

Syria: May 2014

Copyright 2014 by Ronald B. Standler

No copyright claimed for quotations.

No copyright claimed for works of the U.S. Government.

Table of Contents

1. Chemical Weapons: Delivery & Disposal
death toll of more than [162,000](#) (18 May)
[1-3 May 2014](#)
[4-10 May 2014](#)
[11-17 May 2014](#)
[18-24 May 2014](#)
[25-31 May 2014](#)
2. Alleged Use of Chlorine Gas at [Kfar Zeita](#) on 11 April
[Is Assad sane?](#)
3. [Why Peace Negotiations Futile](#)
[Diversion](#)
[Homs](#)
Revised [policy](#) in Syria? Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War
U.S. Government embraces Syrian National [Coalition](#) (5-13 May)
[Aleppo](#)
French propose war crimes [prosecution](#) (12-22 May)
Brahimi [resigns](#) (13 May)
[London11](#) meeting (15 May)
Ban again recognizes that U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 [failed](#) (22 May)

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.

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

- removal of 92% of chemical weapons from Syria, failure of Assad to meet 5 Feb deadline specified by OPCW, and failure of Assad to meet his own 27 April deadline,
- release of chemical weapons (chlorine?) in Kfar Zeita in Syria on 11 April,
- Europe, Russia, USA now paying more attention to crisis in Ukraine/Crimea than to Syrian civil war,

- U.N. Secretary General preparing for Geneva3 (but Coalition refuses to attend more negotiations),
- recognition that Assad seems to be winning the Syrian civil war,
- and failure of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139.

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 *Al-Jazeera*. 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.

In writing these essays, I have been using "Syrian National Coalition" (or just "Coalition") to designate a group of Syrian exiles with headquarters in Istanbul that have the official name "National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces", which they sometimes shorten to "The National Syrian Coalition". The U.S. State Department is calling this organization the SOC, for "Syrian Opposition Coalition". I want to be clear that, despite the different names for it, this Coalition is *one* organization.

Copyright law allows an author to make brief quotations for purposes of scholarship, news reporting, or comment, but *not* to copy an entire article. (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper. However, there is no copyright on works of the U.S. Government (17 U.S.C. §105), so an author is free to copy as much of a Government's work as the author wishes.

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.

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

18 May 2014 Death Toll more than 162,000

At the beginning of each month (except March 2014 and May 2014, when totals were reported on 13 March and 19 May), the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reports its count of the total number of dead people in the Syria civil war. This death toll is a useful reminder of the failure of diplomats to end this civil war.

The SOHR released its monthly death toll on the morning of Monday, 19 May.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented the death of 162,402 persons as of 18/03/2011 which witnessed the fall of the first martyr in Deraa, and until 31/03/2014.

The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 80,836 civilians including 8,607 children and 5,586 women
- Rebel and islamic fighters: 26,858
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2,314
- 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: 13,529
- Regular soldiers and officers: 37,685
- Combatants from popular defence committees, national defence forces, shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 23,485
- Arab and Asian pro-regime militants: 1224
- Fighters from Hezbollah : 438
- Unidentified casualties (documented by pictures and footages): 2,891

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.

After the failure of referring cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria to the International criminal court because of the Russian-Chinese veto in the security council, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights renews its call to all international sides to establish a special court for Syria. We in the Syrian Observatory demand the punishment of all perpetrators, instigators, collaborators and all individuals and sides who used the Syrian blood as a political card and a means to carry out their personal agendas, as well as those who transformed a revolution for dignity to a sectarian and ethnic civil war.

"More than 162,000 dead in Syria since 18/03/2011," [SOHR](#), 19 May 2014. (Bulleted list added by Standler.)

See also:

- "At least 162,000 killed in Syria conflict — monitoring group," [Reuters](#), 09:22 GMT, 19 May 2014.
- Barbara Surk, "Activists: Death Toll In Syria's War Tops 160,000," [Associated Press](#), 12:54 GMT, 19 May 2014. ("The Observatory remains the sole organization providing a reliable tally of Syria's dead.")
- Anne Barnard, "Syria Death Toll Reported to Rise By 10,000 in Less Than 2 Months," [NY Times](#), 19 May 2014.
- "Death toll reaches new grim milestone," [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, 20 May 2014.

My comments: On 31 March, the death toll was 150,344. On 18 May, the death toll was 162,402. That means that 12,058 people died in 48 days, or 7536 dead/30 days. That monthly rate is approximately the same as the 7178 dead/30 day rate during February and March 2014.

The high rate of deaths may be useful to justify the passage of the current [proposal](#) in the U.N. Security Council to refer the Syrian matter to the International Criminal Court.

May 2014 Chemical Weapons in Syria

2 May 2014 Explanation for Delay in Delivery?

On 2 May, Reuters reported:

A Syrian rebel offensive aimed at easing a government siege east of Damascus has brought fighting closer to the last declared stockpile of President Bashar al-Assad's chemical weapons, according to diplomats and activists.

Syria has been removing 1,300 metric tons of chemical weapons under a deal reached last year which averted Western military strikes, after a sarin gas attack on rebel-held suburbs around the Syrian capital in August.

But [Syria] has missed several deadlines to ship out the toxins — the last of which was April 27 — and has told the international mission overseeing the operation that one

remaining chemical site remains difficult to reach because of the fighting.

Assad's Western foes suspect him of deliberately dragging out the process, but the rebel advance east of Damascus suggests there are genuine obstacles to getting the chemicals out.

....

Activists said the fighters are from the Islamic Front — one of the largest and most powerful Islamist rebel coalitions — the Rahman Corps and Ahmad Abdo Brigades. The offensive appeared to be funded by Gulf Arab supporters, they said.

The [anonymous] diplomat said rebels have overrun the abandoned and emptied chemical base at Khan Abu Shammal, which lies between Dumair and Sayqal, and cut the road linking them.

He described the proximity of the fighting to Sayqal [where the chemical weapons are believed to be held] as worrying and said it was not clear whether there were alternative routes to evacuate the chemicals other than the road which was blocked by the rebels.

Dominic Evans, "Syrian rebel offensive encroaches on last chemical stockpile," [Reuters](#), 16:33 GMT, 2 May 2014.

My comments: This military campaign *may* explain why there have been no deliveries of chemical weapons since 24 April. Note that "Gulf Arab" nations are supporting the jihadists who are delaying the delivery of chemical weapons. I regret that there is no way to make the Gulf Arab nations reimburse the Danish and Norwegian taxpayers for their idle cargo ships, and to reimburse the U.S. taxpayers for the idle M.V. Cape Ray.

no news

On 8 May, it has been two weeks since the previous consignment of chemical weapons was delivered to OPCW on 24 April. Initially, there was expectation that Assad would deliver all of his remaining chemical weapons in the few days after 24 April. But now one wonders what is happening. There is no news about Syrian chemical weapons at either the [OPCW](#) or the [OPCW/UN](#) websites. The OPCW/UN website on Syria was not updated between 28 April and 7 May 2014.

8 May 2014

Explanation for Delay in Delivery

On 8 May, the Associated Press reported the reason for the delay in the delivery of the remaining chemical weapons:

[Sigrid Kaag, head of the OPCW/UN mission in Syria] told reporters after briefing the U.N. Security Council that it's not possible at the moment to arrange a cease-fire so authorities can get to the site where 5 containers of the most dangerous chemicals used

to make poison gas and nerve agents and 11 containers of less toxic chemicals — representing 8 percent of Syria's declared stockpile — are awaiting removal.

Kaag said two other sites in the vicinity have been taken over by armed opposition groups and it's currently impossible to reach the roads to Site 2, the location of the 16 containers.

It's very difficult to determine "which armed opposition are operating where," she said. "It's very diffuse. There are many alliances ... It's shifting ground on a daily basis."

....

Kaag said a delegation from the OPCW, which monitors implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention which Syria signed last year, is now in Damascus on a fact-finding mission.

Edith M. Lederer, "Dangerous Syrian Chemicals In Inaccessible Area," [Associated Press](#), 15:31 EDT, 8 May 2014.

Reuters clarified:

Kaag said that the leftover weapons toxins consisted of 16 containers — 5 containing so-called "priority 1" precursor chemicals and 11 others with less toxic "priority 2" agents.

Louis Charbonneau, "Suspicious of possible undeclared Syrian chemical agents voiced at UN," [Reuters](#), 16:23 EDT, 8 May 2014.

8 May 2014 U.S. Statement to OPCW

The U.S. Ambassador to OPCW published his 8 May speech to the OPCW Executive Council:

The U.S. delegation recognizes the accomplishment of having 92 percent of the declared stockpile removed from Syria. But we also share the strong concern and growing disappointment of many delegations here with the reality that 100 metric tons of chemicals remain in Syria. The 27 metric tons of sarin precursor remaining would be enough to conduct scores of sarin attacks against civilians on the scale of the August 21, 2013, attack. We also are very concerned that the physical destruction of twelve chemical weapons production facilities declared by the regime has not yet begun.

The responsibility to complete the removal and to start destroying those facilities resides solely with Syria. The OPCW as a whole, as well as the United States and other OPCW member states, has undertaken extraordinary efforts to assist Syria. There are steps that Syria could be taking right now to prepare for the final chemical removal operation. While we note news that Syria is "considering positively" taking some steps, it has not yet taken them. The regime's performance — insufficient and late steps for completing removals, and refusal to negotiate on a destruction plan for its chemical weapons production facilities that meets treaty standards — is contrary to its

obligations as set forth in numerous Executive Council decisions and UN Security Council Resolution 2118.

Furthermore, outstanding questions about the completeness and accuracy of the Syrian declaration are not yet resolved. Tragically, there are several recent credible allegations that chlorine gas was used repeatedly as a chemical weapon. And videos posted on the Internet appear to indicate the use of chlorine gas — a World War I chemical weapon that inspired the movement to ban all chemical weapons — in barrel bombs dropped from regime helicopters.

....

... the regime must immediately take steps to transport the remaining one hundred metric tons of Priority 1 and Priority 2 chemicals to the port of Latakia. As both the UN Secretary General and the OPCW-UN Joint Mission have made clear, the security situation is cause to complete the removal more rapidly, not more slowly. It is Syria's responsibility to find ways to deliver these final materials to Latakia as rapidly as possible.

....

My delegation is ready today, as we have been for weeks, to engage in technical discussions to resolve the concerns that we — as well as others — have about Syria's approach to the destruction of its chemical weapons production facilities. However, the Syrian delegation has refused to discuss technical matters with the international community. In fact, Syria seems to consider its destruction plan as a "take-it-or-leave-it" document. No questions, no changes. For good reason, under the Chemical Weapons Convention, it is the Council's prerogative to decide if a destruction plan is satisfactory. We are not satisfied with the Syrian plan because we do not believe it meets the Convention's requirements, and we share the concerns expressed by other members of the Council in this regard.

The current situation on this issue, in which Syria refuses to discuss its plan, is highly regrettable and contrary to the spirit of the OPCW. The Council has no hope of ever reaching consensus if Syria refuses even to discuss differences. As a result of Syrian refusal to negotiate directly, the only communication is taking place through the good offices of the Technical Secretariat, which is endeavoring to facilitate an approach that can achieve consensus. But ultimately the member states of the Executive Council must agree to the approach on destruction. The U.S. delegation welcomes the Director-General's efforts to overcome differences on this issue and is cooperating fully with him.

....

In closing, let me remind the members of this Council that every step Syria has taken toward the elimination of its chemical weapons program has been the result of international pressure, not because of Syria's moral abhorrence to chemical weapons.

We must, both as a Council and as the international community, remain steadfast about Syria's obligations until all remaining declared 100 metric tons of chemicals are removed, until the accuracy of Syria's declaration is fully verified, until the chemical weapons production facilities are destroyed, and until all the facts are brought to light regarding the recent allegations of use.

Robert P. Mikulak, [U.S. State Dept.](#), 8 May 2014.

Discussions in the OPCW Executive Council are normally confidential, but sometimes members will make anonymous statements to journalists. It is rather extraordinary for the U.S. Ambassador to openly publish his entire speech to the OPCW Executive Council.

OPCW not finished in Syria after initially declared weapons removed

On 9 May, the Associated Press explained that OPCW would *not* be finished in Syria when the final consignment of chemical weapons is delivered:

Even after it surrenders 100 percent of its chemical weapons, Syria will have to take additional steps before achieving full compliance with commitments it made to eliminate its arsenal, the State Department's top arms control official said Friday [9 May].

"I've been urging people not to declare victory when the last chemicals leave the country. We cannot do that," said Rose Gottemoeller, the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security.

She said during a breakfast meeting with reporters that Syria must also destroy facilities, including hangars and tunnels, associated with its program. And she said there are unresolved "omissions" in the Syrian government's declaration of its chemical stockpile. She said those alleged discrepancies are being pursued by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which monitors implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Robert Burns "US: Syrian Chemical Facilities Must Be Destroyed," [Associated Press](#), 13:10 EDT, 9 May 2014.

Later on Friday, 9 May, this position was reiterated at the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department:

QUESTION: News reports have said that U.S., Britain, and France have raised suspicions at the UN yesterday of possible undeclared Syrian chemical agents. And diplomats have said that the three countries believe that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad never came clean about the full extent of his chemical arsenal. To what extent do — you are concerned about this issue?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Michel, we have never taken the Assad regime at its word, and neither have those partners that you mentioned, and we 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. The OPCW's inspection and verification 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. And obviously, the OPCW will have our full support in that ongoing effort.

....

MS. PSAKI: what I conveyed, I think, Roz, a couple of times now, is that the OPCW's work will continue. We don't take the Assad regime at its word, and [OPCW] will continue to take steps to ensure that the removal process and the inspection efforts are verified and they're verified to be accurate and complete, but [OPCW's] efforts will continue.

[State Dept.](#), 9 May 2014.

13 May 2014
Danes frustrated by slow delivery

On 13 May, the Danish Foreign Minister visited the Danish cargo ship that is anchored in international waters near Cyprus, waiting, waiting, waiting, and waiting for Syria to delivery all of its chemical weapons. The Minister said the cargo ships would wait until 30 June, and he hinted that they would abandon the project at that time. Reuters quotes the Minister as saying: "... we can't stay here forever, and we cannot keep on waiting forever."

[Associated Press](#), 12:53 GMT, 13 May 2014; [Reuters](#), 13:23 GMT, 13 May 2014.

15 May 2014
Editorial in *The Washington Post*

There are now at least three problems with chemical weapons in Syria: (1) Assad stopped delivering chemical weapons to OPCW on 24 April while Assad still has approximately 100 metric tons of chemical weapons; (2) Assad is *not* destroying his chemical weapons production facilities; and (3) Assad apparently began using chlorine gas on civilians in April 2014. Each of these three problems is a blatant violation of past international agreements with Assad's government. On 15 May, *The Washington Post* published a hard-hitting editorial that accused President Obama of doing nothing on the problems of chemical weapons in Syria:

The principal achievement the Obama administration might claim in an otherwise tragically failed response to Syria's civil war is eroding. Last September President Obama brokered an agreement with Russia under which the regime of Bashar al-Assad was to give up its stockpile of chemical weapons and join the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits production or use of those horrific arms.

Yet months after the expiration of the February deadline for removing all chemical stocks from Syria's territory, the regime not only retains a substantial stockpile but also has returned to assaulting civilian areas with chemicals. The Obama administration's response is all too familiar: It is trying to avoid acknowledging those facts.

....

[Assad apparently began to release chlorine gas on 11 April 2014.] But the Obama administration has taken the position that it must await an investigation by the OPCW before reaching a definite conclusion. Meanwhile, the chlorine attacks have continued. An unnamed senior U.S. official offered [the *Post's* reporters] a frank explanation of this filibuster: "There's reluctance to call attention to it because there's not much we can do about it."

....

In reality, Mr. Assad is being allowed to disregard his chemical weapons commitment with impunity not because there's nothing the United States can do but because Mr. Obama chooses to do nothing.

Editorial, "Mr. Obama is choosing not to act on Syria," [Washington Post](#), 15 May 2014.

I am pleased that Obama is not committing U.S. Military resources to motivate Assad to keep his promises on chemical weapons. Without access to confidential diplomatic information and confidential OPCW information, it is not possible for ordinary citizens to say how Assad should be motivated. Assad's failure to deliver his remaining nerve gas simply may be due to insurgents blocking roads between the storage depot and the port of Latakia.

That having been said, I agree with *The Washington Post* that the Obama/Kerry team has been spewing lots of propaganda and obfuscation about Syria during the last few months, in an attempt to conceal their disastrous foreign policy.

20 May 2014

Syria destroys all Isopropanol.

In the midst of a long silence about the failure of Syria to deliver all of its chemical weapons, OPCW/UN gleefully announced:

The OPCW-UN Joint Mission confirms the destruction of the entire declared Syrian stockpile of Isopropanol.

Now 7.2 percent of Syria's chemical weapons material remains in country and awaits swift removal for onward destruction. The Joint Mission urges the Syrian authorities to undertake this task as soon as possible.

"Entire declared Syrian stockpile of Isopropanol is destroyed," [OPCW/UN](#), 20 May 2014.

My comments: I wonder if people reading this OPCW/UN news release will understand that Isopropanol is just an alcohol, commonly used in the USA as the main ingredient in rubbing alcohol. Because of its ability to dissolve water and also because of its flammability, Isopropanol is used as an anti-freeze for gasoline tanks in automobiles. OPCW asked Syria to destroy its stocks of Isopropanol, because Isopropanol is an ingredient in Sarin nerve gas.

22 May 2014

On Thursday, 22 May, OPCW issued the following news release:

Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü briefed the OPCW Executive Council today [22 May] on progress in the work of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria. While welcoming the complete destruction by Syrian authorities of all declared stocks of isopropanol he stressed the urgency of removal of the remaining chemicals from the Syrian Arab Republic so that destruction operations can begin without further delay.

Some 100 metric tonnes of chemicals, or nearly 8 percent of Syria's declared stockpile, remain at a single site. Over the last week they have been packed and are ready for transportation. The Syrian authorities have informed that they cannot yet be moved from the storage site due to the security situation in the area.

Technical consultations on the destruction of structures that housed 12 chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) are ongoing. All CWPFs in Syria were rendered inoperable last year ahead of the 1 November 2013 timeframe set by the OPCW Executive Council. The Director-General expressed the hope that these consultations can soon be concluded to inform a Council decision on the modalities of destruction.

"Update on Syrian Chemical Weapons Destruction and the Fact-Finding Mission into Alleged Chlorine Gas Attacks," [OPCW](#), 22 May 2014.

On Thursday evening, 22 May, Reuters reported there is "no sign" that Syria will soon deliver its remaining chemical weapons.

Syria has made no progress in relinquishing a last batch of chemical weapons it says is inaccessible due to fighting, making it increasingly likely it will miss a final deadline to destroy its toxic stockpile, Britain said on Thursday [22 May].

....

Under the deal [in Sep 2013], Syria's entire stockpile is supposed to have been destroyed by mid 2014, but "it is growing ever clearer that the 30 June deadline will not be met", the British statement said.

Anthony Deutsch, "No sign Syria is handing over remaining chemical weapons," [Reuters](#), 18:30 GMT, 22 May 2014.

My comments: Note that Assad substantially missed his own deadline of 27 April for delivering *all* of his chemical weapons to OPCW. The 30 June deadline is for the *destruction* of all Syrian chemical weapons, and the end of June deadline assumes that all of these weapons were delivered to OPCW *before* the end of April. Because of the time required for the destruction of the chemical weapons, missing the 27 April deadline implies that the 30 June deadline will also be missed. See my [sixth](#) essay on Syria for more comments on deadlines.

28 May 2014

On 28 May, the Associated Press reported that the United Nations Secretary General admitted that the 30 June deadline for the destruction of all Syrian chemical weapons will *not* be met.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has informed the U.N. Security Council that the June 30 deadline for totally eliminating Syria's chemical weapons will not be met because the Syrian government says the final shipment of dangerous chemicals can't be transported safely.

The U.N. chief said in a letter obtained Wednesday [28 May] by The Associated Press that 7.2 percent of Syria's declared chemical stockpile remains in the country. He said the government insists it doesn't fully control security in the area where the chemical agents are stored and has "serious concerns about the safety and security" of convoys that will transport the material to the port of Latakia.

....

It has been clear for several months that the June 30 deadline would almost certainly not be met, because of Syria's delays and the 60 days needed for the [M.V.] Cape Ray to neutralize the chemicals.

Edith M. Lederer, "UN: SYRIA WON'T MEET DEADLINE TO DESTROY CHEMICALS," [Associated Press](#), 20:24 EDT, 28 May 2014.

See also [Reuters](#).

My comment: The admission of the missed final deadline is the least surprising "news" about Syria this year.

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.

On 29 April, OPCW announced it would "soon" send a fact-finding team to Syria to investigate this alleged use chlorine gas in Syria.

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.

For details of the early history of chemical weapons use at Kafr Zeita, see my [sixth essay](#) on Syria.

After the 29 April announcement by OPCW, there was a week-long silence in the news media, as journalists waited for some news to report. In particular, the world waited for the OPCW team to arrive in Syria.

On 6 May, Con Coughlin of *The Telegraph* in London reports "growing suspicions" that the chlorine cylinders were manufactured in China, shipped to Iran, and then flown from Iran to Syria. [The Telegraph](#), [The Telegraph blog](#), 6 May 2014.

The Syrian National Coalition announced it had "conclusive evidence" that Assad had used chlorine gas in Tal Minnis in rural Idlib on 21 April. The Coalition claims the chlorine gas was in cylinders manufactured by "the Chinese company Norico which has been subject to sanctions for illegally selling weapons to Iran." [SNC](#), 7 April 2014. I note that the Coalition admits that they "collected" (i.e., tampered with) evidence of chlorine gas use.

On 6 May, there was a brief mention of chemical weapons at the U.S. State Department's Daily Press Briefing:

QUESTION: The Syrian opposition defense minister has presented today as what he said is proof of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime. Do you have anything to confirm this or any reaction to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, the OPCW is overseeing a process of looking into these details. We'll let them — let that process see itself out. Obviously, there are a range of information and details that is being provided from across the board, but I don't have anything new to update you on today.

[State Dept.](#), 6 May 2014.

8 May: OPCW investigation

On 8 May, Sigrid Kaag — who was in New York City to brief the U.N. Security Council on the stalled delivery of chemical weapons — incidentally mentioned that OPCW personnel were currently in Damascus on their fact-finding mission about the chlorine gas. The OPCW fact-finding team is maintaining a low profile — with zero press releases and no interviews with journalists.

11 May: *The Telegraph*

On 11 May, *The Telegraph* in London reports confirmations of use of chlorine gas in Syria. Two new and independent investigations have confirmed the use by the Syrian regime of chlorine gas to attack civilians in rebel-held areas, backing up the first clear evidence that was produced by *The Telegraph* last month [29 April].

Chlorine gas canister munitions have been photographed at the sites where tests conducted by *The Telegraph* demonstrated that the Assad regime had conducted gas

attacks on civilians.

Daniele Raineri, a reporter for Italy's *Il Foglio*, visited the town of Kafr Zita on Monday and took a series of photographs of the Chinese-made munitions that contained chlorine gas and were dropped from government helicopters on April 13.

Meanwhile reporters from the German magazine *Der Spiegel* managed to reach the affected area and interviewed doctors who treated victims of the attack, as well as a survivor who described seeing the cloud of yellow gas approaching the nearby town of Al-Tamanah, and its effects. After hours in hospital Abu Abda said he was still coughing blood and could barely move.

....

At least six people fatally succumbed to the gas, including two children. Six-year-old Mahmud, and his half sister 16-year-old Maryuma died slow deaths when the gas formed hydrochloric acid in their lungs. It scourged and burned their alveoli, until their breathing organs filled with liquid, essentially drowning them.

....

The OPCW established a fact-finding team in the wake of the evidence gathered by the original *Telegraph* investigation. Officials on the team travelled to Damascus earlier this week but reported it was impossible to cross the front lines to make its own first-hand investigation in Kafr Zita, al Tamanah[,] and Talmenes, the third affected town. Damien McElroy, "Syrian chemical weapons use backed-up by second investigation," [The Telegraph](#), 18:12 GMT, 11 May 2014.

In my view, the most important news in this story in *The Telegraph* is that the OPCW fact-finding team was *unable* to visit three sites of chlorine use.

13-15 May: Fabius & Kerry

On 13 May, the French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, held a press conference in Washington, DC. Agence France-Presse reported:

[Fabius] alleged, however, that "we have credible witnesses for the use, at least 14 uses... of chemical agents since October 2013."

"Syria used chemical arms 14 times since October," [Global Post](#)(AFP), 14:08 EDT, 13 May 2014.

Reuters reported:

Syria may have used chemical weapons involving chlorine in 14 attacks in recent months, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said on Tuesday [13 May], expressing concerns that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is hiding toxic weapons.

"We have at least 14 indications that show us that, in the past recent weeks again,

chemical weapons in a smaller scale have been used, in particular chlorine," Fabius told a news conference through an interpreter. "Right now we are examining the samples that were taken."

Lesley Wroughton, "France says Syria used chlorine in 14 recent attacks," [Reuters](#), 19:38 EDT, 13 May 2014.

See also:

- Lara Jakes, "France: Syria Launched 14 Toxic Attacks Since Oct," [Associated Press](#), 14:04 EDT, 13 May 2014. ("[Fabius] said it has been difficult to garner definitive proof because chlorine gas generally evaporates too quickly to collect samples." <Laughing> because a gas is already a vapor, it can not evaporate.)
- Jonathan S. Landay, "French foreign minister says Syria has likely used chlorine gas in recent attacks," [McClatchy News Agency](#), 13 May 2014.
- "France says regrets Obama failed to attack Syria," [Al-Arabiya](#), 13 May 2014.

My comment is that the chlorine gas that was allegedly used in Syria since 11 April 2014 is in a different category from chemical weapons (e.g., mustard gas, Sarin, and VX) that have been the subject of previous declarations and removal. There are legitimate industrial uses for chlorine. There are no legitimate uses for chemical weapons like Sarin. So it is not clear that Assad "is hiding toxic weapons".

On 15 May, John Kerry said at a press conference in London:

Chlorine is not listed on the list of prohibited items by itself freestanding under the Chemical Weapons Convention. But chlorine, when used and mixed in a way that is used as a chemical weapon in the conduct of war, is against the chemical weapons treaty. And I have seen evidence, I don't know how verified it is — it's not verified yet — it's hasn't been confirmed, but I've seen the raw data that suggests there may have been, as France has suggested, a number of instances in which chlorine has been used in the conduct of war. And if it has, and if it could be proven, then that would be against the agreements of the chemical weapons treaty and against the weapons convention that Syria has signed up to.

John Kerry, "Press Availability in London," [State Dept.](#), 15 May 2014.

Kerry did *not* saying anything new. The French had said similar things on 20 April. But american journalists reported Kerry's remarks as if they were new and significant.

Note that Kerry is so clueless about elementary chemistry that he thinks chlorine is "mixed in a way" that makes it a weapon. Given his ignorance of chemistry, would you trust him to understand the "raw data" that he has allegedly seen?

22 May: OPCW update

On Thursday, 22 May, OPCW issued the following news release:

The Director-General also briefed the [OPCW Executive] Council on the OPCW fact-finding mission on allegations of use of chlorine gas in Syria. The mission is involved in the delicate process of preparing for on-site activities. This is a particularly challenging undertaking as safe and secure access to areas not controlled by the government is required. The Syrian Government has accepted the terms of reference for the mission and agreed to provide security for the Mission in areas under its control.

"The alleged use of chlorine in Syria is of grave concern to the OPCW and the international community," Ambassador Üzümcü [the Director-General of OPCW] said. "All efforts should be made, by all parties to the conflict, to enable safe access for our team enabling it to conduct its important work."

"Update on Syrian Chemical Weapons Destruction and the Fact-Finding Mission into Alleged Chlorine Gas Attacks," [OPCW](#), 22 May 2014.

27 May 2014 U.N. Inspectors Attacked

On 27 May, OPCW issued a press release:

A convoy of OPCW inspectors and United Nations staff that was travelling to a site of an alleged chlorine gas attack in Syria came under attack this morning. All team members are safe and well and are travelling back to the operating base.

The OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, expressed his personal concern for the OPCW and UN staff members and repeated his call to all parties for cooperation with the mission.

"Our inspectors are in Syria to establish the facts in relation to persistent allegations of chlorine gas attacks," he said. "Their safety is our primary concern, and it is imperative that all parties to the conflict grant them safe and secure access."

"Security Incident Affects Syria Fact-Finding Mission," [OPCW](#), 27 May 2014.

Reuters reported that the Syrian Foreign Ministry said: "Two cars carrying 11 people — five Syrian drivers and six members of the team — were 'seized by terrorist groups'." [Reuters](#). Also see [Al-Jazeera](#).

On 28 May, an OPCW press release confirmed the safety of the inspectors:

The team comprising experts and officials of the OPCW and the United Nations which came under attack yesterday has arrived back in Damascus. All members of the team are safe and well, although one driver has sustained minor injuries.

The team was en route to Kafr Zita as part of its mission to establish the facts surrounding allegations of use of chlorine in Syria. The visit was subject to a rigorous security assessment and a local ceasefire had been carefully negotiated for the day with the Government of Syria as well as with armed opposition groups in the area.

Shortly after leaving government-controlled territory, the lead vehicle in the convoy

was struck by an improvised explosive device (IED) sustaining severe damage. The team members were rescued and shifted to two other vehicles in the convoy which turned back to move to a safer location. While entering a built-up area the convoy was ambushed; the first vehicle was shot at from close range with automatic weapons hitting the body, windows and tires.

The occupants of the two remaining vehicles, who were briefly detained by some gunmen, were later released upon the intervention of the main opposition group with whom the ceasefire and security arrangements had been negotiated. The reunited team then returned to Damascus via Homs under Syrian Government escort.

While the situation is assessed, the OPCW fact-finding mission will continue its work by closely monitoring the situation and using all possible means to gather information and data in order to establish the facts surrounding allegations of the use of chlorine in Syria.

OPCW Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü spoke to the Head of the Mission and the Team Leader in Damascus and praised the dedication and commitment of the OPCW and UN personnel, who showed great courage in undertaking such a high-risk mission. The Director-General has strongly condemned yesterday's attack and said that it was a sad day for the people of Syria, and for the international community, because of a blatant attempt to prevent the facts being brought to light. This will not, however, prevent the OPCW from raising its voice against the cruelty of use of toxic chemicals to kill and harm indiscriminately.

"OPCW Team Arrives Safely Back in Damascus," [OPCW](#), 28 May 2014.

My comments: Only barbarians would attack an unarmed United Nations team that was traveling in plainly marked vehicles during a ceasefire. The OPCW identifies these barbarians only as an "armed opposition group". Neither Reuters nor the Associated Press identified the barbarians who attacked the OPCW inspectors.

Is Assad Sane?

In my [first](#) essay on Syria I argued that it was *not* plausible that professional military officers in the Syrian army would release Sarin gas in a suburb of Damascus, a few kilometers from the hotel where U.N. weapons inspectors were staying. I am still not convinced that Assad ordered the release of Sarin on 21 Aug 2013.

Similarly, in my [sixth](#) essay on Syria I argued that it was *not* plausible that Assad would order the release of chlorine gas against a low-value target in Kfar Zeita on 11 April. However, evidence is accumulating that Assad's forces used helicopters to drop the chlorine cylinders attached to barrel bombs. Assad's forces are the only forces in Syria with helicopters or airplanes.

If Assad really ordered either the release of Sarin in 2013 or the release of chlorine in April 2014, one has to ask *why?* The chemical weapons did not kill enough insurgents to

create a military victory for Assad's government, but Assad was quickly condemned by leaders of governments worldwide — no benefit to Assad and a huge detriment to Assad. So Assad's use of chemical weapons was strongly counterproductive for Assad.

The chemical weapons debacle for Assad in Aug/Sep 2013 should have taught Assad that he would be blamed for any use of chemical weapons in Syria. Yet there is strong evidence that Assad released chlorine gas *several times* in April 2014. There is no obvious answer for why Assad would repeat the same serious mistake of using chemical weapons — again for no benefit to Assad, and a huge detriment to Assad. This is *not* rational decision-making by Assad.

I do not lightly make the suggestion that Assad may be mentally ill. But any use of chemical weapons in Syria during 2013-2014 by Assad are *not* the result of rational decisions. Recently, there have been a series of minor news stories that also causes me to wonder whether Assad is making rational choices.

On 18 March 2014, Assad's government created a Syrian space agency to conduct scientific research. This is a colossally expensive project, at the time when Syria is facing massive expenses (perhaps US\$30 billion, according to *Al-Arabiya*) for reconstruction of buildings and infrastructure in cities and towns. [SANA](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

The creation of a Syrian space agency — in the midst of a more than three-year civil war — suggests that Assad has megalomania. Since March 2011, Assad has defied international law — and been condemned by international leaders, except Russia and Iran — without any serious consequences. That successful defiance may have given Assad the delusion that he can do anything.

On 3 May 2014, Syria's minister of tourism predicted a "prosperous tourist season" for the province of Homs during the summer of 2014. [SANA](#); [Daily Star](#); [GlobalPost](#)(AFP); [Arab News](#). The apparently delusional government minister does not realize that most of the historic buildings in the old city of Homs are in ruins, with exterior walls missing, as the result of artillery and mortar shells.

And it is not just the old city of Homs that is in ruins. There is a castle ("Crac des Chevaliers") built by the Catholic Crusaders sometime during the years 1136-1142 in Homs province that was occupied by insurgents in early 2014. Sadly, the Syrian military's artillery and bombs damaged the castle, giving the Syrians one less tourist attraction. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 23 May 2014, the SANA website lists and no speeches by Assad since August 2013. Also on 23 May, the SANA website lists no interviews with Assad since 20 Jan 2014. Even in the middle of his re-election campaign in May 2014, Assad is making few public appearances, giving few speeches and few interviews. On 23 May, the Associated Press noted that Assad was last seen in public on 20 April. [Associated Press](#). This kind of isolation is strange for a politician or national leader, especially in the middle of a war when citizens need inspiration. I wonder if Assad's self-imposed isolation is a hint of mental illness.

cultural differences

On the other hand, let me toss out some provocative thoughts about cultural differences, *not* insanity, that might explain Assad's actions.

After World War I, a group of nations created international law that prohibits use of chemical weapons: "Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare", signed in Geneva in June 1925.

I note that the group of 44 nations that created this Geneva Protocol were all nations that were predominantly Christian — with the exceptions of China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Japan, Persia, Siam (Thailand), Turkey, Serbia/Croatia. [U.N.](#) at pp.72-74 (1929). Is it a form of cultural imperialism to impose this predominantly Christian law on Muslims in Arab nations? No, because the Arab nations explicitly agreed to Geneva Protocol (e.g., Syria in 1968, Saudi Arabia in 1971, Jordan in 1977).

Technically, the Geneva Protocol prohibits the use of chemical weapons in a war between two or more nations. The Geneva Protocol of 1925 does *not* prohibit use of chemical weapons by one nation inside its borders, as in a civil war. However, subsequent treaties on chemical weapons prohibit all use.

Continuing the cultural imperialism theme, the Arab nations have a different political structure than nations in Western Europe. Monarchies are still common amongst Arab nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, etc.), although they now have an elected legislature with limited power. People in Arab nations may feel more loyalty to their tribe than to the nation. We clearly see this tribal loyalty in Libya after Gaddafi was deposed.

Islamic fighters may be less likely to surrender, because they believe they go to Paradise if they are killed in a holy war against infidels (e.g., other Muslim sects, Christians, Jews, etc.).

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

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

The United Nations Secretary General keeps saying that Syria is the largest humanitarian disaster in the world, with its death toll, number of refugees, and number of starving people. But no one is doing anything to solve the civil war. As described [below](#), the U.N. Negotiator on Syria resigned on 13 May, which additionally delayed futile negotiations.

Back in November 2013, I wrote:

Does anyone want to see the death toll in the Syria civil war go past a quarter-million

people? (This is *not* hyperbole: we are already half-way to a total of a quarter-million dead.) When do the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda stop fighting and start a political process?

Standler, "Chemical Weapons in Syria: Oct-Dec 2013," [second](#) essay on Syria, 25 Nov 2013.

On 9 May, John Ging, director of operations at the U.N. Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, asked a similar rhetorical question:

The valid question to ask those political leaders is ... how many poor people will you accept to be killed before you do something different? It's 5,000 a month at the moment and it's over 150,000 already. Is it 200,000? Is it a quarter of a million? Is it a million people?

"U.N. official asks if 1 million Syrians must die before world acts," [Reuters](#), 15:32 GMT, 9 May 2014.

Copy at [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon.

See also: [Al-Jazeera](#), 11 May 2014.

My answer is simple. Before there can be a negotiated end to this civil war, all of the parties (i.e., rebels, jihadists, Al-Qaeda, *and* Assad) must *want* an end to the civil war. At the current time (May 2014), the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda are all eager to continue to civil war — even displaying signs of religious fanaticism. It would be a major achievement if the moderate rebels alone were to concede defeat on the battlefield, negotiate a surrender, and be re-integrated into the Syrian army to fight against the jihadists and Al-Qaeda.

Looking back, journalists prepared fewer news reports about Syria after the failure of the Geneva2 negotiations on 15 Feb 2014, compared with before the failure of the negotiations. On 13 March I observed that governments and journalists seemed to be frustrated with the stream of bad news from Syria. (See my [fifth](#) essay on Syria.) The dearth of news from Syria has continued, punctuated with occasional bursts of news for one or two days. Even the presidential election — which everyone agrees is rigged to re-elect Assad — receives more news coverage than removal of chemical weapons, negotiations to end the civil war, delivery of humanitarian aid, and other issues that are more important than the election.

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*. By 30 May, the crisis in the Ukraine was winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border.

The Ukraine is not the only problem, there are at least four other major problems in the world that divert attention and resources from Syria:

- a continuing civil war in the Central African Republic

more violence in South Sudan, as ceasefires are violated

- On 14 April, the Boko Haram Islamic terrorists in Nigeria, kidnapped more than 230 girls from a boarding school. Given the incompetence of the Nigerian government, foreign nations are involved in finding and rescuing the girls. Meanwhile, an Islamic bomb in Jos, Nigeria killed at least 118 people on 20 May.
- On 18 May, a former Libyan general led an assault against the Libyan Parliament building, causing another crisis in Libya. Various parts of the government and military supported the general's anti-Islamist campaign.

Maybe one way to quantify the neglect of Syria by the newsmedia is to count the number of times the word "Syria" appears in the United Nations Daily Press Briefings. On Thursday, 1 May, the word "Syria" appears only [twice](#). On Friday, 2 May, the word "Syria" again appears only [twice](#). Three of the four mentions were in the context of rumors of the resignation of Brahimi, which the U.N. is denying. There are plenty of questions that *could* be asked. For example, on Wednesday, 30 April, the U.N. Security Council met to discuss the failure of its Resolution 2139, then apparently did nothing.

The word "Syria" did *not* appear in the U.S. State Department Daily Press [Briefing](#) for 19 May 2014, although the monthly Syrian death toll had been announced that morning. The following day, there were three occurrences of the word "Syria" in the Daily Press [Briefing](#), but none of them were in a discussion of issues in Syria.

Homs

On 15 April 2014, Assad's army began an assault to drive the insurgents out of the city of Homs. On 2 May, the insurgents and the Syrian government agreed to a ceasefire beginning at noon local time, during which the insurgents would depart northward from Homs. This agreement gives Assad control of Homs, the third-largest city in Syria. Reuters reports a 24-hour ceasefire, while the Associated Press reports a 48-hour ceasefire. AFP reports that the insurgents can keep their weapons.

References on 2 May 2014:

- [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 10:20 GMT.
- [Reuters](#), 12:04 GMT.
- [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 14:18 GMT.
- [Associated Press](#), 19:23 GMT.
- [Al-Jazeera](#), 20:46 GMT.

On 2 May, the Associated Press reported:

"This isn't what we wanted, but it's all we could get," Beibars Tilawi told The Associated Press in a Skype interview. "The regime wanted to take control of the heart of the revolution." Evacuations may start on Saturday [3 May], he said.

....

The rebels belonged to all factions, including the al-Qaida based Nusra Front, [Tilawi] said. "We agreed to evacuate fighters, not factions," he said. But he, and other rebels cautioned that the deal was still extremely fragile. "We don't trust the regime. If there's any shooting or traps set, the whole thing will fall apart," he said. "We are going to try get out the first group of fighters and see."

Dusan Stojanovic & Daa Hadid, "Reports: Ceasefire reached in Syrian city of Homs," [Associated Press](#), 14:50 GMT, 2 May 2014.

The final version of the Associated Press story on 2 May says:

Although the agreement, if it holds, represents a demoralizing admission of defeat by opposition forces, it can also be seen as a face-saving deal for both sides. Weakened rebels, for whom Homs' collapse was only a matter of time, get a safe exit, while the government can save manpower and weapons and claim it was able to retake the last rebel bastions without blood.

Dusan Stojanovic & Zeina Karam, "Cease-Fire, Evacuation Deal In Syria's Homs," [Associated Press](#), 19:23 GMT, 2 May 2014.

On 3 May, the evacuation of insurgents from Homs was delayed for unspecified reasons. The Associated Press reported:

Rebels in the city agreed Friday to surrender the territory in exchange for safe passage to other opposition-held areas. The agreement came after a blockade by Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces caused widespread hunger in rebel-held parts of the city, which have been hit relentlessly by government artillery and airstrikes.

Local activist Samer al-Homsi and other three activists said it wasn't clear why Syrian forces weren't allowing the first phase of several hundred rebel fighters to leave.

....

Assad's forces have been taking back rebel-held areas throughout Syria with a mix of blockades, deals with rebels and relentlessly pounding of opposition-held areas.

....

As pro-government forces have advanced, rebels have responded by firing mortar shells and detonating car bombs in residential areas, often killing civilians.

Daa Hadid, "Syria Activists Say Evacuations From Homs Delayed," [Associated Press](#), 16:57 GMT, 3 May 2014.

See also [Al-Jazeera](#), 15:28 GMT, 3 May.

At 20:00 GMT on Sunday, 4 May, neither the Associated Press nor Reuters reported anything on Homs since 3 May.

On 4 May, Agence France-Presse reported on the continuing negotiations in Homs:

"An agreement occurred between representatives of the rebels and the chiefs of security, in the presence of the Iranian ambassador, for the pullout of fighters from the Old City to the northern countryside of Homs," Abul Hareth al-Khalidi told AFP,

adding that talks are now focused on implementation.

....

Around 2,250 people, mostly fighters, will evacuate the Old City area, which lies in the heart of Syria's third city Homs, according to a version of the agreement obtained by AFP from an opposition source.

....

Fighters will withdraw to a rebel-controlled area in the north of Homs province, according to the text. They will be allowed to withdraw with light weapons, and one rocket launcher will be permitted on every bus used for the evacuation. The Red Crescent, adds the text, will transport the wounded.

"The guarantors (of the deal) will be the presence of members of the United Nations and Iranian negotiators on the buses," according to the text.

The deal was reached as part of an exchange for an unknown number of Iranian and Lebanese prisoners currently held by the Islamic Front, Syria's largest rebel alliance.

"Implementation will begin after those being held by the Islamic Front are released, and after permission is given to allow relief to enter the (Shiite, pro-regime) towns of Nubl and Zahraa in Aleppo province," according to the text.

"Deal clinched for rebel retreat from Syria's Homs," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 13:36 GMT, 4 May 2014.

My comment to the AFP story is that negotiations appear to have expanded beyond evacuation of jihadists from Homs, and the negotiations now include release of prisoners held by Islamic Front and humanitarian aid to two towns (Nubl and al-Zahraa) in Aleppo province that are besieged by insurgents. In negotiations of this kind, it is generally preferable to have narrow agreements that can be quickly implemented, instead of one big agreement that includes unrelated issues.

A later AFP story says that this is the first time that the Assad regime had negotiated with jihadists. The Iranian ambassador to Syria was also involved in the negotiations. [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 18:03 GMT, 4 May.

On 4 May, an editorial in the *Gulf News* cheerfully recognized that negotiations in Syria can be successful:

The fact that a truce between the Syrian rebels and the government forces was able to be negotiated and then implemented in Homs indicates more structure in the opposition forces than has been reported. The fact that the government and the rebels were able to open communication channels between each other, and produce a truce that has lasted for three days at least shows that discussions can happen when both sides need to talk. That itself is important for the future of Syria when eventually everyone gets tired of slaughtering their fellow nationals and need to find a political way out of the mess that

is destroying the country.

"Homs deal shows Syria talks can happen," [Gulf News](#), 4 May 2014.

My comment to the *Gulf News* editorial is that they did not mention that the Assad regime had besieged Homs since June 2012, and starved the insurgents and civilians in Homs into submission. Eventually, hunger and lack of medical care — and the threat of annihilation by Assad's military — motivated negotiations by the insurgents. Nevertheless, *any* end to the civil war is preferable to the continued slaughter of innocent civilians.

On Sunday night, 4 May, *The Daily Star* reported that the insurgents are now scheduled to depart from Homs on Tuesday, 6 May. [Daily Star](#), 21:37 GMT, 4 May.

On Tuesday, 6 May, the evacuation of insurgents from Homs had still not begun. Reuters reported:

The timing of an evacuation of rebels from the central Syrian city of Homs under a deal with government forces has not been set and could still take days to arrange, the provincial governor said on Tuesday [6 May].

....

Rebels have held out in the Old City district and several other areas despite being undersupplied, outgunned and subjected to more than a year of siege by Assad's forces.

Homs governor Talal Barazi said arrangements for any withdrawal would take time and declined to say when it would likely happen.

"No date set for rebel pullout from Syria's Homs — governor," [Reuters](#), 14:19 GMT, 6 May.

On 6 May, the Associated Press reported:

Meanwhile, activists said negotiations were continuing to evacuate rebels from opposition-held parts of the embattled central city of Homs, which Syrian government forces have been besieging for more than a year.

The activists, who are from the Homs region, said Tuesday [6 May] that Iranian and Russian representatives have been attending the meetings at the al-Safir Hotel in the city. They said they were there because they were negotiating a prisoner exchange as part of the Homs deal that would free at least three Iranians and a Russian seized by rebels in the northern province of Aleppo.

....

The activists said negotiators were still working out minor but key details of the evacuation, including how to guarantee the rebels' safety as they leave. The activists spoke on conditions of anonymity for their own security.

As the talks drag on, the rebels wait, exhausted, said one activist who goes by the name Abu Reem al-Homsi.

"We reached a situation where we would either die from shelling, hunger or in suicide missions. We were eating grass," al-Homsi said from the opposition-held Shayyah neighborhood. "We reached the end."

Diaa Hadid, "Local Al-Qaida Leader In Syria Killed In Blast," [Associated Press](#), 18:26 GMT, 6 May 2014.

My comment is that at noon on Tuesday the ceasefire in Homs has existed for four days, and that is a significant achievement.

Early on Wednesday, 7 May, the Associated Press reported that the evacuation from Homs had begun:

By mid-morning, dozens of rebels boarded five buses that arrived at the police command on the edge of the rebel-held areas ahead of the evacuation, Homs-based activists said. Two of the buses left the city later, heading north.

An activist who goes by the name of Abu Yassin al-Homsi said that up to 1,200 fighters were expected to leave the city Wednesday [7 May], handing it over to President Bashar Assad's forces.

The fighters will be taken a few kilometers (miles) north to the towns of Talbiseh and al-Dar al-Kabira on the northern edge of Homs province.

....

In exchange for their evacuation, activists say opposition fighters will allow aid into two northern pro-government villages besieged by the rebels.

"Rebels Begin Evacuating Syrian City Of Homs," [Associated Press](#), 07:59 GMT, 7 May 2014.

At the end of Wednesday, 7 May, the Associated Press reported:

Carrying their rifles and small bags of belongings, hundreds of exhausted Syrian rebels withdrew Wednesday from their last remaining strongholds in the heart of Homs, surrendering to President Bashar Assad a bloodstained city that was once the center of the revolt against him.

....

Gaining virtually full control of Syria's third largest city is a major win for Assad on multiple levels. Militarily, it solidifies the government hold on a swath of territory in central Syria, linking the capital Damascus with government strongholds along the coast and giving a staging ground to advance against rebel territory further north.

Politically, gains on the ground boost Assad's hold on power as he seeks to add a further claim of legitimacy in presidential elections set for June 3, which Western powers and the opposition have dismissed as a farce.

"For those who want to believe that the regime is winning, it's a powerful symbolic

confirmation of that," said Peter Harling, a Middle East expert at the International Crisis Group think tank. "But it really is about what the regime has to offer beyond years of such symbolic military victories," he added. "If you take a broader perspective, I think it's an indication that this conflict is going to take years."

By early evening Wednesday, some 600 fighters had boarded buses that departed from a police command center on the edge of Homs' rebel-held areas, heading north to rebel held towns of Talbiseh and al-Dar al-Kabira, opposition activists said. Many of the rebels were wounded, and it was unclear how many civilians were among them.

According to the deal, each fighter was allowed to carry his rifle and a bag of belongings with him. One rocket propelled grenade launcher and a machinegun were also allowed on each bus.

....

The rebels, however, will retain one toe-hold in Homs. Fighters in the heavily populated Waer district, just outside Homs' Old City, have so far refused to join the evacuation. Some activists said negotiations were underway for a similar deal there. Bassem Mroue & Zeina Karam, "Syria Rebels Surrender Strongholds In Homs," [Associated Press](#), 19:15 GMT, 7 May 2014.

At night on 7 May, Reuters reported:

But a planned relief convoy trying to reach two rebel-blockaded Shi'ite towns outside Aleppo was turned back by fighters from al Qaeda's Nusra Front, raising questions about the successful completion of the Homs operation.

Homs provincial Governor Talal Barazi denied reports during the day of any halt to the evacuation, which the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said had transported 900 fighters out of the old city.

Dominic Evans, "Rebels evacuated from Homs, the cradle of Syrian uprising," [Reuters](#), 01:05 GMT, 8 May 2014.

On Thursday morning, 8 May, Agence France-Presse reported:

"Eighty percent of the rebels have left the city. The remaining 20 percent will leave on Thursday [8 May]," [Homs provincial governor] Barazi told AFP.

"On Wednesday [7 May], 980 people left, the great majority rebels but some of them civilians, including women and children." He said just 300 to 400 people now remained in the Old City where the rebels had held out for so long and they too would be bussed out on Thursday to the opposition-held town of Dar al-Kabira, 20 kilometres (13 miles) north of Homs.

The withdraw leaves the whole of the city in government hands except the Waer neighbourhood in the northwestern outskirts and Barazi said he expected a similar evacuation agreement to be reached there soon.

"Syria rebels to complete Homs evacuation Thursday: governor," [Daily Star](#), 07:47 GMT,

8 May 2014.

On Thursday night, 8 May, after the evacuation was complete, Reuters reported:

Syrian forces took full control on Thursday over Homs, a city once associated with scenes of joyous pro-democracy crowds but now famed for images of ruin that epitomise the brutality of Syria's civil war.

After holding the Old City of Homs for nearly two years, around 1,200 rebel fighters and trapped civilians boarded buses which took them out of the "capital of the revolution" in convoys on Wednesday and Thursday, activists said.

"Assad's forces take Homs, 'capital of Syrian revolt'," [Reuters](#), 18:35 GMT, 8 May 2014.

It is difficult to tell precisely how many insurgents and how many civilians fled from Homs in the first two days of the evacuation. Not only do different sources give different numbers, but also some sources combine insurgents and civilians while other sources count only insurgents. The total number of insurgents plus civilians evacuated appears to be somewhere between 1200 and 1500.

On Friday evening in Syria, 9 May, the Associated Press reported:

Hundreds of Syrians, some snapping photographs with their cell phones, wandered down paths carved out of rubble in the old quarters of Homs on Friday, getting their first glimpse of the horrendous destruction that two years of fighting inflicted on rebel-held parts of the city.

The scenes that greeted them were devastating: City blocks pounded into an apocalyptic vista of hollow facades of blown-out buildings. Streets strewn with rebar, shattered concrete bricks, toppled telephone poles and the occasional charred, crumpled carcasses of cars. Dust everywhere.

....

The final piece of the agreement fell into place Friday [9 May] afternoon as the last 300 or so rebels left Homs after an aid convoy was allowed into two pro-government villages in northern Syria besieged by the opposition. The aid delivery was part of the Homs agreement.

....

The staggering scale of destruction in the area spoke to the ferocity of the fighting. In the Maljaa neighborhood, every building was damaged, even cars parked inside. An eight-story building was flattened into rubble. Shop fronts were pancaked. Walls of apartment blocks were blasted with holes from artillery and tank shells.

Albert Aji & Ryan Lucas, "Syrians Return To Damaged Homes After Rebels Leave," [Associated Press](#), 16:52 GMT, 9 May 2014.

[Reuters](#) says approximately 270 people were evacuated from Homs on Friday, which increased the total evacuated to between 1500 and 1800. [Al-Jazeera](#) reports "more than

1700 opposition fighters" were evacuated from Homs in three days.

An unscientific online poll at [Al-Jazeera](#) asked: "A rebel commander says the evacuation of Homs is a victory for the rebels. Do you agree?" 71% of the respondents voted NO.

As residents returned to Homs on Saturday, 10 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "Some [residents] accused rebels of looting and burning their homes." [Al-Jazeera](#) reported: "Some [residents] accused rebels of looting their homes [in the Old City of Homs]."

On 25 May, insurgents detonated two car bombs in Homs, killing at least 10 people. The bombs were detonated in an area where Alawites and Christians lived, in an apparent sectarian terrorist attack. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The following day, the Nusra Front claimed responsibility for the car bombing. [Associated Press](#).

Waer suburb of Homs

On 23 May, a ceasefire began in the suburb of al-Waer. It is anticipated an agreement will soon be reached to allow the insurgents to flee from al-Waer. [Associated Press](#); [Daily Star](#)(AP).

During 24-31 May, there was no further news about Waer.

Revised Policy in Syria? Rebels still disorganized Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

The surrender in Homs is just another element that shows that Assad is winning the civil war in Syria. (See my [fifth](#) and [sixth](#) essays on Syria.)

On 1 May, David Crocker — former U.S. Ambassador to Syria (1998-2001) and Iraq (2007-2009), amongst four other ambassadorships — spoke at a meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, DC. The *Al-Monitor* reported:

Ryan Crocker, a distinguished former US ambassador to Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, told a Washington audience May 1 that US military intervention would likely not produce a better outcome in Syria and that the Barack Obama administration should focus on a "post-Assad" but not a "post-Alawite" future for that war-torn country.

"We would be making a grave mistake if our policy were aimed at flipping the tables and bringing a Sunni ascendancy in Damascus," said Crocker, who experienced the pitfalls of US military involvement in Lebanon in the 1980s and in Iraq in the past decade. The United States would have no assurance, he said, that a Sunni government would be an improvement on that of Bashar al-Assad and the probability would be that such a government would be "dominated by the worst of the worst" religious extremists.

....

This post-Assad but not post-Alawite strategy could more easily win buy-in from the Syrian government's main external backers — Russia and Iran — though Crocker suggested that outside powers alone could not end the fighting and that the conflict would go on for many more years until the combatants are exhausted.

Barbara Slavin, "Former US diplomat warns of possible 'grave mistake' in Syria," [Al-Monitor](#), 1 May 2014.

In a comment online to the above article, one reader wrote:

No Saudi or any other Islamist regimes' influenced-group should ever be allowed to ascend to power in Syria. The Arab World needs liberation from religious totalitarianism which has impede human development and kept the region backward and in turmoil for more than 14 centuries.

The Arab people are awakening and began to take charge of their affairs for the first time in their tumultuous history. It's in the best interest of the West and the international community to support pro-secular democracy Arab people regardless of religious orientation, ethnicity, race or gender.

Ali H. Alyami, comment to [Al-Monitor](#), 2 May.

On 1 May, David Ignatius wrote an opinion piece that was published in *The Washington Post* and later republished in *The Daily Star*:

My Syrian contacts described a bitter stalemate: President Bashar Assad holds on to power, but he has lost control of major parts of the country. The rebels fight bravely, but they lack the organization and heavy weapons to protect the areas they have liberated. Meanwhile, Al-Qaeda extremists fester in the shadows. The opposition remains so fragmented that some rebels frankly admit they aren't ready to govern, even if Assad should fall.

"We still need to find a leader," concedes one rebel commander. "We are headless inside the country."

Rebel fighters spoke honestly about three key issues: [Third,] Assad's forces have regained control of many Damascus suburbs, essentially by starving the residents into submission.

....

[Ignatius considers possible new U.S. policies for Syria] There are two obvious possibilities, but each has problems:

First, strengthen the opposition. Saudi Arabia wants the U.S. to expand its covert training program to create a real rebel army, armed with anti-aircraft missiles. Such a force could hold off Assad and protect rebel-held areas. But the rebels would be fighting for a draw and an eventual political settlement. They are too fractured politically to triumph and rule.

Second, negotiate with Assad to create a successor regime. Some in Jordan and Washington argue that for the sake of stability, the friends of Syria should open back-channel contacts with Assad. "We might have to eat some hard crow," argued Ryan Crocker, the widely respected former U.S. ambassador to Syria and Iraq, at a think-tank gathering in Washington Thursday [1 May]. "As bad as the regime is, there is something worse — which is extreme elements of the opposition."

But cutting a deal with Assad's regime strikes me as an unrealistic strategy, in addition to being an amoral one: Assad has so angered many Syrian citizens that he has probably lost any chance of rebuilding a unified country. As one U.S. official notes, "It's like asking Humpty Dumpty to put himself back together."

David Ignatius "Syria's rebels admit they are unable to govern," [Daily Star](#), 21:08 GMT, 4 May 2014.

Originally published as "On Syria, reality-check time," [Washington Post](#), 1 May 2014.

On 7 May, *The New York Times* reported:

The trip [to the USA by Coalition president Jarba] came as President Bashar al-Assad of Syria appears to have gained the upper hand in the civil war and Mr. Obama has continued to express wariness about becoming more deeply involved. Administration officials and members of Congress in both parties have raised questions about the effectiveness of the Syrian opposition and whether it adequately represents the rebels who are doing the brunt of the fighting.

Michael R. Gordon & Eric Schmitt, "Rebels to Ask for Antiaircraft Missiles," [NY Times](#), 7 May 2014.

My comments: I believe the time to pursue a military solution to the Syria civil war has long passed. Maybe the USA and Western Europe should have given more military aid to the rebels in 2011 or 2012, but the time for military intervention is too late now. Ban, Obama, Kerry, and Lavrov all agree that a political solution is the *only* way for Syria. The flow of more munitions to insurgents in Syria will kill more innocent civilians and destroy more buildings, but will not depose Assad. Supplying more munitions to the insurgents in Syria is *not* a moral policy.

The moderate rebels need to recognize that they have lost the civil war, and there is no realistic hope of the rebels prevailing militarily. If any of the insurgents win the civil war, it will be the jihadists or Al-Qaeda who might win parts of Syria, *not* the moderate rebels.

With that recognition, the rebels could be reintegrated into the Syrian army to fight against the jihadists and Al-Qaeda.

Concurrently with the reintegration of the rebels in the Syrian army, the Syrian National Coalition should be ignored by governments and the United Nations. In my opinion, over the past year, the Coalition has repeatedly demonstrated its inability to make decisions, as well as shown it is irrelevant.

On 29 April 2014, Liz Sly — the Middle East correspondent for *The Washington Post* — gave an interview to Public Radio International, in which she explained three reasons for

what she called the "stalemate" in Syria:

1. "The rebels remain riven with factions. Groups split off from each other because of differences in ideology or priorities, or because of old-fashioned personality differences. Last year, open fighting erupted between mainstream rebel groups and an increasingly powerful jihadi faction. 'So there's a lot of rivalry; a lot of disunity,' says Sly. 'It's a huge thing, and they've got to overcome it if they're ever to have any hope of succeeding.' "
2. ".... 'What we've seen,' says Sly, 'is that the West has allowed just enough weapons to reach the rebels to stop them being defeated.' She says the West does not want the rebels to win, but to negotiate. That has left Syrian rebels feeling very bitter, and has sparked multiple conspiracy theories. 'The idea that the United States isn't all that interested or doesn't want to get involved, doesn't occur to them,' says Sly."
3. "Incredibly, Syria is heading for a presidential election on June 3. But Sly says nobody is taking the election seriously. So the stalemate in Syria looks set to continue, says Sly. 'That's basically what we've seen for the past three years and that's what we're probably going to see for the next three years.' "

Christopher Woolf, "Three reasons why Syria's civil war has no end in sight," [PRI](#), 29 April 2014.

On 9 May, Zeina Karam, the chief of the Associated Press bureau in Beirut, wrote an excellent analysis of how Assad is winning the civil war. The following is a brief quotation from her article, followed by my bulleted list and my paraphrase of her explanation:

Two years ago, it seemed almost inevitable that Syrian President Bashar Assad would be toppled. Despite a fierce military crackdown, people were still taking to the streets in exuberant anti-government protests and rebels were pressing their fight deeper into the capital, even placing a bomb inside a high-level security meeting that killed top regime officials including Assad's brother-in-law.

Western leaders predicted Assad would fall in few months. Almost no one thinks that now. As he prepares for elections through which he is set to claim another seven-year mandate for himself, the 48-year-old leader appears to be on a continuously upward path in the three-year-old conflict.

A look at how Assad has managed to seize the momentum in the civil war:

- "thousands of experienced guerrillas and experts" from Hezbollah joined the fight in mid-2013.
- Assad's army is united.
- Assad has an air force, which the insurgents lack, and the insurgents have no anti-aircraft missiles.
- The agreement in Sep 2013 that Assad would surrender all of his chemical

weapons in exchange for no airstrikes from the U.S. military. Obama's "waffling and change of course on the threatened airstrikes enraged Syrian opposition members and emboldened Assad."

- "The already divided umbrella group of rebel factions backed by the West, the Free Syrian Army, has seen its fortunes sink even further over the past year with the rise of militant groups and al-Qaida-inspired extremist factions." The radicalization of the civil war by the jihadists and al-Qaeda "dampen[ed] the West's support for the rebellion."
- Assad established sieges around towns controlled by insurgents, and prevented food, medicine, and other humanitarian aid from entering the towns. Beginning in Feb 2014, insurgents in these besieged towns have negotiated surrenders.
- "Arab sponsors have increasingly clashed over the level and type of assistance they should offer the Syrian rebels."

Zeina Karam, "Analysis: How Syria's Assad Seized Momentum In War," [Associated Press](#), 18:55 GMT, 9 May 2014. (Bulleted list added by Standler, with paraphrases from Karam and adding two dates (Sep 2013 and Feb 2014). The quotations are from Karam.)

Final version at: [Associated Press](#), 17:51 GMT, 10 May 2014.

Copies of Karam's article at: [Miami Herald](#); [Huffington Post](#); [Houston Chronicle](#); [National Post](#) in Canada.

My comments on Karam's analysis: The hundreds of different rebel and jihadist groups — and their differing goals for a post-Assad Syria — have frustrated a unified opposition military strategy. Beginning in January 2014, the rebels and jihadists have fought against ISIL, an Al-Qaeda inspired group, as well as fighting against Assad's forces. The fragmentation of the opposition, as well as internal fighting, significantly weakens the opposition.

Further, the insurgents have limited weapons: no airplanes, no helicopters, no artillery, no tanks. The insurgents have done well with mortars and roadside bombs, but they are no match for Assad's well-equipped military. Given this mismatch in firepower, the insurgents had to be fanatical to engage Assad's military. And that same fanaticism appears in the unwillingness of the insurgents to recognize that they are being either defeated or stalemated.

On 13 May 2014, *Al-Jazeera* published a opinion piece by a professor at the London School of Economics:

Mocking the vote as a "farce", the opposition and Western powers would like to wish it away, belittle it and insist on denying Assad legitimacy. Burying their heads in the sand, Assad's enemies react haphazardly and lack a coherent and operationalised strategy to stop his advance. They seem paralysed and powerless to force Assad to change his ways, relying on old tactics that have proven ineffective.

While Damascus and its allies — particularly Iran, Hezbollah and Russia — have been

resourceful and ruthless in their war game plan, the anti-Assad coalition is deeply divided and suffers from a fatal disconnect between goals, means and ideologies. Beyond Assad's removal from power, there is little unity among the opposition front. In contrast, Assad and his partners share unity of purpose and ranks.

.....

Obama has resisted calls by critics at home and regional allies for a more interventionist approach in order to change Assad's calculation. His reluctance rests on two concerns: 1) US national interests are not directly involved in Syria; and 2) a muscular approach might be counterproductive, triggering a region-wide conflict. The US-Russian rivalry in Syria and Ukraine also imposes constraints on Obama's ability and willingness to intervene actively in the country's killing fields.

Where does this leave the opposition which is overwhelmingly dependent on external support? It is doubtful if the ideologically and sociologically fragmented opposition can level the playing battlefield with the Assad coalition, let alone deliver a decisive blow. As things stand, the odds are against the opposition.

The lack of advanced weapons is one of the least challenges facing armed opposition groups, which wage battle more like local and regional militias than an organised fighting force. With no centralised command-and-control, the armed factions do not strategically coordinate with one another and, time and again squander important gains that could have turned into a breakthrough. More importantly, the war within the opposition, particularly [ISIL], on the one hand, and al-Nusra Front and ultraconservative Islamists and religious nationalists on the other, has exacted a heavy toll on skilled fighters. The Free Syrian Army is the weakest link in the chain pressed between a rock, Assad's forces, and a hard place, al-Qaeda-linked militants.

.....

The opposition's disarray has played into Assad's hands. In the past year, the tide of war has decisively shifted in his favour. He has not only weathered the violent storm but has gone on the offensive. His army, with critical help from Hezbollah and Iran, has regained control of major urban centres in Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo to a lesser extent, consolidating its grip on the western half of the country.

.....

Given inherent structural constraints, the most that the opposition could do is to wage a war of attrition against the Damascus government, a war with unpredictable consequences and prohibitive costs.

Fawaz A. Gerges, "Syria: The odds are against the opposition" [Al-Jazeera](#), 13 May 2014.

On 14 May, *USA Today* ran a headline: "Assad may have won the civil war". Their article says:

The rebel abandonment of Homs, a city known as the "capital of the "revolution," is

the strongest sign yet that the dream of toppling Syrian dictator Bashar Assad from within has failed.

....

"The rebels are in bad shape — they can't win this war," said Joshua Lendis, director of the Center for Middle East studies at the University of Oklahoma. "On the other hand, it is going to be hard for the regime to defeat them because the rebels get money and arms from the outside."

....

One year ago it looked as if Assad may go the way of other Arab despots toppled by popular uprisings demanding democratic reforms. The so-called Arab Spring ousted dictators in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt.

....

But then well-trained Shiite Muslim fighters from Hezbollah in neighboring Lebanon poured into Syria to take the lead in battles against rebels. Iran sent in military trainers and officers, Russia blocked military action at the U.N. Security Council and refused to abide by a ban on weaponry to its ally, Assad. Obama backed away from his threat to bombard Syria. And some rebel units are in fights against their Islamist allies in regions such as Deir Zour and Daraa.

Mona Alami, Osama Abu Zeid, & Elizabeth Parker Magyar, "Assad may have won the civil war," [USA Today](#), 10:32 EDT, 14 May 2014.

In a 19 May news story announcing a death toll of 162,402 in the Syrian civil war, the Associated Press said:

On the opposition side, Islamic extremists, including foreign fighters and Syrian rebels who have taken up hard-line al-Qaida-style ideologies, have played an increasingly prominent role among fighters, dampening the West's support for the rebellion to overthrow Assad.

....

Bickering among the opposition's exiled politicians who make up the Syrian National Coalition has eroded any hope for an end to the war, which has driven nearly a third of the population from their homes.

Barbara Surk, "Activists: Death Toll In Syria's War Tops 160,000," [Associated Press](#), 12:54 GMT, 19 May 2014.

5-13 May 2014 U.S. Embraces Syrian Coalition

On 5 May 2014, an anonymous U.S. "Senior Administration Official" held a briefing for

journalists. Here are some quotations from the transcript:

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think first in terms of U.S. support for the moderate opposition, I think it bears repeating that we are unequivocal in our support for Jarba and the SOC [Syrian Opposition Coalition]. We did recognize the SOC as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people back in December of 2012, and we have seen the SOC build an inclusive and moderate institution that reflects the diversity of Syria, and it has demonstrated its commitment to serving the interests and the needs of the Syrian people and to working with the international community toward a negotiated political transition that we all hope to see.

And we're particularly interested in what they've done to give a voice to Syrians whose opinions, of course, have been suppressed by the Assad regime for several decades. In recent times, the SOC has helped establish an interim government to enhance the capacity of local governance inside of Syria, increase humanitarian assistance — which, as you all know, is badly needed, and restore essential services in some of the liberated areas.

Now in terms of our commitment to empower the moderate Syrian opposition and bolster its efforts to assist people who need help inside Syria, we are taking some additional measures now to support the SOC, local communities inside Syria, and members of the moderate armed opposition. So I just wanted to go through some of those steps that we're taking.

First, we are strengthening our ties with the Syrian opposition by determining that the SOC's Representative's Office in the United States will be now considered foreign missions under the Foreign Missions Act.

Secondly, we're working with the Congress now to provide more than \$27 million in some new nonlethal assistance, which will bring the total nonlethal support we've committed and are providing to about \$287 million.

Next, we are also currently increasing deliveries of nonlethal assistance to commanders in the Free Syrian Army to enhance their logistical capabilities. And of course, we recognize that they need to have what they need to change the situation on the ground.

And finally, we have enhanced our coordination with key regional allies to provide assistance to the moderate opposition. And I have been traveling recently, and if there is interest in that, I'd be happy to talk to that.

....

And finally, in terms of the true endgame here, which is trying to get toward a negotiated political solution, it's really been our strategy from the very beginning to work with and support moderate elements in the Syrian opposition and the likeminded international partners, whether they're in the London 11 or outside, to bring about that kind of political transition that would get Assad out of power and lead to a government which is capable of serving the interests of the Syrian people.

And we continue to believe there is no military solution to the conflict and that the only way to address all dimensions of this crisis is to bring this conflict to an end. And to get that, we do need a negotiated political solution. We happen to think it's the only viable, sustainable option. And that's why we've tried to lead the international community's diplomatic efforts and we continue to work with all the parties concerned to try to get us closer toward that diplomatic solution.

....

QUESTION [Elise Labott of CNN]: Thanks for doing this, [Senior Administration Official]. I was just wondering, to kind of expand on what Jo said and take a bigger-picture look — I mean, what is your endgame here? Because you say that there's no military solution, but clearly the Syrian people, given the brutality and the force of the regime, is not going to be able to cause some kind of revolution along the lines of we've seen in other places. It seems as if clearly there will have to be a decisive military victory by the opposition in order to get rid of these guys. And it just seems both militarily and politically they don't — with the growth of extremists on the ground, they don't have the wherewithal to do it.

So what is your endgame in terms of — how do you see this ending? That the opposition is going to overtake both the extremists and the regime and also have the political clout on the ground to avoid some kind of vacuum? And how are they going to do that if there's not a decisive addition in military sophisticated weaponry? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, let me just put a few thoughts out there on that very good question. Firstly, it's not contradictory to, I think, suppose that for a solution to be sustainable it has to be a political solution. And I think, as what was said on the record to *Al-Hayat*, I do think and I continue to think that whoever thinks that there will be a sustainable, decisive military solution to this is deluding themselves. Now, that is not contradictory with the understanding, I think, which exists in many places in the international community and among our colleagues in the Syrian opposition, that the current conditions, the current asymmetry does not provide the kind of political calculus needed to get that type of negotiated, serious political process underway.

So I think we and others in the international community are focusing — while we continue to push for a genuine political solution, we also are focusing on doing what we can, together with the opposition, to try to address that asymmetry in various ways, to strengthen the opposition, and also to try to bring increased pressure of various types on the Assad regime.

And now in terms of the broader strategy, again, I don't think I'll be telling you anything you don't know, but we have several goals which we continue to keep in mind and work towards. Of course, countering the violent extremism that you referred to and preventing the establishment of a terrorist safe haven in Syria is there, avoiding the

collapse of the Syrian state and its institutions is still there, preventing the transfer or use of CW [chemical weapons] is still there, bolstering the security and stability of Syria's neighbors is still there — and in fact that was one of the key areas of focus for my first trip out to the region — alleviating the humanitarian suffering resulting from this horrible conflict is still there, and again, getting that negotiated transition leading to a more representative form of government that is responsible to the needs of the Syrian people. So those goals are still out there. We need to continue to work towards all of them.

Of course, we are frustrated like others that we haven't made more progress towards them, but I do think that it is consistent to understand that that asymmetry which exists on the ground militarily, unfortunately, between the regime and the moderate opposition is problematic for the emergence of the kinds of political conditions necessary for a serious political process. And we and others are focused on that.

....

QUESTION [Nadia Bilbassy of *al-Arabiya*]: Thank you, [Moderator]. My question is very similar to Elise's but from a different angle. Since you insist on a political solution, on what basis do you really hope that a new round or Geneva III talks can take place next [omission in transcript] Geneva [omission in transcript] what else? I mean, how do you change Assad's calculus if he's winning militarily on the ground?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yeah. Well, this conflict has witnessed some ups and downs or twists and turns. I don't disagree with you that right now there certainly seems to be an advantage that the regime has, and that is very unfortunate, and that is not helpful to getting those conditions. But that doesn't mean we just throw in the towel.

Now we do think that for those talks to resume, and we — I think we've said this before \$#8212; that the Assad regime does have to accept the specific ideas and plan that Joint Special Representative Brahimi threw out there in terms of the items on the agenda. And that predicated a third round or a resumed second round, depending on how you count, on receiving the regime's commitment to discuss a transitional governing body with full executive powers, as is mentioned in the Geneva communique, along with other issues.

Now, unfortunately, the regime refused to do so in the first two rounds of the talks. The opposition was ready to talk about all issues on the agenda, and we happen to think that this really has to be the first item on the agenda. We also, to be perfectly realistic and candid — the idea that you have a so-called presidential election and a candidacy of Bashar al-Assad is pretty inconsistent with any real chances for a political transition, so we happen to think that the regime would also need to postpone this upcoming election and help increase the chances that you can have a serious discussion and hopefully an agreement about the establishment of a transitional governing body, which in turn would oversee the constitutional reforms needed to lead to real free and fair elections.

So the main issues that need to be talked about were out there, they were accepted. That is what we hope to discuss in those first two rounds. Now, whether we will get there soon or not I'm not ready to predict, but we certainly hope that we can, together with the international community and with the Syrian opposition, try to work on that calculus despite the current advantage enjoyed by the regime, because we do think we need to get back to that kind of process.

QUESTION: So you honestly believe there is another round of Geneva talks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, at this point we have to do what we can. I'm not ready to predict or give you a probability about when there will be another round of talks in Geneva or anywhere else, but the basic premise, which is the need for a negotiated political solution and the need to alter the calculus of those who are currently refusing to engage in that, that remains the same.

"Background Briefing on Syria," [State Dept.](#), 5 May 2014.

My comments: The anonymous senior administration official alleges that the the Coalition "has demonstrated its commitment to ... working with the international community toward a negotiated political transition". But, beginning 6 March 2014, the Coalition has posted at its website various declarations that it refuses to continue the negotiations in Geneva and that it will pursue a military victory in Syria. (See my [fifth](#) and [sixth](#) essays on Syria, at 6 March, 10 March, 15 March (in both essays), and 23 April.) This senior administration official is either (1) seriously misinformed about the real intentions of the Coalition, or (2) believes he can persuade the Coalition to resume negotiations sometime.

The anonymous senior administration official alleges that the Coalition "restore essential services in some of the liberated areas". This is a grand claim that is *not* substantiated by any facts specified by the senior administration official. In my reading of the Coalition website (i.e., Press Releases, "Coalition News", "Local News"), I sometimes see webpages that boast of the Coalition's authorizing money to be spent on restoration of services in Syria, but the amount of money is typically small (e.g., US\$ 50,000). See, e.g., [SNC](#) (total of US\$90,000 medical aid to two towns on 12 April 2014); [SNC](#) (2 April 2014 approved project for electricity supply to Azaz for US\$214,000, and electricity to Maart al-Nouman for US\$57,405); [SNC](#) (1 April 2014 "agreements were reached to finance water and electricity projects in Saraqeb in rural Idlib worth of US\$1,700,000"). These projects are a tiny fraction of what is needed to rebuild Syria to its condition before the insurgents began the civil war in 2011. Note also that these projects are plans, and *not* accomplishments. Further, I have doubts whether it is legal for the Coalition to be making agreements inside Syria, which is a sovereign nation.

The anonymous senior administration official says the "true endgame" is a "negotiated political solution", which actually means getting "Assad out of power". The Truth is that, in more than three years of civil war, the insurgents have been unable to oust Assad. The current situation in Syria is that Assad is winning the civil war, and Assad has no reason to resign. Therefore, it is futile to think of a "negotiated political solution" in which the insurgents achieve what they failed to achieve in the civil war: the end of the Assad regime.

The USA is pursuing an inconsistent policy in that the U.S. Government repeatedly *says* "there is no military solution" in Syria, but then the USA continues to give aid to the Free Syrian Army that allows these insurgents to continue their civil war.

Elise Labott of CNN asked a somewhat rambling question that mentioned some of the inconsistencies in U.S. policy in Syria. The anonymous official, in the best tradition of bureaucrats, released a flood of propaganda that tries to argue that providing military aid to correct an "asymmetry" in military capability between the moderate rebels and the Syrian government is somehow different from providing military aid to win the civil war. But if the moderate rebels have more munitions, then they will use those munitions to try to win the civil war. And more innocent civilians will die, and more buildings will be destroyed. Three years was long enough for the Syrian civil war. The war needs to stop! The United Nations Secretary General has been repeatedly saying, as far back as December 2013, that the flow of munitions to the insurgents in Syria must stop.

The Syrian civil war is fragmented with different parties seeking different goals. The moderate rebels are united in a desire to replace Assad. The jihadists and Al-Qaeda want to establish a Sunni Islamic caliphate that will be intolerant of other religions. Assad is fighting to defeat all three kinds of insurgents: the moderate rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda. I fear that the longer the rebels fight against Assad, the greater the chances of either the jihadists or Al-Qaeda winning in parts of Syria. Assad has done some nasty things, but Assad is clearly preferable to Al-Qaeda and also probably preferable to the jihadists.

Nadia Bilbassy of *al-Arabiya* asked a good question. Note that the anonymous official admitted that at this moment (i.e. "right now") Assad is winning the civil war. Journalists have been chronicling Assad's victories since the Fall of 2013, and Assad has *always* been firmly in command of the government of Syria since 2000. By pretending that Assad has only a temporary advantage on the battlefield, the anonymous official then asserts that the advantage "doesn't mean we just throw in the towel." Instead, the U.S. will give more military aid, and we will watch the death toll climb from 150,000 to maybe a quarter-million dead. Will a quarter-million dead be enough dead people to satisfy the anonymous official, or will he still be calling for more military aid to the insurgents?

In answering Bilbassy, the anonymous official paints Assad as unreasonable in Geneva² because Assad did not resign and accept the "transitional governing body" that was specified by foreign meddlers in the Geneva¹ Communiqué. As I have said in my previous essays, the Geneva¹ conference included no one representing Syria. In Geneva¹, a bunch of foreigner meddlers held a one-day meeting and issued a Communiqué that attempts to impose a new government on the people of Syria. The U.S. Government has had an obsession with replacing Assad, and pretending that this is what the people of Syria want, without any "free and fair elections" in Syria.

Bilbassy's second question about the resumption of negotiations in Geneva received mostly obfuscation by the anonymous official. The reality is that Assad is winning the civil war, and Assad is firmly in control of the government in the most populated regions of Syria. As long as the negotiations continue to focus on the "transitional governing body" — which Syria does *not* need, and Assad will *not* accept — negotiations will be futile. As I have said in my

previous essays, the negotiations *should* be about ceasefires, delivery of humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, reconciliation, etc. The fact is the negotiations died on 15 Feb 2014, and the fact that the negotiations have not resumed during the next three months suggests that the negotiations are *not likely* in the foreseeable future.

Lesley Wroughton of Reuters asked a question (not quoted above) that asserted "There were reports that the relations between the U.S. and the SOC had cooled under your predecessor, who also said that it was difficult to find a political solution given that the opposition was not united." There was another mention of "predecessor" in the question by Nick Schifrin of Al-Jazeera America. These two mentions of "predecessor" hint that this anonymous official is the new (appointed 17 March 2014) U.S. Special Envoy for Syria, Daniel Rubinstein. His predecessor was Ambassador Robert Ford.

5 May 2014

U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing

On 5 May 2014, Marie Harf, the Deputy Spokesperson at the U.S. State Dept. said during the Daily Press Briefing:

... the United States is pleased to welcome the delegation of the Syrian National Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces which arrived yesterday in Washington D.C. and is visiting here through May 14th. Led by President Ahmad Jarba, this is the coalition's first official visit to the United States since being established in 2012. Secretary Kerry, as well as other U.S. officials of the Departments of State and Treasury and the National Security Council, look forward to meeting with the delegation.

The United States recognized the coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people in December 2012. The coalition has built an inclusive and moderate institution that has demonstrated its commitment to serving the interests and needs of the Syrian people, rejected extremism, and worked to advance a negotiated political transition in Syria. It has given a voice to Syrians whose opinions have been suppressed by the regime for decades. It established an interim government which focuses on enhancing the capabilities of local governance structures inside Syria, increasing humanitarian assistance, and restoring essential services.

As part of our steadfast commitment to empower the moderate Syrian opposition and to bolster its efforts to assist those in need inside Syria, the United States is announcing additional measures this week to support the coalition, local communities inside Syria, and members of the moderate armed opposition.

First, we are strengthening our ties with the Syrian opposition. We are happy to announce that the coalition's representative offices in the United States are now foreign missions under the Foreign Missions Act.

Second, we are working with the United States Congress to provide more than \$27 million in new nonlethal assistance, bringing the total nonlethal support we have committed and are providing for the Syrian opposition to nearly 287 million.

Third, we are stepping up deliveries of nonlethal assistance to commanders in the Free Syrian Army to enhance their logistical capabilities.

As we take these steps and continue our dialogue this week with the SOC [Syrian Opposition Coalition], we will look at what more we can do and also what our international partners can do to support the moderate opposition, ease the humanitarian suffering from this conflict, and work towards a political solution to resolve the Syrian crisis.

....

QUESTION: Marie, on the announcement of the foreign mission status for the Syrian Opposition Coalition offices, what protection would it give them now that they didn't have before? What does this enhanced status actually mean in practicality for them?

MS. HARF: Yeah, it does a couple of things. So this is not, obviously, tantamount to recognition of the SOC as the Government of Syria. It's a reflection of our partnership with the coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and will do a few things. It will allow us to formally facilitate banking and security services for the coalition offices in the United States. That's one. It will also facilitate their outreach to the Syrian diaspora in an increased way in the United States as well. So those are three things off the bat that I think they'll get from it.

....

QUESTION: What is the political or, let's say, a diplomatic significance that you will achieve by giving them this status?

MS. HARF: Well, I think it just shows how committed we are to working with the SOC, and it takes another step to formalize their relationship with us and to say that we believe they are the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Obviously, it doesn't confer on them status as the Government of Syria, but it takes just another step to say these are the people who are showing they're committed to a diplomatic solution, they are the moderate opposition, they've been at the table negotiating with the regime. It just is another step to formalize that.

....

QUESTION: Okay. And then your status of the Assad, like, how you consider the Assad regime — are they still the Government of Syria in your view, or what is their — what is your view of how they —

MS. HARF: Well, again, this does not confer government status upon the SOC. The regime is still in power, yes.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: But to be clear, we see no place for President Assad in a future Syria, period. What we've said is the two sides need to work together on laying out a transitional governing body. That's a very difficult process, but that's what needs to happen from here.

Daily Press Briefing for 5 May 2014, [State Dept.](#), 5 May 2014.

My comments: I am appalled that the U.S. Government considers the Coalition "as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people". The Truth is that the Coalition is a self-appointed group of Syrian exiles living in Istanbul, who have never operated a government, and who have never been elected by the people of Syria.

The U.S. State Department extols the alleged achievements of the Coalition. But history, as chronicled in my essays, shows that the Coalition delayed deciding to attend Geneva2 for eight months. Since the Geneva2 negotiations collapsed on 15 Feb, the Coalition has repeatedly refused to attend future negotiations. And the Coalition blindly refuses to recognize that Assad is winning the civil war in Syria.

The continuing financial aid from the USA to the Coalition is not only a waste of U.S. taxpayer's money but also the aid will encourage a continuation of the civil war, with more deaths of innocent civilians, and more destruction of buildings in Syria. Giving the Coalition and their partner, the Free Syrian Army, nonlethal aid helps them continue the civil war, and allows them to use their other resources to acquire munitions.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Harf said the Coalition "has ... worked to advance a negotiated political transition in Syria". Apparently, Ms. Harf is not aware of statements on the Coalition's website that reject negotiations and clearly say that the Coalition belligerently intends to pursue a military victory in the civil war. (See my [fifth](#) and [sixth](#) essays on Syria, at 6 March, 10 March, 15 March (in both essays), and 23 April.)

Sadly, the Obama administration continues its so-called policy of — actually an obsession with — demanding regime change in Syria. To justify that demand, the Obama administration continues to demonize Assad and extol the Coalition, while ignoring facts that get in the way of their simplistic view.

Assad is winning the Syrian civil war in the most populated parts of Syria. I believe Assad deserves the support of Western Europe and the USA in the fight against jihadists and Al-Qaeda, who engage in terrorism and discriminate against other religions.

7 May 2014

Coalition Wants Anti-Aircraft Weapons

On Wednesday morning, 7 May, the president of the Syrian National Coalition (Jarba) spoke at The U.S. Institute of Peace and asked the U.S. Government to supply anti-aircraft missiles to "neutralize" Assad's air force, which has been bombing cities in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon; [SNC](#); [SNC](#).

7 May 2014
U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing

On Wednesday, 7 May 2014, these issues arose again at the U.S. State Department's Daily Press Briefing. (On 6 May, Ms. Psaki returned from a trip to Africa with Kerry.)

QUESTION: Okay. Is there anything more that you can tell us about what the Administration's message is going to be to the opposition leader during his many-day visit here? Assad's forces sort of scored a pretty big victory today in Homs, and just across the street this morning the Syrian opposition leader renewed his call for weapons to, "neutralize Assad's air force". Is that still a non-starter?

MS. PSAKI: Sure.

QUESTION: What more can you tell us about —

MS. PSAKI: Well, good to see you. Let me first say that I don't believe we've announced, but the Secretary's meeting with SOC President Jarba tomorrow afternoon, so he'll be here meeting with the Secretary. I have, of course, seen reports of President Jarba's comments. I believe they'll certainly be talking about a range of issues, including our shared concerns about humanitarian access and the importance of implementing the UN Security Council resolution; the fact that people across Syria are literally starving; efforts to work with the international community, including an upcoming meeting next week [15 May] of the London 11 to continue to support and coordinate efforts to provide necessary resources to the moderate opposition; and efforts the moderate opposition itself is taking to continue to expand and strengthen their own leadership. So I expect they'll have a range of topics on the agenda tomorrow.

QUESTION: The Syrian leader did thank the United States for all the humanitarian support and all the political support that he's received at the UN, but he said that until there's a change of power — of balance on the ground, he said there's just no way for a political solution to have an opportunity to succeed. So, I mean, that's his main thrust.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well —

QUESTION: Because they need weapons, they need —

MS. PSAKI: I've certainly seen his comments. Obviously, we're committed — we remain committed to continuing to build the capacity of the moderate opposition, including through the provision of assistance to vetted members of the moderate armed opposition. As we've consistently said, we're not going to detail every element of that assistance. We're certainly aware of their comments. We're working closely with the international community, as is evidenced by the fact that the Secretary will be traveling next week for a meeting to discuss these very issues.

QUESTION: But can I (inaudible)? But even earlier this week, we had — we spoke with a senior Administration official who was talking about the visit, and the Secretary

himself has said that without a qualitative change of the military balance on the ground, that's not going to create the conditions to change President Assad's calculus to forge a political transition. So, I mean, can't you acknowledge that without more sophisticated weapons, training, all this kind of stuff, you're never going to get that — those conditions for a negotiated solution that you seek?

MS. PSAKI: Well, you're familiar with what our view is, and that, as you know, there is no military solution to the situation —

QUESTION: There's no ultimate military solution.

MS. PSAKI: — on the ground. Let me finish. But we still believe that a political process and the pursuit of a political outcome is the best way to proceed here. And certainly, we understand what's happening on the ground. We understand that there have been ups and downs in what's happening on the battlefield. But we still believe that the way to bring an end to this is a political process, and obviously that needs to begin in order to see an end to that process.

[State Dept.](#), 7 May 2014.

My comment on U.S. policy in Syria: The above quotation contains a lovely series of questions that exposes the inconsistencies in the U.S. policy in Syria. And Ms. Psaki did a skillful job at avoiding answering the questions. The meeting "tomorrow afternoon" (8 May) between Jarba and Kerry may decide Jarba's request for advanced weapons, including anti-aircraft missiles. The London11 meeting on 15 May may also decide some of these issues.

As I have said previously, the problem is that the U.S. policy in Syria is an obsession with removing Assad from power. But, at least during the past six months, Assad is winning the civil war. As the "senior administration official" and Jarba clearly understand, the way to remove Assad is to defeat Assad on the battlefield. But the predominant insurgents are jihadists and Al-Qaeda, which the U.S. Government — quite correctly — refuses to help. The Free Syrian Army, which is allied with the Coalition, has been a minor part of the insurgency since Sep 2013 (and perhaps earlier).

If the U.S. Government gives advanced weapons to the Coalition, those weapons will be acquired by the jihadists and Al-Qaeda. Those Islamic terrorists could then use the weapons in their jihad anywhere, including Europe and the USA. This is *not* a theoretical concern. Back on 6 Dec 2013, the Islamic Front seized a warehouse from the Free Syrian Army and stole weapons and ammunition. (See my [second](#) essay on Syria, search for the word "warehouse".)

So, the USA will *not* give adequate weapons to the insurgents in Syria that would permit them to defeat Assad on the battlefield. And without that defeat, Assad will remain in power for the foreseeable future. Assad remaining in power is unacceptable to the USA, but it is an unavoidable consequence of jihadists and Al-Qaeda being worse than Assad.

There is another problem with U.S. policy on Syria. Obama and Kerry are committed to the "transitional governing body" (TGB) in Geneva1, which Assad will *not* accept. The insistence of the United Nations and the London11 on the TGB kills any negotiations with Assad's

government. And that prevents much needed negotiations on ceasefires, humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, reconciliation, etc. Meanwhile, the U.S. Government continues to bleat about the desirability of a "political solution" (i.e., negotiated solution), after having demanded the TGB and killed off negotiations.

So what is the way out of this U.S. policy debacle? First, recognize that the jihadists and Al-Qaeda are all worse than Assad. Second, reintegrate the Free Syrian Army into Assad's army and focus the civil war on the defeat of jihadists and Al-Qaeda. Third, support Assad as the strongest leader of Syria and our best chance of defeating Islamic extremists (i.e., jihadists and Al-Qaeda). The third point means abandoning the TGB in Geneva¹. I think this policy change is very unlikely to occur, because Obama and Kerry — and other leaders in the London¹¹ — will *not* admit that they were wrong to oppose Assad.

Continuing 7 May 2014 U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing

Continuing the quotation from the transcript of U.S. State Department's Daily Press Briefing on 7 May:

MS. PSAKI: Well, Elise, obviously there is — one of the reasons that there's going to be a meeting next week is to discuss how the international community can continue to support the moderate opposition, including the vetted members of the armed opposition. So we'll continue these discussions, but also, we still believe that political pressure and having unity among the international community to convey the atrocities of the Assad regime is part of our calculus in our efforts here as well. It's not just what's happening on the —

QUESTION [by Elise Labott of CNN]: What kind of political pressure are you — do you think that you could possibly put on President Assad that hasn't worked until now?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Elise, there's a range of tools at our disposal. We'll continue to work with the international community to determine what the next best steps are.

QUESTION: Can I ask you — you said that you realize that there have been ups and downs on the battlefield, but in the year since the Secretary — and it is I think just about a year since the Secretary announced the plans for Geneva II in Moscow — the military trend I think has been pretty steadily downward for the opposition, culminating with, as Elise referenced, the — their apparent evacuation from Homs, which, as you know, was one of the original sites of the uprising against — first of the demonstrations, and then of the uprising against Assad. So what are the ups in the last year, or where are there places where you feel like things have actually gone the way of the opposition on the battlefield?

MS. PSAKI: I'm just not going to give a battlefield analysis of this day or the last six months from the podium. Obviously, as you know, there have been a range of factors that have been contributed to supporting the regime, and whether that is support from the Iranians or support with arms from the Russians and others. That has certainly not helped the opposition, but we still continue to believe that there is a path here to

resolve this politically.

QUESTION: And can you explain why — and I know this is your position and has been it for a long time — but why it is the position of the U.S. Government that providing lethal assistance to, in an open manner, to the opposition is not a good idea?

MS. PSAKI: Well, as you know, we're not going to detail now or we have never in the past what types of assistance we have been or are open to providing. Regardless of that, the larger position of the Administration is that there's no military solution to this conflict, because that only furthers the bloodshed and suffering of the Syrian people. And that is part of the calculus through which decisions are made.

....

QUESTION: why is it that it is the judgment of the U.S. Government that you should not openly provide weaponry or any other kinds of lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Arshad, I think the best way I can answer this is by outlining what our objectives are as it relates to the conflict in Syria. One is to counter violent extremism and prevent the establishment of a terrorist safe haven. Two is avoiding the collapse of the Syrian state and its institutions. Three is preventing the transfer or use of chemical weapons. Four is to bolster the security and stability of Syria's neighbors. Five is to alleviate humanitarian suffering, and six is to work towards a negotiated transition.

I'm not going to outline further what kinds of assistance and how we provide assistance than I already have from the podium.

[State Dept.](#), 7 May 2014.

My comments: The above-quoted exchange exposes the folly of U.S. policy on Syria.

Ms. Psaki mentioned increasing the pressure on Assad, but then she was unable to describe a specific way to accomplish that goal. Instead she vaguely deflected the question by saying the USA would "continue to work with the international community". Such work has not resolved the civil war during the past three years and is unlikely to be effective in the future — unless the international community backs way from criticism of Assad, accepts Assad as the legitimate leader of Syria, and recognizes Assad as our ally in defeating Islamic terrorism.

The State Department's Spokesperson, Ms. Psaki, refuses to recognize the fact that Assad is winning the civil war — although that fact is openly acknowledged by journalists who are reporting on the Syrian civil war. I agree with Ms. Psaki that "there is a path ... to resolve this politically", but first the London11 (including the USA) must abandon their insistence on the TGB that is mentioned in Geneva1.

Again, Ms. Psaki reiterates the U.S. declaration that "there is no military solution to this conflict". But that declaration is *not* consistent with the USA proving aid to the Free Syrian

Army, so they can continue the civil war.

Ms. Psaki lists six reasons not to provide military aid to the rebels in Syria. But those reasons are *not* consistent with the "senior administration official" who wants military aid to alter the "asymmetry" between the moderate rebels and Assad's military.

The word "calculus" appears six times in this transcript to refer to "Assad's calculus" or "our calculus" in making decision(s). As someone who took a two-semester calculus class in college — and then took seven more semesters of mathematics — and as someone who used advanced mathematics, including calculus, in scientific research, I want to scream when I see the word "calculus" overused to mean a process of making policy decisions. Using a fancy word like "calculus" attempts to make policy more thoughtful or better justified.

8 May 2014
U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing

On 8 May, the U.S. Treasury Department [announced](#) sanctions against six officials in Assad's government and against two Syrian government oil refineries.

On Thursday, 8 May, the U.S. State Department posted a summary of the meeting between Kerry and Jarba. The entire statement says:

Secretary Kerry met today with Syrian Opposition Coalition President Jarba at the Department of State. He and President Jarba had a productive discussion on the full range of our shared concerns in Syria, including empowering the moderate political and armed opposition, curbing the rise of extremism, completing the work of removing chemical weapons, and easing humanitarian suffering.

As part of our continued efforts to bolster the moderate Syrian opposition and help the Coalition serve the interests of all Syrians, the Secretary also discussed with President Jarba some additional measures we are taking to support the Coalition, local communities inside Syria, and members of the moderate, armed opposition. These steps include our announcement that the Coalition's representative offices in the United States are now foreign missions; working with Congress to provide more than \$27 million in new non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition; stepping up deliveries of non-lethal assistance to commanders in the Free Syrian Army to enhance their logistical capabilities; and, as announced earlier today by the Department of the Treasury, imposing new sanctions and restrictions against members of the regime and its supporters who have suppressed the Syrian people.

Additionally, the Secretary reaffirmed to President Jarba that the United States remains committed to working towards a negotiated political solution that puts an end to the violence and ultimately leads to a representative government that is responsive to the needs of the Syrian people. The United States has led the international community's efforts to advance a political transition, and the Secretary commended the Coalition's commitment to that goal.

"Readout of Secretary Kerry's Meeting With Syrian Opposition Coalition President Ahmed Jarba," [State Dept.](#), 8 May 2014.

My opinion on the Kerry/Jarba meeting summary: As I mentioned above in my comments on the "senior administration official" and Ms. Harf's remarks on 5 May, the statement that the Coalition is "remains committed to working towards a negotiated political solution" is *not* consistent with statements at the Coalition's website since 6 March 2014. The final paragraph of the State Department's summary of the Kerry/Jarba meeting is pure propaganda. The demand of the U.S. Government and the Coalition for regime change in Syria killed any negotiations with the Assad regime.

On Thursday, 8 May, the U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing began at 14:40 EDT, later than the usual time of 13:00.

MS. PSAKI: Hi, everyone. Thank you for your patience. I know we're a little — particularly late today, but I wanted to wait until after the Secretary's meeting. So let me just start by just giving a readout of that. Secretary Kerry met today with Syrian Opposition Coalition President Jarba at the Department of State. He and President Jarba had a productive discussion on the full range of our shared concerns on Syria, including empowering the moderate political and armed opposition, curbing the rise of extremism, completing the work of removing chemical weapons, and easing humanitarian suffering.

As part of our continued efforts to bolster the moderate Syrian opposition and help the coalition serve the interests of all Syrians, the Secretary also discussed with President Jarba some additional measures we are taking to support the coalition, local communities inside Syria, and members of the moderate armed opposition. These steps include our announcement that the coalition's representative offices in the United States are now foreign missions; working with Congress to provide more than \$27 million in new nonlethal assistance to the Syrian opposition; stepping up deliveries of nonlethal assistance to commanders in the Free Syrian Army to enhance their logistical capabilities; and imposing new sanctions and restrictions announced earlier today by the Department of the Treasury against members of the regime and its supporters who have suppressed the Syrian people.

Additionally, the Secretary reaffirmed to President Jarba that the United States remains committed to working towards a negotiated political solution that puts an end to the violence and ultimately leads to a representative government that is responsive to the needs of the Syrian people. The United States has led the international community's efforts to advance a political transition and the Secretary commended the coalition's commitment to that goal.

....

QUESTION: Okay. So there's still — it's fair to say that the Administration is still debating whether or not to give lethal aid to the moderate opposition?

MS. PSAKI: As you know, in the past we have announced our plans — last year, I should say — to expand the scale and scope of our aid. I have nothing new on that front to announce. Obviously, discussions are ongoing.

[State Dept.](#), 8 May 2014.

At the Friday, 9 May, State Department Briefing there was no mention of aid to the Coalition.

13 May 2014 Jarba at White House

On Tuesday, 13 May, Coalition President Jarba met with U.S. National Security Advisor, Susan Rice, at the White House. Obama appeared briefly to meet Jarba. The White House posted the following statement, which I copied in its entirety:

This afternoon, President Obama joined National Security Advisor Susan Rice's meeting with Syrian Opposition Coalition President Ahmad Jarba and the Coalition delegation. President Obama and Ambassador Rice reaffirmed that Bashar al-Assad has lost all legitimacy to rule Syria and has no place in Syria's future. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to a political solution to the conflict that includes a transition to a new governing authority. President Obama welcomed the Coalition's leadership and constructive approach to dialogue, and encouraged the Coalition to further its vision for an inclusive government that represents all of the people of Syria. President Jarba thanked President Obama for U.S. non-lethal assistance, which totals \$287 million and supports the Coalition, local communities inside Syria, and the moderate armed opposition. He also thanked the United States for being the largest donor of humanitarian assistance. The \$1.7 billion committed by the United States goes to those in need inside of Syria and in neighboring countries.

The President and Ambassador Rice condemned the Assad regime's deliberate targeting of Syrian civilians through aerial bombardments — including the use of barrel bombs — and the denial of food and humanitarian assistance to civilians located in areas under siege by the regime. They emphasized the responsibility of the Syrian regime to provide rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian assistance. The delegations also discussed the risks posed by growing extremism in Syria and agreed on the need to counter terrorist groups on all sides of the conflict.

President Obama and Ambassador Rice emphasized the illegitimacy of the regime's plans to hold elections and underscored that the United States stands with the moderate opposition and the Syrian people in their efforts to end the conflict and facilitate a political transition.

"Readout of National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice's Meeting with Syrian Opposition Coalition President Ahmad Jarba," [White House](#), 13 May 2014.

See also:

- "Obama Renews Commitments To Syrian Opposition," [Associated Press](#), 20:24 EDT, 13 May 2014.
- "Obama, in meeting with Syria's Jarba, praises leadership in crisis" [Reuters](#), 20:46 EDT, 13 May 2014.

- "Syrian opposition cites 'significant headway' after meeting with Obama in Washington" [Washington Post](#), 13 May 2014.
- "Obama meets Syrian opposition leader," [Daily Star](#)(AFP) in Lebanon, 14 May 2014.
- "Obama meets Syria opposition leader Jarba," [Al-Jazeera](#), 14 May 2014.

After the meeting at the White House, Jarba traveled to London for a [meeting](#) of the Core Group of the Friends of Syria (London11).

My comments: The plain English translation of the three-paragraph statement by the White House is "Jarba went away without anti-aircraft missiles." The White House statement is mostly american propaganda (e.g., "Assad has lost all legitimacy to rule Syria", and boasting about the amount of humanitarian aid from USA) or a restatement of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 (e.g., "condemned ... barrel bombs" and "unhindered humanitarian assistance").

28 May 2014

USA to Increase Military Aid to Rebels

On 23 May 2014, Senator Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, announced he had inserted a sentence in the Senate version of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2015. The sentence "Authorizes the Secretary of Defense to provide equipment, training, supplies, and defense services to assist vetted members of the Syrian opposition." Note that this legally authorizes (but does *not* require) the training of the rebels. Note also that this proposal passed the Senate Armed Services Committee, but has not yet been considered by either the full Senate or the House of Representatives, so it is only a proposed statute. [Senate Committee](#), 23 May; [Al-Monitor](#), 23 May. This proposal caught the public attention on 28 May, when a White House background press briefing referred to Levin's insertion. [Associated Press](#), 14:19 EDT; [Reuters](#), 18:57 EDT; both on 28 May 2014.

On 28 May, Obama gave a speech to graduating cadets at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, NY. In this important speech, Obama mentions some changes to his foreign policy.

A critical focus of this effort [i.e., Obama's proposed "Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund of up to \$5 billion"] will be the ongoing crisis in Syria. As frustrating as it is, there are no easy answers, no military solution that can eliminate the terrible suffering anytime soon. As President, I made a decision that we should not put American troops into the middle of this increasingly sectarian war, and I believe that is the right decision. But that does not mean we shouldn't help the Syrian people stand up against a dictator who bombs and starves his own people. And in helping those who fight for the right of all Syrians to choose their own future, we are also pushing back against the growing number of extremists who find safe haven in the chaos.

So with the additional resources I'm announcing today, we will step up our efforts to support Syria's neighbors — Jordan and Lebanon; Turkey and Iraq — as they contend with refugees and confront terrorists working across Syria's borders. I will work with

Congress to ramp up support for those in the Syrian opposition who offer the best alternative to terrorists and brutal dictators. And we will continue to coordinate with our friends and allies in Europe and the Arab World to push for a political resolution of this crisis, and to make sure that those countries and not just the United States are contributing their fair share to support the Syrian people.

Obama, "Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony," [White House](#), 28 May 2014.

My comments: Whenever a president has something controversial to say, he can travel to a military installation and receive a polite audience. A military installation is unlike a public place, especially a university campus, where the president might be booed with verbal rotten tomatoes.

In the part of the long speech that was quoted above — the part about Obama throwing five billion dollars at the Syrian civil war — I believe that Obama is absolutely right when he decided *not* to put U.S. military in what Obama rightly calls "this increasingly sectarian war".

But most of this speech is spoilt with propaganda. Obama vilifies Assad as someone who "starves his own people" — but what about the insurgents who *also* prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in cities? Obama bleats about "the right of all Syrians to choose their own future" — but what about the right of our friends in Saudi Arabia and Jordan to vote for their King? The tribal Arabs have existed for centuries without democracy and apparently do not need democracy now.

In this tediously lengthy speech, before the part quoted above, Obama said: "Since World War II, some of our most costly mistakes came not from our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences...." Is Obama really saying past presidents (e.g., Harry Truman who got us into Korea, and Lyndon Johnson who got us into Vietnam in a big way) were idiots who failed to think, or reckless warmongers? Obama needs to study history more and talk less.

I checked the transcript of the White House Press Briefing on 29 and 30 May, but there was no mention of "Syria". There was no State Department Press Briefing on 28 May. The State Department [briefing](#) on 29 May has some questions on U.S. training of Syrian rebels, but the State Department spokesman deflected those questions.

The White House website contains a transcript of a background briefing on 28 May by an anonymous "senior administration official" that explains what Obama said at West Point. It was revealed that Senator Levin wants the U.S. military to train Syrian rebels in some unspecified foreign nation.

QUESTION On Syria, could you give some more details on what the President means when he says he will work with Congress to find ways to ramp up support for the opposition? Is the administration considering an open effort by the U.S. military to train and arm in some way the opposition?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, it's a good question. So, first of all, we have an ongoing effort to ramp up our support for the moderate opposition, and that is an effort that we coordinate very closely with our Arab partners and our European

allies. And we believe that the trajectory of that assistance has been upward and can make a real difference in strengthening the moderate opposition.

We also, as I indicated, are going to commit additional resources to the neighbors — Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq — who are dealing with both refugee and counterterrorism challenges. But as we look for additional ways to strengthen the opposition, we want to review a variety of different options. We believe, again, that strengthening the opposition is both the best counterweight to Assad and also the best counterweight to the extremist elements within Syria. And we do want to work to review the possibility of the United States military participating in that effort.

I would draw your attention, for instance, to a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act, the NDAA, which indicates support for and authorities for the Secretary of Defense to provide military assistance to the vetted Syrian opposition. I think that indicates an emerging view in Congress that is supportive of providing that type of authority for the United States military to participate in support for the opposition.

So this is a conversation that we want to have with Congress as they develop their approaches, as we develop ideas for how to increase resources that can flow to the Syrian opposition. So this is something, again, we'll be discussing with Congress in the coming weeks and months. I think the basic principle is, what are the best ways for us to provide support to the Syrian opposition; what are the different means of doing so; how can we increase resources, as the President spoke about; and how do we explore areas like authorities that are within that provision that I think was an initiative of Carl Levin, but also then drew broad support in the Armed Services Committee — I believe it passed 26 to 1 23-3.

So this will be an ongoing focus for us as we head into the summer.

QUESTION After listening to your answer just now it's still not entirely clear to me whether the U.S. will train an armed Syrian opposition. Are you able to give a yes or no answer to that? And secondly, the President talked about giving more support to Syria's neighbors. Is there a monetary figure on that support? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We have been very clear that we do provide military assistance to the Syrian opposition, the armed Syrian opposition. We don't detail the specifics of that support.

What we're saying today, in addition to that, is not only do we want to continue to increase the assistance that we provide to the Syrian opposition, but we do want to have this discussion with Congress about the potential for there to be a role for the U.S. military in that effort. We would need authorities to do that, obviously, and that is what, for instance, is in the [Senator] Levin provision [to the National Defense Authorization Act] that I mentioned.

[The anonymous official failed to give the requested yes/no answer and gave no monetary figure.]

....

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: On Syria — and your question overlaps with part of Margaret's — look, no, this is not — we're talking specifically about assistance to the opposition; we're not talking about activities within Syria by the United States military. That is not something that we're contemplating.

"Background Conference Call on the President's Commencement Address at West Point," [White House](#), 28 May 2014.

My comments: In my [sixth](#) essay on Syria, in the section titled "USA resuming arming rebels?", I argued that it was a bad idea to provide military aid to the rebels, for the continuation — and escalation — of the Syrian civil war. More people will be killed, more buildings will be destroyed, but Assad will probably still be victorious in the end.

Assume for a moment that military aid to the moderate rebels from various foreign meddlers causes the defeat of Assad. The defeat of Assad would make it increasingly likely that jihadists or Al-Qaeda would control significant parts of Syria, perhaps eventually control all of Syria. Having a base for Islamic extremists in Syria would be a very bad result, not only for the Syrian people, but also for the entire Middle East.

Obama and Kerry, amongst other world leaders, have been repeatedly saying that there is "no military solution" to the Syrian civil war. This means that the flow of munitions to insurgents must stop. It is immoral to continue a civil war that has already lasted more than three years, when there is no reasonable hope of victory by the moderate rebels.

Finally, in the background briefing, there is something that has been bothering me for a long time. The U.S. Government *talks* and *preaches* openness, transparency, and democracy. So *why* is the nature and amount of U.S. military support to rebels in Syria a secret? There is no obvious reason to keep this information secret.

On 28 May, Obama gave an interview to National Public Radio:

OBAMA: The issue has always been in Syria how do we most effectively support a moderate opposition, recognizing that there are going to be limits to how rapidly we can ramp up the capacity of that opposition. And what we don't want to do is set folks up for failure. What we don't want to do is make promises that we cannot keep.

I can't speak to all the work that has been done with respect to both the political opposition as well as the armed opposition that are fighting against Mr. Assad, but I think it's been stated publicly we have been supporting them.

Ultimately, I did not think then and I still do not believe that American military actions can resolve what is increasingly a sectarian civil war, and I also believe that, ultimately, the only way you're going to get a resolution that works for the Syrian people and the region is going to — is going to require some sort of political accommodation between the various groups there.

But what we can do is to work with the neighbors in the region — Jordan, Turkey, the

Gulf states, Lebanon — to deal with the refugee flows that are coming out of Syria, to deal with the humanitarian crisis that exists there and to build on the framework, the progress that we have made over the last couple of years. We've seen some success in the Syrian opposition gaining more capacity, gaining more training, gaining more effectiveness; and building on some of that success, it is conceivable that in combination with the other work that is done on the diplomatic front, that we're able to tip what happens in Syria so that it's more likely that we can arrive at a political resolution.

STEVE INSKEEP [of NPR]: Are conditions better now, then, for a more robust aiding of the rebels and training of the rebels than in the past?

OBAMA: Well, I wouldn't say the conditions are better. I think, in many ways, the conditions are worse. But the capacity of some of the opposition is better than it was before, which is understandable.

Think — think about who this opposition is. The moderate opposition, as opposed to the jihadists that have seen the chaos there as an opportunity to gain a foothold, those are hardened fighters. When you talk about the moderate opposition, many of these people were farmers or dentists or maybe some radio reporters who didn't have a lot of experience fighting. What they understood was, is, that they had a government that was killing its own people and violating human rights in, in the most profound way, and they wanted to do something about it.

But creating a capacity for them to hold ground, to be able to rebuff vicious attacks, for them to be able to also organize themselves in ways that are cohesive — all that takes, unfortunately, more time than I think many people would like.

"Transcript And Audio: President Obama's Full NPR Interview," [NPR](#), 05:02 EDT, 29 May 2014.

See also [Reuters](#), titled: "Situation in Syria has deteriorated, Obama says".

My comments: In the first paragraph quoted above, the rebels and the Syrian National Coalition have been complaining about the absence of actual support, after promises of support by the London11 nations. Obama fails to acknowledge these past false promises, but says "What we don't want to do is make promises that we cannot keep."

In the second paragraph, Obama seems unaware of the details of support from the USA to the rebels and the Coalition.

In the third paragraph, Obama is right to say "sectarian civil war".

In the fourth paragraph, Obama touts "some success in the Syrian opposition", but ignores the fact that Assad is winning the civil war.

After the question quoted above, Obama recognizes "the conditions are worse." Obviously, the USA can not now go back in time and do something different, to change history.

Obama then says that the rebels were *not* experienced soldiers, but were "farmers or

dentists". That ignores the Free Syrian Army that is composed of deserters from Assad's professional military. Regardless of the experience of the rebels, they failed to organize themselves effectively, and they probably have lost the civil war. Assad, the jihadists, and Al-Qaeda are *not* going to sit around and wait for the rebels to organize themselves.

The Washington Post was **not** impressed by Obama's speech:

PRESIDENT OBAMA has retrenched U.S. global engagement in a way that has shaken the confidence of many U.S. allies and encouraged some adversaries. That conclusion can be heard not just from Republican hawks but also from senior officials from Singapore to France and, more quietly, from some leading congressional Democrats.

....

Mr. Obama also pledged to "ramp up support" for the Syrian opposition. But he made the same promise last year and failed to follow through. Those U.S. allies who worry about Mr. Obama's foreign policy retreat — and those who have exploited it — will be impressed by a change in U.S. behavior, not the president's rhetoric.

Editorial, "At West Point, President Obama binds America's hands on foreign affairs," [Washington Post](#), 28 May 2014.

The New York Times also criticized Obama's speech:

President Obama and his aides heralded his commencement speech at the United States Military Academy at West Point on Wednesday [28 May] as a big moment, when he would lay out his foreign policy vision for the remainder of his term and refute his critics. The address did not match the hype, was largely uninspiring, lacked strategic sweep and is unlikely to quiet his detractors, on the right or the left.

Editorial, "President Obama Misses a Chance on Foreign Affairs," [NY Times](#), 28 May 2014.

On 30 May, Reuters issued a story that analyzed reaction to Obama's speech at West Point:

President Barack Obama's second term was supposed to be a crowning opportunity to make his mark on the world stage, but instead he's leading an intense effort to redefine his foreign policy record — and the odds look stacked against him.

An administration-wide public relations blitz, which Obama launched with a big foreign policy speech this week, has done little to quell critics who frequently pan his global approach as rudderless, as the White House lurches from crisis to crisis.

....

While Obama has outlined a strategy that includes both a strong military and the diplomatic tools of alliances and sanctions to provide global leadership, it is unclear if he and his aides have the vision — let alone time — to change the perception of a presidency with eroding global influence.

....

The image of Obama as a passive world leader has been fed by perceptions he has allowed the civil war in Syria to fester. His failure to strike Syrian forces last year after they crossed a U.S. "red line" on the use of chemical weapons left doubts about Obama's willingness to use force in other world crises.

Though Obama used his speech to graduating cadets at West Point on Wednesday [28 May] to announce increased support for Syrian rebels, he made clear U.S. involvement would remain limited.

Matt Spetalnick, "Legacy at risk, Obama struggles to redefine foreign policy," [Reuters](#), 08:41 EDT, 30 May 2014.

Aleppo Atrocities by Insurgents

In Ban's 23 April 2014 Report on the failure of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139, he noted that of the 242,000 people in Syria who live in a besieged city, Assad is responsible for 81% of their besiegings. To give balance to this condemnation of Assad, I mention here some atrocities by the insurgents. I think that both sides in the Syrian civil war are equally vicious, but Assad's forces commit the majority of the breaches of humanitarian aid, simply because Assad has more resources and more control than the insurgents.

On 18 April 2014, jihadists cut the high-voltage transmission lines that carried electric power to Aleppo. A week later, on 25 April, Agence France-Presse reported:

Syria's Aleppo has been hit by a power cut for seven consecutive days, a monitoring group said Friday [25 April], the day after some 50 civilians were killed in air raids there.

Regime-controlled areas of the city and countryside "have been deprived of electricity for seven days, after the (rebel) Islamic court ordered high-tension power lines be cut off as a way to put pressure on the regime," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"Blackout in Syria's Aleppo enters second week," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 14:35 GMT, 25 April 2014.

Copy at: [Daily Star](#).

On 28 April, the *Los Angeles Times* reported:

The Syrian government and rebels struck a rare agreement Monday [28 April] to restore electricity in Aleppo province, cut off by the opposition for more than a week, in exchange for a cessation of airstrikes by the military.

Several rebel groups severed the electricity for the province, demanding that the government cease its bombardment on opposition areas with barrel bombs. The oil drums filled with TNT have ravaged the city of Aleppo and its suburbs for four months and have led to a mass exodus of residents. Activists estimate that more than 2,000 civilians have been killed in the bombings alone.

The deal is scheduled to go into effect Tuesday [29 April].

....

State media reported the restoration of power to Aleppo province but gave a differing account. The Ministry of Electricity reported that power lines damaged by terrorist groups had been repaired, according to the Syrian Arab News Agency. The government routinely refers to opposition forces as terrorists.

....

On Monday [28 April], the Sharia Committee, along with several rebel factions including the Islamic Front and the Al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front, received a written agreement from the government by way of the Red Crescent, Atae [spokesman for the Sharia Committee in Aleppo] said.

The agreement includes promises on both sides not to target civilians and not to interfere with utilities such as water and electricity. Atae said that electricity to several parts of the city was restored on Monday, earlier than expected.

Raja Abdulrahim, "Syrian officials, rebels reach deal to restore electricity to Aleppo," [Los Angeles Times](#), 19:32 GMT, 28 April 2014.

After a 10- or 11-day Islamic interruption in the electricity supply, Aleppo enjoyed one or two days of electricity before there was another Islamic interruption in the electricity supply. (I call it an "Islamic interruption" because it had been approved by the Sharia Committee of the Nusra Front.) On 1 May, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights tersely reported: "The electricity has been cut of Aleppo city, after the Islamic battalions targeted the electricity supply lines yesterday [30 April]." [SOHR](#).

The situation in Aleppo became worse, when the jihadists and Nusra Front cut off the water supply on 3 May. On 10 May 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported:

The Ahel al-Sham operations room in coordination with the Sharia council in Aleppo city has been imposing a water cut-off for 7 consecutive days on Aleppo city, in an attempt to separate the water network and prevent its flow to the regime-held western neighbourhoods of Aleppo city while pumping it to areas under the control of al-Nusra front, islamic and rebel fighters.

Several sources in Aleppo city stated to the Syrian Observatory that the lack of water forced civilians to stand in queues in order to get water from water wells and mosque taps or even to use undrinkable water, an issue which threatens with the dispersal of sicknesses and ills among civilians. Engineers specialized in the water networks stated to SOHR activists in Aleppo that such miscalculated actions by "inexperienced" sides (tampering water pumps and valves to separate the western water network from the eastern water network) threatens the water infrastructure in Aleppo and Reef Aleppo, which is complexly built, and might lead to catastrophic results. Civilians in Aleppo city call upon concerned sides to find a quick and urgent solution to the water cut-off. "Civilians in Aleppo city suffer from a lack of water," [SOHR](#), 10 May 2014.

On 10 May 2014, Agence France-Presse reported:

Residents of Syria's second city Aleppo have been without water for a week because jihadists have cut supplies into rebel and regime-held areas, a monitoring group said Sunday [11 May].

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front had cut water supplies from a pump distributing to both the rebel-held east and government-held west of Aleppo.

Last month, opposition forces cut the electricity supply to regime-controlled areas of Aleppo and the surrounding countryside.

....

The Observatory said the week of water cuts had forced residents to queue in front of wells to collect water, and the Britain-based group warned that some people were drinking unclean water risking a spread of disease.

"Jihadists cut water supply in Syria's Aleppo," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 16:54 GMT, 10 May 2014.

Earlier version at: [Gulf News](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

See also [Al-Jazeera](#).

My comment: Cutting off the water supply to a city is similar to releasing chlorine gas into the air — humans need air and water to survive.

On Monday, 12 May 2014, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported:

Water supplies have begun to return to neighborhoods of war-torn Aleppo, activists said Monday, after more than a week of cuts that affected the entire city.

Local anti-regime activists said supplies were "gradually" being restored to some neighborhoods, but after nine days of cuts, an unspecified number of people had become sick from drinking polluted water, while long lines formed around the city as residents scrambled to secure a minimum of their water needs.

The cuts affected both the western, regime-controlled part of Aleppo, and eastern, rebel-held areas, with accusations flying over who was responsible.

The Britain-based, Syrian Observatory for the Human Rights, an anti-regime group, blamed the Nusra Front for the move, while the city's Public Administration for Services, an ad hoc local council, in the rebel-held part, blamed regime attacks for the inability to repair the network.

The Observatory Monday said the ad hoc rebel alliance of Ahl al-Sham — which includes Nusra — along with Aleppo's Shariah Committee, were seeking to end the cuts in order to fully separate the network so that regime-held areas could be isolated, and presumably targeted later on by another round of water cuts.

"Water crisis begins to ease in Aleppo, foes trade blame," [Daily Star](#), 12 May 2014.

Just after midnight on 15 May, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported:

Pro- and anti-Assad Aleppo residents, as well as rights groups, have slammed what they call the collective punishment of civilians by suspending services and utilities, as a water crisis there entered its 12th day.

While water began return to some areas in Aleppo Tuesday [13 May], large swathes of both eastern, mainly rebel-held areas and western, government-controlled parts of the city remained dry Thursday [15 May], affecting an estimated 1 million people.

....

Rebel factions, meanwhile, traded blame over the water cut, which affected large areas of their own opposition support base, as civilian anger and misery mounted in the city.

A spokesman for the Islamic Front coalition involved in the negotiations over electricity accused the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), an Al-Qaeda splinter group, of cutting the water supply at the Khafsah station outside Aleppo.

"The water supply was cut from the ISIS-dominated area," the spokesman said. "The Islamic Front protects civilians."

Others said the Nusra Front, which controls the main Suleiman al-Halabi station, botched an attempt to deprive regime-held areas of water and ended up affecting the whole city.

Lauren Williams, "Water war takes its toll on Aleppo," [Daily Star](#), 16 May 2014.

On Friday afternoon, 16 May, the United Nations' Secretary General expressed "concern" about the Islamic cut-off of water in the city of Aleppo:

The Secretary-General is concerned by reports that water supplies in the city of Aleppo were deliberately cut off by armed groups for eight days, depriving at least 2.5 million people of access to safe water for drinking and sanitation.

The Secretary-General notes that preventing people's access to safe water is a denial of a fundamental human right. Deliberate targeting of civilians and depriving them of essential supplies is a clear breach of international humanitarian and human rights law.

While water supplies have since been restored, the Secretary-General urges all parties to ensure that the water supply in Aleppo — and everywhere in Syria — is permanently restored and to refrain from targeting civilian facilities and infrastructure. He asks Member States and those with influence over all the parties to the conflict to remind them of their obligations.

"Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Syria," [U.N.](#), 16 May 2014.

My comments on the U.N. "concern": On 3 May, Nusra Front cut off the water to the city of Aleppo. On 12-13 May water was restored to some parts of Aleppo, but other parts of

Aleppo remain without water on 16 May. On 16 May — 13 days after the initial water cut-off — the United Nations noticed and issued a statement of "concern". Note the U.N. mentioned the wrong facts: "eight day" interruption in water, when the actual interruption was longer. It is easy to predict that the Islamic extremists in Aleppo will ignore the United Nations' plea.

The Liberation of Aleppo by Assad

Jihadists and Al-Qaeda had besieged the prison near Aleppo continuously since April 2013, in an attempt to free approximately 3500 inmates. At dawn on 22 May, Assad's forces captured the prison and the area surrounding the prison. Reuters reports: "Assad's forces have control over the north-east approach to [the city of] Aleppo". [Associated Press](#), 07:48 GMT; [Reuters](#) 08:16 GMT; both on 22 May 2014.

12-22 May 2014 War Crimes Prosecution?

On Monday afternoon, 12 May, the Associated Press reported:

France has asked the U.N. Security Council to refer the war in Syria to the International Criminal Court for investigation of possible crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The proposed resolution, circulated to all council members Monday [12 May] and obtained by The Associated Press, condemns the "widespread violation" of human rights and international humanitarian law by Syrian authorities and pro-government militias as well as abuses and violations by "non-state armed groups" during the last three years.

It takes note of reports by an independent commission appointed by the U.N. Human Rights Council to investigate rights violations in Syria. In its latest report last September, the commission said at least eight massacres had been perpetrated in Syria by President Bashar Assad's regime and supporters, and one by rebels in the previous year and a half.

....

Several diplomats said Russia, Syria's closest ally and a permanent council member, is likely to veto the resolution. The diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity because the council has not yet discussed the draft, said discussions are expected this week and France is pressing for a vote next week.

Edith M. Lederer, "France Asks UN To Refer Syrian War To ICC," [Associated Press](#), 14:59 EDT, 12 May 2014.

On Monday afternoon, 12 May, Reuters reported:

France circulated a draft resolution to U.N. Security Council members on Monday [12 May] that seeks to refer the three-year-old civil war in Syria to the International

Criminal Court for possible prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The 15-member council is due to meet on Wednesday [14 May] to discuss the draft and it could be voted on within days, diplomats said.

But Moscow — a veto-wielding council member and ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad — has made clear it is against such a move. Russia, supported by China, has already blocked three resolutions that would have condemned Assad's government, threatened sanctions and called for war crimes accountability.

Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin has reinforced Moscow's stance against referring Syria to The Hague-based court, telling Reuters: "Our position has not changed."

....

U.N. investigators said in March that they had expanded their list of suspected war criminals from both sides in the civil war and that the evidence was solid enough to prepare any court indictment.

Michelle Nichols, "U.N. Security Council could vote within days on Syria ICC referral," [Reuters](#), 15:54 EDT, 12 May 2014.

See also [Al-Jazeera blog](#), 12 May 2014.

On 13 May, when announcing Brahimi's resignation, the U.N. Secretary General seemed to endorse the call for criminal prosecution of parties in Syria:

I also reiterate my strong view that there must be accountability for the terrible crimes that have been — and are being — committed. Such crimes include the deliberate starvation of communities by preventing humanitarian access.

Ban Ki-moon, "United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announces Lakhdar Brahimi's resignation as United Nations and Arab League Envoy to Syria," [U.N.](#); Ban & Brahimi, "Transcript of press briefing with the Secretary-General and Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative for Syria," [U.N.](#) both on 13 May 2014.

My comments on 12 May

I have mixed feelings about the French proposal. I don't see any gain from forcing Russia to veto the French proposal, which might antagonize Russia from cooperating on bringing peace to Syria. But the French are correct that terrible things have happened — and continue to happen — in Syria. And the French proposal is fair in that it also calls for an investigation of war crimes committed by the insurgents.

My biggest concern is pragmatic: I believe we need Assad to continue leading Syria, because he is the strongest and most experienced leader of Syria, and he offers the best chance of defeating the jihadists and Al-Qaeda. If Assad is on trial in the Hague, then he will not be fighting jihadists and Al-Qaeda. For that reason, I am reluctant about Assad being prosecuted. And if we don't prosecute Assad, in fairness, we should not prosecute lower ranking people in his regime.

History teaches us that Joseph Stalin, leader of Russia from the late 1920s until 1953, was a very nasty man. Amongst many horrible acts, he ordered the genocide of millions of Kulaks in the Ukraine during 1932-1933. However, the U.S. Government willingly gave military aid to Stalin during World War II — simply because Stalin was the enemy of Hitler, and the enemy of our enemy is our friend. If the USA can cooperate with Stalin, then it should be easy for the USA to cooperate with Assad in the war against Islamic terrorists, like jihadists and Al-Qaeda. This is *not* a moral reason. This is *not* a legal reason. This is a very practical reason: victory in the fight against Islamic terrorists is more important than enforcing international law in the Syrian civil war. I recognize that the Assad regime has committed atrocities, such as targeting civilians and besieging cities (i.e., starving civilians and insurgents). But the insurgents are committing the same crimes as the Assad regime. (See [below](#) for one recent example of moderate rebels targeting innocent civilians. See [Aleppo](#) for examples of jihadists and Nusra Front cutting off electricity and water to a city.) In particular, ISIL has committed so many atrocities that other insurgents began fighting ISIL in Jan 2014. A victory by Assad would lead to less suffering than a victory by Al-Qaeda, making Assad the least worst option. This is *not* an endorsement of Assad, but recognition that Islamic terrorism is a bigger problem than any misconduct by Assad.

"Holding parties accountable" has become a slogan, often chanted by diplomats without openly recognizing the practical difficulties of a trial in the midst of a civil war. How will the ICC arrest Assad, and arrest leaders of the jihadists and Al-Qaeda? These criminal suspects are *not* going to voluntarily come to the Hague for their trials. How will the ICC arrange for witnesses in Syria to testify in court in the Hague? We can anticipate a lack of cooperation from Assad's regime in granting access to witnesses who will testify for the prosecution of Assad's regime. Similarly, the jihadists will not cooperate with granting access to witnesses who will testify for the prosecution of jihadists, and the same with other insurgent groups. It is going to be really difficult to *prove* in court that some leader gave an order to commit a violation of international law.

I have some ambivalence about my opposition to the French proposal. I could easily take an absolute position that international law must be enforced, and atrocities must stop. But practical difficulties in how to arrest the criminal suspects, and how to get eyewitness testimony — as well as my conviction that Assad is the least worst leader for Syria — convince me that the French proposal is undesirable.

My later comments: Criminal trials of murderers in the USA commonly result in harsh sentences, commonly life in prison without the possibility of parole, or even the death sentence. In contrast, sentences of criminals in Europe are shorter and there is no death penalty. For example, on 23 May a former warlord in the Congo who aided and abetted the murder of approximately 200 people was given a 12 year sentence by the International Criminal Court. [Associated Press](#). Given he spent 7 years in detention before his conviction, he will be free in 5 years.

News on 19-22 May

On 19 May, the Associated Press reported a groundswell of support for the French proposal:

Nearly 60 countries urged the U.N. Security Council on Monday [19 May] to refer the war in Syria to the International Criminal Court for investigation of possible crimes against humanity and war crimes.

France, which drafted the resolution, has called for a vote Thursday [22 May] and Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin has already said Moscow — Syria's closest ally — opposes the measure, which means an almost certain veto. China, which also supports President Bashar Assad's government and has joined Russia in vetoing three previous Syria resolutions, could make it a fourth double veto.

Nevertheless, the 58 countries appealed to all 193 U.N. member states to show their support by co-sponsoring the resolution that would authorize the world's permanent war crimes tribunal to investigate allegations of heinous crimes by the Syrian government, pro-government militias, and armed opposition groups.

Edith M. Lederer, "58 Countries Urge UN To Refer Syria To ICC," [Associated Press](#), 17:37 EDT, 19 May 2014.

On 20 May, Reuters reported that the Russians would veto the French proposal to refer the Syrian matter to the International Criminal Court:

Russia will veto a draft U.N. resolution to refer the civil war in Syria to the International Criminal Court if it comes to a vote in the Security Council, Interfax news agency quoted a Russian official as saying on Tuesday [20 May].

....

"The draft that has been submitted to the U.N. Security Council is unacceptable to us, and we will not support it," [Deputy Foreign Minister] Gatilov was quoted as saying. "If it is put to a vote, we will veto it."

"Russia would veto referral of Syria to criminal court — Interfax," [Reuters](#), 12:09 GMT, 20 May 2014.

On 21 May, the Associated Press reported:

Russia's ambassador to the United Nations said his country will veto a U.N. Security Council resolution to refer the crisis in Syria to the International Criminal Court, calling it a "publicity stunt" and warning that it will harm efforts to end the violence by political means.

The conflict is now into its fourth year, and tense peace talks have gone so poorly that the joint U.N.-Arab league envoy who tried to broker them has announced he will resign.

....

France has called for a vote on the resolution Thursday [22 May]. But permanent council member Russia has vetoed three previous resolutions on Syria, and Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters his country would do the same with this one. Moscow is Syria's closest ally.

Churkin said Russia sees the French-drafted resolution "as simply a publicity stunt which will have a detrimental effect, unfortunately, on our joint efforts in trying to resolve politically the crisis in Syria."

Cara Anna, "Russia Says It Will Veto UN Resolution On Syria," [Associated Press](#), 16:32 EDT, 21 May 2014.

See also [Reuters](#).

Is the French proposal really a "publicity stunt"? The French proposal is a straightforward way of holding parties in Syria accountable for their crimes during the civil war. Such accountability has been repeatedly demanded by the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations, and by the U.N. Secretary General himself.

On 21 May, *The Voice of Russia* reported:

Russia will veto a resolution to refer the conflict in Syria to the International Criminal Court, says Russian Permanent Representative to the UN, Vitaly Churkin. "Yes, we'll do this. I'll explain the reasons tomorrow," Churkin told journalists on Wednesday [21 May]. "The adoption of such a resolution may have negative implications for common efforts toward settling the crisis in Syria," he said.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov had told Interfax earlier that a UN Security Council draft resolution on referring findings on crimes committed in Syria to the ICC was unacceptable.

"Moscow to veto UN resolution on referring Syria to ICC — Russian envoy."

[Voice of Russia](#), 17:39 GMT, 21 May 2014.

See also [Voice of Russia](#), 22 May 2014.

The U.N. Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, told the Security Council before the vote:
I deliver this statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

....

If members of the Council continue to be unable to agree on a measure that could provide some accountability for the ongoing crimes, the credibility of this body and of the entire Organization will continue to suffer.

When we talk of accountability, we should be thinking not only of the parties to the conflict. We should also think of those outside who are fuelling the conflict and exacerbating the suffering by their continued supply of weapons to those who are committing the atrocities.

Jan Eliasson, "Deputy Secretary-General's remarks, on behalf of the Secretary-General, to the Security Council on Syria," [U.N.](#), 22 May 2014.

The call for also prosecuting those who "supply weapons" to war criminals means that government officials in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Russia, and Iran might be prosecuted. While such prosecution is logical, it is also probably unprecedented. Should we also prosecute those who supplied nerve gas to Assad? How about ordering the manufacturers of Syrian nerve gas to reimburse OPCW for the cost of destroying that nerve gas?

On 22 May, 13 of the 15 member nations of the United Nations Security Council voted for the French proposal, but Russia and China both vetoed the proposal. Reuters reported the "explanation" offered by Russia:

Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin questioned why the resolution was put to a vote when it would again expose disunity in the council, which had previously been able to agree resolutions on the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and demanding greater humanitarian aid access in the country.

"The draft resolution rejected today reveals an attempt to use the ICC to further inflame political passions and lay the groundwork in the end for eventual outside military intervention," Churkin told the council.

"We're convinced that justice in Syria will eventually prevail. Those guilty of perpetrating grave crimes will be punished but in order for this to happen peace is first needed," Churkin said.

French U.N. Ambassador Gerard Araud dismissed Churkin's explanation. "It's a very say day," he said. "Russia has not explained really well why it was opposing this referral."

Michelle Nichols & Louis Charbonneau, "Russia, China veto U.N. bid to refer Syria to international court," [Reuters](#) 16:28 EDT, 22 May 2014.

The Associated Press reported:

.... Attempts at peace talks are at a standstill, leading the joint U.N.-Arab league envoy who tried to broker them to resign.

....

[French Ambassador to the U.N.] Araud later told reporters in an admission of frustration: "There is a moment you feel powerless ... in front of barbarians and their supporters."

Cara Anna & Edith M. Lederer, "Russia, China Veto UN Move To Refer Syria To ICC," [Associated Press](#), 14:38 EDT, 22 May 2014.

In an attempt to document *why* the Russians vetoed the French proposal, I looked at the english-language websites of Russian government news media (e.g., RIA-Novosti, TASS, Voice of Russia). TASS said:

Russia's ambassador to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin on Thursday [22 May] criticized a rejected draft resolution of the UN Security Council on Syria.

"We only see the draft resolution rejected today as an attempt to use the International Criminal Court (ICC in The Hague) for further fueling political tensions, and ultimately for external military intervention," Churkin said after the vote in the Security Council.

The diplomat said that "the stake on the military change of regime in Syria at any cost became the original cause for protraction of the crisis and it undermines the Geneva

talks".

The Russian ambassador warned that the decision to put a one-sided project to vote did harm to the unity of five permanent members of the Security Council — Russia, China, the United Kingdom, the United States and France.

"Rejected UN Security Council resolution on Syria is attempt to use ICC for intervention," [TASS](#), 16:07 GMT, 22 May 2014.

My comments on 22 May

It is important to understand *why* Russia and China vetoed the French proposal. In the *Voice of Russia* article on 21 May, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations promised to "explain the reasons tomorrow", but the promised explanation (if it came) was not mentioned by journalists. A promise of an explanation hints that a rational explanation exists, but a mere promise is just propaganda.

Reuters and TASS mention the Russian view that the French proposal will justify "military intervention" in Syria by the United Nations. There is no explanation for this vague fear by Russia. Does "military intervention" mean invading Syria to kidnap Assad and take Assad to the Hague to stand trial? Does "military intervention" mean destroying Assad's air force, to prevent Assad from continuing to bomb civilians and insurgents? There are a variety of possible "military intervention[s]" and the Russians fail to specifically say what they mean.

Churkin mentions the desire of unspecified nations for "change of regime" in Syria. I have been critical of Obama's obsession with removing Assad from power. I agree with Churkin (in the TASS article) that the obsession with regime change has "protracted" the Syrian crisis. Since putting Assad on trial in the Hague would seriously erode Assad's ability to lead the Syrian government in Damascus, the desire for regime change might motivate some nations to support the French proposal.

The TASS article mentions Churkin's view that the vote "did harm to the unity" of the U.N. Security Council. First, appeals to be in the majority (including appeals to avoid disunity) are propaganda. People *ought* to have a significant, substantial reason to vote for/against a proposal. Second, the Russians and Chinese were clearly in the minority (i.e., 2 of 15), so if anyone harmed unity, it was the Russians and Chinese.

The Russian explanation is unsatisfying, and is mostly propaganda. So here is my explanation for why Russia and China vetoed the French proposal.

My world view is colored by my growing up during the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, when the communist hordes threatened to annihilate the USA. In that world view, the communist/totalitarian nations viewed a national government as more important than an individual — the individual served the state, and the state promised to take care of the individual. In contrast, in democracies in Western Europe and the USA, the individual was more important than the state. These contrasting views of the individual played out, for example, in how nations treated riots. In communist nations, when there was a riot, the government often brutally suppressed the riot — slaughtering many rioters — and quickly

restored law and order. But in the USA, when there was a riot (e.g., Watts area of Los Angeles in Aug 1965), the government tolerated looting, rather than shoot looters, because of the belief in the USA that individual life is more valuable than law and order.

Similarly, when there were anti-government demonstrations in Syria, beginning in March 2011, Assad brutally suppressed those demonstrations. As a response to the brutal suppression, the Syrian civil war began. Later, the jihadists and Al-Qaeda appeared and hijacked the insurrection in Syria.

I suggest that this world view explains why Russia and China support Assad, because all three nations believe that governments have the right to brutally suppress demonstrations (or riots), and restore law and order. This is a consequence of their view that the individual exists to serve the state, and that law and order are more important than individual life.

My view is supported by statement by the Syrian government that the defeat of the French proposal is a "rejection of foreign interference in Syria" (i.e., the Syrian government has the legal right to do as it wishes with the people of Syria). [SANA](#).

Churkin's Speech on 22 May

The *Russia Today* website contained a copy of Churkin's speech to the U.N. Security Council:

We understand the motives of many delegations who supported or co-sponsored today the draft resolution referring the Syrian file to the ICC. We share their emotions caused by the crisis in Syria, which has been dragging on for way too long. It is hard to see the destruction, loss of life and suffering of people.

It is more difficult to figure out the motives of France which initiated this draft and put it to vote, being fully aware in advance of the fate it will meet. One can hear many complaints about the lack of unity on Syria within the Security Council, among P5. Indeed, when that unity is present we manage to achieve concrete positive results. Among them is undoubtedly the Security Council Resolution 2118 on the destruction of the Syrian chemical stockpile — that program is about to be successfully completed. Another important benchmark was the Security Council Resolution 2139 on humanitarian issues. P5 unity is important. After all, it is for a reason that France has been pushing for P5's engagement in the political settlement of the crisis, having failed however to advance any positive substantive ideas.

Then why deal such a blow to P5 unity at this stage? Is it just to try once again to create a pretext for armed intervention in the Syrian conflict?

One could not overlook that the head of the French diplomacy saw it fit to take advantage of his recent visit to Washington to publicly criticize the United States for refusing to shower missiles and bombs on Syria last fall.

It should be pointed out that this damage to P5 unity is inflicted at a critical point in the efforts to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

An involuntary hiatus created by the resignation of Lakhdar Brahimi should be used for an in-depth, fair and collective analysis of the situation, for seeking out any possible reserves with the view to break the vicious circle of violence. Useful food for thought in this regard is contained in the "political testament" left by Lakhdar Brahimi to the Security Council on May 13.

This is exactly what the draft Security Council resolution tabled by Russia aims at — to foster the process of "local truces". The draft is not to the liking of our western colleagues who claim that the settlements already achieved do not care standards. One cannot but recall a Russian saying: A bad peace is better than a good quarrel.

And what are our Western colleagues proposing instead? Talk good for naive people that they will be supplying new types of weapons to "good" opposition groups only? Their list of the "good guys" now includes the "Islamic Front", which has openly confessed to a series of brutal terrorist acts, including a recent one in Aleppo that claimed the lives of dozens of civilians. I would note that our western colleagues are demanding that cross-border humanitarian deliveries to Syria be conducted through border-crossings controlled by the Islamic Front. At the same time, they have blocked for a long time any condemnation by the Security Council of numerous terrorist acts committed in Syria.

It is pursuing the regime change by force in Syria at all costs that precipitated the drawing out of the crisis and undermines the Geneva negotiations. It is indicative that Ahmad Jarba, leader of the National Coalition, did not make the effort to show up during the Geneva negotiations and instead travels the world in search of weapons. And Ahmad Al-Khateeb, his predecessor, was removed from office just for attempting to launch talks with Damascus to stop the bloodshed.

In this context it leaps into the eye that there is not a single word on the political settlement and the negotiations process among Syrians in the communiqué of the latest May 15 meeting of the so-called "London 11". And the western "troika" was taking great pains to dissuade the Secretary General and his Special Envoy from calling another round of Geneva negotiations.

What justice can one talk about when the overriding policy aims at escalating the conflict? The draft resolution rejected today reveals an attempt to use the ICC to further inflame the political passions and lay the groundwork for eventual outside military intervention.

It should be noted that the so-called "Caesar Report" used to build up tension ahead of the introduction of this draft was based on unconfirmed information obtained from unverifiable sources and therefore cannot serve as a platform for taking such a serious decision.

One cannot ignore the fact that the last time the Security Council referred a case to the ICC — the Libyan file by its Resolution 1970 — it did not help to resolve the crisis,

but instead added fuel to the flames of conflict. And after the cessation of hostilities the ICC — to put it mildly — did not rise to the occasion. The ICC does not contribute to a return to normalcy or justice in Libya, evading the most burning issues. The death of civilians as a result of NATO bombardments was somehow left outside its scope. Our colleagues from NATO countries arrogantly refused to address this issue altogether. They even refused to apologize. And they wax eloquent about shame! They advocate fighting impunity, but are themselves practicing the policy of all-permissiveness.

The United States frequently shows the path towards the ICC to these or those, but it is reluctant to accede to the Rome Statute itself. And in today's draft the United States insisted on an exemption for itself and its citizens.

Great Britain is a party to the ICC, but it is for some reason unenthusiastic about the exploration that began there of the issue of crimes committed by the British nationals during the Iraq war.

If the United States and the United Kingdom were to refer their Iraqi file to the ICC together, the world would see that they are truly against impunity.

Mr. President, we proceed from the premise that the Geneva Communiqué of June 30, 2012 remains at the core of efforts to settle the Syrian crisis. The Communiqué interprets the principle of accountability and national reconciliation as interrelated, leaving the leading role in this process to the Syrians themselves[.]

We are convinced that justice in Syria will eventually prevail. Those culpable of perpetrating grave crimes will be punished. But in order for this to happen, peace is needed first and foremost. Russia will continue to exert every effort to stop the bloodshed as soon as possible. We call upon our Western colleagues to abandon their futile dead-end policy of endlessly heating up the Syrian crisis. We invite everyone who really values the interests of the Syrian people to join us in the efforts aimed at a Syrian political settlement.

To state as the Permanent Representative of France has done today — that the political process does not exist any longer — is simply irresponsible. This is truly — betrayal of the Syrian people.

Vitaly Churkin, "Russia's statement at UNSC: French resolution 'betrayal of Syrian people'," [Russia Today](#), 16:13 GMT, 22 May 2014.
[copy](#) of Churkin's speech

My comments on Churkin's speech: Taking Churkin's paragraphs in sequence, in his second paragraph he touts the alleged successes when the Security Council has "unity". But the operations under Resolution 2118 are currently months behind schedule, with Assad failing to deliver all of his chemical weapons and failing to destroy all of his production facilities. Resolution 2139 is being ignored by *all* parties in Syria. So Churkin's alleged successes are currently failures. Above, I noted that advocating "unity" was a propaganda tactic.

Above, I criticized the "pretext for armed intervention" argument of Russia. French Foreign

Minister Fabius really did visit Washington on 13 May 2014, and Fabius did criticize Obama for failing to bomb Syria in Sep 2013. See [above](#). I omitted Fabius' criticism of Obama in my essay, because the criticism is irrelevant to the investigation of use of chlorine in Syria, but the criticism is in the references cited above.

I agree with Churkin about the desirability of local truces negotiated between insurgents and the Syrian government.

Although, I intensely follow the news about Syria, I am *not* aware that the London11 have decided to supply weapons to the Islamic Front, as claimed by Churkin.

Churkin's claim: "It is indicative that Ahmad Jarba, leader of the National Coalition, did not make the effort to show up during the Geneva negotiations ..." is false.

Churkin's statement "What justice can one talk about when the overriding policy aims at escalating the conflict?" sounds like propaganda, but the London11 really are increasing aid to the Coalition in an attempt to motivate Assad to negotiate (i.e., compromise and resign). Churkin ignores that Russia is continuing to send massive amounts of aid to Assad's regime.

Churkin mentions the "Caesar Report". That Report contains evidence of the killing of 11,000 prisoners by Assad's regime. See [The Guardian](#), 21 Jan 2014.

Churkin is right to condemn the hypocrisy of the USA, in advocating the International Criminal Court prosecution of other nations, but demanding immunity for U.S. citizens at the ICC. But Churkin ignores the fact that Russia also has immunity at the ICC, along with China.

Churkin wants peace first, then accountability for war crimes in Syria. I think there are good reasons for Churkin's view, but it is not the only way. Accountability for war crimes *could* stop the perpetrators of those crimes, and make peace easier to obtain. Waiting until after the end of the civil war, means that the victor(s) will prosecute only the defeated parties for war crimes, when *all parties* committed war crimes.

Finally, Churkin quotes the French ambassador as saying "the political process does not exist any longer". That is because the Geneva2 negotiations collapsed on 15 Feb and no one has seriously attempted to revive those negotiations. The Coalition is determined to pursue a military victory. Assad, who is prevailing on the battlefield, has no reason to compromise. The United Nations — urged by the London11 — is rigidly committed to an insistence on a "transitional governing body" that will make negotiations futile. That is why the "political process" is dead.

In summary, Churkin's speech is rambling and full of propaganda, contains some false statements of fact, and is unconvincing, although I agree with his conclusion that the French proposal should be rejected.

Chinese Veto

I also looked at *Xinhuanet*, the communist Chinese government's news website, to find their explanation of the Chinese veto.

Also [i.e., in addition to Churkin] speaking at the council after his vote, Wang Min, the deputy Chinese permanent representative to the United Nations, said that China "has serious difficulties" with the draft resolution.

"What is most urgently needed now is to urge the government of Syria and opposition to immediately start a ceasefire and end violence so that the third round of the Geneva negotiations can be resumed to push forward the political process and start the political transition," Wang said.

....

"Under the current circumstances, to forcibly refer the situation of Syria to the ICC is neither conducive to building trust among all the parties in Syria, or to the early resumption of the negotiations in Geneva, it will only jeopardize the efforts made by the international community to push forward the political settlement," he said.

"We believe that at a time when there is a serious divergence of views concerning the draft resolution among all sides, the Security Council should continue to hold the consultations, rather than forcibly push for a vote on the draft resolution, so as not to undermine the unity in the council or obstruct the coordination and cooperation in the council in dealing with the questions such as Syria and other major serious issues," he said.

"Russia, China veto draft U.N. resolution on Syrian civil war," [Xinhuanet](#), 22 May 2014.

A later story at *Xinhuanet* says:

"China believes that any action to seek recourse to ICC for prosecuting perpetrators of serious violations should be conducted based on the premise of respecting state judicial sovereignty and respecting the principle of complementary," Wang [the deputy Chinese permanent representative to the United Nations] said [after the UN Security Council's meeting].

Though the efforts to seek political settlement to the issue of Syria have encountered difficulties, the international community should be patient and firm with confidence, and stick to the overall direction of the political settlement, he said.

"What is most urgently needed now is to urge the government of Syria and opposition to immediately start a ceasefire and end violence so that the third round of the Geneva negotiations can be resumed to push forward the political process and start the political transition," Wang went on.

"Under the current circumstances," he stressed, "to forcibly refer the situation of Syria to the ICC is neither conducive to building trust among all the parties in Syria, or to the early resumption of the negotiations in Geneva, it will only jeopardize the efforts made by the international community to push forward the political settlement."

The envoy emphasized that at a time when there is "a serious divergence of views" concerning the draft resolution among all sides, the Council should continue to hold consultations, rather than simply push for a vote on the draft resolution, so as not to undermine the unity of the Council or obstruct the coordination and cooperation in dealing with problems such as Syrian crisis and other major issues.

"China says passing Syrian issue to ICC now harms efforts for political solution," [Xinhuanet](#), 23 May 2014.

My comments: Looking at the first news article in *Xinhuanet*, Wang is correct about the "most urgent need" for a "ceasefire". But Wang's concern about "forcibly refer[ing]" the Syrian matter to the ICC "will only jeopardize ... the political settlement" is conclusory. The efforts for a political settlement (i.e., Geneva2 negotiations) died on 15 Feb, three months ago. The current plan of the London11 seems to send more military aid to the insurgents, in the hope of encouraging negotiations at some vague future time.

Wang's use of the word "forcibly" gives the impression that the U.N. Security Council is a gang of thugs who are attacking Syria. The Truth seems to be that both Assad's government and the insurgents have committed numerous violations of international law, in targeting innocent civilians. The French proposal sought to have these perpetrators held accountable in a court of law.

Finally, Wang mentions the "serious divergence of views" — by only 2 of 15 nations on the Security Council — as requiring more "consultations" to avoid "undermin[ing] the unity". Above, in my discussion of the Russian veto, I explained why concern with unity is bogus.

Looking at the second news article in *Xinhuanet*, "respecting state judicial sovereignty" will *not* prosecute the victor(s) in the Syrian civil war. Being "patient" means waiting for hundreds of thousands more Syrian people to die in a continuing civil war. The other points in the second news article were also mentioned in the first news article.

The Chinese probably simply followed the Russian lead in vetoing the French proposal. The few different reasons mentioned by Wang make it appear that the Chinese made their own decision.

22 May Attack on Campaign Rally

As one example of why there needs to be prosecution of war crimes in Syria, on 22 May insurgents fired a mortar shell at a political campaign rally for Assad in the province of Daraa (also spelled "Deraa" in English transliteration). Early reports said at least 21 people were killed. Final report was 39 innocent civilians were killed, and 205 civilians were wounded, in this one attack. The Associated Press reports that "an opposition activist" claimed that "rebels from a faction of the Free Syrian Army" fired the mortar shell. It is a terrorist act to attack a group of civilians who were peacefully expressing their political opinions. Obviously, the insurgents are trying to intimidate people from voting in the 3 June election. [Reuters](#), 10:52 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 20:12 GMT; [Al-Jazeera](#), 20:37 GMT; [Gulf News](#), 20:58 GMT ; all on 23 May 2014. [SANA](#); [Daily Star](#); both on 24 May 2014.

The Secretary General of the United Nations condemned the attack by the rebels:

The Secretary-General condemns the mortar attack on an electoral rally in southern Syria that reportedly killed at least 21 people today. He reiterates his opposition to the indiscriminate use of any weapons by any party against civilians in contravention of obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

The Secretary-General deeply regrets the inability of the international community to unite in stopping this conflict, and in finding ways to hold accountable perpetrators of atrocities such as today's attack. The Syrian people desperately need an end to violence and a clean break from the past to move towards a new Syria, one in which their legitimate aspirations are met and all communities are protected.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Syria," [U.N.](#), 23 May 2014.

13 May 2014 Brahimi resigns

On 31 Aug 2012, Lakhdar Brahimi began his job as U.N./Arab League Joint Special Representative on Syria, after Kofi Annan resigned in frustration.

Lakhdar Brahimi — who was supposed to be arranging negotiations in Geneva — issued *only one* [press release](#) after the collapse of Geneva2 negotiations on 15 Feb 2014. (That one press release was on 17 April and concerned negotiations in Homs. As explained [above](#), on 2-7 May an agreement on Homs was reached.)

On Tuesday morning, 13 May 2014, Lakhdar Brahimi resigned as the United Nations mediator in the Syrian civil war. The U.N. Secretary General personally announced the resignation:

Ban Ki-moon: I have an announcement to make and because of its nature I wanted to make it in person.

It is with great regret that, following consultations with Arab League Secretary General Nabil Elaraby, I have decided to accept the request of Mr Lakhdar Brahimi to relinquish his duties as Joint Special Representative of the Secretary-General and League of Arab States, effective 31 May 2014.

For nearly two years, Joint Special Representative Brahimi has sought an end to the brutal and still worsening civil war in Syria.

He has faced almost impossible odds, with a Syrian nation, Middle Eastern region and wider international community that have been hopelessly divided in their approaches to ending the conflict.

He has persevered, with great patience and skill, because he knows that without efforts towards a new Syria, the Syrian people will be condemned to further suffering.

I greatly appreciate Mr. Brahimi's diplomacy in organizing the Geneva Conference on Syria and for facilitating the intra-Syria talks earlier this year. I regret that the parties, and especially the Government, have proven so reluctant to take advantage of that opportunity to end the country's profound misery. I renew my appeal to them to show the wisdom and sense of responsibility that could allow a way out of this nightmare. I also reiterate my strong view that there must be accountability for the terrible crimes that have been — and are being — committed. Such crimes include the deliberate starvation of communities by preventing humanitarian access.

Mr. Brahimi has long been recognized as one of the world's most brilliant diplomats, as well as an outstanding proponent of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. That the objective to which he applied his extraordinary talents has proven elusive is a tragedy for the Syrian people. That his efforts have not received effective support from the United Nations body that is charged with upholding peace and security, and from countries with influence on the Syrian situation, is a failure of all of us.

Lakhdar Brahimi knows that I will continue to count on his wisdom, advice and unique experience on other issues of concern to the United Nations.

But that is for tomorrow; he now deserves some rest. Today, I urge all involved, including those states with influence over the parties, to reflect deeply on what we should do at this moment to generate hope of a better future for the people of Syria. I thank you and I ask Dr. Brahimi to speak.

Lakhdar Brahimi: Mr. Secretary-General, I am truly humbled by your kindness and the extremely generous words that you have had on this occasion, which is not very pleasant for me. It's very sad that I leave this position and leave Syria behind in such a bad state.

But, as you said, Secretary-General, I have absolutely no doubt that you will continue, as you have, to do everything that is humanly possible to work with the Security Council, with the neighbours of Syria, and indeed with the Syrian parties themselves to end this crisis.

I'm sure that the crisis will end. The question is only this: everybody who has responsibility and an influence in the situation has to remember that the question is how many more dead? How much more destruction is there going to be before Syria becomes again the Syria we have known — the new Syria that will be different from the Syria of the past, but it will be the Syria we have loved and admired for many, many years.

I'm extremely grateful to you, Secretary-General. And especially that I know you are traveling in a few minutes, but you have taken time to come down for this occasion personally. Thank you very much indeed, sir.

Ban Ki-moon, "United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announces Lakhdar Brahimi's resignation as United Nations and Arab League Envoy to Syria," [U.N.](#); Ban &

Brahimi, "Transcript of press briefing with the Secretary-General and Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative for Syria," [U.N.](#) both on 13 May 2014.

The New York Times reported that Brahimi's

resignation came amid rising frustration with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, who ignored Mr. Brahimi's proposed agenda for talks and then scheduled a presidential election that will probably install him for another seven-year term.

[NY Times](#), approximately 13:00 EDT, 13 May 2014.

The Associated Press reported:

While Brahimi had many admirers, his dealings with the opposition were difficult. The opposition leaders he needed to talk are deeply divided and have no backing from Syrians either fighting inside the country or those who are refugees. In addition, the government branded Brahimi an American stooge from the beginning, though he did make several trips to Damascus.

anonymous, "Brahimi Resigning As UN-Arab League Envoy To Syria," [Associated Press](#), 16:32 EDT, 13 May 2014.

At 15:00 EDT on Tuesday, 13 May, Brahimi briefed the U.N. Security Council. Afterwards, Brahimi held a press conference. I have been unable to find a transcript of that press conference.

Also see:

- [U.N. press release](#), 13 May 2014.
- "Brahimi Resigning As UN-Arab League Envoy To Syria," [Associated Press](#), 20:24 EDT, 13 May 2014.
- "Frustrated Syria mediator Brahimi to step down, U.N. seeks replacement," [Reuters](#), 20:52 EDT, 13 May 2014.
- [Al-Jazeera](#), 23:40 EDT, 13 May 2014.
- [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon.

With all of the praise for Brahimi, it is important to recognize that Brahimi accomplished nothing in 20 months. At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, the following exchange occurred:

QUESTION [by Said]: Does the resignation of Mr. Brahimi sort of end the diplomatic effort for now?

MS. PSAKI: Not at all, Said. As you know, he played an incredibly important role during a challenging time in the ongoing situation on the ground in Syria. We certainly support and will work with whomever the UN decides to put in place in his place.

....

QUESTION [by Matt Lee of Associated Press]: And has been noted, I mean, [Brahimi is] not the first person to try and fail at this. But I'm just wondering how — why it is that you say "he played an incredibly important role" — those are your words — at "a challenging time". What exactly did he do other than organize very expensive

conferences in European cities at very nice hotels? What exactly did he do?

MS. PSAKI: Matt, we continue to believe that the discussions that the regime and the opposition — and more so really the bigger meeting, also, with so many members of the international community that showed strong support for the opposition — was an important moment. Obviously, things are on a hiatus now, and we continue to press in many directions to see how we can resolve the crisis on the ground.

QUESTION: Well, I understand. But what — if you go back and look at his tenure in office — not that anyone else's tenure in office has been much different, but you say "he played an incredibly important role". I mean, can you name — is there any tangible positive result of him having had this job?

MS. PSAKI: Well, clearly, no one is satisfied with where things stand in Syria. That's why we're continuing to work on it. But he did convene a range of meetings. He was an important mediator between those and a facilitator with many other members of the international community, and we're grateful for his leadership.

QUESTION: Well, okay, but even the Secretary General, when he announced the resignation, said this is a failure for all of us.

MS. PSAKI: I think —

QUESTION: And so I'm just wondering if you can point to anything that wasn't a failure during his watch —

MS. PSAKI: Well, Matt —

QUESTION: — or, actually, the watches of the previous people.

MS. PSAKI: Clearly, the Secretary is going to London tomorrow [14 May] and he just met with the opposition and our — a range of White House officials are meeting with the opposition because we believe there's much more work that needs to be done. But that doesn't mean that the work that we've done in the past or other officials have done in the past isn't an important part of it.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 13 May 2014.

At a press conference, John Kerry was asked a string of ten questions at one time. I quote only one question that is relevant here and Kerry's simplistic reply to it:

QUESTION [Roz Jordan of *Al-Jazeera*]: As we all know, Lakhdar Brahimi has stepped aside as the special envoy for Syria. He is the second person to fail in this job after Kofi Annan. Can a third special envoy succeed where he and Annan have failed?

....

SECRETARY KERRY: First of all, Mr. Brahimi did not fail. It's a great mistake here to place on a peacemaking effort the notion that the failure of an envoy or a special envoy, or the inability to be able to reach agreement is the fault of the envoy. It's not.

It's the fault of a party — Assad — who will not negotiate, who absolutely refused to negotiate at every single session.

John Kerry, "Remarks With Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini After Their Meeting," [State Dept.](#), 13 May 2014.

Kerry went on to say that "there was a growth in the number of extremist groups [Nusra Front & ISIL] who were trying to remove Assad, and then an increasing fight between the extremists and the moderate opposition." Kerry also notes that Hezbollah and Iranian forces entered the Syrian civil war. Kerry says all of these developments were between the time the Geneva2 negotiations were proposed on 7 May 2013 and the actual beginning of the negotiations on 22 Jan 2014. But the changing situation on the battlefield made the rebels weaker — a conclusion that Kerry did *not* mention. If the rebels had been willing to surrender, they could have had successful negotiations in Geneva. Therefore, the changing battlefield situation was not directly responsible for the collapse of the negotiations. Kerry also neglected to say that delay by the Syrian National Coalition caused the eight-month delay in scheduling Geneva2. So I omitted four paragraphs of Kerry's irrelevant "answer" to the question of why the Geneva2 negotiations failed.

A reader of *The Washington Post* commented on Kerry's response to the question:

One cannot help but be amused at the vacuity in Secretary of State John Kerry's response to the admission by Lakhdar Brahimi, the U.N. envoy to Syria, that he had failed to bring the conflict there to a negotiated end. [quoting Kerry:] "Brahimi did not fail. It's the fault of ... Assad ... who absolutely refused to negotiate."

This is like a student who, after failing an exam, tells the teacher, "I did not fail; it's the fault of the one who posed questions I could not answer."

Albert Arking, Letter to Editor, "Kerry's vacuous response to a resignation," [Washington Post](#), 16 May 2014.

Kerry inadvertently helped the negotiations to fail when Obama and Kerry insisted that Assad must resign. Further, note that Kerry ignored the actual question that was asked by the journalist: whether a third diplomat could succeed in the negotiations (after the previous two diplomats had failed).

My comments: Once again, the response of the U.S. Government to this complex issue was a simple response, more propaganda than Truth. It is simple to demonize Assad, blaming Assad for all of the problems in Syria, when the Truth is significantly more complex.

Assad is winning the civil war. Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government. There is no reason why Assad should resign and let the Syrian National Coalition — a group of exiles in Istanbul with no experience in operating a government and unelected by the people of Syria — control the Syrian government.

It should be the position of the moderate rebels to recognize that they are defeated or stalemated, and negotiate a surrender, and then be re-integrated into Syrian society.

Foremost, Brahimi's resignation is a serious setback for the peace process. It is true that negotiations stalled on 15 Feb and have not been resumed. It is true that negotiations will not resume in the foreseeable future. But at some unanticipated future time, there may be some change that makes the parties desire negotiations. And, at that future time, Brahimi will not be there to guide the negotiations.

Brahimi is fluent in French, Arabic, and English languages and has many years of experience as a diplomat. There are not many Arab diplomats who are comfortable in both Arab nations and Western nations, the way Brahimi was comfortable. Also, Brahimi had 20 months of experience in meeting with the Coalition, Assad's government, and the various diplomats at the United Nations. Brahimi will be missed.

We need to understand why Brahimi resigned, so that problems can be fixed, so that Brahimi's successor does not encounter the same problems.

There are two reasons for Brahimi's resignation. First, Assad refuses to resign and allow a "transitional governing body". Second, Assad will likely be re-elected in a presidential election, which causes anguish in the Syrian National Coalition.

As I have said many times previously, Assad is winning the civil war and Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, so there is no reason for Assad to resign. Therefore, insisting on a "transitional governing body" will kill negotiations with Assad's government. Moreover, the world — and especially Syria — needs a strong leader like Assad to defeat the jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria.

In theory the "transitional governing body" is easy to abolish, with a vote in the U.N. Security Council to repeal §16 of Resolution 2118. In practice, the "transitional governing body" is code for replacing Assad, and retaining Assad will be unacceptable to both the Syrian National Coalition and the London11 nations (including the USA, with Obama's obsession with deposing Assad).

My [sixth](#) essay on Syria (search for the word "election") explains why the election *should* have no effect on negotiations about ceasefires, delivery of humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, reconciliation, etc. in the Syrian civil war. Note that Assad will be president of Syria both before and after the election, so the election will produce no change in leadership. It is illogical for the election to prevent negotiations to end the Syrian civil war. The Syrian National Coalition's reaction makes the Syrian presidential election much more significant than the little significance that the election should have.

My [fourth](#) essay on Syria explains why the Geneva2 negotiations were futile.

I put the blame for the failure of Geneva2 negotiations on:

1. the governments of the USA and Western Europe for their obsession with deposing Assad, including their continuing insistence on the "transitional governing body" in Syria.

2. the desire of the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda for continuing the civil war.
3. the failure of the Syrian National Coalition to represent either the moderate rebels fighting in Syria or the Syrian people. The Coalition has never operated a government. The Coalition has never been elected by either the rebels or people of Syria. The Coalition is *not* the appropriate representative of the opposition to Assad. Unfortunately, there is no other opposition political group (except for the Islamic Front, Nusra Front, and ISIL — all of whom are Islamic extremists, who are unacceptable to the USA and Western Europe).

Until *all three* of these problems have been resolved, more negotiations are futile. None of these problems will be easy to solve, and I predict that the Syrian civil war will continue for the foreseeable future, probably for years.

If the United Nations had the will to choke off the flow of munitions (from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, etc.) to the insurgents, then that *might* motivate some of the insurgents to negotiate a surrender.

I note that the failure of the Geneva2 negotiations was *not* Brahimi's fault. The Geneva1 Communiqué, with its "transitional governing body", was created by other people and handed to Brahimi as the agenda desired by the United Nations (see U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118, §16). The problems with the Syrian National Coalition are also *not* Brahimi's fault. Brahimi's failure was *not* because he was incompetent, and *not* because he was lazy. It would be helpful if the next negotiator had more freedom to select an agenda, according to the desires of the parties, and ignore both the United Nations and the London11 nations. But, because the negotiator works for the United Nations, the negotiator will not be able to ignore the United Nations.

And recognize that, *if* Brahimi had miraculously secured an agreement in Geneva, then the insurgents in Syria would have rejected that agreement. We saw an example of that lack of authority from insurgents to negotiate when an agreement was reached in Geneva on 26 Jan to deliver food to Homs, but the parties in Homs did not agree until 7 Feb.

Two days after Brahimi resigned — and decapitated the U.N. negotiation process in the Syrian civil war — the Russian Foreign Ministry urged that negotiations resume "as soon as possible without wasting time". [ITAR-TASS](#), 15 May.

Annan's Resignation on 2 Aug 2012

It is useful to look back 21 months at two parts of Kofi Annan's resignation speech on 2 Aug 2012:

The increasing militarization on the ground and the clear lack of unity in the Security Council, have fundamentally changed the circumstances for the effective exercise of my role.

Yet the bloodshed continues, most of all because of the Syrian government's intransigence, and continuing refusal to implement the six-point plan, and also because

of the escalating military campaign of the opposition — all of which is compounded by the disunity of the international community.

At a time when we need — when the Syrian people desperately need action — there continues to be finger-pointing and name-calling in the Security Council.

....

The Geneva Communiqué, endorsed by the Action Group for Syria on 30 June [2012], provided an international agreement on a framework for a political transition. This should have been automatically endorsed by the Security Council and something the international community should have built on.

Without serious, purposeful and united international pressure, including from the powers of the region, it is impossible for me, or anyone, to compel the Syrian government in the first place, and also the opposition, to take the steps necessary to begin a political process.

You have to understand: as an Envoy, I can't want peace more than the protagonists, more than the Security Council or the international community for that matter. Kofi Annan, "Opening remarks by Kofi Annan, Joint Special Envoy for Syria, at press conference — Geneva," [U.N.](#), 2 Aug 2012.

My comments on Annan's resignation speech in 2012: The U.N. Security Council finally endorsed the Geneva1 Communiqué of 30 June 2012 in their Resolution 2118, §16 (27 Sep 2013). But by Sep 2013, Assad was beginning to win the civil war and continuing insistence on the "transitional governing body" killed negotiations in Jan/Feb 2014. Instead of having foreign meddlers at Geneva1 — remember, no one from Syria attended Geneva1 — impose a solution on Syria, the parties in Syria should negotiate their own ceasefires, reconciliation, etc. In this way the London11 group, acting through the United Nations, inadvertently managed to kill the Geneva2 negotiations.

Note also Annan's words: "... as an Envoy, I can't want peace more than the protagonists...." This is still true. And it is still true that *neither* the rebels, jihadists, *nor* Al-Qaeda *desire* to quit fighting. This is another reason why Geneva2 negotiations are futile.

15 May 2014 London11 meeting

At 08:00 GMT on 15 May, I checked several of the websites for newspapers in London, England, but none of them mentioned the London11 meeting. Apparently this meeting was not highly anticipated in London.

The London11 nations are: Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the USA. These eleven are the core members of Hillary Clinton's "Friends of the Syrian People" meetings that began on

24 Feb 2012. See the 5 Feb 2012 Associated Press story at [Politico](#). The "Core Group" of eleven nations became known as the London11 at a meeting in London on 11 Oct 2013.

The 15 May 2014 Communiqué from the London11 says:

1. We the countries of the "London 11" Core Group of the Friends of Syria denounce the Assad regime's unilateral plan to hold illegitimate presidential elections on 3 June. This mocks the innocent lives lost in the conflict, utterly contradicts the Geneva communiqué and is a parody of democracy. Under rules set by the regime, such elections will be devoid of political participation of millions of Syrians. We call on the entire international community to reject these illegitimate elections, as the Arab League, United Nations, United States of America, Turkey and the European Union have already done.
2. We have agreed unanimously to take further steps together, through a coordinated strategy, to:
 - increase our support for the moderate opposition National Coalition, its Supreme Military Council and associated moderate armed groups;
 - hold the Assad regime accountable for the terror it is perpetrating against its own people and spreading across the region, including through Security Council referral to the International Criminal Court;
 - counter the rising forces of extremism;
 - complete the removal of Syria's chemical weapons;
 - and step up efforts to deliver humanitarian aid across borders and across lines irrespective of the consent of the regime.

We have directed our officials to implement a Core Group action plan.

"Friends of Syria Core Group (London-11) Communiqué," [U.S. State Dept.](#), 15 May 2014. (bulleted list in second paragraph added by Standler, to make the run-on sentence easier to read).

Another copy at U.S. Embassy in [Belgium](#), and a copy posted by the [U.K. Foreign Office](#).

The HTML webpage at the U.S. State Dept. has bloated HTML code with a file size of a whopping 72.9 kilobytes. I edited the HTML code and reduced the file size to only 2.6 kilobytes, and then posted the little file at [my website](#).

After the London11 meeting Kerry held a [press conference](#). Permit me to be blunt. Kerry is floundering badly. All of Kerry's major projects (e.g., Israel/Palestine peace agreement, limiting Iran nuclear program, Syria, Ukraine) are deteriorating under his leadership. It's not a pretty sight. The USA really should consider appointing an experienced, professional diplomat as Secretary of State, *not* a politician like Kerry.

After Kerry's press conference, *The Washington Post* reported:

The [London11] group has met regularly for two years, each time pledging unity as well as determination that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad not be allowed to remain in power.

Yet Assad's position, with assistance from Iran, Russia and Lebanon's Hezbollah

movement, has appeared to be growing stronger. Kerry acknowledged "hurdles" over the past year, which has been marked by deep divisions within the Syrian opposition, as well as reluctance and weak coordination among the countries committed to helping the rebels.

Karen DeYoung, "Kerry says 'raw data' indicate recent use of chemical weapons by Syrian government," [Washington Post](#), 17:52 GMT, 15 May 2014.

My comments: The first paragraph of the Communiqué is a rant about the election. Everyone, except the Syrian government, agrees the elections will be rigged to re-elect Assad, and therefore the elections are meaningless. The words about "mocks the innocent lives lost in the conflict, utter contradicts the Geneva communiqué and is a parody of democracy" are all propaganda.

My comments on the second paragraph:

1. increasing military support will kill more people and prolong the civil war — this is a very bad decision by the London11
2. note that they will *not* refer any of the insurgents (e.g., rebels, jihadists, Al-Qaeda) to the International Criminal Court. This is a selective prosecution that refuses to hold terrorists accountable for their crimes, and holds Assad to a higher standard than Al-Qaeda.
3. "counter the rising forces of extremism" sounds like propaganda. Who are these unnamed "extremists"? How are the London11 going to accomplish this? If extremism can be "countered", why haven't the London11 already been doing that?
4. "complete the removal of Syria's chemical weapons" — good idea, but *how* are the London11 going to accomplish this?
5. "deliver humanitarian aid across borders and across lines irrespective of the consent of the regime" means they will violate the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic. One can expect that Assad will use military force to respond to such deliveries of humanitarian aid. One of the legal rights of a nation is to control its borders.

The moderate rebels seem to have failed in their quest for anti-aircraft missiles. Jarba departed from Washington, DC without a promise of the missiles and then Jarba departed from London without a promise of the missiles.

Two days after the London11 meeting, the Syrian National Coalition issued a press release criticizing the Communiqué of that meeting:

Ahmed Ramadan, member of the political committee, said that "we expected that the statement issued by Friends of Syria after their meeting yesterday in London to be more specific and straightforward regarding the protection of the Syrian people and supporting the Syrian Coalition and the Syrian interim government, which is the executive branch as it provides services to more than half of the Syrian people." He also stated that "the communique's talk about the delivery of humanitarian aid to people

inside Syria without waiting for the approval of the Assad regime is seen as a recognition by those countries that the aid provided by the United Nations and channeled through the Assad regime didn't end in the hands of the people it was supposed to help." With regard to the absence of the subject of a political solution from the statement, Ramadan said that "the priority now is not working to bring about a political solution while the Assad regime is using internationally banned weapons against the Syrian people. The Geneva II talks proved that the Assad regime will not agree to negotiate a political solution without military pressure, and when 11 countries convene without coming out with a clear vision or a strong position towards Assad's crimes he will be emboldened even more to continue to commit these crimes. The promises made during the meeting to supply Syria's rebels with advanced weapons are not new, and there is a pressing need that they finally materialize."

"Syrian Coalition: We Expected London Meeting to Adopt Stronger Positions Regarding the Protection of Syrian People," [SNC](#), 17 May 2014.

My comments: At the beginning, Ramadan says: "we expected that the statement issued by Friends of Syria ... to be more specific and straightforward regarding the protection of the Syrian people and supporting the Syrian Coalition". He is right to be disappointed. The London11 *claims* to support the Coalition, but then only provides a meager amount of financial assistance and some small arms. Personally, I am opposed to *any* support of the Coalition after their eight-month delay in accepting an invitation to the Geneva2 negotiations. However, if the London11 nations are going to encourage the Coalition with promises of support, then those nations should deliver on their promises.

Later he says: "The promises made during the meeting to supply Syria's rebels with advanced weapons are not new, and there is a pressing need that they finally materialize." He does *not* say who made these promises. The Obama administration has consistently refused to provide advanced weapons to the rebels, because of legitimate concerns that the weapons will be acquired by the jihadists or Al-Qaeda and then later used against Europe or the USA.

He boasts that the Coalition "provides services to more than half of the Syrian people." There is no factual support for that claim. The claim is not plausible, because Assad's regime controls more than half of Syria's people, and the Islamic Front controls most of the remainder.

He asserts "the priority now is not working to bring about a political solution while the Assad regime is using internationally banned weapons against the Syrian people." The Coalition *should* be negotiating ceasefires and an end to the civil war, regardless of whether Assad is using banned (i.e., chemical) weapons.

Later, he says: "when 11 countries convene without coming out with a clear vision or a strong position towards Assad's crimes he will be emboldened even more to continue to commit these crimes." I doubt that Assad will be "emboldened" by what the London11 says, or does not say. The London11 has issued six Communiqués beginning in April 2013. None of those Communiqués resulted in significant action in Syria. Assad should ignore the London11.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 Failed

On 22 Feb 2014, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2139, which required parties in Syria to allow humanitarian aid and to stop targeting civilians. Although this Resolution was effective immediately, *all* of the parties in Syria ignored it. The U.N. Secretary General issued Reports on 24 March and 23 April 2014 that recognized that Resolution 2139 had failed. (See my [fifth](#) and [sixth](#) essays on Syria.)

On 22 May, U.N. Secretary General Ban issued his third monthly report that again recognized that Resolution 2139 had failed. Because of the failure of the U.N. website (see following text), I can not download the Report and comment on it. See my next essay for quotations and discussion of Ban's third monthly report.

My comments: On 16 May, when I was compiling a list of links of documents at the United Nations website, I noticed that links to documents on U.N. webpages (Security Council and General Assembly) were not properly functioning (error 507). The next day, the problem continued, so I used the mail form at the U.N. website to send a note to their webmaster. The mail form returned an error message and I do not know if my note was received. These error 507 messages continued to appear, even on 30 May. On 31 May, a different error message, "bad request", appeared. On 1 June, the error 507 message returned.

On 24 May links to documents on the Secretary General's webpage returned the message: "The UN website is undergoing urgent maintenance and is currently unavailable". This message continued to appear on 25 and 26 May. On 30-31 May, there were bibliographic data from the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, but no link to the document.

In past months, when the U.N. website was functioning, it still took the U.N. bureaucrats days to post a document at their website. As a webmaster, I know it takes less than ten minutes to post a document at a website and put a link to the new document on a webpage. There is no good excuse for not having new documents posted on the Internet the same day the documents are issued. The U.S. State Department posts documents at their website within hours of the release of those documents.

It is unacceptable for an important organization, like the United Nations, to have its documents unavailable to the public for days. It frustrates me to read an Associated Press or Reuters news story in which the journalist has read a document, but that document is *not yet* available to the public.

Conclusions

Here is what 38 months of military conflict in Syria have accomplished:

- At least 162,000 dead people by 18 May 2014, increasing at approximately 7500/month.
- Approximately 2,800,000 refugees have fled from Syria. ([Reuters](#))
- 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 United Nations 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.

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

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

....

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

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

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

Despite Assad's significant delay in delivering his chemical weapons to OPCW, and despite

Assad being suspected of violations of international law, I still believe that Assad is the strongest leader that Syria — or the Syrian exiles — have. Moreover, Assad is ruthless, a good quality to have in the pursuit of jihadists and Al-Qaeda terrorists. It seems to me that Assad is the least worst leader of Syria, particularly compared with either (1) the indecisive 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](#), [fifth](#), and [sixth](#) 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 insurgents 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. (See my separate [essay](#) that collects reasons why the Geneva2 primary goal is seriously flawed in that it seeks to impose a transitional governing body on Syria.) 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, re-integration of moderate rebels (i.e., Free Syrian Army) into the Syrian army, and other issues that affect the *people* living in Syria.

The London11 group — acting through United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, §16 (27 Sep 2013) — inadvertently managed to kill the Geneva2 negotiations by demanding that the "transitional governing body" be a major part of the agenda at Geneva2.

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 in Jan/Feb 2014 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* 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 four big problems are:
 - A. the London11 governments and the Syrian National Coalition for their obsession with deposing Assad, including their continuing insistence on the "transitional governing body" in Syria;
 - B. the intransigence and stubbornness of *all* the parties in Syria, many of whom refuse to talk to other parties;
 - C. the continuing flow of munitions to insurgents in Syria from foreign meddlers (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE); and
 - D. 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 insurgents 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 31 May 2014, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

this document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria9.pdf>
begun 1 May 2014, last modified 1 June 2014

The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to source documents.

[my homepage](#)