposition, as well as other tasks that stem from the Geneva communique dated June 30, 2012," Lukashevich said.

"It is imperative to avoid imposing any agreements on the Syrian sides taking part in the talks, but make sure that these agreements are based on their mutual consent," he said.

"Work underway to arrange Geneva-3 conference on Syria — Moscow," [Voice of Russia](#), 05:52 GMT, 4 April 2014.

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### **3 April 2014 Statement of London11 Nations**

On 3 April, the U.S. State Department posted a statement by the London11 nations. The entire text says:

The core group of the Friends of Syrian People — including Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States — continues to support the efforts of Joint Special Representative Brahimi to mediate a political solution between both sides and calls

upon the Syrian regime to cease its obstruction of the Geneva process by clearly endorsing all elements of the Geneva Communique, which was enshrined in Security Council Resolutions 2118 and 2139 and reaffirmed by the United Nations and the international community at the Montreux conference.

As previously stated by the core group of the Friends of the Syrian People in January 2014 and recently by Joint Special Representative Brahimi, any unilateral decision by the Syrian regime to hold presidential elections would be entirely inconsistent with the Geneva Communique's call for the establishment of a transitional governing body to oversee constitutional reforms leading to free and fair elections in a neutral environment. Elections organized by the Assad regime would be a parody of democracy, would reveal the regime's rejection of the basis of the Geneva talks, and would deepen the division of Syria.

Recent actions by the Assad regime to pave the way for presidential elections in the coming months, including the promulgation of a new electoral law, have no credibility. Bashar al-Assad intends these elections to sustain his dictatorship. They would be conducted in the midst of a conflict, only in regime-controlled areas, and with millions of Syrians disenfranchised, displaced from their homes, or in refugee camps. An electoral process led by Assad, who the United Nations considers to have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, mocks the innocent lives lost in the conflict.

The best way out of Syria's crisis is a political solution based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communique. This requires the Syrian regime to accept the agenda and sequencing laid out by Joint Special Representative Brahimi as a condition for the resumption of talks: (i) violence and terrorism; (ii) transitional governing body; (iii) national institutions; and (iv) national reconciliation. As Joint Special Representative Brahimi has stated, items (i) and (ii) must be discussed in parallel, and there must be genuine engagement on the creation of a transitional governing body.

"Joint Statement by the London 11 Countries," [U.S. State Dept.](#), 3 April 2014.  
Copy at Saudi-US Relations Information Service ([SUSRIS](#)).

Later on 3 April, at the U.S. State Department's Daily Press Briefing, Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson, said the following:

QUESTION: So other thing, which is like — because I was surprised to see this statement, and nobody is now talking about any political process.

MS. HARF: Well, that's not true entirely. I said yesterday that our special envoy was meeting with Joint Special Representative Brahimi to talk exactly about how to move the political, diplomatic process forward. So we're talking about it. We're trying to get everybody back to the table. Haven't had success at it yet.

QUESTION: So you — because when you say how we make a process, it's different from a process which was going on and it seems that —

MS. HARF: Well, there is a process that's been going on, as you know, with the

Geneva talks. And what, I think, Mr. Brahimi's trying to determine right now is if there's a way forward with that process at it stands with them, us, the Russians — if there's a way to get everybody back to the table. But we need the regime, quite frankly, to agree to discuss a range of issues, not just terrorism.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 3 April 2014.

Only a few news sources reported this statement of the London11:

- "London 11 group of nations mock Syrian elections as 'parody of democracy'," [Kuwait Press Agency](#), 18:34 GMT, 3 April 2014.
- "Anti-Assad allies rebuff Syrian presidential election plan," [Reuters](#), 19:07 GMT, 3 April 2014.
- "Anti-Assad allies: elections will kill peace talks," [Al-Arabiya](#), 05:25 GMT, 4 April 2014.

**My comments:** Who cares if elections in Syria are consistent with the Geneva1 Communiqué? The Geneva1 conference of foreign meddlers in June 2012, which called for a transitional governing body (TGB), contained no one from Syria and attempts to temporarily wrest Syrian policy from the Syrians. The TGB is just diplomatic code for ousting Assad, something the rebels failed to do militarily during more than three years of civil war. Now the rebels — encouraged by the London11 nations — will futilely attempt to oust Assad in negotiations. The world needs to recognize the reality that Assad is in the dominant position in Syria and he is firmly in control of the government. Continuing to babble about a TGB makes negotiations futile, because Assad is not going to resign.

The criticisms of Assad's proposed election could also have been leveled at the election in Afghanistan in 2009 where Karzai was the only candidate, but Hillary Clinton said it was an legitimate election. (See my [fifth](#) essay on Syria, "Brahimi afraid of elections in Syria (13 March)" in the Table of Contents.) Instead of condemning the result of the election *before* the election occurs, foreign nations should try to work with Assad to make the election credible.

I disagree with the London11 assertion: "The best way out of Syria's crisis is a political solution based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué." In my opinion, the best way out of the Syrian civil war is for the opponents of Assad to realize they lost the civil war. The parties in Syria need to negotiate an end to the war, on whatever terms they (and *not* foreign meddlers) wish.

Some of the foreign meddlers in the London11 are continuing to send munitions to the rebels/jihadists in Syria, thereby enabling the continuation of the civil war that the negotiations are supposed to end. Moreover, this London11 statement is unhelpful when it continues to endorse the transitional governing body that Assad will *not* accept. The London11 nations need to abandon their obsession with deposing Assad, and instead focus on ceasefires, humanitarian aid, rebuilding Syria, integrating the rebels into the Syrian army, release of prisoners, return of refugees, etc.

The Syrian National Coalition attended the 12 Jan 2014 meeting of the London11 in Paris (see my [third](#) essay on Syria), but the Coalition was *not* part of the 3 April 2014 statement.

I wonder if the Coalition is continuing its 10 March renunciation of negotiations, in defiance of the London11, Russia, and the U.N.

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### **3 April 2014**

#### **Russian view on Geneva negotiations**

On 3 April, concurrent with the London11 statement quoted above, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations told TASS:

The Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for the Syrian Crisis, Lakhdar Brahimi, is showing no signs of readiness to convene the third round of Syria talks, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin said on Thursday, April 3.

"Brahimi is continuing his work and consultations and is showing no readiness to convene the third round of talks," he said.

The international mediator "so much disliked" the previous round of talks that "he is hesitating to convene the third round, while stating his thoughts about what should be done to make the third round more productive. This is not the most convincing reason for delaying the talks," Churkin said.

The second round of the talks ended in Geneva on February 11, 2014. The discussions were expected to resume in March, but the international envoy has so far been unable to convince the sides to get back to the negotiating table.

Churkin believes that long pauses between the rounds will do no good since "the sides have to get used to negotiating with each other". "After all, they met for only two five-day negotiating sessions," the diplomat said.

....

The basis of the talks is full implementation of an action plan adopted in the Geneva Communique of 2012, the first international conference on the conflict, which calls for setting up a transitional government that should then lead the country to free and fair elections.

"Churkin: Brahimi not ready to convene third round of Syria talks," [ITAR-TASS](#), 18:41 GMT, 3 April 2014.

Brahimi disappeared from public view after his 24 March remarks at the Arab League meeting, in which he said that negotiations in Geneva would *not* resume soon. So it was useful to have Churkin's announcement of what Brahimi is currently doing.

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### **5 April 2014**

#### **USA to resume arming rebels?**

On 5 April, Reuters reported:

The U.S. government is finalizing a plan to increase training and small-arms shipments for Syrian rebels, two U.S. security sources said on Friday [4 April], as Syrian government troops gain momentum following the collapse of U.S.-backed peace talks.

The United States would increase assistance and send the shipments to moderate rebel factions mostly based in Jordan, along Syria's southern border, the officials familiar with the plan told Reuters.

The additional supplies are likely to be modest and will not include surface-to-air missiles, the officials said, raising questions over the impact in a civil war that has killed an estimated 136,000 people, produced nine million refugees and threatens to destabilize the region.

Rebels have urged the Obama administration to provide advanced weapons including surface-to-air missiles and exert greater military pressure on Russia-backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has intensified bombings of rebel neighbourhoods in recent month.

But the United States fears supplies of advanced weapons to pro-Western rebels could be diverted to Islamic militant groups, who could use them to attack allied, Israeli or civilian aircraft, the U.S. officials said, explaining why the surface-to-air missiles won't be included in the assistance.

....

The sources said that while the Obama administration accepts that the plan will not turn the tide of the conflict decisively against Assad, the U.S. assistance could improve the chances that if Assad is deposed the United States will have allies among successful revolutionary forces.

Mark Hosenball and Missy Ryan, "U.S. finalizing plan to boost support for Syrian rebels — sources," [Reuters](#), 23:19 GMT, 4 April 2014.

Copy at: "Sources: U.S. readies to further back Syrian rebels," [Al-Arabiya](#), 13:53 GMT, 5 April 2014.

**My comments on 5 April:** Reuters mentions a death toll of 136,000 in Syria. This is a stale number, from 31 Jan 2014, two months ago. The [current](#) estimate is *at least* 150,000.

What is keeping the civil war alive in Syria is the flow of foreign munitions into Syria. U.N. Secretary General Ban has been repeatedly saying at least since December 2013 that foreign nations should stop sending munitions to Syria. But everyone ignores Ban. However, Ban is correct.

In my opinion, sending munitions to rebels/jihadists in Syria is like giving a case of vodka to an alcoholic. How much higher do we want the death toll to go? How many more buildings do we want the war to reduce to rubble?

I am appalled at the reasoning used by U.S. Government officials that, if we supply

munitions to the rebels now, then the USA "will have allies" in Syria when Assad is finally deposed. In my opinion, the rebels are more likely to say to the USA: "a real friend would have given us anti-aircraft missiles and other advanced weapons." And the rebels could say: "the USA should have established a no-fly zone over Syria, to prevent the Syrian Air Force from martyring our comrades."

History shows that, many years after the assistance was delivered, nations are *no longer* grateful for military assistance. People either forget about the assistance, or believe they were entitled to the assistance.

The concept of purchasing friendship with gifts is repugnant. Friendship is not a commodity to be purchased.

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On 7 April, journalists reported that videos show rebels using anti-tank missiles manufactured in the USA. It is not known how the rebels acquired these missiles, but the USA has previously sold missiles of this type to both Saudi Arabia and Turkey. News media in Russia seems certain that the U.S. Government supplied the missiles to the rebels, in an escalation of the civil war. [IHS Jane's](#), 7 April; [Debka File](#) in Israel; [Russia Today](#); [Voice of Russia](#), 8 April.

On 15 April, Agence France-Presse reported that the Free Syrian Army had received twenty U.S. anti-tank missiles from an unspecified "Western source". [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 17:04 GMT, 15 April 2014.

On 15 April, Reuters reported:

Online videos show Syrian rebels using what appear to be U.S. anti-tank rockets, weapons experts say, the first significant American-built armaments in the country's civil war.

They would signal a further internationalization of the conflict, with new rockets suspected from Russia and drones from Iran also spotted in the forces of President Bashar al-Assad.

None of that equipment, however, is seen as enough to turn the tide of battle in a now broadly stalemated war, with Assad dominant in Syria's central cities and along the Mediterranean coast and the rebels in the interior north and east.

It was not possible to independently verify the authenticity of the videos or the supplier of the BGM-71 TOW anti-tank rockets shown in the videos. Some analysts suggested they might have been provided by another state such as Saudi Arabia, a U.S. ally, probably with Washington's acquiescence.

U.S. officials declined to discuss the rockets, which appeared in Syria around the same time Reuters reported that Washington had decided to proceed with plans to increase aid, including delivery of lower-level weaponry.

U.S. officials say privately there remain clear limits to American backing for the insurgency, given the widely dominant role played by Islamist militants. A proposal to supply MANPAD surface-to-air missiles was considered but rejected.

Peter Apps, "Rebel videos show first U.S.-made rockets in Syria," [Reuters](#), 12:37 GMT, 15 April 2014.

**My comments on 15 April:** Note that Reuters reports the anti-tank missiles are *not* "enough to turn the tide of battle". If they will not make a difference in the outcome of the civil war, then they are probably provided either to purchase influence with the Syrian National Coalition, or to mollify Saudi Arabia. Above, on 5 April, I explained my opinion that providing munitions that will prolong the civil war, and attempting to purchase influence, were bad reasons.

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### Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

On 5 April, *The New York Times* reported:

As government forces seize the last insurgent strongholds along the Lebanese border, securing the strategic corridor from Damascus to the coast, President Bashar al-Assad's home region, the message from the government is clear: It is winning, and it can afford to be magnanimous. It is offering what it calls reconciliation to repentant opponents, and some are accepting.

But the relative tranquillity may be deceptive. Beneath a calm imposed by military force, siege and starvation, the stage appears set for an unstable period of prolonged conflict that could explode again months or years on. Resentment and distrust smolder on all sides. The country remains divided between government areas and the insurgent-held north. In the capital, the ferment seems clamped down, rather than soothed.

....

Some vow to continue the struggle peacefully; others say fighters are giving up for lack of arms, or to spare their towns more destruction and starvation, but not generally from a change of heart.

"Now there is no point, no money, no weapons," said one shopkeeper, who like many others asked not to be identified for his safety. "But I am sure there are thousands of young men who are just waiting for their chance to fight."

Anne Bernard, "Relative Calm in Parts of Syria Is Deceptive," [NY Times](#), 5 April 2014.  
Copy at [Gulf News](#), 6 April 2014.

On 6 April, the Lebanese National News Agency reported:

Hezbollah Secretary General, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, reassured Sunday [6 April] that the risk of terrorist bombings in Lebanon has dropped considerably, praising herein the measures adopted along the Lebanese-Syrian borders.

"The danger of the Syrian regime's fall has ended, just as the danger of divisions within

Syria," added Nasrallah, speaking in a dialogue interview to *Al-Safir* newspaper to be published Monday [7 April].

"Nasrallah: Risk of terrorist bombings has dropped considerably and risk of Syrian regime's fall has ended," [NNA](#) in Lebanon, 17:30 GMT, 6 April 2014.

Nasrallah's opinion that "the danger of the Syrian regime's fall has ended" was widely reported: [Associated Press](#), 19:36 GMT, 6 April; [Washington Post](#)(AP), 6 April. [Al-Arabiya](#) 06:35 GMT, 7 April; [Reuters](#), 11:42 GMT, 7 April 2014.

**My comments:** Nasrallah is *not* a neutral observer, so his opinion that his friend Assad is secure is suspect. However, journalists are *not* disputing Nasrallah's opinion. Also, note that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization since the U.S. Government's list was created in Oct 1997. [U.S. State Dept.](#)

The Associated Press reports the following statement during an 8 April hearing at the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

Kerry predicted that the war will end only through a negotiated political agreement — not a military strike by outside forces. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who has long pushed for more lethal aid for Syrian rebels, scoffed. "Any objective observer will tell you that Bashar Assad is winning on the battlefield," McCain said.

Lara Jakes, "Kerry: US Strike In Syria Wouldn't Be Devastating," [Associated Press](#), 12:33 EDT, 8 April 2014.

Also at [Al-Jazeera](#) blog.

On 9 April, Reuters reported the recognition in Western Europe and the USA that Assad will continue to rule at least half of Syria for the foreseeable future:

Bashar al-Assad's Lebanese ally Hezbollah said his Western foes must now accept [Assad] will go on ruling Syria after fighting rebels to a standstill — a "reality" to which his foreign enemies seem increasingly resigned.

....

[That "Assad is no longer at risk" of defeat] is a view of Assad that — quietly — seems to be gaining ground in Western capitals. Calling it bad news for Syrians, the French foreign ministry said this week: "Maybe [Assad] will be the sole survivor of this policy of mass crimes".

France, which last year was preparing to join U.S. military action that was eventually aborted, now rules out force and called the stalled talks on "transition" the "only plan" — a view U.S. officials say is shared in Washington, notably among military chiefs who see Assad as preferable to sectarian chaos.

While rebels do not admit defeat, leaders like Badr Jamous of the Syrian National Coalition accept that without foreign intervention "this stalemate will go on". A U.S. official, asked about a deadlock that would leave Assad in control of much of Syria, conceded: "This has become a drawn-out conflict."



....

More than 150,000 people have been killed in three years, as Assad has lost the oil-producing and agricultural east and much of the north, including parts of Syria's largest city, Aleppo.

....

... [Assad] has clawed back control near Damascus, where a year ago rebels hoped for a decisive assault, and the center of the country which links the capital to the coastal stronghold of Assad's Alawite minority. His troops, backed by Hezbollah fighters, took another key town on Wednesday [9 April].

Though as much as half the country is being fought over, Assad could hope to hold at least a roughly southwestern half, including most of the built-up heartlands near the coast, and more than half of the prewar population of 23 million.

This leaves Western powers reflecting on a perceived loss of influence in the Middle East. Many now see a new strategy of "containing" Assad — and the fallout from a bitter war that has created millions of refugees and legions of hardened guerrillas. Samia Nakhoul & Laila Bassam, "Hezbollah confident in Assad, West resigned to Syria stalemate," [Reuters](#), 15:26 GMT, 9 April 2014.

On 24 March, Reuters published a map of Syria showing the area controlled by Assad and the various opposition groups. [Al-Jazeera](#), 10 April 2014. Assad controls most of the heavily populated western parts of Syria, the Islamic terrorists (i.e., jihadists, Nusra Front, ISIL) control a swath of land across the north, the Kurds control northeast Syria, and the rebels control some rural areas and the city of Deraa.

On 14 April, the Syrian government recaptured the old Christian town of Maaloula from jihadists and the Nusra Front. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). (The Nusra Front kidnapped a dozen nuns from Maaloula on 2 Dec 2013, and released them on 9 March, as explained in my previous essays.)

The Associated Press described the Syrian government's victory at Maaloula:

Syrian troops triumphantly swept through some of the last remaining opposition strongholds north of Damascus, including a much coveted ancient Christian hamlet, sending rebel fighters fleeing to nearby hills amid an ever tightening noose.

The near total collapse of rebels along a key supply route that has long funneled weapons to opposition-held districts around Damascus helps strengthen President Bashar Assad's hand in and around the capital ahead of presidential elections during which he intends to run for a third term.

The dramatic capture of Sarkha, Maaloula and Jibbeh was the fastest series of army successes against rebels in the Qalamoun region since the government launched an

offensive in November in the strategic area, a wedge of mountainous territory between the capital and the Lebanese border.

The string of military achievements there this year by government forces — often boosted by allied Hezbollah fighters — adds another layer of defense for Damascus.

....

Maaloula, located some 40 miles (60 kilometers) northeast of the capital and home to a large Christian population, serves as an important symbolic prize for the government in its quest to be seen as protector of religious minorities, including Syria's Christians. Some Maaloula residents still speak a version of Aramaic, the language of biblical times believed to have been used by Jesus.

Rebels had taken the town and been driven out of it twice before. This latest time, rebels seized the village in early December.

....

During a government-led tour of the village Monday, the toll of the past few months on Maaloula was clear, including to Christian sites. It was not clear, however, whether the wreckage to Christian buildings was intentional, or whether the ancient sites were merely caught in the crossfire.

The church bell and cross were missing from the Mar Sarkis convent, while icons of saints, copies of the holy bible, papers and glass littered the floors. The convent is located below the hilltop Safir Hotel, which served as one of the main rebel positions in Maaloula for months.

....

Christian clerics hailed the rebels' ouster from Maaloula with the patriarch of the Greek Catholic church Gregory III Laham declaring the army's victory there as a symbol of liberation of "every human being and every inch of Syria."

Albert Aji, "Syrian Troops Choke Off Rebels North Of Damascus," [Associated Press](#), 18:37 GMT, 14 April 2014.

On Easter, 20 April, Assad personally visited the town of Maaloula, "wished a blessed Easter for all Syrians", and condemned the terrorists who had vandalized the Christian monastery there. [Syrian Radio & TV](#); [SANA](#), both Syrian government propaganda. [GlobalPost](#)(AFP).

On 21 April, it was announced that the presidential election will be held on 3 June in Syria. *Al-Jazeera* says: "Assad, whose term ends on July 17, is widely expected to run and win another seven-year term in office despite the conflict." [Al-Jazeera](#).

In an early version of this election story, the Associated Press reported:

Syria will hold presidential elections on June 3, the country's parliament speaker announced Monday, a vote President Bashar Assad is likely to contest, and win, as the

country enters its fourth year of war.

Assad, who has ruled the country since taking over from his late father in 2000, has suggested he would seek another seven-year term in office, reflecting his determination to show he is the legitimate leader of Syria. He has strengthened his once-tenuous hold on power in recent months with a crushing military assault to recapture key urban areas, likely hoping to have them under government control before the vote is held.

....

On Sunday [20 April], Assad visited the ancient Christian village of Maaloula, where he projected the image of a protector of Syria's religious minorities, many of whom feel threatened by the majority Sunni rebels.

The government has presented the elections as the solution to the crisis: If the people choose Assad in the election, the fight should end; if Assad loses, then he will leave.

In the chaos of the conflict, there are no official statistics on public support for Assad. But it appears Syrians are cleaved between those who support Assad and those who seek his overthrow, with many more mistrustful of all the country's warring parties. Albert Aji & Daa Hadid, "Syria To Hold Presidential Election On June 3," Associated Press, 12:56 GMT, 21 April 2014. Removed from AP website. Copy at [MyWay](#). Later copy at [San Jose Mercury-News](#).

In the final version of this story, the Associated Press reports:

The opposition and the United States denounced the vote as a farce, and a U.N. spokesman said it will "hamper the prospects for a political solution." But Assad's government appears determined to hold the election as a way of exploiting its recent military gains.

....

With the unwavering support of his strong allies, Russia and Iran, Assad has strengthened his once-tenuous hold on power in recent months with an ongoing crushing military assault to recapture key urban areas, likely hoping to have them under government control before the vote is held.

....

The government has presented the elections as the solution to the war, suggesting Assad would step down gracefully if he loses the vote.

No reliable statistics exist on public support for Assad. But a large number of Syrians are mistrustful of all the country's warring parties.

The armed rebellion is dominated by Syria's Sunni Muslim majority, while Syria's mix of Christian and Muslim minorities, including Assad's own Alawite sect, tend to

support the president, fearful of their fates should hard-line Sunni Muslims come to power.

Albert Aji & Zeina Karam, "Syria Elections Set For June 3 Amid Civil War," [Associated Press](#), 18:23 GMT, 21 April 2014.

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### **7 April 2014 Interview with Assad**

On 7 April, the Russian news agency, ITAR-TASS, reported:

"In reply to my question about military affairs, Assad said, 'The active phase of warfare in Syria will be finished within a year'," Stepashin [the chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society] told a news conference. "Then we will have to proceed to what we have been doing all the time — fight against terrorists, Shakhids," he quoted the Syrian leader, adding that the talks had focused mainly on economic cooperation.

....

According to the Syrian president, there was no conflict among religions in his country, but there was a conflict between people of all confessions and gunmen. Humanitarian aid from the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society confirmed this, said its chairman Stepashin.

"Active phase of warfare in Syria to end within a year, Assad says," [ITAR-TASS](#), 10:32 GMT, 7 April 2014.

Reuters reported:

President Bashar al-Assad has forecast that much of the fighting in the Syrian civil war will be over by the end of the year, a former Russian prime minister was quoted on Monday [7 April] as saying.

"This is what he told me: 'This year the active phase of military action in Syria will be ended. After that we will have to shift to what we have been doing all the time — fighting terrorists'," Itar-Tass news agency quoted Sergei Stepashin as saying.

Stepashin, an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and former head of Russia's FSB security service, portrayed Assad as secure, in control and in "excellent athletic shape" after a meeting in Damascus last week.

....

Russia and the United States organised peace talks that began in January between Assad's government and its foes. But no agreement was reached and a resumption appears unlikely soon, in part because of high tension between Russia and the West over Ukraine.

Russian officials say Moscow is not trying to prop up Assad and but that his exit from power cannot be a precondition for a political solution. Their assessments of his future

have varied with the fortunes of his military.

Assad has lost control of large swathes of northern and eastern Syria to Islamist rebels and foreign jihadis. But his forces, backed by militant group Hezbollah and other allies, have driven rebels back from around Damascus and secured most of central Syria. "Assad 'says fighting largely over by end of year' — former Russian PM," [Reuters](#), 01:11 GMT, 8 April 2014.

Also reported by [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); both on 7 April 2014.

The Syrian government's news agency, SANA, published a news story on this topic that mentioned *neither* the end of the civil war within one year *nor* the "gunmen". Instead, the SANA story emphasizes "international terrorism" (the phrase is mentioned four times in the article and also in the title) that is supported by Turkey and "some Western and regional countries." [SANA](#). The difference between the SANA version and the TASS/Reuters version casts doubt on the TASS/Reuters version.

**My comments:** It is astounding that Assad believes the civil war will end before April 2015. If Qatar and Saudi Arabia continue to send munitions to the rebels and jihadists, the war could continue indefinitely.

Assad says the "active phase" will end in a year, but then Assad's military will continue "fighting terrorists". But Assad's government has long used the label "terrorists" for *all* of the opposition, including moderate rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda. Perhaps Assad believes the moderate rebels will surrender sometime during the next year, leaving Assad to fight only the Islamic extremists (e.g., jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL).

Equally perplexing is Assad's view that the civil war was between "gunmen" and people of all religions. Surely, Assad understands that Shiite sects (e.g., Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Shiites from Iraq) are supporting Assad's government with both munitions and fighters. And the Sunni majority in Syria, aided by munitions from Sunni nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Qatar) and many foreign fighters, are fighting against Assad's government. There is obviously a religious dimension to the Syrian civil war.

What Assad may be trying to say is that he tolerates all religions: Christians, Shiite Muslims, and Sunni Muslims. It is especially ISIL — and also the Nusra Front and jihadists — who demonstrate intolerance for other religions.

Perhaps translation of Assad's remarks into Russian language, and then translation into English, caused the difficulty in understanding Assad.

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### 17 April 2014 Homs

During 7-12 February 2014, there were six days of delivery of food and medical supplies to Homs and evacuation of approximately 1400 civilians from Homs. (See my [fourth](#) essay on

Syria.) On 17 April, Brahimi briefly met with Kerry. (I say "briefly" because Kerry was also to attend a meeting on Ukraine.) Also on 17 April, Brahimi spoke to journalists in Geneva — *not* about negotiations between the Coalition and Syria in Geneva — but about negotiations in Homs.

Brahimi's complete statement said:

Recent discussions between the Syrian authorities and a Negotiating Committee representing the civilians and fighters still trapped in the Old city of Homs as well as the inhabitants of the Al-Waer neighbourhood were followed with keen interest and great hope by people all over Syria as well as elsewhere in the region and the world. The Government Media in Damascus wrote very positively about the process.

It is a matter of deep regret that negotiations were brutally stopped and violence is now rife again when a comprehensive agreement seemed close at hand. It is alarming that Homs, whose people have suffered so much throughout these past three years is again the theatre of death and destruction.

We have reached out to all those who could help put an end to this tragedy. We urge all the parties to return to the negotiating table and complete the deal which was on the verge of being signed.

"Press statement by the Joint Special Representative for Syria Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi — Geneva," [U.N.](#), 17 April 2014.

The United Nations press release repeated some of Brahimi's words. [U.N.](#), 17 April 2014. Also see: [Reuters](#), 14:00 GMT, 17 April 2014; [Associated Press](#), 15:08 GMT, 17 April 2014; [Guardian](#), 18:17 GMT, 17 April 2014.

**My comment on 17 April:** The lack of progress in agreeing a durable ceasefire in Homs shows the great difficulty in negotiating peace between the opposition fighters, who *want* to continue fighting, and the government of Syria. The failure of the opposition to agree to a ceasefire means that the Syrian Army will need to annihilate the opposition, in order to bring peace to Homs.

On 18 April, *Al-Jazeera* reported:

Syrian armed forces have made advances around the Old City of Homs, where some 1,200 rebels are dug in and under regime siege.

....

Meanwhile, the army, which began a broad offensive against rebel-held parts of the central city on Tuesday [15 April], was progressing daily by "capturing buildings and tightening the noose around the terrorist groups", a security source told the AFP news agency. Syrian authorities refer to all those seeking to oust Assad as "terrorists".

....

[Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said:] The remaining rebel fighters in Homs "know the area very well and refuse to leave. They

want to fight until the end," he added.  
"Syria army advances in besieged Homs," [Al-Jazeera](#), 17 April 2014.

On Tuesday, 22 April, the Associated Press reported that Assad would conquer Homs sometime in the next several days:

Weakened Syrian rebels are making their last desperate stand in Homs, as forces loyal to President Bashar Assad launch their harshest assault yet to expel them from the central city, once known as the capital of the revolution.

....

"We expect Homs to fall," said an activist who uses the name Thaer Khalidiya in an online interview with The Associated Press. "In the next few days, it could be under the regime's control."

....

The fight for Homs underscores Assad's determination to rout rebels ahead of presidential elections now set for June 3, aiming to scatter fighters back further north toward their supply lines on the Turkish borders. Assad's forces are building on gains elsewhere — they have been able to almost clear rebels from a broad swath of territory south of Homs between the capital, Damascus, and the Lebanese border, breaking important rebel supply lines there. Rebels have also capitulated in several towns around Damascus after blockades that caused widespread hunger and suffering.

....

Inside Homs, rebels have been deeply weakened by months of blockade around their strongholds and the loss of their supply lines from Lebanon in March, after Syrian forces seized the border town of Zara. .... The rebels remaining in the city are predominantly from the Nusra Front, an al-Qaida affiliate, and other Islamist factions. Daaa Hadid, "Syrian Rebels Make Last Stand For Homs," [Associated Press](#), 12:14 GMT, 22 April 2014.

See also Anne Barnard, "Homs Emerges as Turning Point in Shaping Syria's Future," [NY Times](#), 22 April 2014.

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### **23 April 2014** **Blair's view of radical Islam**

On 23 April, Tony Blair, former U.K. prime minister (1997-2007), gave a keynote speech at Bloomberg Headquarters in London. His speech warned of the danger of radical Islam. The following paragraphs specifically concern Syria:

Within the Middle East itself, the result has been horrible, with people often facing a choice between authoritarian government that is at least religiously tolerant; and the

risk that in throwing off the government they don't like, they end up with a religiously intolerant quasi-theocracy.

....

In Syria, we call for the regime to change, we encourage the Opposition to rise up, but then when Iran activates Hezbollah on the side of Assad, we refrain even from air intervention to give the Opposition a chance. The result is a country in disintegration, millions displaced, a death toll approximating that of Iraq, with no end in sight and huge risks to regional stability.

....

If we apply those principles to the Middle East, it would mean the following. .... [9] Syria. This is an unmitigated disaster. We are now in a position where both Assad staying and the Opposition taking over seem bad options. The former is responsible for creating this situation. But the truth is that there are so many fissures and problems around elements within the Opposition that people are rightly wary now of any solution that is an outright victory for either side. Repugnant though it may seem, the only way forward is to conclude the best agreement possible even if it means in the interim President Assad stays for a period. Should even this not be acceptable to him, we should consider active measures to help the Opposition and force him to the negotiating table, including no fly zones whilst making it clear that the extremist groups should receive no support from any of the surrounding nations.

Tony Blair, "Why the Middle East Matters," [Blair](#), 23 April 2014.

See news reports: [The Guardian](#); [BBC](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#)(AP); [Bloomberg](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Arab News](#); all on 23 April 2014.

Commentary:

- Gideon Rachman, "The holes in Blair's Middle Eastern Vision," [Financial Times](#).
- John McTernan, "Tony Blair's Middle East speech should prick consciences and spur action," [The Guardian](#).
- "Tony Blair is right that defeating Islamism is a generational battle. But we won't win by repeating the errors of the past," [The Independent](#).
- "The wisdom of Tony Blair," [Saudi Gazette](#).

**My comments:** Amongst enlightened people there is a common view that all religions are equally good, and *all* religions should be not only tolerated but also respected. That doctrine makes it taboo to criticize another person's religion.

But then radical Islam (e.g., Al-Qaeda) appears and repeatedly carries out murderous attacks — terrorism — against people who do not accept the views of radical Islam. These terrorists are more than willing to kill Jews, Christians, and even other Muslims. These terrorists advocate restricting the religious freedom of others, so that radical Islamists are not offended.



Just because radical Islam has an underlying religious motivation should not protect them from criticism — and should not protect them from prosecution — because their use of terrorism to advance their cause is repugnant to civilization and freedom.

Blair would like to see Western Europe and the USA become militarily engaged in the fight against radical Islam. While I agree with Blair that we have a strong interest in seeing radical Islam defeated, I disagree with Blair on how to accomplish this.

Notice that the International Red Cross uses a worldwide logo that shows a red cross on a white background, except in Arab nations where the logo is a red crescent. This difference comes from ancient history, in that the red cross was originally the logo of Christian Crusaders who attempted to expel Muslims from Palestine approximately during the years 1095 to 1291. Seven hundred years later, the red cross is still anathema to Arabs. The lesson we should learn from this history is not to have religious warfare (e.g., Christians vs. Muslims), but a coalition of *all* civilizations — specifically including mainstream Islam — against terrorism (e.g., radical Islam). Another lesson we should learn is that predominantly Christian nations should keep a low profile in the fight against radical Islam, and let the predominantly Muslim nations take the lead.

Blair now joins the chorus of respected diplomats who urge that Assad remaining in power is better than having jihadists or Al-Qaeda control Syria. In my opinion, the USA and Western Europe should end their obsessions with deposing Assad. The USA and Western Europe should stop the incessant criticism of Assad that seems to encourage rebels to continue futilely fighting against Assad.

The United Nations needs to identify nations who are sending munitions to the jihadists and/or Al-Qaeda in Syria, and then stop the flow of munitions to these fighters. Assad — aided by Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah in Lebanon — might be able to defeat the jihadists and Al-Qaeda, if the United Nations would stop the flow of munitions to the jihadists and Al-Qaeda. And if Assad defeats radical Islam in Syria, Assad should have our gratitude.

Finally, let me remind the reader that former U.S. president Jimmy Carter and Prof. Pastor wrote an op-ed about Syria in *The Washington Post* on 23 Dec 2013. (See my [second](#) essay on Syria.) Despite Carter and Pastor having many good ideas, their ideas were ignored by the international news media and their ideas immediately disappeared from public discussion. I predict it will be the same with Blair's interesting ideas. For more than three years the governments of the USA and UK have pushed the simplistic view that Assad is Evil, and "Assad lost his legitimacy to lead Syria", that is the basis for the so-called foreign policy of Western Europe and the USA. It is difficult for a complex view like Carter's or Blair's to compete with a simplistic view being pushed by major governments. At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Dept. on 23 April, Blair's speech was *not* mentioned.

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**23 April 2014**  
**Syrian National Coalition Again Rejects Geneva2**

On 23 April, the Syrian National Coalition issued a news release:

Hadi Al Bahra, Secretary of the political committee, rules out resuming Geneva talks in the foreseeable future, pointing out that efforts to bring about a political solution are currently deadlocked. Bahra also said that the Assad regime's announcement of a date for the presidential election confirms its rejection of the international efforts to bring about a political solution through the formation of a transitional governing body." Furthermore, Bahra decries "the international silence towards Assad's genocidal campaign against the Syrian people. This silence indicates the absence of an effective international will to enforce the UN resolution No. 2118, which demands that the Assad regime agree to political transition and negotiate the formation of a transitional governing body with full executive powers. The inaction of the international community towards the daily massacres committed by the Assad regime suggests that there is a will for the continuation of the tragedy in Syria." Bahra concluded his remarks stressing that the Syrian people have no other option but to go through with the revolution unless there is an international will to enforce the UNSC resolutions and Geneva I declaration."

"Syrian Coalition: Absence of Prerequisites for Effective Negotiations Nullifies Need to Resume Geneva Talks," [SNC](#), 23 April 2014.

**My comments:** This short news release contains four errors of logic:

1. The election date is irrelevant to negotiations about ceasefires, humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, etc. Moreover, Assad will be president both before and after the election, so the election will produce no change.
2. "The inaction of the international community towards the daily massacres committed by the Assad regime suggests that there is a will for the continuation of the tragedy in Syria." This sentence is pure nonsense. The inaction of the international community is mostly a result of Russia's ability to veto in the U.N. Security Council any sanctions against the Assad regime. The inaction of the international community is also recognition that past military engagement by Western nations in Muslim nations (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya) led to humanitarian disasters and continuing governmental instability.
3. The failure of the international community to enforce Geneva1 does *not* imply that the fighting must continue (i.e. "no other option"). There are always alternatives to violent revolution.
4. The last sentence of the news release is an ultimatum: Unless the U.N. enforces Geneva1, the rebels will continue to fight. And if the rebels continue to fight, then Assad's military will also continue to fight, and cities will be besieged, and many tens of thousands — maybe hundreds of thousands — of innocent Syrians will die. Ironically, the Geneva1 Communiqué was originally intended to bring peace to Syria, *not* to be a reason to continue a civil war.

Note that U.N. Resolution Nr. 2118 endorses Geneva1. The Coalition is enamored with Geneva1 because it requires a "transitional governing body", which is code for replacing Assad. The Coalition has been unable to defeat Assad in more than three years of battle, so now the Coalition seeks to defeat Assad in negotiations. On the other hand, Assad, who is

winning the civil war, has no desire to resign. This is just one reason why Geneva2 is futile. (Other reasons were given in my [fourth](#) essay on Syria.)

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### **24 April 2014 Ban Again Realizes U.N. Resolution 2139 Failed**

On 24 March, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon issued a monthly report that clearly showed that U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 had failed. (See my [fifth](#) essay on Syria.) On 23 April, Ban issued a second monthly report that again showed the failure of that Resolution. In his second monthly report, Ban said:

**16.** Concerns also remain about the situation of civilians in other areas under opposition control, in particular given the previous track-record of some of the opposition groups involved. After the opposition gained control of Kassab, an initial report indicated that 40 people, mostly elderly Armenians, were trapped in Kassab town and surrounding villages. Eight Armenians are reported missing, and there is no information about the whereabouts of Alawites who used to live in Kassab. Both Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham took part in a previous offensive on Alawite villages in rural Ladhqiqiyah in August 2013, which resulted in the killing of at least 190 people and the kidnapping of another 200, most of them women and children. During the reporting period, Ahrar al-Sham stated that it continued to hold over 90 hostages from that incident. In a statement issued on 29 March, Jabhat al-Nusra confirmed that it had killed a number of people, although it is not clear whether they included civilians.

....

**24.** The situation of approximately 242,000 [footnote omitted] people in besieged areas remains of grave concern. It is estimated that approximately 197,000 people live in areas that are besieged by Government forces in the Old City of Homs, Moadamiyet al-Sham, eastern Ghouta, Darayya and Yarmouk, while approximately 45,000 people live in areas besieged by opposition forces in Nubul and Zahra.

....

**48.** While the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic can be resolved only through a political solution, I regret to inform the Council that we have drifted even further from that goal. After two rounds of intra-Syrian negotiations in January and February, the Geneva II talks on implementation of the Geneva Communiqué have stalled. While current conditions may not be conducive for a quick resumption of peace talks, international and regional actors and the Syrian parties themselves must put aside their differences and refocus on promoting a political solution to the crisis.

**49.** With the ever-increasing violence and extremism, I repeat my strong calls on all in the region and beyond to stop the flow of arms and fighters to all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. The international community must do all it can to prevent extremist groups from acquiring financial resources, weapons, food and other supplies. All regional actors must also exercise restraint and avoid provocation that would lead

to further escalation of the conflict.

....

**52.** Two months since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), none of the parties to the conflict have adhered to the demands of the Council. Civilians are not being protected. The security situation is deteriorating and humanitarian access to those most in need is not improving. It remains an extremely challenging environment in which to work. Thousands of people are not getting the medical care that they need, including life-saving medicines. Medical supplies, including life-saving medicines and vaccines, and equipment for the wounded and the sick are commodities privileged throughout the Geneva Conventions. Denying these is arbitrary and unjustified, and is a clear violation of international humanitarian law. Yet, medicines are routinely denied to those who need them, including tens of thousands of women, children and elderly. The Security Council must take action to deal with these flagrant violations of the basic principles of international law.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014)," [U.N.](#), 23 April 2014.

[The Guardian](#) posted a copy of the Second Report five days before this document was posted at the U.N. website.

The first sentence of ¶52 deserves emphasis: "none of the parties" are obeying Resolution 2139. The situation in Syria is *not* a problem of Assad defying the U.N. The Truth is that *all* of the parties in Syria are defying the U.N. However, Assad may create bigger problems than the insurgents, because Assad controls more access routes for humanitarian aid, and because Assad has besieged more cities than the insurgents.

The last sentence of ¶52 also deserves emphasis: "The Security Council must take action to deal with these flagrant violations of the basic principles of international law." But Ban did *not* say what kind of "action" would be appropriate. Surely, the Russians will veto any sanctions on Assad's government, and both the jihadists and Al-Qaeda are already operating outside of international law.

On 23-24 April, a few journalists summarized Ban's Second Report:

- "UN: 3.5 million Syrians desperately need aid," [Washington Post](#)(AP).
- "Security Council must act on Syria: UN chief," [Al-Jazeera](#).
- "U.N. says 3.5 million Syrians in dire need of aid," [Al-Arabiya](#).
- "U.N. chief demands Security Council action on Syria," [Reuters](#), 24 April 2014.

Separately, on 23 April, five chiefs of U.N. aid agencies pled for Syria to allow humanitarian aid, the subject of Resolution 2139. "Syria: UN chiefs issue impassioned plea to save besieged civilians," [U.N. News Centre](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 25 April, a United Nations spokesman (1) denied that Brahimi had resigned and (2) said the discussion in the U.N. Security Council of Ban's Second Report on Resolution 2139 was scheduled for 30 April. [U.N.](#); [Kuwait News Agency](#).

On 30 April, the Associated Press reported on the meeting of the U.N. Security Council: Members of the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday [30 April] said they fear that no progress will be made on getting desperately needed humanitarian aid into Syria as long as Russia opposes any actions against the government there.

U.N. humanitarian chief Valerie Amos briefed the council and said a resolution passed in February aimed at eliminating obstacles to deliver aid is "not working," and she blamed the parties in the conflict of "an endless spiral of targeting and harming civilians."

....

But Russia, Syria's closest ally, can veto any such action as a permanent council member.

French U.N. ambassador Gerard Araud tweeted from the council meeting, "#UNSC will be haunted by its failure."

....

But Araud called Wednesday's meeting "a big disappointment." "Unfortunately after what I've heard, nothing that we could table to the council would pass," he told reporters. "We have the impression of unconditional defense of the regime." Araud said the council could press ahead on another resolution, and a veto, but that could show "that the council is unable to act, which is not very good for the U.N., so it's a sad impression of a dead end, unfortunately."

Cara Anna, "UN Security Council Despairs Over Syria Aid," [Associated Press](#), 14:09 EDT, 30 April 2014.

See also [Reuters](#), 15:58 EDT, 30 April.

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### **25 April 2014 Kuwait funding Nusra Front**

On 25 April, *The Washington Post* reported:

Kuwait, a U.S. ally whose aid to besieged Syrian civilians has been surpassed only by the United States this year, is also the leading source of funding for al-Qaeda-linked terrorists fighting in Syria's civil war, according to Obama administration officials.

The amount of money that has flowed from Kuwaiti individuals and through organized charities to Syrian rebel groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra totals in the hundreds of millions of dollars, according to experts whose estimates are endorsed by the Treasury Department.

Until recently, tiny, oil-rich Kuwait avoided public scrutiny as attention to terrorist financing focused more sharply on Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

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Last month [4 March 2014], the administration decided to go public with its concerns. In a remarkably undiplomatic [statement](#) that officials said had been cleared at senior levels, Treasury Undersecretary David S. Cohen called Kuwait "the epicenter of fundraising for terrorist groups in Syria."

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Kuwait's generally low profile in the West rose most prominently in 1991, when the United States sent hundreds of thousands of troops to liberate the constitutional emirate from a seven-month occupation by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq was launched from Kuwait, which subsequently provided the platform for the George W. Bush administration's Iraq operations and eventually for the U.S. withdrawal.

Karen DeYoung, "Kuwait, a U.S. ally on Syria, is also the leading funder of extremist rebels," [Washington Post](#), 25 April 2014.

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### 30 April 2014 Brahimi rumored to resign soon

On 30 April, Reuters reported rumors that Brahimi, now 80 y old, will soon resign: The search has started for a replacement for Syria mediator Lakhdar Brahimi, who diplomatic sources say is planning to resign in the near future, largely out of frustration at Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's plans to hold an election in June.

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For more than a year, Brahimi has made no secret that he is contemplating stepping down from the post as the United Nations and Arab League joint special representative on Syria. Brahimi told reporters a year ago in New York that he thought about resigning every day.

Brahimi will be in New York at the end of this week and is due to meet with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Friday [2 May]. Security Council diplomats say he will brief the 15-nation body on May 13 on his so far unsuccessful efforts to bring an end to the Syrian civil war, now in its fourth year.

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A senior U.N. official told Reuters it was not a question of whether Brahimi would resign, but when. "It will certainly happen soon," the official said. Louis Charbonneau, "Search is on for successor to Syria peace mediator Brahimi," [Reuters](#), 19:58 GMT, 30 April 2014.

**My comments:** The Geneva2 negotiations have focused on the "transitional governing

body" that is mentioned in Geneva1. The opposition demands that Assad resign, while Assad — who is winning the civil war — has no intention of resigning. This makes negotiations futile on the issue of Assad's future as leader of Syria. Superficially, it appears that Brahimi made an error in focusing on the TGB. But the Geneva1 Communiqué is endorsed in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118, which is binding on Brahimi.

The election in Syria is only symbolic. The conventional wisdom is that the election will be rigged so that Assad is re-elected. The London11 Communiqué of 12 Jan 2014 calls the future election a "parody of a ballot" and declared: "If [the election] were to happen, we would consider it totally null and void." On 3 April, the London11 nations issued a statement — quoted [above](#) — that calls the future elections "a parody of democracy". With nearly everyone condemning the Syrian election before the election occurs, one wonders why anyone would be influenced by this election. But, illogically, the Syrian National Coalition has threatened to withdraw from negotiations if Assad is re-elected. (See my [fifth](#) essay on Syria, discussion at 13 March.)

The first negotiator on Syria, Kofi Annan, resigned in frustration in August 2012. It is easy to understand why any negotiator between Assad and the Syrian National Coalition would be frustrated.

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## Conclusions

Here is what 37 months of military conflict in Syria have accomplished:

- At least 150,000 dead people by 31 March 2014, increasing at approximately 7000/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.

On 8 April, there was a small delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo, using 54 hand-pulled carts.

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On 20 Jan 2014, the Associated Press eloquently summarized the Syrian civil war:

Both the government and the opposition have suffered enormous losses, but even now, neither side appears desperate enough to budge from its entrenched position. At this point, just getting the antagonists into the same room to start what is expected to be a long process that could drag on for years would be perceived as a success.

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Syria's crisis began in the heyday of the Arab Spring uprisings that swept away authoritarian leaders in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. Unlike the others, Syria's leadership responded to largely peaceful protests for political reform with a withering crackdown. That slowly forced the opposition to take up arms and gave birth to a civil war that has also spawned a proxy battle between regional Shiite Muslim power Iran and Sunni heavyweight Saudi Arabia.

The cumulative effect of the war has been disastrous. Syria lies in ruins, its economy shattered, its rich social fabric shredded.

Zeina Karam & Ryan Lucas, "UN Rescinds Invitation To Iran To Attend Talks," (previously titled: "Syria Talks Set To Open Amid Low Expectations"), [Associated Press](#), 18:48 EST, 20 Jan 2014.

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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 and inexperienced 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](#), [fourth](#), and [fifth](#) 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.

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.

4. The United Nations negotiations process is continuing to insist on a "transitional governing body" mentioned in Geneva1. (Geneva1 was a hastily adopted plan by foreign meddlers in June 2012 that involved no one from Syria, at a time when the U.S. Government believed Assad would soon resign. 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.) Syria already has a stable government with a strong leader (i.e., Assad), so Syria does *not* need a transitional government. Moreover, Assad is winning the civil war. Instead of a discussion of an unnecessary "transitional governing body", there *should* be negotiations about ceasefires, delivery of humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, and other issues that affect the *people* living in Syria.

Because the Syrian National Coalition is absolutely united in their demand that Assad must resign, and Assad has no intention of resigning, negotiations on this issue are futile. For other reasons why Geneva2 is futile, see my [fourth](#) essay on Syria.

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 insurgents still control some regions of Syria and parts of some cities.
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. By 13 March 2014, people in Western Europe and the USA were frustrated with continuing 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 essential problem is that the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda *want* the civil war to continue, and their foreign supporters are continuing to supply these insurgents with munitions.

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, delay, 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.

9. Stating the problems a slightly different way, the three big problems are:
  - A. the intransigence and stubbornness of *all* the parties in Syria, many of whom refuse to talk to other parties,
  - B. the continuing flow of munitions to insurgents in Syria from foreign meddlers (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE), and
  - C. the refusal of rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda to negotiate an end to 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, and again in April 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 and *if* the rebels rejoin the Syrian army, it will be a tough job to defeat the jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria. As of 30 April 2014, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

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this document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria8.pdf>  
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and a list of source documents at my website.

[my homepage](#)