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EDITOR'S CORNER



Editorial

Brig Gen (ret'd) Ioannis Galatas, MD, MA, MC

Editor-in-Chief
CBRNE-Terrorism Newsletter



Dear Colleagues,

Two important events characterized March 2016.

The first one is not new since immigration tsunami is flooding Europe for the last few months. The new thing is that Europe changed its borders leaving Greece out – new borders are now defined by Albania, FYROM and Bulgaria! This means that both refugees from war zones and illegal immigrants from allover are now trapped in Greece. NATO's involvement proved a BIG joke although we are not laughing mainly because suspicious background is beginning to reveal. Turkey was the big winner from EU-Turkey negotiations (tons of money, free visa to travel within EU etc). New immigrant/refugees villages are poppin up in many places within Greece – mostly Muslim villages inhabited by people who do not want to stay in Greece. Big game with international NGOs with also devious backgrounds and lots of money at stake. Despite this ugly environment, Greek citizens still teach lessons of hospitality the moment that Greek government seems lacking a concrete management plan mainly because the ruling left party recently discovered that it is totally different to be in the opposition compared to actions need to be taken when been a governing party. But the moto "first time left" is not enough to excuse governance failure in this issue and the many others problems we face (financial armagedon; unemployment; lack of investments; progress in general; research etc.) Now we only trust in God hoping that profecies will be proved wrong! (Do not laugh with the last one – CIA is taking profecies seriously).

Today Europe was attacked again! This time Brussels experienced a series of suicide bombings at the international airport and the underground metro system during which 36 people were killed and approximately 150 were injured (so far). Perhaps it was a counter action of existing Islamic State's cells pro-acting following the arrest of the Paris mastermind a few days ago. It would also not be a surprise to be an al Qaeda attack in an effort to regain "face" lost by cruelty experienced by IS in Syria and Iraq (just now IS claimed responsibility for the triple Belgian attack). Nowadays nothing is surprising enough and people are always prepared (wrong word) for the unexpected. Imagine if the suicide bombers at the Brussel's airport was also carrying a small cylinder with a radioactive isotope – enough to make detectors scream! Perhaps this is something we have to fear off and not if simultaneous attacks would be 3, 5, or 10 (as the UK security forces now testing). Perhaps next target would be a major hospital – just think of the hundreds of visitors entering a big hospital and the trolleys/backpacks they carry with them!

These two events are overtly/covertly interconnected suggesting that evil need to be hit into its roots and that policies need to be substantially changed and power games to be left aside – for the seek of human survival and a chance for a bearable life!

Be alert First Responders because you are the shield protecting our values and core survival in an ugly world! Just remember that!

The Editor-in-Chief



Some thoughts on immigration crisis

The Editor

The human tsunami slowly shallowing Greece is in full progress. Exact numbers are of no importance anymore – thousands. What is really happening and what solutions can be implemented – if any!

THE FACTS

Greece is a country in Southern Europe, located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Its mainland is located at the southernmost tip of the Balkan Peninsula and is surrounded on the north by

Albania, the FYROM and Bulgaria; to the east by the Aegean Sea and Turkey, to the south by the Mediterranean Sea and to the west by the Ionian Sea and Italy. According to the CIA World Factbook, Greece has 13,676 kilometers (8,498 mi) of coastline, the largest in the Mediterranean Basin. Greece has a very large number of islands, with most of them being in the Aegean Sea and the rest in the Ionian Sea. Estimates of the number of islands vary between 1,200 and 6,000. A figure frequently cited in travel guides is 1,425 islands, of which 166 are said to be inhabited. The Greek Tourism Organization reports a figure of 6,000, with 227 of them inhabited. Major islands in the Aegean Sea (Lesvos, Chios, Samos and Kos) are in very close proximity to Turkish coastline. For example, the distance from

Bodrum Peninsula (Turkey) and Kos Island is only four kilometers (2.5 miles).



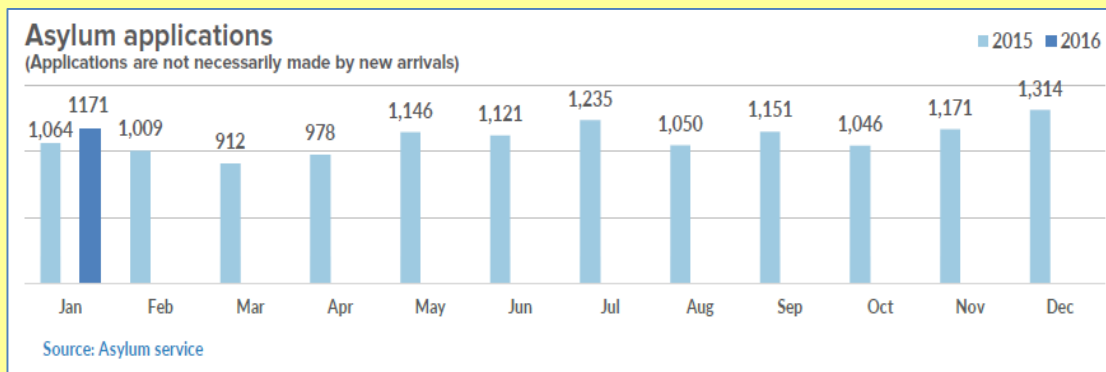
Origin and composition of human tsunami

Incoming human flow originates mainly from Syria (48%), Afghanistan (26%), Iraq (17%), Pakistan

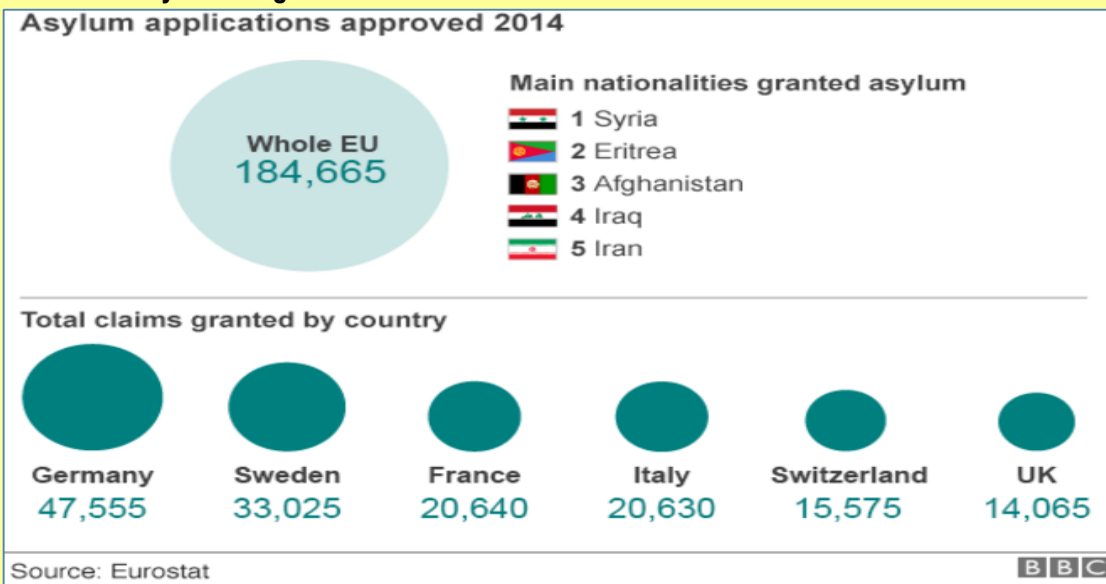


(3%), Iran (3%) and others (3%). As for demographics: children (36%), women (21%) and men (43%). The UN Refugee Service (UNHCR) provides the following incoming statistics for 2015 and the first two months of 2016.

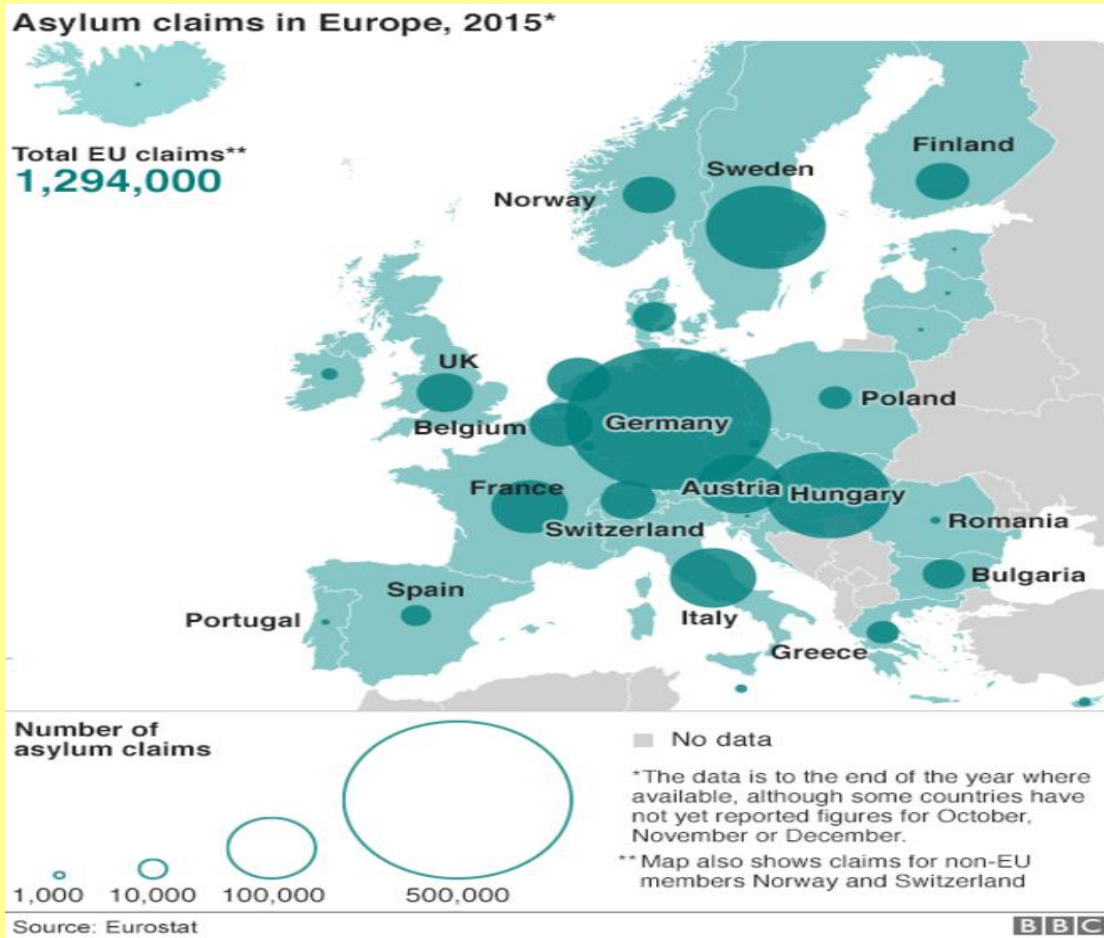
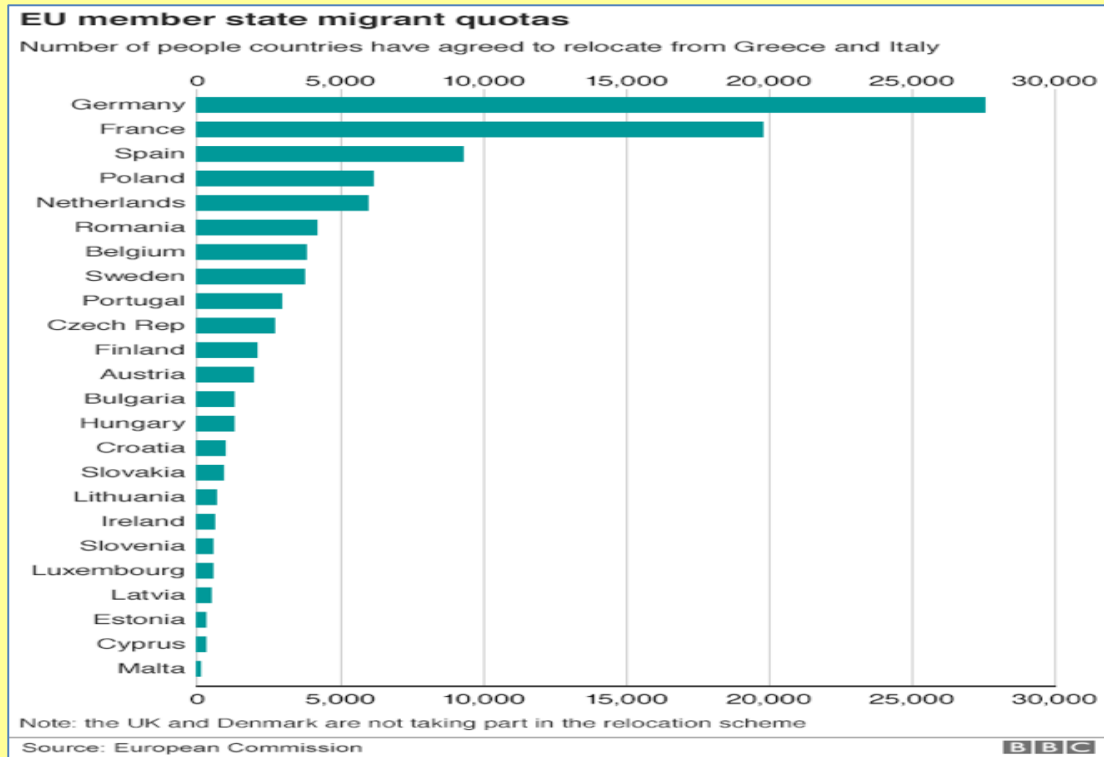
Do they want to stay in Greece?



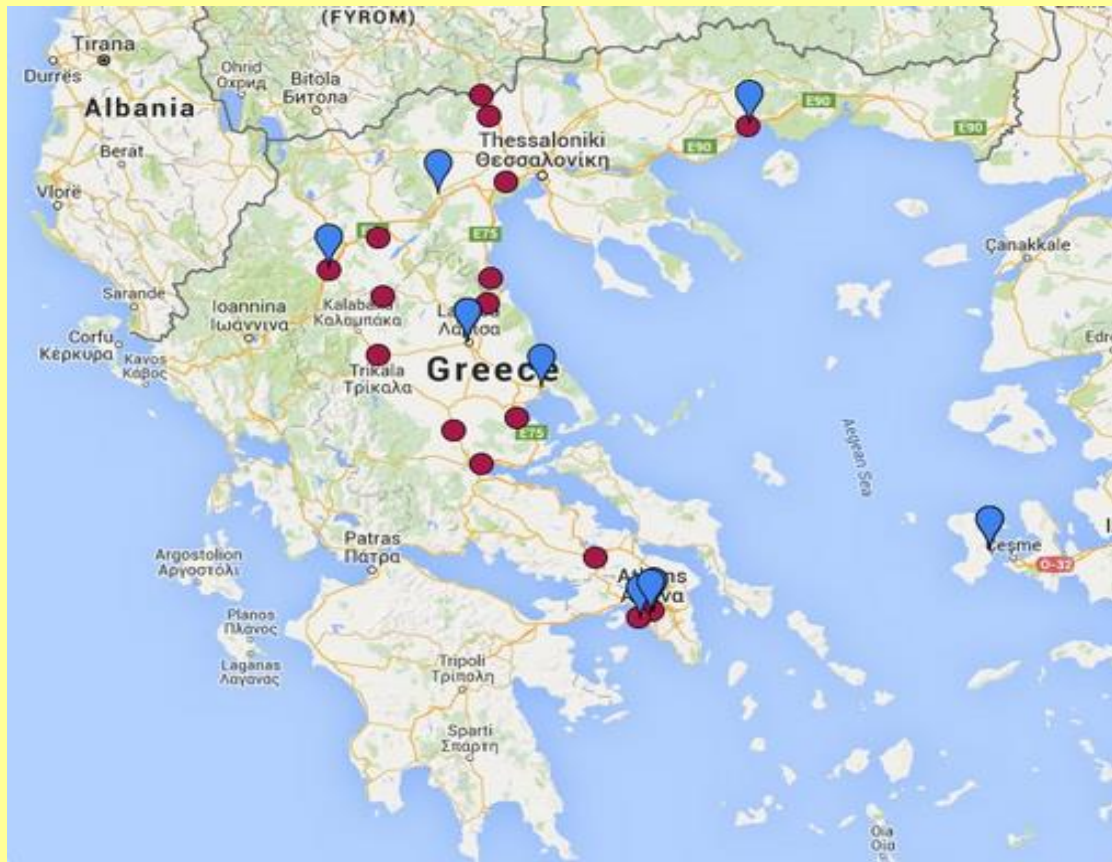
Where do they want to go?



How has Europe responded?



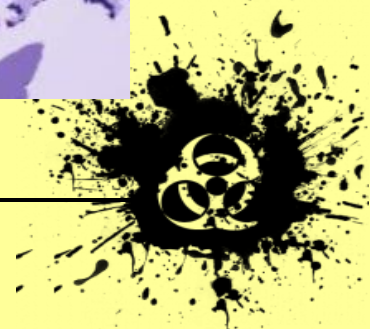
How Greece responded



Refugees' gathering areas (red dots) – hotspots (blue pin)



Refugees/immigrants' hotspots in Greek islands (black circles)





New hotspots in Nea Kavalla and Cherso, Kilkis (N Greece)



EU member states overall response (February-March 2016)

Feb 10 – The European Commission says Greece's response to the refugee emergency continues to be too slow and that it's not sending enough migrants who don't qualify for asylum back home.

Feb 22 – Slovakia says it is prepared to fence off its borders with Austria and Hungary. Slovenia sends troops to its frontier with Croatia while Croatia warns its main migration route will close if Austria and Germany shut their borders.

Feb 24 – In Vienna, ministers from countries on or near the main Balkan migration route agreed to tighten border controls. Greece wasn't invited to the meeting. Recent days have also seen a flurry of unilateral action and strongly-worded warnings.

Albania says its border could close if FYROM fully shuts its Greek border while Bulgaria approves an extension to its Turkish border fence. Hungary's prime minister calls an anti-refugee quotas referendum while the Czech Republic forms a special migration police unit.

Feb 25 – Greece has recalled its ambassador to Austria amid growing tensions between the two countries over Vienna's strong-arm approach to the handling of Europe's migrant crisis. "If it is really the case that the Greek external border cannot be protected, can it be still a Schengen external border?" Austrian Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner said.

Hungary has meanwhile called an anti-immigration referendum aimed at stopping Brussels and Berlin forcing it to take in refugees under any EU quota schemes.

Mar 02 – Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico suffered a delirium attack and claimed "there will be a single hot spot and its name will be Greece." Threatened by his opponents ahead of the upcoming elections on Sunday, the Slovak official accused Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras for having "brought the crisis upon himself for failing to set up EU-mandated processing centers." "We have come to the time when Greece is likely to be sacrificed for the good of the EU," Robert Fico said.

Mar 03 – FYROM close its borders with Greece and nearly 11,000 people stuck at the area, FYROM's police fired tear gas and used stun guns at refugees. Antonis Rigas of charity *Medicins Sans Frontieres* quoted: "We worry that if it exceeds 12,000 the situation might get out of hand".

Mar 04 – 12,000 trapped in Greek-FYROM borders (Oidomeni); 12,985 in mainland (total 24,985); approximately 7,000 (6,857) in the Greek islands. Deadline by EU to control borders and finalize immigrants recording by May 15th, 2016.

Mar 07 – The "Balkan Route" closed following decision of EU leaders' summit with Turkey in Brussels.

How NATO responded

Feb 26 - According to Jens Stoltenberg, former Prime Minister of Norway and currently the Secretary General of NATO: "Earlier this month, NATO also decided to provide support to the international efforts to stem illegal trafficking and illegal migration in the Aegean. Based



on a proposal by our allies Germany, Greece and Turkey, the decision was taken practically overnight. Within the following 48 hours, we deployed a Standing Maritime Group to the Aegean. It currently includes ships from Canada, Germany, Greece and Turkey. They will conduct reconnaissance, monitoring and surveillance activities to provide critical information to the Greek and Turkish coastguards and other relevant national authorities, as well as to the European Union's border agency Frontex. This will help them carry out their duties even more effectively, in order to help save lives and to deal with the illegal networks that traffic in human suffering. We have also decided to intensify intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance along the Turkish-Syrian border. NATO ships will not do the job of national coastguards in the Aegean. Their mission is not to stop or turn back those trying to cross into Europe. And this in no way represents a militarization of the response to the crisis. What NATO does, will be in a support role. It will be conducted with full respect for national sovereignty and in close cooperation with relevant national authorities. Our added value is that we can facilitate closer cooperation and assist in greater exchange of information between Greece and Turkey, as both are NATO Allies, but only Greece is in the EU. At the same time, NATO is working closer, and faster, than ever before with the EU. So NATO has a unique role to play as a platform for cooperation. This crisis affects us all, so we have to find common solutions. If NATO vessels need to rescue people or boats at risk – something we have done many times in the Mediterranean in recent years – they will do so in full accordance with international law. The obligation to help people in distress at sea is a general responsibility which applies to all vessels, regardless of whether they are part of a NATO or a national mission. In case of rescue at sea of persons coming via Turkey, they will be taken back to Turkey. In carrying out their tasks, our nations will abide by national and international law. “

Some comments

What should be done (in Greece)?

- Separate refugees from illegal immigrants;
- Separate Christians from Muslims and separate the later further into Sunni and Shiites;
- Provide hotspots for refugees – open (free access) hotspots;
- Provide temporary shelters for illegal immigrants – closed (guarded) hotspots; activate process for immediate deportation of those already on Greek territories. Return back to Turkey those captured while attempting to trespass Greek sea borders;
- Provide specialized hotspots for unaccompanied children or orphans; explore the possibility for fat track adoptions from Greek nationals;
- Modernize and update required refugees/immigrants' recording technologies; enrich the functionality of EURODAC (European Dactyloscopy) system assisting immigrants' identification (finger prints based only);
- Introduce real/heavy penalties for human traffickers without the possibility of appeal (recently a Turkish court convicted Syrian traffickers Muwafaka Alabash και Asem Alfrhad responsible for the death of 3 years old Aylan Kurdi with sentences of 4 years and two months just for trafficking instead of murder!);
- Facilitate those requesting asylum into Greece (both old and new);
- Provide a 3-months definite deadline for all illegal aliens currently in Greece to present themselves and be recorded; if not, they will be arrested and deported within one month;
- Open borders and establish refugees' "safe" routes towards EU member states agreed to accept specific numbers based on their overall integration capacity;
- EU should actively assist peace process in Syria;
- EU should firmly define its requests to Turkey regarding human trafficking business;
- Start a global campaign informing specific nations about current situation in Greece and stressing the fact that those travelling without documents will be immediately deported. Inform origin nations that Greece will change the rules of engagement (ROE) at its sea/land borders (Armed Forces; Police and Coast Guard);



- Change the type of NATO assistance with resources (armed patrol vessels' fleet) able to counter the incoming flow of small boats carrying refugees and immigrants to Greek islands. Big vessels are not suitable to stop these tiny fleets or perform repeated S&R operations (it is a standard procure to sink the boats in order to be "saved"). Besides, a small boat loaded with explosives will have a perfect disguise for a Cole-type attack against a NATO warship.

THE BIG QUESTION

What can be done then?

Unfortunately there are many viable answers to this important question! But in order to answer this question, first change your shoes and become a Greek! Then think of the following as a Greek now:

- **Shoot them and sunk their boats!** The easiest thing to be done and would change the course of tsunami for sure or end it at least for Greece. Desperate incomers risk their lives on non-friendly territories and seas but still consider their lives a valuable asset to sacrifice without any gain. International organizations and human rights authorities will demand throwing Greece to the lions' pit and the country would be called names and suffer unbearable sanctions. You might say yes but without illegal immigrants or refugees!
- **Allow Greece to become a big permanent "souls' trap"** – an expression recently introduced into our vocabularies. If this is the case then new immigrant/refugees' "villages" will emerge throughout Greece inhabited by people who do not desire to be trapped in Greece and therefore their overall attitude and potential for future incorporation with citizens will be limited or none. Given the current unfortunate financial situation in Greece, there will be no working opportunities for them (even for the educated and skilled Syrian refugees/immigrants) and survival will become difficult or impossible. These will soon lead to direct clash with Greeks living in proximity to these villages and the issue of different religions will be easily turned to an uncontrolled war since policing would be not sufficient to prevent/control frictions. Does this remind you the Calais Jungle in France? Surely yes but multiplied by 5 or 10 depending on the number of new villages or towns emerging.
- **Share the problem with other EU member states:** That would be ideal but now you have to go back in your own shoes and think as a German, a Swede or Austrian. Would you like that? Would you like that? Most probably not! Perhaps now it is the opportunity to decide about the prominent religious issue wounding Europe. Does Europe favor multiculturalism or not? Christianity or Catholicism are religious. Islam is a both a religion and a way of life. Does Europe intend to change its way of life and adopt a new one? Although the answer is most probably not, the profit/business issue becomes prominent and Europe's struggle for money favors adaptation although the model dearly failed. Another issue is the working problem and allowances given by member states. It is very attractive not to work and get paid and have 4-6 children but this is not in favor of the national interest. Citizens are contributing to allowances given to the less fortunate members of each society but they also expect a payback via contribution to the commons. Otherwise what is the point to go to work when all immigrants and refugees are enjoying life (compared with the lives they had into their own countries) and do nothing? They do not speak the language, they do not work, they do not pay taxes, they do not respect national laws (prefer *sariah*), they do not eat local foods (unless *halal* – recent article in Deutsche Welle notes that German restaurant owners are starting to remove pork sausages from their menus as offending Muslims) and they do not even extensively use national banking system (prefer *hawala*) for sending money to their own back home. And what is most important is the fact that as their numbers gradually grow, their involvement into politics grows in parallel and it comes to a point that they are able to impose and satisfy their demands in expense of local citizens in the receiving country.
- **Stop the generation of refugees/illegal immigrants.** If the above problems are difficult to solve or counter, this looks like almost impossible. A prominent example is Syria and the Islamic State. Even now, a unified reaction against the atrocities of Islamic State has not been achieved mainly because of term of geopolitical strategies and business. Both the Western world and the Arab world they do not seem to care



about the bloodshed and humanitarian crisis that is exported to Europe as well but care only about dominance and power leading to more profitable business in the near future in an effort to use expected prosperity as a carpet to hide own involvement and responsibilities underneath. In that respect, the easiest solution is the one that sounds impossible and even the proclaimed elections in Syria do not look enough to re-route the peace process and provide an acceptable living environment that will keep people into their homeland instead of migrating elsewhere with unknown future and unfulfilled expectations.

As in all emergency response plans, the most important player is left out of the game – that is people (the citizens of Europe). You might say that people are represented by their governments but it seems that this democratic system is not enough in our modern world. Perhaps a more direct democracy system based on referendums on major national and European issues should be implemented and respected. The small club that rules the World and Europe proved unable to prevent and solve problems in an efficient and manageable way (providing that they have tried and failed; the alternative might be that this was the primary intention for their own reasons and chess strategies).



Oidomeni temporary camp (close to Greek-FYROM borders – March 04, 2016)

In conclusion

It is very easy to let European big mouths accuse Greece for doing nothing or doing not enough securing the Gates of Europe. It is also very convenient to do this from the safety of a country far away from the problem or without an extensive coastline or neighboring with another country that is not friendly enough through time and history. It is easy to propose things applicable to others but not for your own. In that respect, it would be much more helpful to provide viable concrete applicable solutions than to continue meaningless rhetoric that mostly divides instead of unifying Europe and use funding provision as a cheap excuse of doing nothing. The fact is that these people are already here and we better unite to deal with the problem instead of accusing each other of mistakes made in the past or yesterday. It is time to think Europe as our common house instead of a multistore building with private apartments.



Western European Cities Top Quality of Living Ranking

Source: <http://www.mercer.com/newsroom/western-european-cities-top-quality-of-living-ranking-mercero.html>

Feb 23 – Despite recent security issues, social unrest, and concern about the region's economic outlook, European cities continue to offer some of the world's highest quality-of-living, according to Mercer's 18th annual [Quality of Living survey](#). Safety, in particular, is a key factor for multinationals to consider when sending expatriate workers abroad, both because it raises concerns about the expat's personal safety and because it has a significant impact on the cost of global compensation programs.

"Heightened domestic and global security threats, population displacement resulting from violence, and social unrest in key business centers around the world are all elements adding to the complex challenge facing multinational companies when analyzing the safety and health of their expatriate workforces," said Ilya Bonic, Senior Partner and president of Mercer's Talent business. "Multinational companies need accurate data and objective methods to determine the cost implications of deteriorating living standards and personal safety issues when compensating expatriates."

Vienna continues its reign in the top spot for overall quality of living, followed by Zurich (2), Auckland (3), and Munich (4). Vancouver (5) is North America's highest ranking city, and Singapore is the highest ranking Asian city, holding 26th place.

Mercer's survey also identifies the personal safety ranking for the full list of cities; it is based on internal stability, crime figures, performance of local law enforcement, and the home country's relationship with other countries. Luxembourg tops the personal safety list and is followed by Bern, Helsinki, and Zurich – all tied in 2nd place. Baghdad (230) and Damascus (229) are the world's least safe cities according to the ranking. The safest UK cities are Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Glasgow – all ranked in 44th place.

Mercer's authoritative survey is one of the world's most comprehensive, and is conducted annually to enable multinational companies and other employers to compensate employees fairly when placing them on

international assignments. Employee incentives include a quality-of-living allowance and a mobility premium.* Mercer's Quality of Living surveys provide valuable data as well as hardship premium recommendations for over 440 cities throughout the world; this year's ranking includes 230 of these cities.

"Ensuring that the needs of expatriates and their families are met wherever work takes them is an essential part of talent retention and recruitment strategies for most multinationals," said Slagin Parakatil, Principal at Mercer and responsible for the quality-of-living research. "Managing safety and health issues is of utmost importance, especially for employees who relocate with a family. Our surveys enable companies to take adequate precautions for them.

Mr. Parakatil added: "Other elements that add to safety costs in the host location are obtaining suitable and well secured accommodations; having an in-house comprehensive expatriate security programme and providing access to reputable professional evacuation services and medical support firms, and finally, providing security training and guarded office premises."

Europe

Despite economic uncertainties, Western European cities continue to enjoy some of the highest quality of living worldwide; they fill seven places in the top-10 list. Vienna continues to lead the ranking and has done so in the last seven published rankings. It is followed by Zurich (2), Munich (4), Dusseldorf (6), Frankfurt (7), Geneva (8), and Copenhagen (9). In 69th place, Prague is the highest ranking city in Central and Eastern Europe, followed by Ljubljana (76) and Budapest (77). The lowest ranking cities in Europe are Kiev (176), Tirana (179), and Minsk (190).

European cities also dominate the top of the personal safety ranking with Luxembourg in the lead, followed by Bern, Helsinki, and Zurich, which are tied for the number-two spot. Vienna ranks 5th; Geneva



and Stockholm are placed jointly in 6th; and Copenhagen, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Munich, and Nurnberg all share 11th place. **A number of key or capital cities do rank considerably lower as many suffered either terrorist attacks or social unrest in the last few years; examples include Paris (71), London (72), Madrid (84), and Athens (124).** The recent political and economic turmoil in Greece, which resulted in violent demonstrations in Athens and other cities in the country, has undermined its safety ranking. Kiev (189), St. Petersburg (197), and Moscow (206) rank lowest for personal safety in the region.

Americas

Quality of Living remains high in North America, where Canadian cities dominate the top of the list. Vancouver (5) is the highest ranking city, followed by Toronto (15) and Ottawa (17). In the United States, San Francisco (28) ranks highest for quality of living, followed by Boston (34), Honolulu (35), Chicago (43), and New York City (44). In Mexico, Monterrey (108) is the highest ranking city, whereas Mexico City ranks 127th. The lowest ranking cities in North America are Monterrey (108) and Mexico City (127) and for the Caribbean, Havana (191) and Port-au-Prince (227). **In South America, Montevideo (78), Buenos Aires (93), and Santiago (94) remain the highest ranking cities for quality of living, whereas Bogot a (130), La Paz (156), and Caracas (185) rank lowest.**

Canadian cities all rank high for personal safety, with Calgary, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver sharing 16th place, whereas no US cities make the top 50. Kingston (199), Tegucigalpa (201), and Port-au-Prince (211) have the lowest levels of personal safety in the region. In 96th place, Montevideo is South America's highest ranking city for personal safety; Caracas (214) is the lowest.

Most North American cities remain fairly safe for expatriates. But Mexican cities are ranked relatively low, mainly because of drug-related violence. The recent increase of unemployment in Latin America and Caribbean countries, along with the economic downturn and political instability in some of these countries, explains

relatively low rankings in personal safety across the region.

Asia-Pacific

The vast region of Asia has considerable variation in quality of living. In 26th place, Singapore remains its highest ranking city, whereas Dhaka (214) is the lowest. Following Singapore in Southeastern Asia is Kuala Lumpur (86). Other key cities include Bangkok (129), Manila (136), and Jakarta (142). Japanese cities rank highest in Eastern Asia, with Tokyo in 44th place. Other notable cities here are Hong Kong (70), Taipei (84), Shanghai (101), and Beijing (118).

For personal safety, the rankings for Asian cities again vary greatly. Singapore (8) ranks highest overall and is followed by five Japanese cities—Kobe, Nagoya, Osaka, Tokyo, and Yokohama—that are tied for 32nd place. Other key cities include Hong Kong (37), Taipei (78), Beijing (97), Seoul (115), New Delhi (142), and Jakarta (172). Following considerable political unrest and terrorist attacks in several tourist areas over the last few years, Bangkok ranked 173rd for personal safety.

New Zealand and Australia have some of the highest quality of living worldwide. Auckland ranks 3rd globally, Sydney 10th, Wellington 12th, and Melbourne 15th. For personal safety, Pacific cities also rank high, with Auckland and Wellington sharing 9th place. Canberra, Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney share 25th place.

Middle East and Africa

Dubai (75) continues to rank highest for quality of living across Africa and the Middle East, followed by Abu Dhabi (81) and Port Louis (83) in Mauritius. The South African cities of Durban, Cape Town, and Johannesburg rank 85th, 92nd, and 95th respectively. Baghdad (230) ranks lowest regionally and worldwide.

Only a handful of cities in this region place in the top 100 for personal safety—with Abu Dhabi ranking highest in 23rd place, followed by Muscat (29), Dubai (40), and Port Louis (59). **Upcoming host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Doha, ranks**



70th for personal safety. Regional geopolitics is highly volatile and characterized by safety concerns, political turmoil, and an elevated risk of terrorism. The lowest ranking cities in the

region are Damascus (229) and Baghdad (230), both of which have witnessed continual violence and terrorist attacks that weigh upon the daily life of locals and expatriates.

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EDITOR'S COMMENT: Not a single line about Brazil to host coming 2016 Olympic Games?

The Consequences of American Retreat from the Middle East

By Efraim Inbar

Source: <http://www.meforum.org/5870/american-retreat-from-the-middle-east>

Feb 24 – **The US, under President Barack Obama, has signaled its intent to reduce its presence in the Middle East. The US fought two unsuccessful wars in the region – a frustrating lesson about the limits of its power. At the same time, US dependency upon Middle Eastern energy has been reduced thanks to domestic progress in fracking technology. Moreover, Washington has decided to "pivot" to China, an emerging global challenger, and also to cut defense expenditures, leaving fewer military assets available for projecting power in the Middle East.** (For a while during President Obama's tenure, the US had no aircraft carriers in the eastern Mediterranean or in the Gulf at all, an unprecedented situation.) **In addition, the American campaign against ISIS has been extremely limited, and has met with little success.**

Unfortunately, this disengagement signals both fatigue and weakness.

Washington also has desisted from confronting Iran and has gone to great lengths to accommodate it. President Obama's contention is that by completing a nuclear deal with Iran, he resolved one of the outstanding security issues in the region before leaving office. However the deal legitimizes a large nuclear infrastructure in Iran, and ignores the cardinal national security interests of at least two US allies: Israel and Saudi Arabia. The subsequent

removal of international economic sanctions – with no reciprocal requirement for any change in Iranian regional policy – positions Iran to reap great financial benefits at no cost. President Obama's Iran policy has occasioned a dramatic change in the regional balance of power, yet Washington appears largely unperturbed.

Whereas US policy on Iran has been guided primarily by wishful thinking, the apprehensions of regional actors with regard to Iran's hegemonic ambitions have multiplied in response to the nuclear deal. While Washington claims to be confident that Iran will play "a responsible regional role," leaders in Ankara, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Riyadh see Iran as almost entirely unaltered from its pre-deal state in any meaningful political sense, with the potential to produce nuclear bombs in a short time.

The gravest consequence of the US policy of disengagement from the region is the increased probability of nuclear proliferation. Powers contending for regional leadership, such as **Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia** will not stand idly by in the nuclear arena, particularly as the US is no longer seen as a reliable security provider. US attempts to convince regional powers to rely on an American nuclear umbrella in an attempt to prevent nuclear proliferation are



likely to fail. The emergence of a multi-polar nuclear Middle East, which is a plausible consequence of the American nuclear accommodation with Iran, will be a strategic nightmare for everyone.

An emboldened **Iran**, which traditionally acts through proxies rather than through military conquest, might intensify its campaign to subvert Saudi Arabia, possibly by playing the Shiite card in the Shiite-majority and oil-rich Eastern province. The loss of that province would considerably weaken the Saudi state and might even bring about its disintegration.

Iran could use subversion, terrorist attacks, and intimidation of the **Gulf States** to evict the thinning American presence completely from the Gulf. In the absence of American determination and ability to project force, Iranian superior power might "Finlandize" the Gulf countries. We could also see also the Finlandization of the Caspian basin, where Iran shares the coast with important energy producers like Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. The Caspian basin and the Persian Gulf form an "energy ellipse" that contains a large part of the world's energy resources.

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are very fearful of growing Iranian influence. Those countries, which adopted a pro-Western foreign policy orientation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, might decide to return to the Russian orbit, because Russia appears at present to be a more reliable ally than the US.

Russia is fully alive to the potential for a reassertion of a Russian role in the region in the wake of American retreat. To that end, it has taken the major step of intervening militarily in Syria to assure the survival of Assad's regime. The Syrian littoral is a vital base for enhanced Russian naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean, and this preceded Russian air participation in the Syrian civil war. In addition, Russia wants to protect energy prospects that depend on Assad's survival. It already has signed exploration contracts with

the Assad regime with regard to the recent gas discoveries in the Levant basin.

Syria has been an ally of Iran since 1979 – the longest alliance in the Middle East. The preservation of the Assad regime is critical to Iranian interests because Damascus is a linchpin to its proxy, the Hezbollah in Lebanon. Russia's efforts on Assad's behalf thus directly serve the interests of the Iranian regime. If successful, those efforts will further Iranian influence in the region.

Outside Syria, we may see Iran join Russia in supporting Kurdish political ambitions in order to weaken Turkey, Iran's rival for regional leadership. The Kurds are a thorn in Turkey's side. Iran and Turkey are supporting opposing sides in the civil war in Syria, where the Kurds are carving out autonomous regions. Depending on how the war transpires, Kurdish national dreams might benefit from the power vacuum created by the disruption of the Arab statist structure and the American exit from the region.

As to Egypt, American reluctance to support the al-Sisi regime plays into Russian hands. The Russians are selling weapons to Egypt, negotiating port rights in Alexandria, and supplying Egypt with nuclear reactors. In Iraq too, we see the harbingers of a Russian presence in coordination with Iran, as American influence in that state continues to wane.

The rise of a more aggressive Iran – a direct consequence of the US retreat – may bring about greater tacit cooperation among Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Israel. The big question is whether Turkey will join such an anti-Iranian alignment.

US weakness in the region inevitably will have ripple effects in other parts of the globe. American credibility is now subject to question, and allies elsewhere may determine that it would be wise to hedge their bets. Greater challenges await the US beyond the Middle East.

Efraim Inbar, a professor of political studies at Bar-Ilan University, is the director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies and a Shillman-Ginsburg fellow at the Middle East Forum.





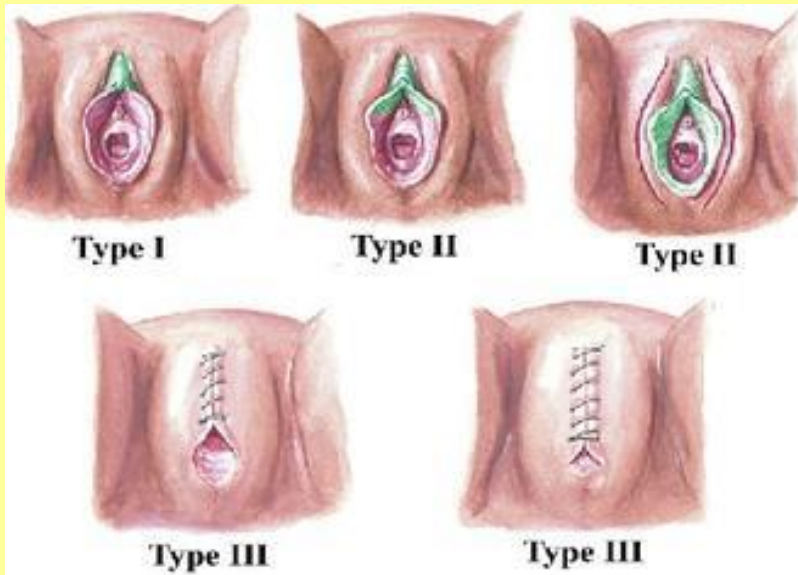
Drs. Propose Female Genital Alteration as FGM 'Compromise'

By Meira Svirsky

Source: <http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/drs-propose-female-genital-alteration-fgm-compromise#>



Feb 24 – Writing in the *British Journal of Medical Ethics*, two U.S.-based [doctors have proposed](#) that as a “compromise solution,” it would be better to adopt a “more nuanced position” on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) -- one “that acknowledges a wide spectrum of procedures that alter female genitalia.”



The doctors think that the worldwide drive in recent years to completely eradicate the brutal practice, without allowing “minor” modifications is “culturally insensitive and supremacist and discriminatory towards women.”

Types of FGM – green areas are removed

They argue that criminalizing FGM in Western countries

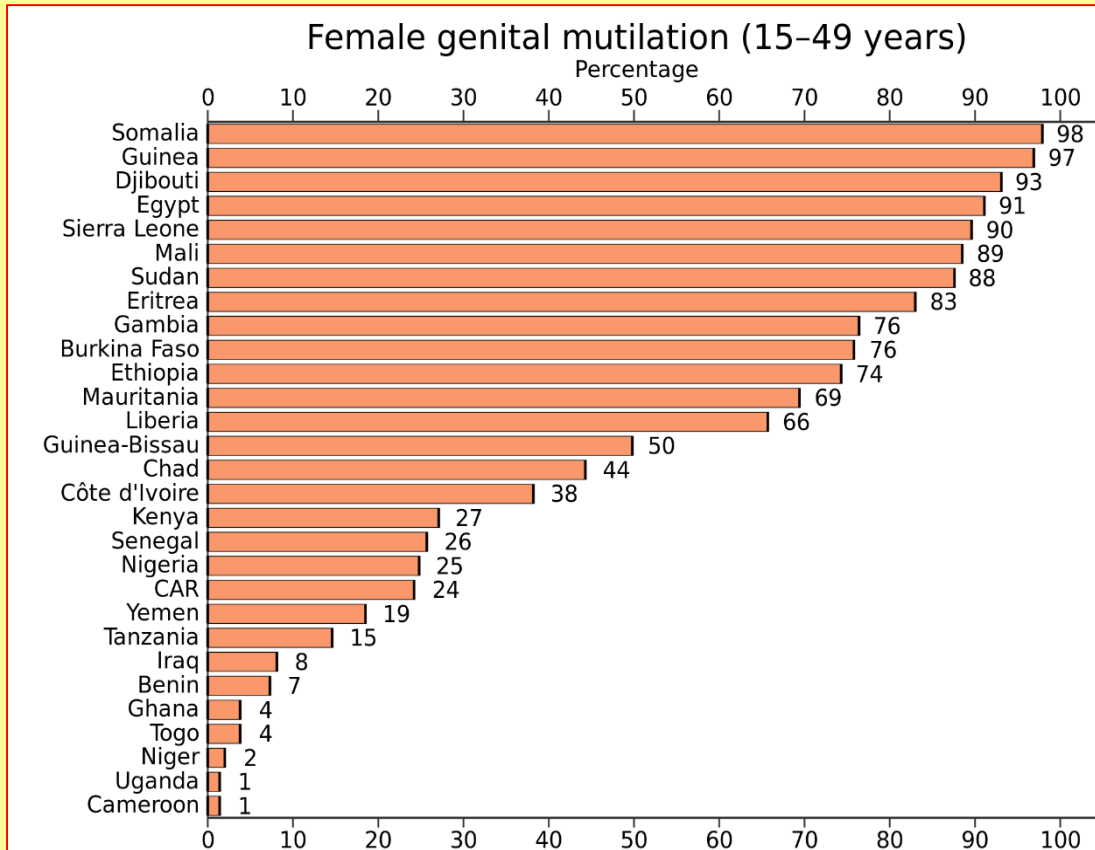
has pushed the practice underground in the U.K. and the U.S. and given rise to “**vacation cutting,**” a phenomena where girls are taken to their native countries during summer vacations for the harmful and traumatic procedure.



Doctors Kavita Shah Arora, director of quality, obstetrics and gynecology at the MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland and Dr. Allan Jacobs, professor of reproductive medicine at Stony Brook University, believe that minor alterations of the female genitalia do not “reach the threshold of a human rights violation” and should not be considered child abuse.

vaginal opening, leaving a small opening for urine and menstrual blood.

The procedure, in its worst cases, can also involve burning the tissue, scraping of tissue surrounding the vaginal orifice, cutting inside of the vagina itself or introduction of corrosive substances into the vagina for the purpose of tightening.



Although the doctors say that a “wide spectrum” of procedures that alter the female genitalia would be acceptable, they fail to delineate exactly what these alterations would entail, save for two specifically mentioned: a small cut to the external genitalia or the removal of the hood that covers the clitoris.

The faultiness of their arguments is many-fold. But first, let us own up to the facts.

FGM is a brutal, barbarian practice in which involves partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM ranges from the removal of the clitoral hood, the partial or total removal of the clitoris, the removal of part or all of the exterior female genitalia including the labia minora and labia majora to the stitching or narrowing of the

Prevalence among the 15–49 age group in the 29 countries in which FGM is thought to be most prevalent (UNICEF, November 2014)

Horrific and permanent side effects are associated with FGM. Every year, it is estimated that 3 million girls undergo FGM, with over 200 million women in over 30 countries estimated to have endured the procedure.

The doctor’s claim that mutilating babies, girls and young women is “culturally insensitive” and “discriminatory towards women” is outrageous, when considering that the “minor” alterations proposed are both traumatic and life-changing.

A simple medical search of the purpose of the clitoral hood –



which the doctors blithely propose removing – shows that this part of the body not only has tremendous immunological importance to a woman's body but also greatly contributes to a woman's sexual pleasure, without which, sexual relations may be painful.

As for a "simple" nick, "it's a lie for anyone who thinks that a nick will reduce the harm," says Mariama Diallo, a counselor and African community specialist at Sanctuary for Families, a New York-based gender violence nonprofit organizations. "The effect on the survivor is the same. The psychological effect is exactly the same."

The doctor's argument that the West's criminalization of FGM has pushed it underground in Western countries is not a defensible claim. Worldwide efforts to completely eradicate FGM – by educating communities in Africa and the Middle East (where the great prevalence occurs) have made tremendous strides.

Changing attitudes in these Third World countries has a tremendous influence on their

natives who have immigrated to the West. The combination of changed attitudes and criminalization can be a powerful deterrent to an immigrant family's decision not to have their daughter cut.

Voicing the criticism of anti-FGM campaigners who have said that this proposal would undermine the international push to completely eradicate the practice, Diallo asks, "How can we end FGM by a nick?"

[Writing on his Facebook page, Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser](#) says more bluntly, "Both as a bioethicist of 20 years and as a lifetime anti-Islamist Muslim dedicated to reform I am beyond horrified by the position of these so called "ethicists" based in the US (Cleveland and NYC). There is NO compromise against the immorality and barbarism of FGM. To give some utilitarian explanation or excuse gives the Islamist supremacists and theocrats a pass and sets the clock back hundreds of years upon the movement for women's rights in Muslim communities."

Meira Svirsky is the editor of ClarionProject.org

War crimes, illegal refugee returns marred 2015 human rights - Amnesty

Source <http://in.mobile.reuters.com/article/idINKCN0VX0EQ?irpc=932>

Feb 24 – **At least 30 countries illegally forced refugees to return to places where they would be in danger last year, Amnesty said on Wednesday as it warned that many governments were brazenly breaking international law.**

War crimes or other violations of the "laws of war" were committed by governments or armed groups in at least 19 countries, Amnesty said in its annual review of human rights around the world.

Amnesty Secretary General Salil Shetty said that short-term national self-interest and draconian security crackdowns had led to an "unprecedented assault on human rights" in 2015.

"Your rights are in jeopardy: they are being treated with utter contempt by many governments around the world," he said.

One of the most egregious examples of countries turning their backs on asylum seekers took place when human traffickers left thousands of people from Myanmar and Bangladesh adrift on the open seas without food and water.

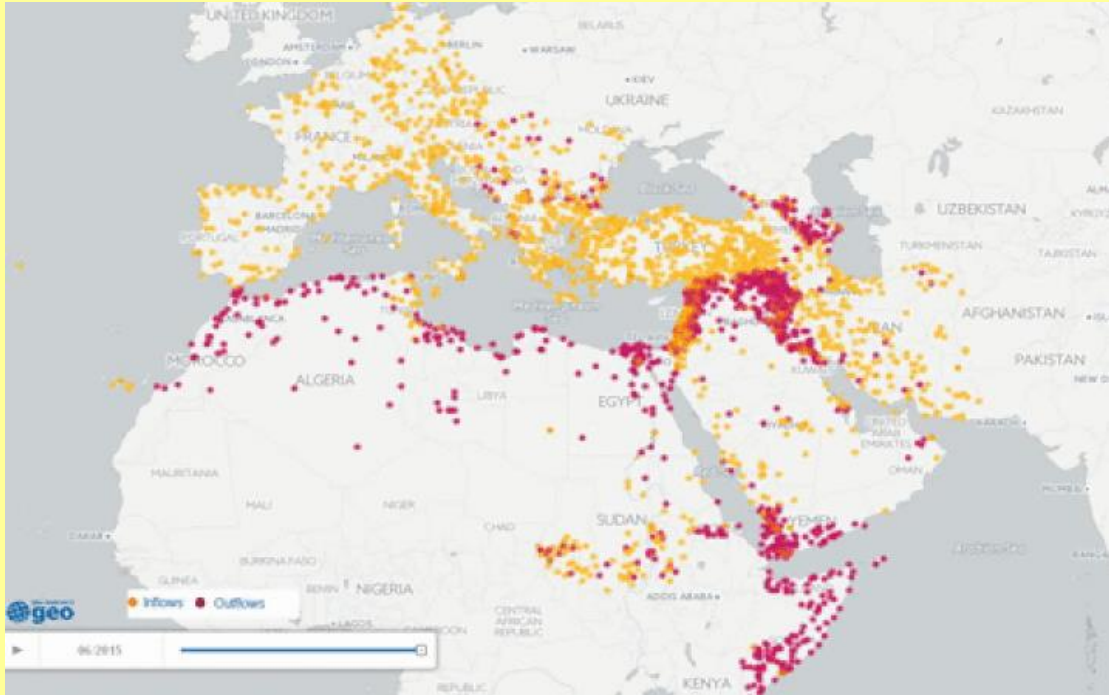
Hundreds are thought to have died from thirst and hunger as countries in the region played "ping-pong in the sea" with them, Amnesty said.

In Europe, the report strongly criticized Hungary for sealing its borders to keep out thousands of desperate refugees and obstructing collective regional attempts to help them.

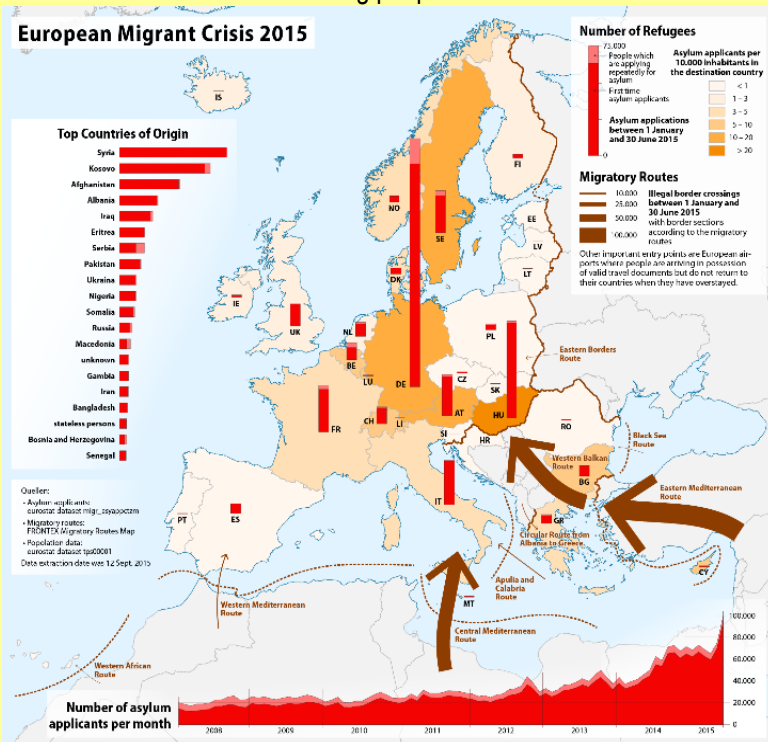
More than 1 million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe last year, many fleeing war zones. Amnesty said that, with the exception of Germany, the response to the crisis had been woeful.



"That Europe, which is the richest bloc in the world, is not able to take care of the basic rights of some of the most persecuted people in the world is shameful," Shetty said. He called for the world to find legal and dignified ways for refugees to reach safety and said 1.2 million of them must be resettled without delay. Around half the arrivals in Europe last year were from Syria, which Shetty described as a "human rights-free zone".



Amnesty condemned the killing in Syria of thousands of civilians in direct and indiscriminate attacks with barrel bombs and other weaponry and criticized lengthy sieges of civilian areas and the blocking of international aid to starving people.



It also said Saudi Arabia had committed war crimes in the bombing campaign it had led in Yemen and criticized it for obstructing the establishment of a U.N.-led inquiry into violations by all sides in the conflict.

High stakes

Shetty warned that not only human rights, but also the laws and institutions meant to protect them, were under attack.

Many African countries have threatened to walk out of the International Criminal Court, which was set up to end impunity for leaders who commit war crimes.

Countries hampering cooperation with the ICC include Kenya,



Ivory Coast and South Africa, which ignored a court order last year to arrest Sudan's president. Shetty also said too many governments were using the threat of violence from armed groups as an excuse to "take short cuts on human rights".

"The human rights of civilians cannot be sacrificed under some vague notions of combating terrorism," he said.

"Human rights are a necessity, not an accessory ... the stakes for humankind have never been higher." Amnesty's annual review, which includes reports from 160 countries and territories, said there had been some gains for human rights last year.

Three countries - Madagascar, Fiji and Suriname - abolished the death penalty in 2015, and Mongolia is set to do so in 2016. Other countries launched national campaigns to end child marriage or passed laws to recognize same-sex relationships.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Perhaps in its next annual report Amnesty will include FYROM, Austria and other European countries that closed their borders resulting Greece turned to a "souls' trap".

Greece says up to 70,000 migrants may be left 'trapped' in the country next month as Pope Francis urges other European countries to 'share the burden fairly'

Source: <http://www.terrorismwatch.org/2016/02/greece-says-up-to-70000-migrants-may-be.html>



Greece has raised the alarm on migrant and refugees reaching the country, claiming that as many as 70,000 people could be left 'trapped' within its borders due to a cap imposed by Balkan countries. The warning comes as Pope Francis urged European countries struggling with the migrant crisis to 'share the burden fairly', praising the 'generous help' offered by Greece and other countries on the front line.

Europe is struggling to handle the flow of people fleeing poverty and war amid growing divisions and unilateral efforts by some countries to solve the crisis.



Austria, which lies farther up the migrant trail that extends from the Balkans to Germany, launched a clampdown on arrivals by introducing a daily cap of 80 asylum-seekers. It also said it would only admit 3,200 migrants transiting the country.

That created a bottleneck in Greece, where migrants have been arriving *en masse* from neighboring Turkey.

'We estimate that in our country the number of those trapped will be from 50,000-70,000 people next month', Migration Minister Yiannis Mouzalas said.

'Today, there are 22,000 refugees and migrants', he added in an interview with Mega Channel tv.

Some 6,500 people were stuck at the Idomeni camp on Greece's northern border with FYROM on Sunday as FYROM's border officials let only 300 refugees and migrants pass the day before.

The build-up at the 1,500-people capacity camp began in earnest last week after FYROM began refusing entry to Afghans and imposed stricter document controls on Syrians and Iraqis.

The knock-on effect is expected to get worse after EU members Slovenia and Croatia, as well as Serbia and FYROM, imposed a limit of 580 migrants entering their borders each day. Thousands, including many children, are now stranded there as the European Union struggles with the continent's worst migration crisis since the end of World War II.



Ingenious New Non-Lethal Bullet Burns Propellant Inside the Round

Source: <http://www.popularmechanics.com/military/weapons/a18812/pogojet-non-lethal-gun/>



Jan 04 – A new compact, lightweight weapon will stop a target in their tracks from a hundred meters away without harming them. Nicknamed the **Pogojet**, it's a radical less-than-lethal design from Jeffrey Widder, senior research scientist at Battelle Memorial Institute in Ohio.

The Pogojet—whose official name is the Caseless Telescoping Less-lethal System—is unique in that the propellant burns inside the round, pushing on a piston that propels it forward. The action resembles a pogo stick, hence the name. Once the piston reaches its full extent, the exhaust gases can be vented sideways, so the round continues forward at the same speed, or directed through holes in the base of the round like rocket exhaust to



give as much extra kick as required. This is the 'jet' aspect of the Pogojet, which Widder compares to the old [1960s Gyrojet rocket pistol](#).

Smart Bullets

It's a clever design meant to get around a pesky problem. Conventional wisdom says that the non-lethal rounds used to stun suspects need to be big, soft, and slow. Think of the bean bag rounds fired from police shotguns, the 40mm sponge grenades used by the military, and traditional "rubber bullets." Their low velocity gives them a shorter range than a thrown rock—a serious disadvantage when facing rioters.



The other challenge with less-lethal impact weapons is balancing effectiveness with safety. A round that travels slowly enough to be safe at point-blank range is ineffective at long range. Increase the muzzle velocity to knock down a target further away and the weapon becomes potentially deadly when used up close.

The base of the .50-caliber Pogojet round.

Widder's challenge was to find a way of varying the muzzle velocity depending on the distance to the target so that the projectile always hits at the sweet spot of between 77 and 87 meters per second. His final design uses a small .50 caliber weapon firing a hard projectile that uses that gas venting strategy to hit the target at optimal speed. This variable speed makes the Pogojet safe at short range and effective at long range. Widder says it will be effective at a hundred meters, far further than any existing kinetic round.

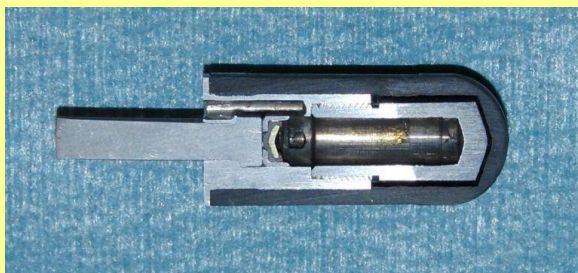


"Once the gas comes out it can be throttled," says Widder. "The technical challenge turned out to be remarkably simple. Once I'd figured it out I didn't know why I found it so difficult."

Pogojet, pre-firing

launchers. The Pogojet will interface with a rangefinder to ensure that the right muzzle velocity is automatically selected without any manual control. Building the interface is one of the next steps in the project. But the key element, the variable

velocity system, has already proven highly reliable.



Pogojet, post-firing.

shotguns. Unlike other less-lethals, the Pogojet can be fired as rapidly as needed, so the shooter can get off another shot if they miss the target.

The piston arrangement also means even a very short barrel is enough for high velocity and accuracy, making the Pogojet more compact than the alternatives. Widder imagines the weapon fitted as an under-barrel extra to an M4 carbine, giving soldiers a simple, long-range, multi-shot alternative to lethal rounds. The Pogojet might also be used separately as a pistol, without the rangefinder and set to the lowest velocity. It could still be effective out to fifty meters, compared to twenty meters maximum for a [bean bag gun](#) and even less for a Taser, giving cops an easily portable alternative.



Sting like a Bee

Most non-lethal kinetic rounds are designed to flatten on impact and spread the blow over a large area. This improves safety by minimizing the risk of a penetrating injury. This also explains why such rounds tend to be large caliber: small ones can go through an eye socket with [serious consequences](#).



Pogojet pistol on rifle

Widder takes a different approach. His round is spin-stabilized and has a flat trajectory so it can be aimed accurately. Shooters are trained to aim lethal rounds at the target's center of mass, and the Pogojet is fired in the same way. (Widder says other non-lethal rounds are supposed to be aimed at the thighs or buttocks.) The Pogojet bullet does not deform on impact but delivers all its energy over a smaller area. Widder says that it produces a high level of pain with less

kinetic energy than the traditional approach. "It's like a bee sting. It's only over a small area, but it is intense enough to be effective."

The small rounds might seem dangerous compared to more traditional, larger-diameter non-lethal weapons, but Widder argues that a high level of fire discipline is always needed. And unlike other kinetic weapons, the accuracy of the Pogojet means it will hit where it is aimed.

"The greatest risk of severe injury or death occurs from impacts to the head, face, or neck of the intended target or a bystander" Widder says. "The use of more accurate weapons with disciplined fire can substantially reduce the likelihood of this unintended consequence."

The next stage of Pogojet's development will be to build the rangefinder interface and the semi-automatic mechanism, as well as replacing many of the metal components with plastic. So it will be ready for Human Effects Testing to make sure the Pogojet really is safe and effective. If it's as good as Widder says, then the weapon could someday offer a new option for police and members of the military faced with situations where normal firearms would constitute excessive force.

If Russia Started a War in the Baltics, NATO Would Lose — Quickly

Source: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/03/if-russia-started-a-war-in-the-baltics-nato-would-lose-quickly/>

Feb 28 – If Russian tanks and troops rolled into the Baltics tomorrow, outgunned and outnumbered NATO forces would be overrun in under three days. That's the sobering conclusion of war games carried out by a think tank with American military officers and civilian officials.

"The games' findings are unambiguous: As currently postured, NATO cannot successfully defend the territory of its most exposed



Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank

Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics

David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson

members," said a [report](#) by the Rand Corp., which led the war gaming research.



In numerous tabletop war games played over several months during 2014-2015 period, Russian forces were knocking on the doors of the Estonian capital of Tallinn or the Latvian capital of Riga within 36 to 60 hours. U.S. and Baltic troops — and American airpower — proved unable to halt the advance of mechanized Russian units and suffered heavy casualties, the report said.

The study argues that NATO has been caught napping by a resurgent and unpredictable Russia, which has begun to boost defense spending after having seized the Crimean peninsula in Ukraine and intervened in support of pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine.

In the event of a potential Russian incursion in the Baltics, the United States and its allies lack sufficient troop numbers, or tanks and armored vehicles, to slow the advance of Russian armor, said the report by Rand's David Shlapak and Michael Johnson.

"Such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad," it said.

The United States and its NATO allies could try to mount a bloody counter-attack that could trigger a dramatic escalation by Russia, as Moscow would possibly see the allied action as a direct strategic threat to its homeland. A second option would be to take a page out of the old Cold War playbook, and threaten massive retaliation, including the use of nuclear weapons. A third option would be to concede at least a temporary defeat, rendering NATO toothless, and embark on a new Cold War with Moscow, the report said.

However, the war games also illustrated there are preemptive steps the United States and its

European allies could take to avoid a catastrophic defeat and shore up NATO's eastern defenses, while making clear to Moscow that there would no easy victory.

A force of about seven brigades in the area, including three heavy armored brigades, and backed up by airpower and artillery, would be enough "to prevent the rapid overrun of the Baltic states," it said. The additional forces would cost an estimated \$2.7 billion a year to maintain.

The report was released Tuesday, the same day Defense Secretary Ash Carter unveiled plans to add more heavy weapons and armored vehicles to prepositioned stocks in

Eastern Europe to give the Pentagon two brigade sets worth of heavy equipment on NATO's eastern frontier. As it stands now, there are two U.S. Army infantry brigades stationed in Europe — one in Italy and the other in Germany — but they have been stretched thin by the constant demands of training rotations with allies across the continent. The new \$3.4 billion plan outlined by Carter and the White House would add another brigade to the mix, but it would be made up of soldiers from the United States, rotating in for months at a time. Late last month, Gen.

Philip Breedlove, commander of U.S. European Command, [released](#) a new strategy anticipating — and pushing back against — the call for more rotational forces. Flying troops in and out of the region "complements" the units who call Europe home, he wrote, but they're no "substitute for an enduring forward deployed presence that is tangible and real.

Key findings

- Across multiple games using a wide range of expert participants playing both sides, the longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of Tallinn and Riga is 60 hours.
- Such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad.
- Having a force of about seven brigades, including three heavy armored brigades—adequately supported by airpower, land-based fires, and other enablers on the ground and ready to fight at the onset of hostilities—might prevent such an outcome.
- While not sufficient for a sustained defense of the region or to restore NATO members' territorial integrity, such a posture would fundamentally change the strategic picture from Moscow.
- While this deterrent posture would not be inexpensive in absolute terms, it is not unaffordable, especially in comparison with the potential costs of failing to defend NATO's most exposed and vulnerable allies.



Virtual presence means actual absence.” David Ochmanek from the Rand Corp., a former senior Pentagon official who has studied the challenge posed by Russia’s military, called the administration’s budget

hardware back into Germany for use in training exercises with NATO partners. Last year, U.S. Marines also began to roll a small number of Abrams tanks into Romania for a series of exercises with local forces.

Since Russia’s intervention in Ukraine sparked alarm in Eastern Europe, the United States has repeatedly vowed to defend Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the event of an attack, citing its mutual defense obligations under the NATO alliance. In a September 2014 speech in Tallinn, President Barack Obama made an explicit promise to protect the Baltic countries.

“We’ll be here for Estonia. We will be here for Latvia. We will be here for Lithuania. You lost your independence once before. With NATO, you will never lose it again,” Obama said.

But the Rand report said “neither the United States nor its NATO allies are currently prepared to back up the

president’s forceful words.”

The borders that the three Baltic countries — all former Soviet republics — share with Russia and Belarus are about the same length as the one that separated West Germany from the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War. But in that era, NATO stationed a massive ground force along the frontier with more than 20 divisions bristling with tanks and artillery.

Tanks are few and far between now in NATO countries, the report said. Germany’s arsenal of about 2,200 main battle tanks in the Cold War has declined to roughly 250. Britain, meanwhile, is planning on pulling out its last brigade headquarters left on the continent.

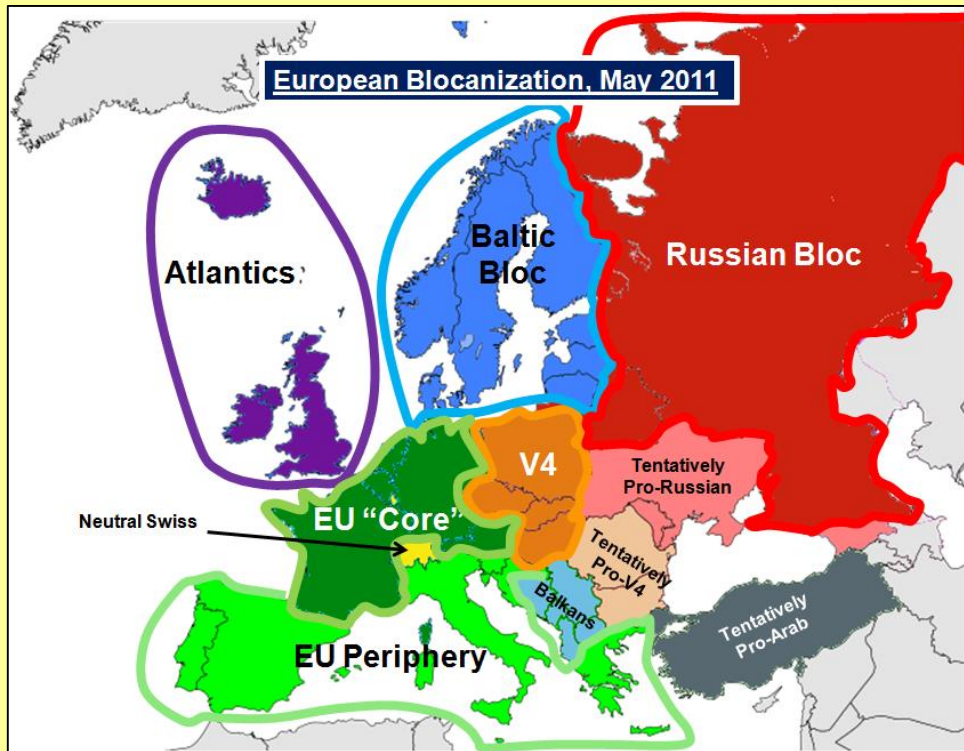
With only light infantry units at the ready in the Baltics, U.S. and NATO planners are also worried about the continued Russian arms buildup in the exclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic coast between Poland and Lithuania, and Moscow’s intention to build a new air force base in Belarus, just south of the Polish-Lithuanian border.

proposal for European forces an important step and an “encouraging sign.”

“Heavy armored equipment, pre-positioned forward, is the sine qua non of a viable deterrent and defense posture on the alliance’s eastern flank,” Ochmanek told *Foreign Policy*. But he said much more needed to be done to strengthen NATO’s defenses.

The findings from the war games will be warmly welcomed by senior officers in the U.S. Army, who have struggled to justify the cost of maintaining a large ground force amid budget pressures in recent years and a preference for lighter footprints. And the report will reinforce warnings from top military leaders, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford, that Russia may represent the number one threat to U.S. interests.

In early 2012, the Obama administration announced the withdrawal of two heavy brigades and their equipment from Germany, cutting deeply into the U.S. Army’s traditional, large footprint on the continent. Since then, the service has been slowly trying to move some



The war games run by Rand underscored how U.S. and NATO forces lack the vehicles and firepower to take on their Russian adversaries, which have maintained more mechanized and tank units. NATO ground troops also lacked anti-aircraft artillery to fend off Russian warplanes in the Baltic scenario.

“By and large, NATO’s infantry found themselves unable even to retreat successfully and were destroyed in place,” the report said.

In the war games, although U.S. and allied aircraft could inflict damage on the invading Russian forces, they also were forced to devote attention to suppressing Russia’s dense

air defenses and defending against Russian air attacks on rear areas.

Although it was unclear if deploying more troops and armor would be enough to discourage Russia from gambling on an attack in the Baltics, NATO’s current weak position clearly did not pose a persuasive deterrent, the report said.

By undertaking “due diligence” and bolstering NATO’s defenses, the alliance would send “a message to Moscow of serious commitment and one of reassurance to all NATO members and to all U.S. allies and partners worldwide,” it said.

Swiss voters reject automatic deportation of foreigners who committed crimes

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160229-swiss-voters-reject-automatic-deportation-of-foreigners-who-committed-crimes>



Feb 29 – **With a turnout of more than 62 percent, higher than for any other Swiss referendum since 1992, Swiss voters on Saturday rejected a proposal automatically to deport foreigners found guilty of committing crimes.**

The final tally showed that 58.9 percent of voters opposed the proposal.

The *Telegraph* reports that the proposal had been put forward by the anti-immigration Swiss People’s Party (SVP), which is the largest single party in the country’s Federal Assembly.

Six years ago, in another referendum, Swiss voters had agreed to a proposal to expel foreigners who commit offenses such as rape or armed robbery after serving their jail term. Since that vote, however, the initial law was weakened, allowing judges to block automatic deportation at their discretion.

The extended plan, which was rejected on Saturday, would have automatically expelled individuals for lesser offenses, such as traffic violations, if it was the second violation they had committed within a 10-year time period.

Both human rights activists and business leaders energetically campaigned against the expanded measure, arguing it would violate human rights and complicate relations with the EU.

About a quarter of the people living in Switzerland have a foreign passport, with the majority coming from European countries. **Experts said that if voters approved the new measure, it would have led to the immediate expulsion of about 10,000 people.**



EDITOR’S COMMENT: The KEY word here is “business leaders”!



UN warns of imminent humanitarian crisis in Greece

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160301-un-warns-of-imminent-humanitarian-crisis-in-greece>

Mar 01 – Europe faces an imminent humanitarian crisis, largely of its own making, following a rapid build-up of people in already over-stretched Greece, [UNHCR](#), the UN Refugee Agency, warned.

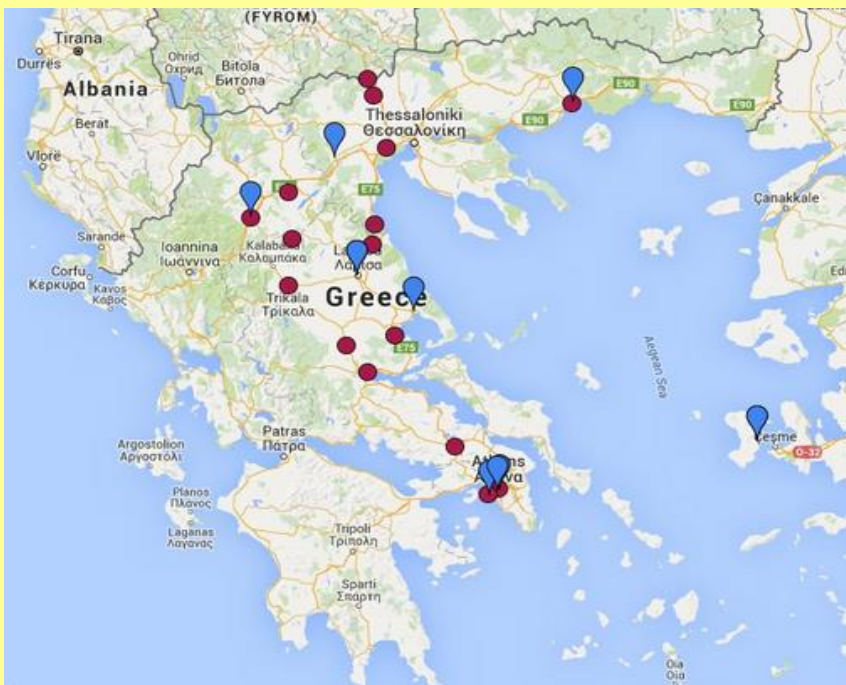
“With governments not working together despite having already reached agreements in a number of areas, and country after country imposing new border restrictions, inconsistent practices are causing unnecessary suffering and risk being at variance with EU and international law standards,” UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards told a press briefing in Geneva.

Edwards added that as of last night (Monday), the number of refugees and migrants in Greece and needing accommodation had soared to 24,000. Around 8,500 of these were at Eidomeni, near the border with the FYROM.

“At least 1,500 had spent the previous night in the open. The crowded conditions are leading to shortages of food, shelter, water and sanitation. Tensions have been building, fueling violence and

playing into the hands of people smugglers,” Edwards stressed.

The Greek authorities have responded with the military setting up two camps near Eidomeni with a projected capacity of 12,500 and a nearby third site already under construction. UNHCR is supplementing the Greek response effort.



Refugees gathering areas and hotspots in Greece



“We have provided rub halls, tents and refugee housing units, other core relief, plus additional staff and specialists, including protection and technical staff,” he added.

The UNHCR says that overall, Mediterranean arrivals have slowed over the winter but remain relatively high. Data as of this morning shows that 131,724 people made the journey during January and February (122,637 of these landing in Greece). This is approaching the total for the first half of 2015 (147,209). So far, 410 lives have been lost.

Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR’s Regional Refugee Coordinator for the Refugee Crisis in Europe, called for Europe to implement burden-sharing agreements reached last year, warning there was “No plan B.”

“Greece needs a safety valve... it is time for Europe to wake up, either we have a massive orderly relocation from Greece or a repeat of what we saw last year, more chaos and confusion,”

he told the briefing in answer to questions on the current situation on the ground.

He added that some 55 percent of refugees from Syria currently arriving in Greece were women and children and many were from the north where fighting had recently taken place.



UNHCR has reiterated its overall position that solving Europe's refugees and migrants' situation and preventing a new crisis in Greece required a number of clear actions.

Among the most urgent of these when it comes to Greece is the need for better contingency planning, with increased accommodation capacity and other support.

"The authorities are trying to respond now to prevent a further deterioration of conditions throughout Greece. But, more resources and better coordination are critical for averting wider suffering and chaos," Edwards stressed.

UNHCR said it is continuing to support the response operation and has set up field offices in eight locations and deployed additional staff including mobile emergency teams who quickly move to wherever the changing situation demands.

However, with increasing border restrictions across the Balkans, the agency says it is concerned that the situation could escalate into a humanitarian crisis similar to that on the Greek islands last autumn.

UNHCR has been urging the Greek authorities, with the support of the European Asylum Support Office and EU Member States, to reinforce its capacity to register and process asylum seekers through the national asylum procedure, as well as through the European relocation scheme.

"Greece cannot manage this situation alone. It remains absolutely vital therefore that the relocation efforts that Europe agreed to in 2015 are prioritized and implemented. It should concern everyone that despite commitments to relocate 66,400 refugees from Greece, states have so far only pledged 1,539 spaces, and only 325 actual relocations have occurred," Edwards detailed.

Increased regular pathways for admission of refugees from countries neighboring Syria will also help in the overall management of this situation. More resettlement and humanitarian admission, family reunification, private sponsorship, and humanitarian and refugee student and work visas all serve to reduce demand for people smuggling, onward movements, and dangerous boat journeys. They thus save lives. UNHCR will convene a conference on this topic in Geneva on 30 March and hopes for concrete offers in this regard.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: The title of this article would be more accurate if the word "double" was inserted between "imminent" and "humanitarian!"

Yet another side of our ugly world!

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3472062/Lion-tiger-bear-brothers-living-Georgia-animal-shelter-haven-t-left-s-15-years.html>



© Noah's Ark Animal Sanctuary

police in the basement of an Atlanta home during a drugs raid in 2001.

A pairing of a lion, tiger and a bear has resulted in the most unlikely friendship at a Georgia animal shelter. Baloo the American black bear, Leo the African lion and Shere Khan the Bengal tiger were all rescued by Noah's Ark Animal Shelter when they were less than one year old. The unlikely trio were found by



Back to our ugly word...**3000-year-old statues found in a refugee center**

Source: <http://www.rtvsllo.si/news-in-english/3000-year-old-statues-found-in-a-refugee-centre/387195>

Mar 02 – **In a refugee center near the Croatian border, Slovenian police found 3 items of great historical significance believed to have been left behind by refugees. According to unofficial estimates, the statues could be more than 3000 years old.**

According to Radio Slovenia journalist Milan Trobič, a number of sources confirmed that the statues belong to the Sumerian civilization, whose territory sprawled from Syria to Iraq and Iran. Police found the artifacts in one of the rooms that housed refugees. No criminal report was filed because the items were found rather than seized.

The authenticity of the statues is now being verified, and experts are trying to determine their age. According to Trobič, the refugee carrying those statues may have planned to sell them on the black market in order to pay for his or her journey. However, the money could also be used to finance other activities.

Military operations in the Middle East have caused irreparable damage to ancient monuments. Many of them were destroyed - or stolen and then sold on the black market. The issue was discussed at an Association for Research into Crimes against Art symposium recently held in London. The participants talked about *"the use and abuse of art and antiquities*



by terrorist groups, including ISIS" in places like Palmyra. However, experts have also warned against spreading misinformation, since ancient artifacts from the Middle East have been available on the black market for a long time.

Ancient artifacts can save locals from certain hell

According to Art Newspaper, speakers at the London symposium also talked about the damage inflicted to the Turkish-Syrian border region, stressing that artifacts as well as pieces of monumental art have been smuggled out of that region. According to Mike Giglio (Buzzfeed), policing the border is difficult; moreover, even border police are often involved in black market activities. Giglio warned against pillorying people who dig for such objects, claiming they do so out of desperation and in order to survive.

International collectors are the main culprits

Speakers at the London symposium stressed that it is the *"powerful international players"* - rather than the impoverished local population - who profit from this illicit trade. Former Italian minister of culture and former mayor of Rome Francesco Rutelli underscored that international dealers should be blamed for the illicit trade.

Migrants: intelligence, risk infiltration terrorists Balkans

Source: http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/politics/2016/03/02/migrants-intelligence-risk-infiltration-terrorists-balkans_27cd0cee-f675-426d-8815-ae15b28bbdc1.html

Mar 02 – There is no reported risk of terror infiltration in the migration inflow from North Africa while the risk "is more concrete" along the Balkan route, according to the annual report for Parliament released by the intelligence services. The report noted that the Balkan region is a privileged area of transit for foreign fighters (over 900 have reportedly travelled to conflict zones through there), as well as areas of "consolidated extremist realities".



"The great number of people moving towards the community area - observed the report - along with representing a humanitarian, health and public order emergency, can pose a threat on a security level". And intelligence activities have focused on the potential contamination between illegal immigration and terrorism, also in the light of the fact that "Syrian, Iraqi, Libyan, Sub-Saharan and Corn of Africa crisis contexts have in part been infiltrated by Islamist terrorist manifestations that can poison immigration channels and radicalize elements then set to emigrate to European countries".

Also worthy of consideration, according to the intelligence report, is the fact that "having lived in conflict areas, at times actively taking part in fighting, can give migrants a potentially critical profile, mostly due to the 'military' expertise acquired".

In Libya, from which 90% of migrants who land in Italy hail, "organizations of smugglers operate, structures that are flexible, mainly multi-ethnic, and able to manage all phases of the transfer".

In Italy, ethnic criminal groups proliferate, mainly including Egyptians, Romanians and Horn of Africa nationals, specialized in forging documents and providing assistance to migrants for their transfer from holding centers to destinations in northern Europe.

Another issue that emerged in the report was the presence of networks from Brindisi transferring migrants from the coasts of the southern Balkan Peninsula to Italy.

As far as the rise of Islamic radicalism in the Balkans is concerned, the intelligence services outlined risks "both for its destabilizing potential and the possibility of logistical bases in the region able to support terror plots against European countries, including ours".

Russia, Syria triggered refugee crisis to destabilize Europe: NATO commander

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160303-russia-syria-triggered-refugee-crisis-to-destabilize-europe-nato-commander>

Mar 03 – **General Phil Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Europe and head of the U.S. European Command, said Russia and Syria are indiscriminately bombing Syrian civilians to drive the refugee crisis and "weaponize migration."**

The general said that weapons such as barrel bombs, widely used by the Assad regime against Sunni civilian population, have no military value, and are used solely to terrorize those living in rebel-held territories.

He told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the destruction formed part of a deliberate strategy by Russia and the Assad regime to "get them on the road" and "make them a problem for someone else."

"Russia's entry into the fight in Syria has exacerbated the problem, changing the dynamic in the air and on the ground," General Breedlove told lawmakers.

"Despite public pronouncements to the contrary, Russia has done little to counter Daesh (ISIS) but done a great deal to bolster the Assad regime and its allies.

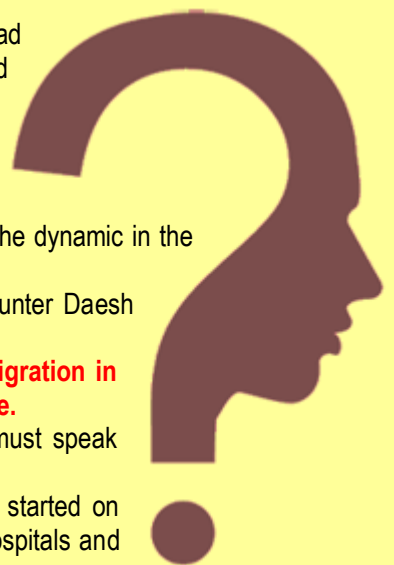
"Together Russia and the Assad regime are deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve.

"All genuinely constructive efforts to end the war are welcome but actions must speak louder than words."

DW reports that in the run-up to the "temporary cessation of hostilities" that started on Saturday, Russian and Syrian forces were accused of deliberately targeting hospitals and civilian infrastructure in possible war crimes.

In a report released earlier today (Thursday), Amnesty International claimed it has "compelling evidence" of at least six deliberate attacks on medical facilities in the Aleppo governorate over the past twelve weeks (▶ read more on this at Part C of the Newsletter – pp.47-49).

The Assad regime's advance triggered a new wave of refugees into Turkey as asylum seekers continued to arrive on Greek islands at about ten times the rate they were during the same period in 2015, which was a record-breaking year.

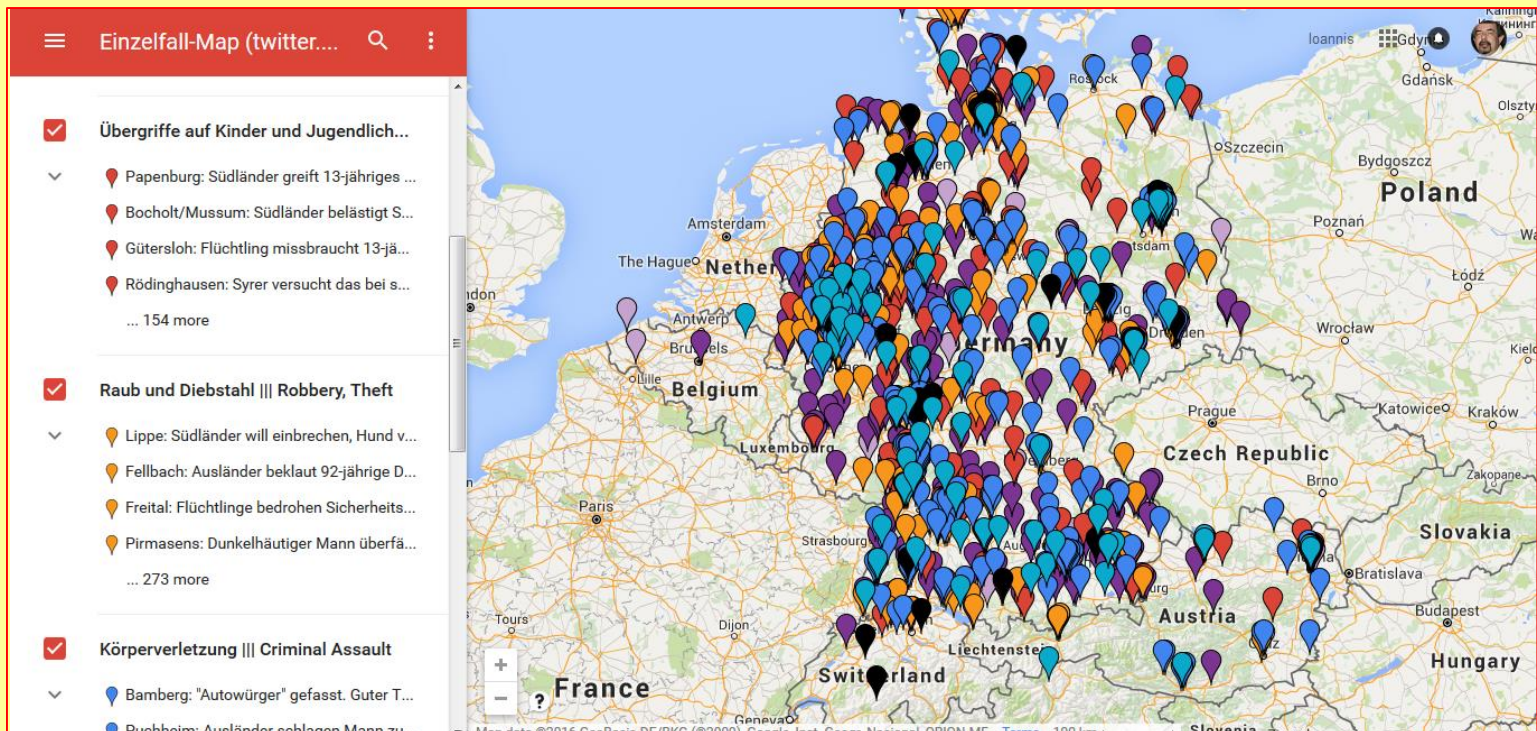


EDITOR'S COMMENT: There is an odor of propaganda here (Russia and Syria weaponized migration) mainly because there is not a single reference on who is behind the Syrian War and Islamic State. I am not sure if Senate Armed Services Committee is well informed about the details and the background of the problem but I am sure that there are thinking people in the Committee and it would be very interesting to know the dialogue elicited during the hearing – if any! Subjectivity and objectivity are two words causing so many problems and unfortunate conclusions...



Illegal immigrants criminality map – Germany

Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=z12D0zt-V4il.kXGfjzjOS1Q>



A very interesting interactive map of crimes committed by refugees and illegal immigrants in Germany. Click (at source's URL) on each pin for a short description of the incident recorded. These crimes refer only in the first two months of 2016 – total numbers can be seen in the index on the left.



The Pope says 'it is a social fact' that Europe is seeing an 'Arab invasion' – and it's a GOOD thing

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3476959/The-Pope-says-social-fact-Europe-seeing-Arab-invasion.html>



Mar 04 – Pope Francis described the influx of migrants into Europe as an 'Arab invasion' before explaining that the new arrivals will enhance Europe for the better.

The pontiff was giving a speech to an audience of French Christians when he reflected on Europe's history of migration and the positive impact it has had on its culture today. He described the migrant crisis as 'a social fact' before explaining the change will help Europe



in the future by making it more multi-cultural, according to Bloomberg.

Pope Francis referred to an 'Arab invasion' when he was recalling the moments of mass migration to Europe in history, according the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano.

'Today we can talk about an Arab invasion. It is a social fact,' he told his audience.

The pope went on to explain that the arrival of migrants, predominantly from Syria and Iraq, should be seen from a wider perspective in time and impact.



© AFP/Getty Images

He insisted Europe will 'go forward and find itself enhanced by the exchange among cultures.'

Speaking proudly of Europe, the Pope declared that the continent 'can bring about a certain unity to the world.'

[Men pray outside in the 'Jungle' migrant camp in the French port city of Calais](#)

The news comes as Greek's Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras accused Austria and other Balkan countries of 'ruining Europe'

The number of Syrians seeking asylum doubled to 362,800 last year while the growing number of Iraqi nationals has now reached 121,500, the

European Commission said today.

The news comes as Greek's Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras accused Austria and other Balkan countries of 'ruining Europe' by imposing border restrictions. The restrictions have been designed to try to slow the flow of migrants heading north from Greece. Austria angered Greece by not inviting it to a meeting of Balkan leaders in Vienna last week to coordinate a slew of border restrictions.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: With all the respect to Pope Francis I would like to ask what are exactly the "benefits" that Europe and Europeans are expecting to gain from Arab invention? Contribution to sciences (i.e. medicine; mathematics; astronomy; physics; aviation)? Philosophy? Poetry? Respect of equality of the two sexes? Perhaps climate change – we are not very good on that. It is rather sad when everyone speaks about everything and when politics are merged with real life and problems people face worldwide and specifically under our own roof.

Underwater Drone Tech Could Doom Trident

Source: <http://i-hls.com/2016/03/underwater-drone-tech-could-doom-trident/>

Mar 05 – **Britain's Trident nuclear submarine deterrent could be facing grave dangers in the future, a new report presented at Westminster parliament predicts.**



Technological progress in underwater drone technology could make it virtually impossible to prevent the detection of the submarines. New technologies, both unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV) and advanced sensors, could make the world's oceans "transparent."

In the emerging debate over the Successor program, set to replace the current fleet of four 20 year old submarines. The defense committee of the Commons (the lower house of the British parliament) asked defense contractors BAE Systems and Babcock International to assess

"whether new technologies, for example underwater drones, are being developed which could accurately detect and track submarines" and deprive them of their one great advantage – stealth.



The answer to this question comes from independent security think-tank, the British American Information Council (BASIC), and in short it is that yes, advances in technology will someday make it impossible to hide a big missile-carrying submarine in the deep ocean.

“In the past, submarines have enjoyed the luxury of hiding in empty seas. In the future, those seas are likely to be increasingly crowded with networked drones, a net of eyes and ears which no submarine can escape,” the report reads.

That is not to say that tomorrow submarines will become effectively useless. These developments will not happen overnight. But BASIC argues that it could be extremely shortsighted to spend some £40 billion on four submarines that are only expected to launch sometime in the 2030s, by which time their usefulness could be greatly diminished.

The main questions going forward should be about how to counter this counter-submarine technology if and when it arrives.

News without wide mass media coverage...



Perhaps the **last sausage** consumed in modern Germany before banned as insulting item!



The other (bright) face of Greece!

March 2016 – The vision of mechanical - engineering Dimitris Chatzikakidi and his associates, to change the way global automotive industry is designing cars is becoming a reality via their patented



Parametric Chassis and Suspension Module Technology.

The first "fruit" of this innovative vehicle design model presented by Mr. Chatzikakidis and his team, causing "earthquake" in the European, American and Asian markets, will be the (hyper) car with the symbolic name Elênica, which will become the "flagship" of the daring project, highlighting the advantages of the new method and opening the way for the construction of electric/hybrid vehicles, conventional low-cost cars, high performance



(expensive prototype vehicles) and military jeeps, based on the "recipe" of Greek parametric chassis. The Elênica is currently under development in Switzerland and England, and will be presented in a few months.



The swan that died for a photograph...

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3480700/The-swan-died-photograph-Tourist-kills-bird-dragging-lake-just-pose-Macedonia.html>



Mar 07 – **This is the moment a female tourist terrorist dragged a swan from a lake in FYROM in order to pose up for a photograph, before leaving it to die on the beach.**

The woman, reportedly from Bulgaria, grabbed the unsuspecting swan by the wing and dragged it onto the pebble-strewn shoreline of Lake Ohrid, south-western FYROM.

When the unidentified tourist had gotten her selfie snap, she abandoned the swan, which later died on the beach of Lake Ohrid, local media reports.

Shocked witnesses have described how the

swan did not react to the woman walking up to it, as they are used to the presence of tourists visiting the town of Ohrid, which shares the lake's name.

Photographs show the woman dressed in jeans and a black coat, grabbing the swan by the wing and dragging it out of the water. Despite the visibly distressed swan clearly fighting to be freed, the unidentified woman is smiling for the camera.

Witnesses said the swan 'remained motionless on the beach after the encounter', and later died.

The incident was reported in FYROM's news less than two weeks after the shocking incident in where a baby dolphin died in Argentina, while beach-goers passed it around for selfies.

How Israel Navigated through the Hurricane of the Syrian Civil War

By Jonathan Spyer

Source: <http://www.meforum.org/5897/israel-syrian-civil-war>

Mar 08 – Syrian civil war is a disaster of historic proportions that shows no sign of ending anytime soon. The latest figures suggest that it has killed nearly half a million people, making it the greatest catastrophe to hit the Levant since 1945, dwarfing earlier crises in terms of its human cost. But throughout all this carnage, only one country that borders Syria has managed to remain largely immune to the side effects of the war. That country is Israel.

With constant fighting on the other side of the border, life in the Israeli-controlled part of the Golan Heights and in the Galilee goes on much

as before the Syrian war began in 2011. This is not simply the result of good luck. It represents a quiet but notable success for an Israeli policy pursued over the last four years. This policy avoids taking sides on the larger question of who should govern Syria. Instead, Israel has sought to forge local alliances with rebel elements close to the border in order to prevent Iran and its allies from establishing a new platform for attacks on Israel, and keep Islamic State-aligned forces away from the border. So far, they have mostly worked.



Jerusalem has also worked to strengthen the physical infrastructure on the border. It has reordered its military presence, invested in a new border fence, deployed drones and other means of electronic surveillance, and created a new Combat Intelligence Collection Battalion.

At the same time, Israel has acted on a number of occasions to prevent the transfer of sophisticated weapons systems to Hezbollah in Lebanon, and has probably carried out targeted killings on Syrian soil.

With the Syrian war now transformed as a result of Russian intervention, it is an appropriate time to look at the emergence of this policy and the reasons for its success.

The Israeli political and security establishments have been beset by differences over the Syrian war since it first broke out. Prior to the war, a powerful body of opinion within the country's defense establishment regarded the regime of Dictator Bashar Assad as the "weakest link" in an Iran-led regional axis. The hope was that a blow could be dealt to the Iranians by tempting the non-Shia, non-ideological Assad regime away from its alliance with Iran and toward a pro-U.S. stance, mainly through Israeli territorial concessions on the Golan Heights.

These assumptions were among the first casualties of the Syrian war. The support of Iran and Russia was clearly of central importance to the Assad regime. Unlike authoritarian regimes aligned with the West (Mubarak in Egypt, Ben Ali in Tunisia), the Assad regime was not rapidly abandoned by its patron at the first sign of serious internal unrest. Instead, Iran and Russia mobilized all necessary resources to preserve the regime, leading to the current situation in which Assad's survival in at least part of Syria seems assured. With the prospect of "turning" Assad no longer of immediate relevance, and with a coherent pro-American alliance no longer discernible in the region, the Israeli security establishment, like many others, first presumed that the regime's survival was unlikely. In late 2011, then-Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak predicted that the dictator would fall "within weeks" and welcomed his supposedly imminent departure. "The Assad family and its faithful have killed more than 4,000 people in Syria to date," he said. "It is impossible to know who will rule Syria in the future, but in any

event, it will be a blow to the axis between Iran and Hezbollah."

However, as Sunni Islamist and jihadi forces rose to prominence in the course of 2012-13, and Iranian and Russian assistance kept Assad in place, a "minority" view emerged. It held that the rise of Salafi jihadist forces among the Syrian rebels meant that the overall victory of the rebellion would not be in Israel's interest. It further posited that the Sunni Islamists had become the greater danger to Israel. This view failed to win the support of the policymaking elite. The Sunni Islamist threat was recognized, but the primacy of the Iranian threat remained.

The result has been a synthesized view that goes something like this: Iran and its allies, of which the Assad regime in Syria is one, remain the most potent and dangerous threat facing Israel. As such, the primary goal of Israeli policy should be to prevent Iranian gains, and stop Iran and its allies from using the situation in Syria to improve their position against Israel. But given the nature of the rebellion against Assad and the forces dominating it, their victory could also be harmful to Israel. There is a danger that Assad's fall could produce a Sunni Islamist regime no less hostile than Iran, and perhaps more determined to act on this hostility.

As a result, Israel has no incentive to align with or actively support the rebels. The Israeli establishment's strong aversion to interfering in internal political processes in neighboring countries – deriving from the institutional "trauma" of the unsuccessful alliance with the Lebanese Christians in the 1980s – has also militated against any overt efforts at backing the rebellion in Syria. Indeed, from a perhaps harsh but realist standpoint, the war itself, and in particular the fragmentation of Syria into rival enclaves, is not necessarily bad for Israel.

However, the acceptance of the Syrian "status quo" should not induce excessive passivity. Rather, Israel should work to secure its border against spillover from the war, while actively preventing the Iranians and their allies from gaining an advantage. In addition, Israel needs to be aware of the smaller but significant threat represented by Sunni jihadi forces. These forces should be prevented from reaching the border, where they



would be in a position to launch attacks against Israeli communities.

Up to now, Israeli policy has been conducted along these lines. What practical form has their implementation taken?

Syrian rebels



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits an IDF field hospital for treatment of wounded Syrians on February 18, 2014. Photo: FLASH90

It is an open secret in Israel that the country maintains relations with Sunni rebel elements in the area adjoining the border in Quneitra Province. The reason is to ensure that they remain the dominant force on the border, rather than elements aligned with the Assad regime, Iran, or the Lebanese terror group Hezbollah. The Israeli policy of providing medical aid to Syrian civilians and wounded rebel fighters from this area is clearly an aspect of this policy (in addition to purely humanitarian considerations). The precise nature of the assistance afforded the rebels is not known. No evidence, however, has emerged of direct military aid. Given the great efforts to which Israel goes in order to ensure a clear intelligence "picture" of events in southwest Syria, it may be assumed that intelligence sharing probably forms part of the relationship. The rebels located close to the border are a mixed bunch. In the southern corner is Liwa Shuhada al-Yarmouk, a rebel group of long standing which is now clearly affiliated with the Islamic State. Israel has closely followed the movement of this organization in the direction

of IS and is concerned about it. The relations between Israel and the group are hostile, though they have not yet resulted in open violence. There are Israeli concerns that a second rebel group in the area, the Harakat al-Muthanna al-Islamiya organization, may also be moving closer to the Islamic State.

According to informed sources, Israeli contacts with rebel elements close to the border are not limited to the Western-supported rebel coalition called the Southern Front. They also include elements sympathetic to and affiliated with Sunni Islamist groups. Israeli sources note that the rebellion is a fragmented, localized phenomenon. As such, it has been possible to foster small-scale cooperation independent of

the broader ideological sympathies of these groups. As a result, one former senior security official described the area east of Quneitra Crossing as a "virtual security zone" for Israel.

The delicate and sensitive nature of such relationships is obvious. But nearly five years into the Syrian civil war, the success of this policy speaks for itself. As of today, with the exception of the small area controlled by Shuhada al-Yarmouk in the south and another small area controlled by the regime in the far north, the greater part of the area abutting the Israeli border is in the hands of non-IS rebels. And these groups, thus far, have not mounted cross-border attacks on Israel. Furthermore, according to media reports, Israel's influence over the rebels in this area has been used to prevent a small pro-regime enclave in their midst, the Druze village of el-Khader, from being harmed. The fact that the residents of el-Khader are themselves fanatically hostile to Israel adds another layer of irony to this complex reality.

This quiet policy of cooperation, which has kept the Iranians, the regime, and Hezbollah away from the border, has of course been accompanied by more kinetic action on the part of Israel. This has included action



close to the border to prevent Iranian-led attempts to construct infrastructure to facilitate attacks on the Golan Heights. The January 2015 killing of Hezbollah terrorist Jihad Mughniyeh, along with IRGC Colonel Ali Reza Tabatabai and a number of Hezbollah operatives in an area close to the border, was the highest-profile demonstration to date of Israel's willingness to act directly to frustrate Iranian intentions in this regard. The death of Samir Kuntar in the Jaramana area of Damascus alongside a number of other Hezbollah operatives may be another example of Israel's "long arm," though Syrian rebels also claimed responsibility for the attack.

Israel does not claim responsibility for attacks on regime, Iranian, or Hezbollah weapons convoys on Syrian soil. But it is likely that Jerusalem has been responsible for a number of attacks of this kind over the last half decade. Such actions are intended to prevent or disrupt the transfer of weapons systems across the border from the regime and Iran to their Hezbollah allies. These attacks have taken place over regime heartland areas including the Damascus area, the Qalamoun mountains region, and on at least one occasion in Lebanese territory. While Israel does not comment on specific incidents, Israeli leaders have made clear that they will act to prevent Hezbollah from obtaining "game-changing" weapons technology. In April 2015, Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon stated openly that Israel would not permit Iran to arm Hezbollah with advanced weapons systems.

Of course, it is much harder to measure Israeli success in this regard. The quiet on the border, however, is testimony to at least some success. With regard to weapons transfers, it is impossible to independently assess what weapons systems may have passed into Hezbollah's hands. A conclusive answer to this question will become available only in the event of a new war between Israel and the terrorist group.

However, the ongoing engagement of Iran and Hezbollah in the Syrian war itself provides an inadvertent benefit to Israel. Hezbollah probably has around 10,000 fighters deployed in Syria at any given time. The movement has lost over 1,000 dead in the war. Hezbollah has forces deployed in the northern Bekaa area to

hold off the ongoing possibility of cross-border attacks by Sunni forces. With all this to deal with, renewed aggression against Israel may well be a luxury the movement is currently unable to afford.

Russia

Russia's direct entry into the Syrian civil war on September 30, 2015 appears to have ended the long stalemate. As of now, regime, Iranian, Hezbollah, and allied forces are moving decisively against the Sunni Arab rebels in Aleppo province. The regime has also made gains further south in Hama and Deraa provinces. Bashar Assad made clear in an interview in February 2016 that his intention is to eventually reconquer the entirety of the country. It appears that the goal of the regime and its allies is to eliminate the non-IS rebellion and secure western Syria, along with the majority of the country's population, for the regime.

This raises the possibility of the regime's eventual return to Quneitra province, which would also imply the return of the Syrian army to the border area. While such an eventuality cannot be ruled out, it should be noted that it does not appear imminent. The regime will need to complete the reconquest of Aleppo and Idlib provinces before such a task can be contemplated. This remains a mammoth task that is only now beginning. The rebellion has proven tenacious and hard to uproot over the last half decade.

Russian air power of course enormously increases the regime's strength. But the old situation in which the regime is able to reconquer areas but then proves unable to police them remains in effect. When it comes to pacifying reconquered areas, air power will be of limited use, unless the regime wishes to simply depopulate the area in question. So while the regime's return to the border area cannot be ruled out, it does not appear imminent.

It is no less important that Israel has been careful to maintain communication with the Russians, and a "deconfliction" regime appears to be in effect between Russian and Israeli air power over Syria. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, IDF Chief of



Staff Gadi Eisenkot, and Military Intelligence chief Herzl Halevi travelled to Moscow immediately following the Russian intervention, presumably to lay the groundwork for a channel of communication. As of now, this appears to have permitted Israel to continue to operate in the skies over Syria. Thus, while the emergence of a fledgling Russian-Iranian strategic alliance in the Middle East is surely of concern to Israel, the evidence to date suggests that the alliance by no means implies *carte blanche* for the Iranians to pursue all their regional goals under the umbrella of Russian air cover. On the contrary, the Russians, as the senior partner in the relationship, dictate when and to what extent cooperation takes place.

Netanyahu, according to the *Times of Israel*, told Russian President Vladimir Putin in "no uncertain terms" that Israel would not tolerate Tehran's efforts to arm Israel's enemies in the region, and that Jerusalem has taken and will continue to take action against any such attempts. *The Times* quoted the prime minister saying, "This is our right and also our duty.... There were no objections to our rights.... There was readiness to make sure that whatever Russia's intentions for Syria, Russia will not be a partner in extreme actions by Iran against us."

Israel appears to have taken at least two actions over Syrian soil since the Russian intervention, indicating that, for now, the agreement appears to be holding. Nevertheless, given Israel's general satisfaction with the situation east of Quneitra under the present arrangement, Jerusalem will

no doubt be watching the situation carefully and with some concern regarding the possible return of the regime and other Iran-backed forces to the area.

In this regard, it should be noted that Russia and the Assad regime's stance on current efforts toward a ceasefire include the demand for the exclusion of "terrorist" groups. Thus, even if the efforts were to reach fruition, it is unlikely to have a major impact on Russian-backed regime efforts to reconquer rebel-held areas in the southwest of the country.

Israeli policy with regard to the Syrian civil war offers an example of modest, pragmatic aims pursued with a notable degree of success. Israel is now the only state bordering Syria that has not suffered major fallout from the war. Iraq and to a lesser extent Lebanon have seen the war erupt on their own soil. Jordan and Turkey have been faced with a wave of refugees and, in the latter case, the return of a Kurdish insurgency. Israel has managed, thus far, to avoid all of this.

Given the massive, historic dimensions of the events taking place in Syria and Iraq, this represents a significant achievement. A few kilometers from a conflict in which nearly half a million lives have been lost, normal life is going on unimpeded in the Israeli and Druze communities on the Golan Heights. The lesson for other countries may well be that a sober, pragmatic, realist policy, with clearly set aims and absent grand ambitions for the reshaping of other societies, offers the best route toward success.

Jonathan Spyer is director of the Rubin Center for Research in International Affairs and a fellow at the Middle East Forum.

Anti-Drone Net Launcher

Source: <http://i-hls.com/2016/03/watch-anti-drone-net-launcher/>

Mar 06 – As drones have become cheaper and more popular, so have the risks associated with them grown proportionally. Last year, in a second incident of its kind, a man was arrested for flying a drone outside the White House. In several incidents that made international news, drones flying too close to airports nearly caused collisions that could have had catastrophic results.

Clearly, rogue drones have become a major problem.



A startup hailing from rainy England may have come up with the coolest solution for when you might need to quickly take a drone down. OpenWorks Engineering's SkyWall is a shoulder-mounted



compressed-air projectile launcher that shoots out shells containing a net and a parachute to catch a safely land drones flying where they really shouldn't. The SkyWall looks like a weapon pulled straight

out of a science fiction film, but this cool bit of tech is anything



but fictional. To ensure best netting results, it's armed with a holographic scope and a targeting computer to predict a [drone](#)'s flight path.

► Watch SkyWall at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3E9VwgZ0Xk>

Brazil expects Olympics without protests despite tensions

Source: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/mar/9/brazil-expects-olympics-without-protests-despite-t/>

Mar 09 – Brazil's Defense Minister Aldo Rebelo has played down the risks of massive protests during the Olympic Games, despite the country's economy and political crisis and a mushrooming scandal at state-run oil giant Petrobras.

Rebelo told a news conference in Brasilia on Wednesday that the expected 85,000 security agents, including 38,000 members of the armed forces, will be enough to guarantee safety during the games in Rio de Janeiro from Aug. 5-21.

The minister also said that violent protests, like those witnessed during the 2013 Confederations Cup, are not likely, but would "have to be confronted and repressed if they happen".



“I don’t think we will see what happened in 2013. During the (2014) World Cup that (tension) was much cooled down,” Rebelo said. “The Olympics will be in a much calmer atmosphere in comparison with 2013.” Rebelo was Brazil’s sports minister during the last edition of the Confederations Cup.



Many Brazilians are expected to take to the streets again this weekend, with different groups either demonstrating their opposition to - or support for - President Dilma Rousseff, who faces impeachment proceedings. Some groups have promised to protest during the games, especially those representing people who have been displaced by Olympic construction projects.

Rebelo said that Brazil is working with the United States, Britain and Russia, among others, to prevent attacks being carried out during the Olympics. However, he said the security effort was not linked to last November’s attacks in Paris.

“Since the Olympics in Munich in 1972, that concern exists,” Rebelo said, referring to the killing of 11

Israeli athletes by Palestinian attackers in the Olympic Village. “There was an attack in Atlanta 1996 too. There are many examples in the past.”

Rio’s top state security official, Jose Mariano Beltrame, has repeatedly said that preventing terrorism has “always been the No. 1 priority” in Olympic planning, even though Brazil does not have a history of attacks. The more visible problem in Rio is endemic street crime.

Brazil is expected to spend about \$190 million dollars on security operations.

In November, a government watchdog said that “flaws” in Brazil’s border security are also a “big

concern” for Rio 2016. According to auditor Augusto Nardes, Brazil’s police and military need better ways to control the country’s 17,000 kilometer-long (10,500-mile) border, which touches 10 countries and runs through remote areas of the Amazon jungle.



No, we haven't banned books on pigs – but sensitivity is key in global publishing

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/15/books-pigs-global-publishing-oxford-university-press-children>

Jan 15 – Given that our editorial guidelines that reference pigs and pork have been in place for as long as I can remember, little did I imagine that they would attract [international headlines](#) claiming that the Oxford University Press had banned sausages. To clarify, OUP does not have a blanket ban on pork products in its titles, and we do still publish books about pigs. Although there have been no recent



changes to our guidance on this topic, these articles highlighted the fine balance needed when considering students' cultural and learning needs.

is led by our mission: furthering excellence in worldwide. We are resolute in this, and I have positive impact our resources can make round the world. This is not just due to quality, but also because they are relevant to the children that use them and make a real difference to their learning in the UK and the other 200



Our publishing education seen the all the

countries in which they are sold. Our reading programs have taught millions of children to read across the globe. To address children's learning needs, it is important that they also reflect the cultural context in which children are learning. In the UK, we take it for granted that we would not include references to sex, violence, or alcohol in our textbooks; to do so would be considered inappropriate and offensive to many. In order to make an impact around the world, there are other sensitivities that, although not necessarily obvious to some of us, are nonetheless extremely important to others.

While we should be mindful of these cultural sensitivities, a healthy dose of common sense is also required. Cultural taboos must never get in the way of learning needs, which will always be our primary focus. So, for example, a definition of a pig would not be excluded from a dictionary, and we wouldn't dream of editing out a "pig" character from an historical work of fiction. We also maintain entirely separate guidelines for our academic titles which are relevant to scholarly rather than educational discourse.

What we do, however, is consider avoiding references to a range of topics that could be considered sensitive – in a way that does not compromise quality, or negatively impact learning. So, for example, if animals are depicted shown in a background illustration, we would think carefully about which animals to choose. In doing so we are able to ensure children remain focused purely on their learning, rather than cultural characteristics.

Managing cultural sensitivities isn't about reducing educational quality, pandering to minority views, restricting freedom of speech or self-censorship. It's about ensuring the educational value of our publishing is able to navigate the maze of cultural norms for the benefit of students around the world. We want to ensure we can make the widest possible impact.

Does it surprise me that in times of heightened sensitivities there will be a keen focus on publishers' educational guidelines? No. Will there be a moment when publishing for all audiences will be an easy process? Yes, I imagine so ... when pigs fly.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: Just another British suicidal case! What really happened to these people?





Migrant assaults mother and 4yo son in Austrian swimming pool

Source: <https://www.rt.com/news/335175-migrant-assault-mother-son/>

Mar 10 – **The quiet southern Austrian town of Klagenfurt has witnessed a grotesque case of sexual harassment, to which both a 37-year-old mother and her 4-year-old son fell victim.**

Swimming in the pool with her young son on Sunday, the woman was approached by a man who hardly spoke German but tried to chat with her, according to Kurier daily.

Things went awry when she rejected his advances: the man, later described by the police as a brown-eyed foreigner in his 50s, “strong and fit,” jumped into a nearby children’s play pool and grabbed her 4-year-old son who was splashing there.

He then put the boy on his shoulders and ran into a grotto behind a fake waterfall at the swimming park. The panicked mother immediately ran after the attacker and found him hiding in the grotto with her son, reportedly unhurt.



When the mother stepped in the grotto, however, the man put the child aside and grabbed her instead, groping inside her swimming costume and putting his hand on her private parts and breasts.



She managed to escape with her son (relatively) safely, and the man left the place shortly after that.

According to the local newspaper Kleine Zeitung, the 37-year-old Austrian was so shocked and depressed that she did not file a complaint with the police until the following day.

The woman added that the attacker showed up suddenly, and she was simply unable to call somebody for help.

Klagenfurt police said it is investigating CCTV footage inside the swimming complex, but warns that finding a match would be no easy – according to Gerald Knes, who is in charge of the pool, there were more than 500 visitors that day.

Since the outbreak of the refugee crisis, multiple media reports suggested that sexual offenses committed by some migrants were on the rise.

Austrian officials also confirmed that sex attacks in the country are at the highest level in many years with average 12 such crimes being reported every day. Over the New Year, there were 24 sexual assaults on women, according to the Interior Ministry.

“Vienna and Salzburg were the cities with the biggest problem. Most of the sex attacks happened on women at public events. They were targeted mostly by small groups of asylum seekers who, after surrounding them, then attacked,” the ministry said in a statement as quoted by the Local.

At the same time, it remains unclear, how many of the growing total number of sex attacks in Austria can be linked to the refugee crisis. According to the police report, only 25 out of 343 cases of sex-related incidents reported over the recent months involved charges against asylum seekers, while Austrian citizens were under suspicion in 175 such cases. Another 43 sex attacks were reportedly committed by foreigners who were not refugees and came from such countries as Turkey, FYROM or Germany.



Austrians are also suspected of committing 38 out of 61 recently reported rapes, while refugees are under suspicion only in six such cases. At the same time, some high profile sex-related incidents were linked to refugees.

Last month, Austrian police said that an Iraqi refugee was arrested over the rape of a 10 year-old boy at a swimming pool in Vienna in December. The suspect told police he did it due to a "sexual emergency." When asked if such actions were permitted in his home country, he admitted that "such acts were forbidden in any country of the world."

Preventive measures, which have been denounced as racial profiling, were previously seen in neighboring Germany.

In January, male refugees living in a hostel in Bornheim, a town on the outskirts of Bonn in western Germany, were banned from going to a local swimming pool after the number of complaints of sexual harassment from female visitors became alarmingly high.

"After that I had enough and I decided to ban them all until we find the culprits. I need to protect my guests and my family," Karin Siebrecht-Janisch, the owner, told AFP, insisting that she was not inciting racism or hatred.

Shadow CIA' Using 'Boogeyman Scare Tactics' to Make Money

Source: <http://sputniknews.com/politics/20160311/1036122276/stratfor-friedman-predictions.html#ixzz42alTyv9I>

Mar 11 – **Stratfor's founder George Friedman has recently claimed that the world should get ready for a major 21st century war that will most likely break out in Eastern Europe, the Middle East or Asia.** But experts have taken these predictions with a pinch of salt, citing ulterior motives behind the "Shadow CIA's" forecasts.

"I don't know what he is thinking. He's been consistently wrong. I don't know why anyone would listen to Stratfor," author, geopolitical analyst and journalist Ryan Dawson told Radio Sputnik in an exclusive interview. Stratfor analysts "didn't see Libya coming, they didn't see Syria coming. They thought there might be a war with Iran."



The expert dismissed Stratfor's predictions as a form of "saber-rattling" and "boogeyman scare tactics." For instance, the group, in his opinion, is trying to scare China and North Korea and provoke an arms race by saying that Japan would rise as a maritime power.

"It is just a way to create a Cold War in that part of the world so that both use each other to build up their navies," Dawson explained. These predictions justify military spending and "that's all it's for." There is "absolutely no chance" that a war would break out between China and Japan, because their economies are too intertwined.

Friedman also asserted that Poland and Russia could clash since the former is one of the emerging powers and the latter is supposedly declining. "I just have to laugh at that. That's not going to happen," Dawson noted.

"Poland is going nowhere. Russia is not going to collapse. And there is definitely not going to be a war with Japan. This is ridiculous. No one should be paying attention to these people," he said laughing. Stratfor analysts "have been wrong over and over again."

For his part, political scientist Alexey Martynov maintains that Stratfor's founder is intentionally exaggerating current trends. This approach seems to point to the fact that the think tank is having financial troubles.

"Stratfor is a private firm, which is trying to sell its predictions to major international corporations, business communities and even some small states that are ready to pay for this kind of analytics. They act as if they were part of the US intelligence agencies. Of course, they are not," he told Radio Sputnik. Friedman is trying to "scare those, who are ready to pay for their scribbings," he added.

► Watch a related video at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/stratfor-world-predictions-security-politics-international-2015-7>



Some common words in our modern vocabulary

Source: Wikipedia

Xenophobia is the fear of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange. Xenophobia can manifest itself in many ways involving the relations and perceptions of an ingroup towards an outgroup, including a fear of losing identity, suspicion of its activities, aggression, and desire to eliminate its presence to secure a presumed purity. Xenophobia can also be exhibited in the form of an "uncritical exaltation of another culture" in which a culture is ascribed "an unreal, stereotyped and exotic quality". Dictionary definitions of *xenophobia* include: "deep-rooted, fear towards foreigners" (Oxford English Dictionary; OED), and "fear of the unfamiliar" (Webster's). The word comes from the Greek words ξένος (*xenos*), meaning "strange", "foreigner", and φόβος (*phobos*), meaning "fear".

Patriotism is an emotional attachment to a nation which an individual recognizes as their homeland. This attachment, also known as national feeling or national pride, can be viewed in terms of different features relating to one's own nation, including ethnic, cultural, political or historical aspects. It encompasses a set of concepts closely related to those of nationalism. An excess of patriotism in the defense of a nation is called chauvinism; another related term is *jingoism*. The English term *patriot* is first attested in the Elizabethan era, via Middle French from Late Latin (6th century) *patriota*, meaning "countryman", ultimately from Greek πατριώτης (*patriōtēs*), meaning "from the same country", from πατρίς (*patris*), meaning "fatherland".

Nationalism is a shared group feeling in the significance of a geographical and sometimes demographic region seeking independence for its culture and/or ethnicity that holds that group together. This can be expressed as a belief or political ideology that involves an individual identifying with or becoming attached to one's nation. Nationalism involves national identity, by contrast with the related concept of patriotism, which involves the social conditioning and personal behaviors that support a state's decisions and actions. From a political or sociological perspective, there are two main perspectives on the origins and basis of nationalism. One is the primordialist perspective that describes nationalism as a reflection of the ancient and perceived evolutionary tendency of humans to organize into distinct groupings based on an affinity of birth. The other is the modernist perspective that describes nationalism as a recent phenomenon that requires the structural conditions of modern society in order to exist. An alternative perspective to both of these lineages comes out of Engaged theory, and argues that while the form of nationalism is modern, the content and subjective reach of nationalism depends upon 'primordial' sentiments. There are various definitions for what constitutes a nation, however, which leads to several different strands of nationalism. It can be a belief that citizenship in a state should be limited to one ethnic, cultural, religious, or identity group, or that multinationality in a single state should necessarily comprise the right to express and exercise national identity even by minorities. The adoption of national identity in terms of historical development has commonly been the result of a response by influential groups unsatisfied with traditional identities due to inconsistency between their defined social order and the experience of that social order by its members, resulting in a situation of anomie that nationalists seek to resolve. This anomie results in a society or societies reinterpreting identity, retaining elements that are deemed acceptable and removing elements deemed unacceptable, in order to create a unified community. This development may be the result of internal structural issues or the result of resentment by an existing group or groups towards other communities, especially foreign powers that are or are deemed to be controlling them. National flags, national anthems and other symbols of national identity are commonly considered highly important symbols of the national community.

Racism is a product of the complex interaction in a given society of a race-based worldview with prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. Racism can be present in social actions, practices, or political systems (e.g., apartheid) that support the expression of prejudice or aversion in discriminatory practices. The ideology underlying racist practices often includes the idea that humans can be subdivided into distinct groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked as inferior or superior. Today, the use of the term "racism" does not easily fall under a single definition. It is usually found in, but usage is not limited to, law, the social and behavioral sciences, humanities, and popular culture.



Racist ideology can become manifest in many aspects of social life. Social actions can be based in human ideas and associated with xenophobia, otherness, segregation, hierarchical ranking, supremacism, and related social phenomena. While race and ethnicity are considered to be separate in contemporary social science, the two terms have a long history of equivalence in popular usage and older social science literature. "Ethnicity" is often used in a sense close to one traditionally attributed to "race": the division of human groups based on qualities assumed to be essential or innate to the group (e.g. shared ancestry or shared behavior). *Racism* and *racial discrimination* are often used to describe discrimination on an ethnic or cultural basis, independent of whether these differences are described as racial. According to a United Nations convention, there is no distinction between the terms "racial" and "ethnic" discrimination. The UN convention further concludes that superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous, and there is no justification for racial discrimination, anywhere, in theory or in practice.

'Historic' crowds protest against Brazil's president

Source: <http://news.yahoo.com/massive-anti-government-protests-set-shake-brazil-073647462.html>

Mar 13 – **More than three million Brazilians, according to police, demonstrated across Latin America's biggest nation to demand the ouster of embattled President Dilma Rousseff.**

Chanting "Dilma out!" and draped in the bright yellow and green national flag, protesters across Brazil sought to pressure Congress into accelerating impeachment proceedings against the leftist leader, blamed for a massive corruption scandal and the worst economic recession in a quarter century.



"We are at a decisive moment for our country. We are going to start the change now," said Rogerio Chequer, leader of Vem Pra Rua, one of the main organizers of the demonstrations, at the Sao Paulo protest.

Helio Bicudo, a prominent lawyer who once supported the government but helped initiate the push for impeachment told the Sao Paulo protesters: "Brazil can't take being looted and robbed anymore, it can't take more incompetence and corruption."



Will the Syrian Ceasefire Last?

By Jonathan Spyer

Source: <http://www.meforum.org/5906/will-syria-ceasefire-last>

Mar 16 – **The cease-fire that came into effect in Syria on February 27 is a partial success.** Humanitarian convoys have begun to get through to some of the areas besieged by government forces.

The death toll is sharply down. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the **civilian death toll in Syria fell by 90 percent last week.** This was accompanied by an **80% decline in deaths among combatants on all sides.**

"credible, inclusive, and nonsectarian" transitional government. This government will then set about drafting a new constitution and holding free and fair UN-supervised election within 18 months.

The tentative success of the February 27 cease-fire notwithstanding, this plan still sounds utterly unrealistic. Its main stumbling block remains the core disagreement between regime and opposition over the future role of President Bashar Assad. For the opposition, any role for Assad in the course of the transition remains utterly unacceptable.

For Assad, riding high on the results of the Russian intervention that began last September, there is no reason to compromise or contemplate departure. On the contrary, the Syrian dictator bullishly (and absurdly) announced this week that **parliamentary elections will take place across Syria on April 13.**

Since the officially sanctioned diplomatic process remains somewhat otherworldly, and yet the cease-fire has not been a total failure, what direction are events likely to take? As of now, Syria has fragmented, and a host of

related conflicts are taking place over its ruins. The Russian intervention has effectively removed from the table the possibility of the military destruction of the dictatorship.

For this to be achieved, an air force capable of besting that of the Russians, who guarantee Assad's survival, would need to enter the fray. Such air power is possessed only by the US. Washington has absolutely no intention of acting as the air wing of the Syrian Sunni rebels, in a way analogous to that of the Russians vis-à-vis the regime.

Since this is likely to remain the case, it follows that there is no longer any credible military threat to the continued existence of the Assad regime in its enclave in Damascus, in the western coastal area, in the cities of western Syria and in the areas linking them.

This being said, it remains the case that **a regime re-conquest**



"Proximity" talks between the sides are set to commence in Geneva on Wednesday. The government has announced it will attend. The opposition High Negotiations Committee has yet to make a final decision but will probably also be there.

So does the cease-fire in Syria represent the beginnings of an endgame in the long and bloody civil war that has racked the country since mid- 2011? This is a war in which, according to a recent report by the Damascus-based Syrian Center for Policy Research, **up to 470,000 people have died. Fully 11.5% of the population have been killed or injured, and 45% have left their homes.**

As of now, there remains very little chance of the implementation of the plan as outlined in Vienna last November for the diplomatic process in Syria. According to this plan, within six months of the commencement of negotiations, the sides are to establish a



of the entirety of Syria also remains unlikely. Assad, in a recent interview, declared this to be his goal. But it is unlikely that the actual forces that could conceivably achieve this goal for him – Russian air power and Iranian proxies on the ground – are interested in pursuing it.

Iran is withdrawing Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps personnel from northwest Syria. The immediate goal of preventing any threat to the regime has been achieved. The Iranian regime does not appear to wish to commit its own forces to the mutual slaughterhouse that a campaign to reconquer all of rebel and Sunni jihadist-controlled Syria would entail.

The Russians, too, appear wary of a long and grinding campaign of re-conquest. With a devalued ruble and very low oil prices, it is not clear that they could sustain the necessary expenditure.

Again, the goal of the Russian campaign appears to have been to preserve the regime enclave, not to enter an all-out assault for the reunification of Syria by military means.

Even Assad himself may be aware that an attempt at reunifying the country under his rule would bring back the original dilemma that caused his withdrawal in the first place.

Assad does not possess sufficient forces to securely govern those areas that reject his rule. The Russian intervention has not altered this core reality.

Russia wants to see the removal of Ukraine-related sanctions on it, and to be treated as a world power. Backing its allies and ensuring their survival forms a part of this. An ongoing bloody campaign of re-conquest is unlikely to do so.

Jonathan Spyer is director of the Rubin Center for Research in International Affairs and a fellow at the Middle East Forum.

Iraq's Coming Apocalypse

By Daniel Pipes

Source: <http://www.meforum.org/5908/iraq-coming-apocalypse>

Mar 16 – **No, it's not ISIS or rampaging Shi'i militias. It's the Mosul Dam, Iraq's largest, and its possible collapse, perhaps leading to millions of deaths.** Those in the know worry catastrophe could strike this spring, as

So if the disparate rebellion can't beat Assad, and if Assad is unlikely to achieve or even try for a knockout blow against the rebellion, and if there is no basis for a negotiated settlement, doesn't that mean that the diplomacy is doomed, the cease-fire bound to be short-lived, and a return to full-blown conflict inevitable?

Maybe, but not necessarily. It is worth remembering that there are two other vital players on the Syrian map, apart from the Assad regime and the Sunni Arab rebellion. The two other elements are the Kurds, and Islamic State. As of now, a Western-backed military alliance, the Syrian Democratic Forces, is making steady headway against Islamic State. If this progress can continue, the prospect opening up in Syria will be for a Russian-guaranteed, Assad-ruled west, and a US-guaranteed east, in which Islamic State has either been destroyed or is in the process of eclipse.

On this basis, with neither side able to dislodge the other and neither side having an obvious interest in continued conflict (or with each side deterred by inescapable realities if they do), it is possible to imagine the beginning of a diplomatic process based on the emergence of a confederal or de facto divided Syria.

Such an outcome is, of course, not certain, but it is possible. If it does not emerge, the bloodletting in Syria is likely to recommence with full force in the future, and the current cease-fire to be remembered as little more than a brief respite.

snows melt and build an uncontrollable water pressure. Hastily built in wartime for the dictator Saddam Hussein by a German-Italian consortium, the



Mosul Dam was located where it is because one of Hussein's cronies came from the area and used his pull, despite the fact that engineers knew from the start that its porous gypsum base could not sustain such a huge structure.



Mosul, a city of some one million inhabitants, in about four hours. Then the flood wave would roll down the Tigris River valley to other cities, including the capital Baghdad, before dispersing in a wide flood. A huge number of immediate casualties would be followed by drought, disease, lack of electricity, chaos, and crime, ensuring biblical-level miseries and fatalities.

For years, quiet grouting and blithe assurances kept the precariousness of the Mosul Dam obscure. But heightened alarms coming from the U.S. government since the start of 2016, relying primarily on U.S.

What was then called the Saddam Dam opened in 1984 and within two years needed **constant grouting, that is, day and night infusions of micro-fine cement, lots of it – 200 million pounds over the decades – to keep it from collapsing.** The grouting keeps the foundational problem from worsening but does not solve it.

The years went by; fortunately, there was no disaster on the American watch. Then, during a fateful ten-day period, August 7-17, 2014, the Islamic State (ISIS) seized control of the dam. While the group neither sabotaged nor blew up the structure, grouting stopped for six weeks and the whole repair regime – especially the skilled workers and the supply of cement – henceforth became less consistent.

As a result, the dam has steadily weakened over the past 19 months, to the point that experts worry that a surge of spring waters will overwhelm it and cause its collapse. That the dam's two emergency floodgates are broken and cannot be opened to relieve intense pressure renders the situation the more fraught.

The consequences of a collapse are terrifying: A wall of water 45-70 feet high would reach



Army Corps of Engineers estimates, appear finally to have awakened Iraqis to the dangers they face. The U.S. embassy in Baghdad has even issued a highly unusual "Mosul Dam Preparedness Fact Sheet" with advice (in English, alas) on evacuation steps, educational needs, and relief efforts.

In contrast, the Iraqi government issues a stream of dishonest assurances that there's no problem. Mohsen al-Shimari, Iraq's minister for Water Resources and official in charge of the dam, says "The danger is not imminent, it's far off. The danger is 1 in 1,000" (itself, an unacceptable risk). Or he insists that Mosul Dam is in "no greater" danger than other dams. At other times he actually claims "there is no problem in the dam that may



lead to its collapse." Note the inconsistency, itself a sign of duplicity.

In keeping with this irresponsible, even criminal nonchalance, Iraqi authorities have done next to nothing to prepare for a possible collapse.



Yes, they claim that a contingency plan exists, but no one has seen it, much less learned its details, so what use can it have in time of crisis? Yes, they signed a \$300 million deal with Trevi, an Italian company, to repair and

maintain the Dam, but this is a Band-Aid fix, not a long-term solution.

To make matters worse, the dam's most vulnerable city, Mosul, labors under the rule of the apocalyptic Islamic State, whose disregard for human life and extreme hostility toward the outside world negates both crisis planning and international assistance. But there is a silver lining here; ISIS' monstrous rule has caused Mosul's population to decline from 2½ million two years ago to about 1 million now, thereby reducing the number of potential casualties there.

Assuming the dam survives this year's snow melt, only one long-term solution exists: to complete the Badush Dam (left) downstream from the Mosul Dam, which would mitigate the consequences of a collapse. Started soon after the grouting began in 1986 but halted in 1990, this ancillary dam will cost US\$10 billion that the Iraqi government cannot afford. But it must be the country's highest priority.

Daniel Pipes is president of the Middle East Forum.

"We are afraid" - Swedish schoolchildren's desperate letter to the principal

Source: <http://speisa.com/modules/articles/index.php/item.2604/we-are-afraid-swedish-schoolchildren-s-desperate-letter-to-the-principal.html>

March 2016 – More and more parents keep their children home from school, after children



have been abused by newly arrived immigrant students who attend the Central School in Kristianstad.

Children who are beaten, kicked, choked and suffer other degrading treatment - It has now become everyday life at the Central School in

Kristianstad. The school has received a large number of new students from the recent asylum chaos, and has two preparatory classes for newly arrived immigrants.

And it is the newly arrived immigrant children who create the problems. "My kids have been home since Wednesday, they have not felt safe and I have not wanted to force them there", says Malin, who is the worried mother of two boys who go to the school.

The headmaster and teachers have urged the Swedish children to "walk away" if there are fights or conflict with immigrant children, a recipe that does not work.

"When they leave, they are persecuted by this gang who call



them bad words, they use a very abusive language towards children in second and third grade”, says Malin, and adds: “When one of the boys said he did not want to play football because the immigrants cheat, two of them attacked him. It ended with this boy being completely covered in blood before some adults intervened.”



Malin is not the only parent who let her children stay home because they do not feel safe at school. Madeleine is another mother who also has two boys in first and second grade at the school. They stay at home because they are afraid to go to school also. “My children were at home on Friday as their best friend was getting strangled on Thursday,” she says. “They had fear in their stomachs, my little boy who is seven, and in first grade, was tripped and fell. His knees are bruised.”

The principal: "Try to understand"

Malin and Madeleine is clear that they do not want a witch hunt at the school and that the only thing they want is that everything will be fine again. Moreover, they are far from the only ones to pay attention to the problems. On Friday parents from seven families met with the principal, Annika Persson, to talk about the problems with the violent immigrant children. At first, the principal refused to even talk to the affected pupils' parents, but after a while she gave in and set up a meeting. Madeleine brought a letter that her two sons wrote to the principal, where their fear is expressed. “The

principal told us at the meeting that one must have an understanding for this, as they have left the war, they are perhaps born in refugee camps and may have traumatic backgrounds,” she says and continues: “Then I asked the headmaster and wondered how to explain to my children that it is okay to become a little strangled or beaten, or they say go home and “fu@k dad's di@k”, and to feel sorry for them because they come from war. I do not understand how I can explain this to my children?”

[Capture from official Swedish website](#)

Swedes a minority

At the meeting with the principal yesterday, parents were told that between 90 and 95 percent of the students at the school now are children of foreign origin.

“Our children have become a minority and the principal said that's why it has become so messy as it is,” says Malin. “She did not mean that it is just the foreign children who are the problem,

but that there is a lack of communication between the children. There are cultural differences and language difficulties, one cannot understand each other, and then they use fists to make themselves heard.”

Madeleine does not know what she will do on Monday, if her children will continue to stay home from school or have to go there despite the threat of more violence. “I'm afraid so. I cannot stay home from work, so I do not know how it will be on Monday”, she says and adds: “I'll check if my dad can be with the kids on Monday, but I do not know.”

Malin has, however, begun looking for a new school for her boys, something that is difficult because all the schools are overcrowded.

“I told the principal yesterday at the meeting that I do not feel good about this, and I do not know if I will be able to send my children to school on Monday.” Then she said to me: “You will send your children on Monday! I'm breaking the law if I keep them at home”, she says. “But yesterday we visited a new school.”

The principal would not comment. When Fria Tider on Saturday



called Annika Persson to ask her for a comment on the violence against Swedish children at the school. Instead she asked the

news outlet to try again on Monday, when she is on "duty".

EDITOR'S COMMENT: A case from the future or just today's reality in Europe? Schools are micrographics of our societies and therefore do not differ when comes to bullying and pure violence. The combination of bloody background of immigrants' children together with lack of communication due to language barriers and the different life standards create an explosive combination augmented by politics (have a second look at the photo in p.53) and state guidelines (principal's behavior) promoting failed multiculturalism and oppression of national values and liberties. Is this what we really want? And if not, why we are allowing these things to happen? What would be our excuse to future generations?



Migrant 'pedophile' is dragged through refugee camp after he is accused of raping a seven-year-old girl before being handed over to police on Greece/FYROM border

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3497672/Justice-migrant-camp-Refugees-Greece-Macedonia-border-drag-push-man-accused-raping-seven-year-old-child-turn-authorities.html>



Mar 17 – Migrants living in the squalid Idomeni camp took the law into their own hands after suspecting a fellow refugee of raping a seven-year-old girl.

The photographer who took the harrowing images could not confirm if the girl being escorted just a few behind him was the victim but said if the police station was further, 'he may have been in serious trouble'.

The photographer told MailOnline how the horde of men kicked the suspected rapist, and one man tried to hit him over the head with his belt.

Around 46,000 migrants and refugees are currently stranded in Greece after several Balkan states shut their borders to them.



Of these, around 14,000 are camped out in the border town of Idomeni, desperately hoping to move on towards Germany or Scandinavia.

Some Idomeni refugees waded through a raging stream to cross into FYROM this week, only to be sent back bloody and bruised.

Under an EU agreement being thrashed out by European leaders in Brussels this week, Turkey would take back all the migrants who currently call such makeshift camps in Greece home.

For every irregular migrant returned to Turkey, EU countries would take in one Syrian refugee from Turkey, up to a total of 72,000.

In exchange, the EU could provide Turkey with up to £4.75bn in aid, to help the 2.7million Syrian refugees living there, and also speed up EU membership talks.

Rights groups fear the deal is a distraction to hide the deportation of migrants, even though the EU insists that each person can make a case in an interview and has the right to appeal.

Changes made to the draft deal since it was made public on March 7 'do little to hide Europe's shameful planned mass return of refugees to Turkey', Amnesty International said Wednesday.

Ahead of the summit, EU Council President Donald Tusk said 'I am cautiously optimistic, but frankly more cautious than optimistic' about the chances for success.

He said any deal must satisfy every single EU member nation, no matter how 'big or small'.

Humanitarian lessons from a Greek family providing shelter to 13 Syrian refugees

(in a small house in Kilkis [N Greece] and a pension to provide for all)



EU migrants' benefits and the U.K. EU-exit referendum

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160317-eu-migrants-benefits-and-the-u-k-euexit-referendum>

Mar 17 – A new Cambridge University research project is gathering “robust empirical evidence” on the experience of EU migrant workers in the United Kingdom, exploring everything from hopes and expectations to how they find work and what use EU migrants make of benefits.



The research is timely, as perceptions of EU migrants undercutting British workers or acting as “benefits tourists” are fueling much of the debate in the lead-up to June’s EU Referendum.

Some MPs are warning that Britain has become a “honeypot nation” with its social security system acting as a primary pull factor, leading to David Cameron’s negotiation of a so-called “emergency brake” on benefits for EU migrants.

However, critics argue that the government have been consistently unable to provide any evidence that this is the case. For example, last week’s response to a Parliamentary question on the amount spent on benefits to EU migrants was simply: “the information is not available.”

The [EU Migrant Worker Project](#) will aim to fill some of that knowledge gap. By combining interviews and focus groups with new methodologies for analyzing available data, the research team hope to build an evidential base for EU migrants’ experiences of and attitudes toward Britain’s employment and social security systems.

Cambridge U reports that the project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, is led by Professor Catherine Barnard and Dr. Amy Ludlow from Cambridge’s Faculty of Law, and was launched on 26 February with a roundtable discussion involving Labor former Home Secretary Charles Clarke and current Conservative MP Heidi Allen among others.

Professor Barnard said: “We hope to shed new light on the big question of how we adequately regulate migration within a socio-economically diverse EU and a post-financial crisis context. This question is central to Brexit and to the outcome of the U.K.’s referendum on EU membership.”

Initial work has already been carried out, and a study published last October in the journal [Industrial Law](#) shows that EU migrants are using U.K. employment tribunals at much lower rates than would be expected relative to population size.

The study, the only one of its kind, is based on analysis of three years of Employment Tribunal decisions alongside field interviews. It suggests that migrant workers from EU-8 nations use employment tribunals over 85 percent less than would be expected, given the size of the workforce they represent.

The researchers identified various factors affecting migrants’ willingness and ability to use tribunals, including: lack of knowledge of their rights, reluctance to engage with the judicial system and, for those in the United Kingdom for a short time, a desire to maximize their earnings that is prioritized over complaints about mistreatment.

Under current EU law, EU migrants have rights to equal treatment in their terms and conditions of employment offered to domestic workers.

However, this initial study suggests that when it comes to employment conditions these may be rights that “exist more “on paper” than in practice”, write the researchers.

“While we found good evidence to suggest that EU-8 workers were fairly treated by Employment Tribunal judges, navigating the system and accessing enough advice to understand the basic elements of the rights these workers are due is deeply problematic,” said Dr. Ludlow.

“In interviews, we were told that largescale cuts to local authorities have had a negative impact on resources such as Citizen Advice Bureaus. These are important sources of guidance for workers who cannot afford legal advice, including workers from the EU.”

Professor Barnard said that the introduction of Employment Tribunal fees has meant that many workers are now priced out of claiming their employment rights. “If the Government is concerned about migrant workers’ undercutting employment terms and conditions and labor standards for domestic workers, our research suggests that resource needs to be directed to enabling migrant workers to enforce their rights, and to properly resourcing enforcement organizations such as the Gangmasters’ Licensing Authority.”

Unlike some other EU Member States, the United Kingdom did not impose restrictions on the admission of workers coming from the so-called EU-8 countries (such as Poland and the Czech Republic), apart from the requirement to register under the Workers’ Registration Scheme.

Over a million EU-8 workers, taking advantage of their free



movement rights under Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), have arrived in the United Kingdom since 2004. They enjoy rights to equal treatment in any social and tax advantages offered to domestic workers – including the payment of child benefit and ‘in-work benefits’ such as tax credits.

Barnard and Ludlow plan to use the research design from their employment enforcement study and apply it to social security tribunals, to help give some sense of the number of EU migrants who claim benefits and the nature of the cases in which they are involved. They will also interview EU migrants and those that work closely with them, to explore migrants’ hopes, expectations and experiences.

Early interviews have highlighted the importance of online grass roots communities such as Facebook groups for migrant workers seeking advice, and that stopping child benefit for EU migrants may result in fewer family units making the transition to the United Kingdom, and an increase in younger, unattached men working in the United Kingdom, who are likely to integrate less permanently within their host community.

While some interviewees are preparing to leave Britain, citing a better quality of life in their home nation (“I’m not interested in staying in the United Kingdom just because it’s possible”), the researchers also found migrant success stories.

One interviewee spoke of her determination to work in nursing: “I didn’t come to the United Kingdom just to work in any kind of job. Either I’m working my way towards nursing or, if that’s

not possible, I’m going back.” After struggling through bar work and learning medical English on her days off, the woman is now a nurse in a local hospital.

“Many of the EU migrants we’ve talked to so far don’t understand our complex social security system; their only interest is in finding work,” said Dr. Ludlow.

As well as one-to-one interviews and focus groups, the researchers will be making a documentary and providing migrant workers with disposable cameras. “It’s another way of trying to capture the migrant experience that offers an alternative insight to words on paper,” said Professor Barnard.

The project is a two-way process, she says, with minute-long podcasts summarizing relevant aspects of the law, which will be available on EU Migrant Worker Project later this month.

“What we can offer the migrant community in return is quite detailed knowledge of the law and their rights and how to enforce those rights, both to claim employment rights but also social security benefits.”

Added Dr. Ludlow: “Accusations that the United Kingdom has become a ‘honeypot nation’ has become a key issue in the debate about the U.K.’s membership of the EU.

“By gathering empirical evidence about EU migrants’ experiences of navigating the labor market and social security system in the United Kingdom, we hope to increase our understanding of EU and domestic law as it works in practice and to inform public opinion in anticipation of the referendum on 23 June and beyond.”

EU, Turkey strike deal on Syrian refugees

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160318-eu-turkey-strike-deal-on-syrian-refugees>

Mar 18 – The EU and Turkey have reached an agreement which stipulates that as of Sunday, all refugees and migrants arriving in Europe will be turned back and sent across the Aegean Sea to Turkey.

The European council president Donald Tusk and Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu reached the agreement during talks earlier today (Friday). “The Turkey agreement has been approved,” Finland’s prime minister, Juha Sipilä, said on Twitter.

CNN reports that the agreement means that all refugees and migrants arriving in Greece from Sunday will be returned to Turkey.

The deal was reached without even though the EU refused to accept Turkey’s main condition: that talks over Turkey’s EU membership would be resumed in five areas.





The EU did agree, however, to language which stated that in return for taking back refugees, Turkey can expect “re-energized” talks on its EU membership, with the promise of negotiations on one policy area to be opened before July. The EU has also agreed to speed up the disbursement of €3 billion intended to help Syrian refugees in Turkey, with new projects to be agreed this week.

In the face of concerns expressed by human rights organizations, Turkey has pledged that all returned refugees will be treated in line with international law, including firm guarantees that they will not be forced to return to the countries from which they have fled.

The agreement also contains a controversial clause called the one-for-one formula: for every Syrian refugee the EU sends back across the Aegean to Turkey, a Syrian in Turkey will be given a new home in Europe.

The number of Syrians who can be resettled in Europe from Turkey has been capped at 72,000, short of the 108,000 a year recommended by international aid agencies.

Why Norwegian parents are sending their kids to live in fake refugee camps?

Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/03/15/why-norwegian-parents-are-forcing-their-kids-to-live-in-fake-refugee-camps/>



Norwegian teens take part in a role-playing exercise as refugees this month at an old military camp in Trandum. (Fredrik Varfjell/AFP/Getty Images)

Mar 15 – Norway has faced harsh [criticism](#) amid the recent influx of refugees into Europe. Sweden and Germany, for instance, have complained about the Scandinavian country's low acceptance rates. Norway also made headlines when it decided that refugees who had taken the Arctic route to cross into the country would be sent back to Russia.

Its tough stances initially surprised many, particularly because Norway historically has been a role model and main destination for

asylum seekers from countries ravaged by war or poverty.

But there's one group of Norwegians who might have been especially surprised — the tens of thousands who have experienced life as a refugee themselves in recent years, or at least pretended to for a day.

Every year, thousands of parents ask their children to live in fake refugee camps to get a feeling for the suffering millions of people experience. "The camp is supposed to give the teens a small insight and a

feeling of how it is to be a refugee," said Kenneth Johansen, director of the organization Refugee Norway, which manages the project.

The organization aims to create an authentic atmosphere: Sirens can be heard in and around the camp. The teenagers are given only a minimum amount of food and must sleep in crowded residences on their imaginative journey from Sudan to Norway. In the middle of the night, an "attack" on the camp forces the participants to change locations amid temperatures around freezing, according to a recent description of life in the camp by Agence France-Presse.



"The outcome we hope for is to give the teens more perspective on the world and to show them how lucky they are to live in a peaceful



country like Norway," Johansen said.

The experience is also supposed to show that it is not only extreme temperatures and exhaustion refugees are fighting but also bureaucracy and legal hurdles, even after they



arrive in Europe. In January, Norwegians mourned the death of a refugee who had been stuck in asylum limbo for more than 25 years. The case illustrated the complicated world of asylum that is part of the camp experience.

"The teens get a feeling of how bureaucracies often work against them," Johansen said. He and his co-workers hope that by operating the camp they can make younger

Norwegians more empathetic. "Many of the reactions we have gotten focus around how lucky [the participants] feel to live their privileged life in Norway."

Originally developed in Denmark in 1987, the idea of such camps quickly spread. In Norway, for instance, there are two similar projects. The organization **Refugee Norway** set up its first camp 12 years ago. **So far, 80,000 Norwegian teenagers have spent 24 hours in the camp, an average of 5,000 people per year.**

So why are Norwegians so enthusiastic about sending their children to such camps?

Many atheist Europeans go through a "civil confirmation" in their teenage years that gives them the opportunity to participate in workshops aimed at making them ready for adult life. In Norway, participation in the refugee camp is mandatory for anyone who wants a **civil confirmation**, which is seen as a step toward adulthood. However, it is not only atheist teenagers who participate. "We also have youngsters from Christian Confirmation and [Christian] schools in Norway on the camp," Johansen said.

The organization stresses that it does not use the camp to advocate for refugees or to make political statements. "We don't discuss political questions or aspects with the teens," Johansen said.

However, in some cases, the camp might have opened some minds. "We get feedback from the teens, and some of them say that the participation in the camp changed their opinion on some of the aspects around refugees," he said.

At times, the adventure can be quite realistic: The 24-hour experience starts near a real detention center for refugees facing deportation.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: When you are rich country you do things like this! Remote Norway did not get the message that the multiculturalism model dearly failed. Let's hope that they at least learned the difference between illegal immigrants and refugees that European adults still confuse!

► Do you know about "Civil Confirmation" in Norway? If not:

<http://mylittlenorway.com/2011/05/the-norwegian-confirmation/>





Migrants Attack 60 Minutes Crew in Sweden

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42jpuXJPk0w>

Majority of Norwegians 'do not believe in God' for first time in country's history

Source: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/norwegians-believe-in-god-majority-do-not-for-first-time-ever-a6943706.html>



Mar 21 – **The number of Norwegians who say they do not believe in God has reached an all-time record and eclipsed those who do believe for the first time ever, according to reports.**

An annual survey answered by 4,000 Norwegians revealed that those replying "no" or "don't know" to the question "Do you believe in God?" now comfortably outweighed those who said "yes".

According to The Local, 39 per cent said "no" when asked whether they believed, compared to 37 per cent who said "yes", while the remaining 23 per cent said they did not know. When the question was first asked in 1985, a full 50 per cent said they believed in God while only one-fifth said they did not.

And Jan-Paul Brekke of Ipsos Norway, who led the survey, said that since they started asking 30 years ago "the percentage of those who said they aren't sure has been about the same".

The figures mark a clear change from just two years ago, when the number of believers versus non-believers was still equal.

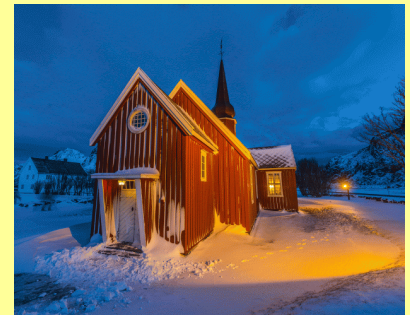
In the country's capital, Oslo, only 29 per cent said they were believers, while the sparsely-populated county of Vest-Agder in the north-west had the most believers at 44 per cent.

Mr Brekke noted that not all religious groups were strongly represented in the country-wide assessment, and that "God" was not defined in the question.

"It could be the Christian god, an independent god or one from other faiths," he said.

"There are quite a few immigrants included, but the majority of them come from Western religious traditions. We have only a few Muslims in our material."

Only [two in five British people now identify as Christian](#), meanwhile, according to a two-year inquiry which recommended that state ceremonies and the House of Lords needed to be more representative of the country. The proportion of UK citizens who do not follow a religion has risen from just under a third in 1983, to almost half in 2014, the report stated in December last year.



Why Putin Wants Syria

By Jiri Valenta and Leni Friedman Valenta

Middle East Quarterly

Spring 2016

Source: <http://www.meforum.org/5876/why-putin-wants-syria>

Russia's military intervention in Syria that began on September 30, 2015, is its first major intrusion into the Levant since June 1772 when "Russian forces bombarded, stormed, and captured Beirut, a fortress on the coast of Ottoman Syria." Then as now, the Russians backed a ruthless local client; then as now, they found themselves in "a boiling cauldron of factional-ethnic strife, which they tried to simplify with cannonades and gunpowder."



But why? Why did President Vladimir Putin intervene in a faraway country, hundreds of miles away from Russia proper while in the midst of his temporarily frozen proxy war with Ukraine?

► Read the rest of this article at source's URL.

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How the Rio Olympics Could Cement a Brazilian Coup

Source: <http://www.thenation.com/article/how-the-rio-olympics-could-cement-a-brazilian-coup/>



Brazil's then-President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (from left); Carlos Arthur Nuzman, now a 2016 Olympic Games organizer; and Brazilian soccer great Pelé in 2009 celebrated Rio de Janeiro's winning bid to host the 2016 Summer Games. (AP Photo / Charles Dharapak, Pool)

Mar 21 – **There is a fevered media narrative about Brazil currently swamping the airwaves: a narrative with two stories existing in the same space, yet being told as parallel dramas.** **One** is about the state-oil corruption fracas, known as the [Petrobras/Operation Car Wash Scandal](#). This investigation, alongside an inquiry into illegal budget manipulation, threatens to bring down President Dilma Rousseff and the Workers' Party (PT) government that has ruled South America's largest nation for the last 12 years. Even though there is evidence of hundreds of millions in bribes, touching every corner of the

political establishment, the media and investigative focus has been lasered in on the PT.

The other narrative involves hand-wringing over how in the world Rio de Janeiro is going to host the Olympics, given this level of turmoil, not to mention how the city will possibly handle the unbuilt Olympic construction projects, fetid water, and fears over the Zika virus. Yet the story we may be missing could be how these narratives might connect to build support for what Rio-based journalist Glenn Greenwald has called "[a judicial](#)



[coup](#)—organized by a thoroughly corrupt ruling class—that would depose the Workers’ Party and install a new, right-wing government into power. The real story could be about how the investigation has focused intensely on the car-wash/bribery scandals and not the Olympics, even though both are linked to the same venal construction monopolies. This could be because any investigation into Olympic corruption would be centered upon a different political party, now waiting in the wings to take power. That party would be the centrist Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) of Rio’s Mayor Eduardo Paes and Governor Luiz Fernando Pezão. They run Rio. As Theresa Williamson, director of the NGO Catalytic Communities, said to me, “The Olympics has been organized by a local/state coalition that barely includes the PT.”

To understand why this is happening now, why the right wing feels so confident, and how the Workers’ Party opened the door to its enemies, start with the eight-year presidency of a once-penniless youth and factory worker, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. In 2011, Lula left office after two terms, in the words of President Obama, as [“the most popular politician on earth.”](#) His approval ratings were driven by a Brazilian economy that was experiencing 10 percent annual growth, due to massive investment of international capital in the Brazilian stock market, Lula’s seizing of peasant and native lands for development, and the expansion of oil drilling. This neoliberal model carried by a left-wing folk hero inspired economists to call Lula “the IMF’s favorite president.” The *Financial Times* was so besotted with him that it suggested he be named to head up the World Bank. This was difficult for many of his supporters to swallow, particularly the thousands who were expelled from the Workers’ Party for agitating against this agenda. Yet Lula maintained a powerful base of support by investing the nation’s stock-market windfalls into antipoverty programs and increases in the minimum wage, which made real dents in Brazil’s staggering levels of destitution and economic inequality. Lula also leveraged his status to pass laws empowering the judiciary to root out endemic and long-standing corruption in Brazil’s political and

ruling class—laws that are used today against the Workers’ Party.

The cherry on the sundae of Lula’s Brazilian Miracle was the securing of both the World Cup and the Olympics, to be hosted back to back in 2014 and 2016. The Olympics in particular was treated like a brass ring finally reached for a country that had long felt disrespected in the international arena. Upon landing the games, Lula said, “Today I have felt prouder of being a Brazilian than on any other day. Today is the day that Brazil gained its international citizenship. Today is the day that we have overcome the last vestiges of prejudice against us. I think this is the day to celebrate because Brazil has left behind the level of second-class countries and entered the ranks of first-class countries. Today we earned respect. The world has finally recognized that this is Brazil’s time.”

Fast-forward to today, and these words have the air of the tragic. The World Cup was met with widespread protests, rooted in people seeing the rapid construction of unneeded stadiums while basic needs like healthcare and education were ignored, all while the economy stagnated. These demonstrations ran the gamut politically, depending on the region: Some were right wing, with open calls for military coups; others had left with socialists and expelled Workers’ Party members leading the charge. Overwhelmingly, their primary character was young and fed up. Yet today, with oil prices at an international low and Brazil’s economy in free-fall, shrinking at 4 percent already this year, the right-wing political forces and Big Capital are seeing this as the time to strike, seizing Lula in his own home and frog-marching him down to police headquarters for questioning. The Brazilian stock market actually rose upon news of his detention; his status as the IMF’s favorite leader is clearly something in the past.

São Paulo-based socialist activist Dylan Stillwood summed it up:

Dilma has spent her entire second term desperately trying to appease every faction of the ruling class and the institutional right. This effort at an alliance has failed.

The PT government has long consisted of a pact where investors profited mightily and the streets were quiet thanks to



progressive reforms and the general sense that the left was in power, and this model was a smashing success for a decade. Domestically, their biggest partners in crime were state-centered heavy industry, especially the four construction giants—Odebrecht, OAS, Camargo Corrêa, and Andrade Gutierrez—and privatized or semi-privatized titans like Petrobras. They showed off their babies: big projects like the Belo Monte Dam and the redirection of São Francisco River, and the crowning glory on the world stage was supposed to be the World Cup and the Olympics. All this lies in ruins and the pact is over. The system is in crisis, economically and politically, and the PT no longer serves a purpose for capital, and scapegoating them is a convenient rallying cry for a new right-wing movement.

The Workers' Party is not drawing millions of defenders into the streets, partly because there is mass dissatisfaction with the status quo, and partly because the World Cup and the Olympics have exacerbated the hard times and symbolized a government woefully out of touch. Yet most critical to the Workers' Party's absence of engaged mass support has been the inability of Rousseff to follow through on her campaign promises to expand social spending and civil liberties. Instead, as Sean Purdy, a professor at the University of São Paulo, wrote in *Jacobin*, Rousseff has backtracked, instead pushing through "massive cuts to health care, education, social welfare, and pension rights have been coupled with a government-sponsored anti-terrorist bill which may criminalize dissent and social movements."

The result is that now 68 percent of the country wants Rousseff to be impeached or to resign. But what's waiting in the wings is very dark, very frightening, and getting organized. Yes, the very anticorruption laws signed by Lula are being used against the PT, and may end with Lula's imprisonment, and, yes, the man is miles from being the saint of his dwindling supporters' dreams. Yet this is just one prong of attack. The investigation has been conjoined with a coordinated media offensive by the country's largest outlet, the right-wing idea engine Globo, and mass demonstrations egged on by this Fox News-on-steroids media giant.

These protests staged last weekend brought several million people into the street. NBC's Chuck Todd tweeted a photo of this under the caption, "The People Vs. The President." But what people? The demonstrations have had a decidedly right-wing, militaristic character. Yes, many in the streets are just fed up with corruption in politics. But many more are openly calling for a military coup. In a country where that was a reality just a few short decades ago, it is a threat with teeth.

The right is attempting to take advantage of this climate to create a kind of state with more in common economically with Pinochet's neoliberal fever dream in Chile than the current welfare state, however flawed. This is seen in one of the organizations at the heart of the protests, the Free Brazil Movement. As Rio-based freelance journalist Catherine Osborn reported, this group was "founded by members and alums of another group that's been spreading fast in this country: Estudantes Pela Liberdade, 'Students for Liberty.'" Students for Liberty is for "cutting government spending, privatizing state companies, and reducing regulation." It has received funding from US right-wing billionaire Charles Koch. This Koch vibe on the protests has been exemplified in [one viral photo](#) of two demonstrators—a white woman and man marching with their purebred dog, while their nanny—black—pushed their baby behind them. The role of the Olympics in the politics of impeachment is critical. First and foremost, there are enough lurid tales of kickbacks, bribery, and forced displacement swirling around these Olympic Games to keep the Brazilian judiciary busy for the next decade. Construction magnate Marcelo Odebrecht, whose family's eponymous company helped build many of the World Cup and Olympic facilities, [was sentenced to 19 years in prison](#). Yet this conviction was for his role in the Petrobras scandal, and the case did not touch the Olympics side of Odebrecht's criminality and corruption.

Williamson of Catalytic Communities told me, "The Olympics fit like a glove in Rio because of the propensity for corruption combined with the centrality of real estate and construction interests—those most set to gain from the Games. We all knew



from early on that Rio would ‘pull off’ the Games, that they would just leave works to the last hour so they could get away with hyping up costs. The fact Odebrecht has been implicated in the corruption at the national level and is also building the Olympic Park is reflective of just how extensive their tentacles are, how widespread the corruption is, that it is all linked.”

Could anyone really believe that Odebrecht acted in a corrupt manner with regards to oil but was squeaky clean on the Olympics? The only difference between Petrobras and the Olympics is that the Petrobras bribery and money laundering took place primarily under the eye of the PT, while the Olympic bids were organized by the centrist PMDB. Or as Williamson said, “The Olympics has been organized by a local/state coalition that barely includes the PT.”

Paes and Pezão of the PMDB oversaw a process where Olympic facilities were bid upon by “consortiums” of real estate firms, like the Rio Mais (More Rio) syndicate, which included Odebrecht as well as the companies Andrade Gutierrez and Carvalho Hosken. Paes and Pezão ignored the Rio-based left-wing organizations and NGOs agitating against these kinds of consortiums. They demonstrated, argued, and even designed alternative Olympic plans to combat these syndicates, which they maintained were both artificially inflating costs because of the absence of competitive bidding and colluding in transparent efforts to displace people in an effort to grab more of Rio’s valuable real estate. As Chris Gaffney, for years a Rio-based activist/journalist, said to me, “The Construction Industrial Complex of Brazil is similar to the military Industrial complex of the USA. Instead of Halliburton and the Carlyle Group, Brazil has Odebrecht and all the rest.” The police chief of Curitiba, Igor Romário de Paula, told Reuters Brazil in November that the car-wash investigations “would reach Olympics

contracts,” but there has been zero evidence of anyone in the judiciary making that obvious leap.

Numerous sources have also said to me there is widespread belief that if Rousseff is impeached and deposed, especially if it takes place before the summer, then any investigations—no matter how shallow—into Olympics contracts would magically evaporate. And guess who would be installed in power if the Workers’ Party takes the fall for Petrobras and budget manipulation? Cue dramatic music: It would be the PMDB, and perhaps Eduardo Paes himself. The PMDB is the biggest party in Brazil and has been part of the coalition of every government after the dictatorship, whether left wing or right. Lula campaigned for Pezão and Paes. Rousseff’s vice president, Michel Temer, is a PMDB member. As Stillwood said to me, “This is the most dramatic example of PT’s cynical alliances coming back to bite them hard in the ass.”

And here is how the Olympics could lead to a judicial coup in Brazil. If Rousseff’s government falls and the Games go smoothly, it could contribute to the utterly undeserved image that Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes is trying to cultivate as a competent, pro-business manager who makes the trains run on time. This narrative ignores how the Olympics have been organized on the backs of the poor. It ignores the brutal debt, displacement, and militarization that have surrounded the Games. These facts will be forgotten to create a counter-narrative of a country cleansing itself through the successful staging of Olympics glory. This is a narrative that will thrill audiences, stoke Brazilian nationalism, please international investors, and make the Koch brothers light their cigars. Ignored will be the ways that the lighting of the Olympic torch could also facilitate the lighting aflame of Brazil’s fragile democracy.



The Islamic State Seeks Doomsday Weapons

Source: <http://www.vocativ.com/news/290384/the-islamic-state-seeks-doomsday-weapons/>



Feb 26 – The signs of an alarming menace first appeared last summer: a yellow cloud lingering in the air after a mortar bombardment by forces of the Islamic State. Scores of Kurdish fighters evacuated to medical facilities struggling to breathe, with eye and lung damage and telltale blistering on their skin. Especially for the Kurds of Iraq the symptoms recalled a nightmare passed down the generations: Saddam Hussein's 1988 extermination by mustard gas and nerve agent of an estimated 5,000 men, women and children in the village of Halabja.

In recent weeks top U.S. intelligence officials have confirmed that ISIS has crossed another red line, becoming the first terrorist group in over two decades to employ chemical weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Since last summer the extremist group has targeted Kurdish fighters with mustard and chlorine gas roughly a dozen times. Testing of mortar fragments after some of those attacks revealed the presence of an unusual mustard agent, suggesting that ISIS has developed the capability to produce and employ its own chemical weapons. The extremists are using Kurdish fighters as "lab rats for WMD" in the words of a doctor in northern Iraq quoted by Fox News.

"We found that the mustard agent used by ISIS is somewhat weaker than the weapons grade variant produced by nation-states, which

indicates they probably have some people with chemistry training working in a lab somewhere producing their own mustard gas," a knowledgeable U.S. military source told *Vocativ* on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter. "So far the ISIS gas attacks have not been particularly effective in causing mass casualties, but psychologically they certainly have an impact we can't ignore."

Given its "end of days" ideology, control of vast territory, recruitment of over 30,000 foreign fighters, and status as the best-funded terrorist group in history, ISIS is uniquely positioned to realize Osama bin Laden's dream of employing weapons of mass destruction in the cause of Islamic extremism. The scenarios that counterterrorism and nonproliferation experts are paid to imagine are certainly alarming, and even plausible:

What if ISIS were able to smuggle its chemical weapons into crowded urban centers in Europe, and potentially launch multiple attacks on par with those that paralyzed Tokyo in 1995? What if some of the senior Baathist officials known to have joined ISIS ranks include scientists and biologists that previously worked on Saddam Hussein's biological weapons program, and have expertise in weaponizing anthrax? What if the



suicide bomber that blew himself up outside a crowded soccer stadium in Paris holding 80,000 fans and the president of France had gotten inside and triggered a “dirty” radiological bomb? What if the kind of complex assault that ISIS has successfully used against well-guarded prisons were launched against nuclear reactor facilities in Europe, in hopes of causing a Chernobyl-like disaster? What if?

The potential for ISIS to wield chemical, biological and even radiological weapons as instruments of mass terror has many counterterrorism experts worried. In recent Senate testimony, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper noted that ISIS’s chemical weapons attacks were the first use by a terrorist group of chemical warfare agents since the Japanese terrorist group Aum Shinrikyo used sarin gas in a 1995 attack on the Tokyo subway, killing 12 people, injuring nearly a thousand, and causing mass panic in a major capital city.

Last week Belgian officials confirmed that ISIS terrorists involved in the attack on Paris in November that killed 130 people had conducted extensive video surveillance of a high-ranking Belgian nuclear official, possibly as part of a plot to secure radioactive material for use in a “dirty bomb,” or even to sabotage a Belgian nuclear reactor facility. The International Atomic Energy Agency also recently confirmed that since November, radioactive material has disappeared from Basra Province in southern Iraq. Though the territory ISIS controls is in north and western Iraq, the possibility of radiological material reaching the murky black markets in the war-torn country has proliferation experts concerned.

“ISIS is essentially al-Qaeda on steroids, and the two groups share an apocalyptic vision of a ‘clash of civilization’ between Islam and the West leading towards Armageddon, and in that struggle the use of any weapon, to include weapons of mass destruction, is acceptable,” said Bruce Hoffman, a counterterrorism expert and director of the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown University. Osama bin Laden famously proclaimed that acquiring weapons of mass destruction was a religious duty for Muslims, a statement that ISIS leader and bin

Laden admirer Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has apparently taken to heart.

“One of the great dangers of allowing ISIS to control territory and sanctuary for so long is that it presents an opportunity for the group to conduct research and development of WMD, because for terrorists these are weapons of psychological warfare *par excellence*,” said Hoffman, the author of seminal book “Inside Terrorism.” **He noted that a single Army biological warfare expert was able to paralyze Washington D.C. with a 2001 anthrax attack that took authorities four months and over \$40 million to clean-up.**

“These weapons heighten fear and undermine public confidence in a government’s ability to protect them or quickly resolve a terrorist incident. So terrorists see WMD as a game changer that can suck the will to fight out of their enemies.”

ISIS has embraced so many elements of Osama bin Laden’s worldview and strategy that Hoffman’s says the group has essentially “stolen al-Qaeda’s lunch.” Certainly acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction was always central to bin Laden’s vision of a jihad that would smash the global order, end Western hegemony and lead to the creation of an Islamic caliphate.

Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan in the 1990s had basic training in chemical, biological and radiological weapons for hundreds of extremists, and current al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri oversaw not one, but two WMD development programs. The group also sought out Pakistani nuclear scientists and biologists with extremist sympathies in its search for the ultimate doomsday weapons.

Nor was al-Qaeda’s WMD quest limited to research and theory. The group’s 1993 attack on New York’s World Trade Center involved a car bomb and cyanide canisters that were supposed to asphyxiate thousands with a poison gas cloud. Would-be 9/11 hijacker Zacarias Moussaoui was captured with crop duster manuals and biology textbooks in his possession, leading investigators to suspect he was contemplating a follow-on attack with biological agents. American al-Qaeda operative Jose Padilla was arrested while plotting to explode a “dirty”



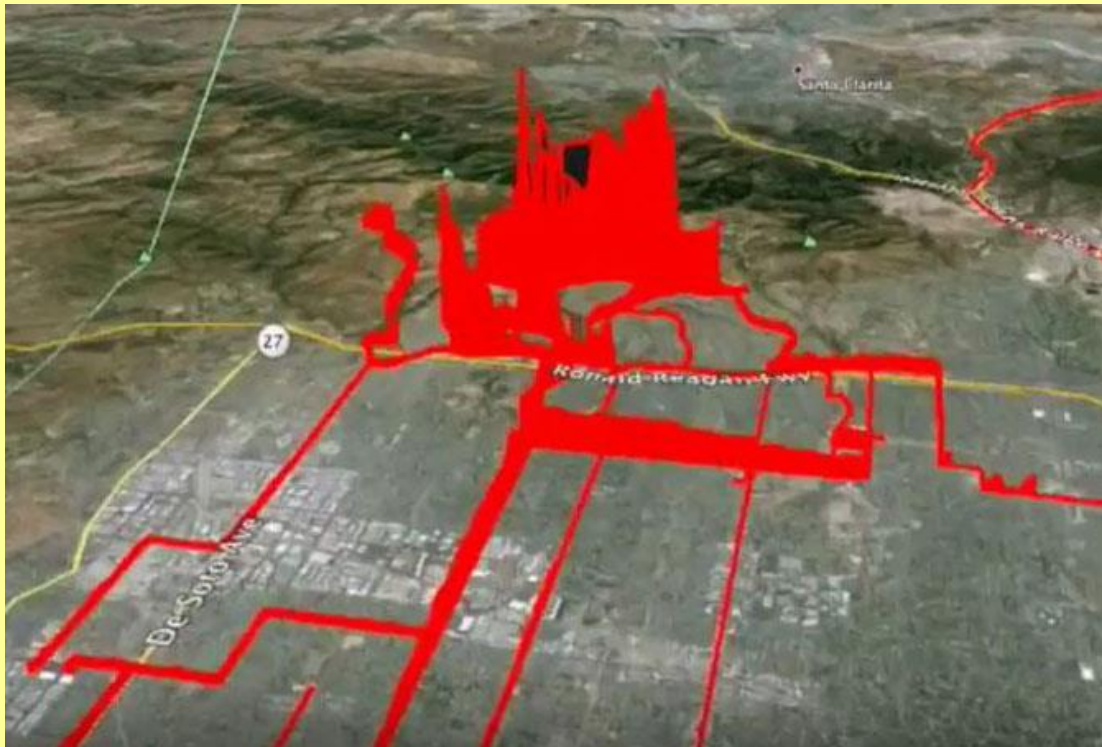
radiological bomb inside the United States. With the uber-terrorists of ISIS and the regime of Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad having both used chemical weapons in a conflict that has already killed more than 200,000 people, experts worry that a red line against the use of WMD has been crossed that will be difficult to reestablish.

“The vast majority of countries have long supported ridding the world of chemical weapons, and now that they are being used in

the conflict in Syria and Iraq an important norm has been breached,” Malik Ellahi, spokesman for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague, Netherlands, told Vocativ. “When one of those actors using these terrible weapons is a terrorist group not bound by treaty, contractual obligations or any rules whatsoever, and which has absolutely no compunction about using these weapons, that is a matter of the greatest concern.”

California gas well blowout caused U.S. largest methane release,

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160226-calif-gas-well-blowout-caused-u-s-largest-methane-release-study-finds>



Feb 26 – The Aliso Canyon natural gas well blowout released more than 100,000 tons of the powerful greenhouse gas methane before the well was finally plugged 11 February, according to the first study of the event, to be published today (26 February) in the journal *Science*. The results confirm that it was the largest methane leak in U.S. history.

The University of California, Irvine joined the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, UC Davis and others to show that during the peak of the Aliso Canyon

disaster, enough methane poured into the air every day to fill a balloon the size of the Rose Bowl.

“The methane releases were extraordinarily high, the highest we’ve seen,” said UCI atmospheric chemist Donald Blake, who has measured air pollutants across the globe for over thirty years. A co-author of the study, he also collected surface air samples near homes in the adjacent Porter Ranch residential area.



The analysis of these samples found above-normal levels of several potentially dangerous compounds present in natural gas, including benzene, toluene and xylenes. “Some of the volatile organic compounds have been linked to health effects if exposure is long-term,” Blake said.

The disaster will substantially affect California’s ability to meet greenhouse gas emission targets for the year, the researchers noted. “Our results show how failures of natural gas infrastructure can significantly impact greenhouse gas control efforts,” said NOAA’s Tom Ryerson, a lead scientist on the study.

the North Sea. They assembled a group of researchers from UCI, the California Energy Commission, and the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder, many of whom had previously collaborated on regional air quality projects.

The team’s measurements confirmed that high concentrations of methane and ethane were surging from the Aliso Canyon well into the densely populated San Fernando Valley. The analysis found that at its peak, the blowout doubled the rate of methane emissions from the entire Los Angeles Basin and temporarily

created the largest known human-caused point source of methane in the U.S., twice the size of the next-largest source, an Alabama coal mine.

According to the study, total emissions during the 112-day event were equal to one-quarter of the annual methane pollution from all other sources in the Los Angeles Basin combined.

The disaster’s impact on climate will be equivalent to the effect of annual greenhouse gas emissions from over half a million cars, it says.

Eventually, more than 11,000 nearby residents were evacuated, and Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency.

In addition to providing real-time air quality data from the leak site to state regulators, the measurements will let

researchers check the accuracy of greenhouse gas measurements by remote sensing systems, such as satellites.

The mega-leak has drawn attention to the broader problem of unintended emissions from natural gas production, processing, pipelines and storage infrastructure across the country. The study highlights the value of rapid-response airborne sampling for independent, time-critical, accurate and detailed information about major chemical releases, the authors said.

Gauging leak rates, plume locations and plume composition could also help officials assess public health risks, the effectiveness of leak control, and climate and air quality impacts.



Fellow lead scientist Stephen Conley of Scientific Aviation and UC Davis said his first readings, in early November, were so high that he rechecked his gear. “It became obvious that there wasn’t anything wrong with the instruments,” he said. “This was just a huge event.”

At the time, Conley and his specially equipped plane were working with UC Davis on a California Energy Commission project searching for pipeline gas leaks. The state agency asked him to overfly the area around the breached Southern California Gas Co. well. UCI [reports](#) that Conley teamed with Ryerson, who had pioneered techniques for assessing oil spills with airborne chemical sampling during the 2010 Deepwater Horizon catastrophe and the 2012 Elgin rig blowout in



“If we don’t measure these things quickly, we won’t have any idea what kind of response might be called for,” Conley said. “We’re happy that we could provide state officials with the scientific information they needed.”

UCI notes that the work was funded by the California Energy Commission, the Southern California Gas Co., the California Agricultural Experiment Station and NOAA.

— Read more in S. Coley et al., “Methane emissions from the 2015 Aliso Canyon blowout in Los Angeles, CA,” *Science* (26 Feb 2016)

And at: <http://agreenroad.blogspot.gr/2016/01/unprecedented-largest-ever-in-history.html>

Game of Drones: the unmanned revolution in CBRNe security

By Anna Paternosto

Source: <http://www.cbrneportal.com/game-of-drones-the-unmanned-revolution-in-cbrne-security/>

Feb 29 – Recent technological developments in the field of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) have demonstrated the outstanding potential of remotely operated capabilities in mitigating risks to human security in CBRNe environments. On one side unmanned capabilities in contaminated sites can perform a wide range of information gathering tasks without compromising human security. On the other side of the spectrum, the spread of



civilian UAVs on the market represents opportunities for potential illicit exploitation of these capabilities by criminal or terrorist groups. Public gatherings and critical infrastructure can be the target of CBRNe attacks conducted through the use of unmanned aircrafts. The wide availability and low cost of remote control devices make them easily obtainable by terrorist groups with illicit purposes. In this challenging security environment, the priority needs to be set on the development of mitigation strategies that include detection and interception systems, but also enhanced legislation and regulations to deter illegal UAVs activities.

In terms of CBRNe defense missions, unmanned systems can perform a wide variety of tasks that range from reconnaissance and surveillance to detection and decontamination. CBRNe sensors installed on a UAV platform can perform their functions independent of ground conditions, thus reducing risks of human loss and permanent health damages to first responders and soldiers. Instead of deploying personnel in non-secure and contaminated environments, UAVs can perform extensive information gathering tasks in areas that are too hazardous for normal workforce activities. Unmanned aerial vehicles can detect radiations, chemical and biological hazards, as well as explosives while saving human labor and increasing force protection. By deploying unmanned systems in non-secure environments, CBRNe first responders can perform more oriented and specialized tasks where the necessity of human labor is needed.

In the aftermath of the Fukushima Daichii accident occurred in 2011, the deployment of unmanned vehicles allowed wide-area measurements in high-contaminated areas without exposing human workers to nuclear radiation. In 2015 Japanese scientists developed a drone able to enter the Fukushima reactor buildings through a laser technology. Not only can this drone avoid obstacles, but it can also to operate in areas without GPS signal and replace its own batteries, without human intervention. UAVs have been sent into Fukushima’s reactors previously, but the high level of



radiations have put the drones out of action in few hours. In addition to monitoring functions in highly-contaminated areas, drones have also been deployed in remote areas to prevent the outbreak of diseases and detect new infectious agents. In Malaysia UAVs have been used to monitor macaque movements and prevent malaria cases. Currently a group of researchers is working on a project that involves a drone programmed to collect and analyze mosquitoes with the aim of detecting potential diseases before they become an epidemic.

Despite the CBRNe capabilities that unmanned vehicles can perform, the flip side is all but

encouraging. The impact of drone technology rises concerns that UAVs could be illicitly exploited by terrorists posing emerging threats to public security. The expansion of civilian unmanned vehicles on the market and the attractiveness – in terms of price and manageability – of these systems have inspired a considerable amount of concern about the possible misuse of drones. Without the need of precision flying or advanced technologies, unmanned aerial systems can be transformed in delivery platforms for CBRNe materials. Most consumer drones will be employed for legitimate purposes, but the potential of their misapplication cannot be ignored.

► Read the rest of this article at source's URL.

Anna Paternostro is an analyst at IB Consultancy. She holds a Master's Degree in International and Diplomatic Studies from the University of Trieste (Italy). From 2013 to 2015 she covered the role of Deputy- Secretary of the Youth Atlantic Treaty Association of Gorizia and participated in numerous international seminars on transatlantic security and emerging security challenges. Before joining IB Consultancy, she conducted a traineeship at the Austrian Mission to NATO in Brussels.

NCT Comes to Singapore and Germany in 2017

By Ilja Bosen

Source: <http://www.cbrneportal.com/nct-comes-to-singapore-and-germany-in-2017/>

Mar 01 – **DSO National Laboratories from Singapore and IB Consultancy are proud to announce that the 2017 editions of SISPAT and NCT will be held in conjunction at the Marina Bay Sands in Singapore on 21-23 March 2017.** The 8th edition of SISPAT will again be the premier scientific forum in the field of CBRN. The 24th and 25th editions of the NCT CBRNe Asia and eXplosive Asia conferences will continue to be the main forum for CBRNe professionals in the Asian region. During the three-day event, the three conferences will have one shared exhibition showcasing the latest equipment from the global CBRN



industry.

NCT Europe will be held at the Bundeswehr CBRN School in Sonnhofen on 26-28 June 2017 in cooperation with the Bundeswehr CBRN Command.

Ilja M. Bosen, CEO of IB Consultancy is proud of the cooperation with DSO: "This is a great opportunity for the global CBRNe community to come together in Singapore. Singapore has been a great example of excellent preparation against CBRN incidents.

Having the NCT CBRNe Asia and eXplosive Asia conferences as the leading conference series on the practical side of CBRNe, hosted next to the famous SISPAT conference which focuses on the technical aspects of CBRN is a great opportunity for all stakeholders to meet, network and exchange views. We are very proud to work together with DSO in making these conferences a great success!"



Dr. Weng Keong, Programme Director (CTRN) at DSO National Laboratories adds that “We are looking forward to working with IB Consultancy on hosting the 8th edition of SISPAT and we are certain that SISPAT will again be the premier scientific forum in the field of CBRN in 2017!”

If you are interested in joining these great conferences, please visit www.nctsingapore.com where we will have more information available.

Ilja M. Bonsen is founder and Managing Director of IB Consultancy, an independent defense and security firm specializing in non-conventional threats.

Chemical terrorism now a reality, extremists getting real warfare agents - Lavrov

Source: <https://www.rt.com/news/334075-lavrov-chemical-weapons-isis/>

Mar 01 – **Chemical terrorism is now a reality, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov believes, as extremists from Islamic State and other terrorist groups now possess the technical capabilities to produce 'proper chemical war agents.'**

The threat of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of non-government groups is widely recognized, the Russian Foreign Minister said.

The issue emerged in light of evidence that militants from Islamic State (IS, previously ISIS/ISIL) and other terrorist groups not only repeatedly used “toxic industrial chemicals,” but also “proper chemical warfare agents,” Lavrov said. He added there is a growing threat of similar crimes being committed in Libya and Yemen.

There is intelligence about terrorist groups acquiring access to scientific and technical documentation for the production of chemical weapons, and seizing equipment needed for such production, according to Lavrov. This involves foreign specialists in order to master the synthesis of chemical warfare agents. Lavrov mentioned incidents in the town of Marea, 25 kilometers north of Aleppo in northern Syria in August-September 2015.

In October, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) released a report saying that mustard gas had been used during fighting between IS and other militant groups in Marea. The gas is known to cause severe delayed burns to the eyes, skin and lungs.

“It leaves no room for doubt that chemical terrorism is now turning from an abstract threat to a harsh reality, which can and should be stopped by intensifying serious work at an international level.”

Lavrov has suggested developing a separate convention to counter acts of chemical terrorism. According to the minister, the current norms of international law “don't solve the problem of forbidding the use of chemical weapons by non-governmental organizations.”

“To eliminate such problems by adding amendments to the Chemical Weapons Convention is a problem” as it includes “too complex, lengthy and bulky procedures.”

“A more realistic, reliable and promising means of tackling this problem is to develop a separate convention for battling the acts of chemical terrorism.”

These are the Pentagon's 'kinetic fireball incendiaries' aimed at destroying WMD bunkers

Source: <http://www.businessinsider.com/pentagons-kinetic-fireball-incendiaries-destroying-wmd-bunkers-2016-3>

The Pentagon has been developing a weapon system of highly flammable and intensely hot rocket balls to help destroy weapon of mass destruction (WMD) bunkers.



These "kinetic fireball incendiaries" are specially designed to rocket randomly throughout an underground bunker while expelling super-heated gases that rise over 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

These rocket balls are specifically designed for destroying potentially dangerous materials — such as chemical or biological weapons — without blowing them up, which would risk scattering the materials into the surrounding area, Wired notes.

"There are plenty of bombs which could destroy a lab, and bunker-busting weapons can tackle hardened underground facilities. But blowing up weapons of mass destruction is not a good idea. Using high explosives is likely to scatter them over a wide area, which is exactly what you want to avoid," Wired writes.

Instead, the fireballs function alongside a **2,000 pound BLU-109B bunker bomb** (BLU is an acronym for Bomb Live Unit). Flight Global reports. **These bunker bombs are able to punch through six feet reinforced concrete.** After punching into a bunker, the bomb would then release its internal kinetic incendiaries.

Once inside a bunker or structure, the rocket balls get to work. Essentially, the balls are hollowed out spheres comprised of rubberized rocket fuel that have a hole on the outside. As *Technology* notes, this hole causes the balls, once ignited, to expel hot air in excess of **1,000 degrees Fahrenheit (=537.7°C).**

Additionally, the expulsion of air causes the incendiary balls to rocket wildly throughout a structure with enough force to break down doors. This allows the balls to randomly and fully reach the entirety of a bunker while incinerating everything inside.

Wired also notes that the use of such incendiary devices could allow the military to effectively clear out a building without damaging the structure's integrity, as well as effectively dealing with a nuclear facility without spreading nuclear material into the atmosphere or surrounding region.



Hizballah launches Chemicals & Dirty Bombs program at secret Syrian site

Source: <http://www.debka.com/article/25268/Hizballah-launches-Chemicals-Dirty-Bombs-program-at-secret-Syrian-site>

Mar 02 – **The southwestern town of Zabadani, 30 km west of Damascus, is a ghost town, depopulated by five years of Syrian war ravages, except for one sign of life – or rather death.** Since December, Hizballah has enclosed this once attractive tourist resort, strategically located on the Damascus-Beirut highway, into a heavily fortified ex territoria enclave whose high walls conceal the terrorist group's new program for the development of weapons of mass destruction. This is disclosed for the first time by debkafile's military and intelligence sources.

Most of the facilities for the research and development of chemical weapons and dirty bombs are sunk below the surface of the secret 2.5 sq. km site.

Syrian and Iranian engineers and technicians are developing the chemical weapons for Hizballah's arsenal, **and foreign experts** were hired from outside the Middle East to help build radioactive weapons. They are kept out of sight in on-site accommodation at Zabadani.





A telltale sign that the Shiite terrorist organization was actively pursuing a radioactive bomb program – and which prompted our investigation – was dropped in a speech given by Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah on Feb. 16.

He boasted that a pair of Hizballah rockets falling on the Israeli city of Haifa would cause a catastrophe equivalent to a “nuclear bomb” attack. He elaborated on this: “An Israeli expert had said that Haifa’s residents fear a deadly attack on the ammonia storage tanks which contain more than 15,000 tons of this gas. That would lead to the deaths of tens of thousands of Israelis and affect another 800,000” he declared.

“This would be exactly like a nuclear bomb and we can say that Lebanon today has a nuclear bomb, seeing as any rocket that might hit these tanks is capable of creating a nuclear bomb effect,” Nasrallah said.

When someone like the Hizballah terrorist chief drops four references to a nuclear bomb in as many sentences, ending with the boast that “Lebanon today has nuclear bomb,” it must be presumed that he is crowing over some sort of nuclear device in hand.

It may not be an actual atom bomb – which would call for multimillion dollar investment, expertise and time, “only” a “dirty bomb” (essentially a conventional bomb mixed with radioactive material). That too could cause massive damage to Haifa’s chemical industry, resulting in a high death toll, runaway panic and major disruption – the perfect weapon for terrorists.

Israeli officials decline to discuss Hizballah’s new WMD program, but it certainly raises hard questions for Moscow and the commanding Russian military presence in Syria. It is hard to believe that the Shiite terrorists can develop game-changing poison chemicals and dirty bombs in the heart of Syria, without Russian intelligence noticing what was going on. Does that mean that Vladimir Putin is amenable to his air force providing it with cover?

UCF Professor Receives Grant to Protect Against Chemical Weapons of Mass Destruction

Source: <http://spacecoastdaily.com/2016/03/ucf-professor-receives-grant-to-protect-against-chemical-weapons-of-mass-destruction/>

Mar 05 – It’s not every day an engineer gets to do his or her part to save the world, but at the University of Central Florida, Subith Vasu is doing just that.

The assistant mechanical and aerospace engineering professor is trying to figure out how long it takes the toxic chemicals from weapons of mass destruction to break down after they’ve been destroyed with bombs.

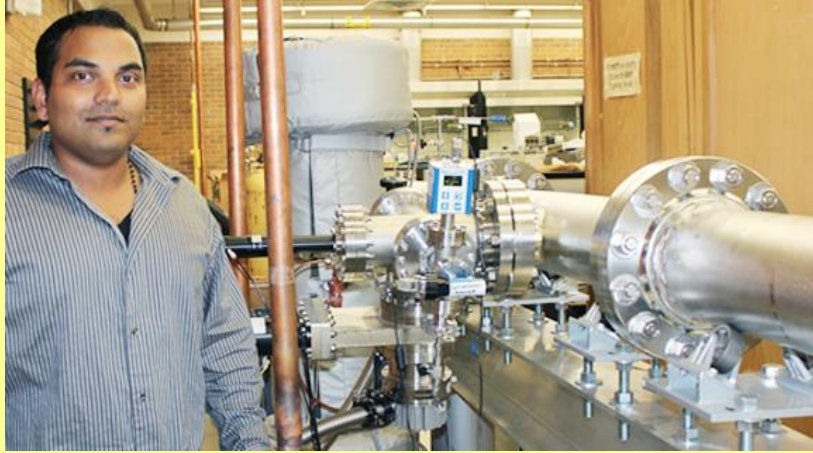
Quick disclaimer: He doesn’t have any toxic chemicals or bombs on campus. Vasu studies nontoxic materials that share similar chemical structures as some of their toxic cousins such as sarin, a type of nerve gas. These cousins are called simulants and are safe, he said.



In his lab, Vasu uses a shock tube to mimic the quick high pressure and temperatures a bomb would have on the simulant.

He places a sample of the chemical in one chamber and then sends in a shock wave. Using infrared laser-absorption spectroscopy he can track the decomposition of the original chemical so he can see how it happens and how long it takes for the chemical to break down to its base elements.

It's information the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency wants so it can create computer simulations.



The agency, which falls under the Department of Defense, was formed in 2005 and its mission is to “keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of terrorists and other enemies by locking down, monitoring, and destroying weapons and weapons-related materials.”

The agency recently recognized Vasu with a

2015 DTRA Young Investigator Award to start his research.

“It's good to be part of this important program,” Vasu said.

“My research at this moment in time is quite relevant given the terrorists groups out there and our need to keep our world, our families safe.”



The duration of the initial award is three years with an option for two additional years.

Vasu has earned several grants in the past year, including a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to investigate using supercritical CO₂, a fluid state of carbon dioxide, in power plants instead of steam.

He also earned a 2015 American Chemical Society's Doctoral New Investigator Award to study the chemical kinetics of gasoline mixtures used in car engines.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: That “disclaimer” at the beginning of this article really puzzled me.



ISIS chemical weapons expert captured and under interrogation in Erbil

Source: <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/10032016>

Mar 09 – Iraqi and US officials revealed that an Islamic State leader they captured in Iraq last month was the head of an Islamic State (ISIS) chemical weapons unit who is now being questioned about the group's use of chemical weapons.



Sleiman Daoud al-Afari was an employee of the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's Military Industrialization Authority where his specialty was the development of biological and chemical weapons.

In recent months, according to AP, he was working on building a similar branch for ISIS.

Last month he was captured by American Special Forces near Tal Afar west of Mosul. The American-led coalition has subsequently been launching airstrikes and special operations raids against targets relating to ISIS's chemical weapons program.

According to the New York Times, US defense officials have confirmed that Afari is held in Erbil and being questioned about ISIS plans to use mustard gas.

"The man has already told interrogators how IS loaded mustard gas into shells," BBC reported.

ISIS has used chemical weapons in both Iraq and Syria against Kurdish forces.

The Kurds were infamously gassed by Saddam Hussein in the town of Halabja in 1988 where 5,000 people were killed in one day.

"More than a symbolic attack seems to me to be beyond the grasp of ISIS," Dan Kaszeta, a former US Army chemical officer and Department of Homeland security expert, told AP. "Furthermore, the chemicals we are talking about are principally chlorine and sulfur mustard, both of which are actually quite poor weapons by modern standards."

EDITOR'S COMMENT: I will strongly disagree with my friend Dan Kaszeta regarding the side effects of a "symbolic attack". Europeans (the closest targets) are currently under extreme pressure following latest terrorist attacks and a "chemical attack" no matter how deadly would be, might be the drop that will the glass of fear. Chlorine and mustard might be "poor weapons" but they are strong enough to achieve IS purposes and propaganda.

1,500 people killed in 160 documented chemical attacks in Syria since 2011

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160314-1-500-people-killed-in-160-documented-chemical-attacks-in-syria-since-2011>

Mar 14 – The Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) earlier today (Monday) released a report detailing 161 chemical attacks in Syria since the conflict emerged in 2011.

"Since the conflict in Syria began, there have been numerous and horrific violations of humanitarian and human rights law, including the systematic use of chemical weapons," said a statement by SAMS announcing the report.



“The 161 documented chemical attacks have led to at least 1,491 deaths and 14,581 injuries from chemical exposure,” SAMS added.



Result of mustard gas test during World War I
// Source: commons.wikimedia.org

Some 133 other chemical attacks were reported in addition to the 161 documented in the reported, although SAMS said the claims “could not be fully substantiated.”

Investigators of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in December 2014 began to dismantle Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile in agreement with a UN Security Council resolution passed in 2013.

The *Guardian* reports that the EU special envoy Jacek Bylica, in November harshly criticized Damascus for not fully disclosing its supply of toxic arms, saying it was “impossible

to have confidence that its chemical weapons program has been irreversibly dismantled.”

At least sixty-nine chemical attacks were documented in 2015, making it the year with the highest frequency of attacks since the conflict started, according to the report.

“By the summer of 2015, the types of chemical agents being used and number of actors using chemical weapons increased, as non-state actors including ISIL were accused of using mustard gas and chlorine gas,” said SAMS, referring to the “Islamic State” militant group by an alternate acronym.

In February, U.S.-led coalition forces captured the militant group’s head of chemical and traditional weapons manufacturing. The *Guardian* notes that information gathered from the detainee was used to launch airstrikes on the group’s chemical weapons assets in Iraq.

UN war crimes expert Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni said the documentation of biological weapons use in Syria will be useful in holding those responsible for the attacks accountable for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

“The documentation of these international crimes, as well as others, will become useful one day when criminal accountability will occur,” said UN war crimes expert Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, who reviewed the report.

ISIS attacks Iraqi town with chemical weapons

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160314-isis-attacks-iraqi-town-with-chemical-weapons>

Mar 14 – **Iraqi officials has said that ISIS has launched two chemical attacks near the city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq, killing a three-year-old girl and wounding up to 600 people.**

The chemical attacks took place early Saturday in the town of Taza, security and hospital officials said place early on Saturday in the small town of Taza. The town was struck by several rockets carrying the chemicals.



“There is fear and panic among the women and children,” said Adel Hussein, a local official in Taza. “They’re calling for the central government to save them.”

CBS News reports that a German and an American forensics team had arrived in the area to test for

the presence of chemical agents.

The wounded are suffering from infected burns, suffocation and dehydration, said Helmi Hamdi, a nurse at the Taza hospital.



Zika Virus Exposes Weaknesses in Public Health

Source: <http://www.emergencymgmt.com/health/Zika-Virus-Exposes-Weaknesses-in-Public-Health.html>

Feb 24 – State health officials were heartened when President Barack Obama this month asked Congress for \$1.8 billion to combat the spread of the Zika virus because they fear they don't have the resources to fight the potentially debilitating disease on their own.

Budget cuts have left state and local health departments seriously understaffed and, officials say, in a precariously dangerous situation if the country has to face outbreaks of two or more infectious diseases -- such as Zika, new strains of flu, or the West Nile and Ebola viruses -- at the same time.

"We have been lucky," said James Blumenstock of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, of states' and localities' ability to contain the flu, West Nile and Ebola threats of the last five years.

"Not only have the last major threats not been as severe as they might have been, they have also been sequential," Blumenstock said. "The issue is: What if the next pandemic is not as mild as the last ones? What if more than one of them happens at once?"



States to varying degrees have cut back spending on public health since the onset of the Great Recession in 2007. Overall state spending on public health fell by \$1.3 billion between 2008 and 2014, two health research organizations -- the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation -- reported last year.

And the trend didn't end as the economy improved. Sixteen states reduced spending between fiscal 2013 and 2015, the two organizations said in another report. Those were the same years the nation faced Ebola, a new outbreak of West Nile, and, in 2014, widespread cases of the H3N2 flu strain.

States with the biggest cuts over that time: California (13.3%), Massachusetts (11.6%) and

Washington (11.1%). Six states -- Alabama, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, Ohio and Washington -- cut their spending all three years.

Local health departments have suffered, too. They lost nearly 52,000 staff positions as a result of hiring freezes and budget cuts between 2008 and 2014, the National Association of County and City Health Officials reports.

"The steady reduction in public health funding has resulted in a progressive erosion of manpower and the capacity to do the kind of work that would be optimal," said Jeff Duchin, chief medical officer in Seattle and King County. "Quite frankly, we just don't have the staff we need."

Mosquito Monitoring Suffers

Health officials are confident they could contain an outbreak of the Zika virus if Congress approves the president's request for money, which would go to eradicating the mosquitoes that spread it, research into vaccines to inoculate people against it, and public education about prevention.

As of last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 92 confirmed cases in the United States, including the U.S. territories. In almost every case, the patients are believed to have been infected by mosquitoes, either abroad or at home in Puerto Rico.

The mosquito that transmits the virus, the *Aedes aegypti*, breeds in the United States and the rest of the Americas, and is also a carrier of dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever. Scientists say that with international travel and Zika outbreaks in more than two dozen Latin American countries, it is inevitable that mosquitoes carrying Zika will surface here.



Zika poses little threat to most people, but it is potentially very dangerous for pregnant women. There is increasing evidence in Brazil -

Even with West Nile, declining mosquito surveillance contributed to a new spike in cases in 2012, particularly in the Dallas area,



- which had a virulent outbreak of Zika last spring -- that the virus causes a birth defect, known as microcephaly, in which children are born with unusually small heads and brains. That Zika is spread mainly by mosquitoes particularly alarms health officials. A 2014 report by the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists found that state and local health departments are less prepared to track and contain mosquito-borne infections than at any time since the early 2000s, when they ramped up to deal with the first outbreak of another mosquito-borne illness, the West Nile virus.

Between 2004 and 2012, there was a 41 percent drop in the number of staff working at least half time in mosquito surveillance (to detect if they are carrying disease), according to the report. Seven states no longer conduct mosquito surveillance.

Surveillance for mosquito-borne viruses other than West Nile runs from patchy to absent in the states, the report said. "In particular," it said, "public health laboratory capacity for proactive surveillance is poor to nonexistent in most states."

said Jeff Engel, director of the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists. "We let our guard down."

More than mosquito surveillance has suffered in the budget cuts. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials reports that since 2008, 20 state health agencies have cut programs for sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, and 15 have cut laboratory services.

"Funding has been reduced for public health activities at the same time that public health threats are coming more often and more vigorously and with more intensity," Blumenstock said.

Redeploying Staff

When a new infectious disease such as Zika emerges, state and local health departments face a multitude of tasks: isolating and containing the threat; identifying people who are infected and assuring they are treated; reporting cases to the CDC; coordinating responses with hospitals and other agencies; performing necessary laboratory



work; and educating the public and the medical community.

To cope with an infectious disease outbreak amid reduced budgets, state and local health departments have become adept at crisis management and deploying staff to meet the latest threat, said Joshua Sharfstein, former Baltimore health commissioner and Maryland secretary of health.

So the public may not see the effect of the budget cuts when a crisis strikes. But public health officials do.

"We found responding to Ebola [in 2014] really taxed our ability to respond to other outbreaks because we needed to pull all the staff" from other tasks, said Sharfstein, now an associate dean at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The same thing is starting to happen now across the country, Blumenstock said.

"State and local departments today are looking at their staff and deploying them to deal with Zika," he said. "But if you send an

epidemiologist to deal with Zika full time, that's eight hours a day less that he's doing foodborne surveillance, or HIV surveillance or flu surveillance."

The cuts result in other problems, often hidden from the public eye. They deprive health departments of needed expertise and trained personnel, which is difficult to replenish in a crisis. The networks of relationships that health departments have with other agencies, hospitals and doctors are often neglected and must be rebuilt every time there is an emergency. All that can lead to slow response times.

The biggest fear remains that more than one dangerous and quickly spreading disease break out simultaneously.

"We've been lucky so far, and you don't want to hope for a different scenario so you can prove your point," Blumenstock said. "But there are tipping points, and there were times when we were close to those tipping points."

Small study suggests ZMapp may boost Ebola virus survival

Source:http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/MED_EBOLA_TREATMENT?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2016-02-24-12-49-22

Feb 24 – **A tiny study suggests that the experimental Ebola treatment ZMapp sharply increases the chance of surviving the deadly virus.**

The study included only 72 patients, less than half the 200 originally planned, because the Ebola epidemic was declared over in January. Researchers testing the experimental combination drug, developed by Mapp Biopharmaceuticals, cut off enrollment when the epidemic ended.

The outbreak raged in several western African countries for two years, killing more than 11,000 people.

The study, released late Tuesday at a medical conference, found that **22 percent of participants given ZMapp died, compared with 37 percent of participants receiving standard treatments.** Because so few people were tested, the results could have occurred by chance.

Still, the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, one of the study sponsors,

wrote that Mapp's combination drug "was well tolerated and showed promise."

Because of that, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has asked Mapp to make its drug available to any future patients as needed. Mapp plans to continue testing and seek approval to put the drug on the market as quickly as possible.

"Having a therapeutic option available for Ebola will help motivate patients to come to treatment units, reducing opportunities for infection in the community," Dr. Armand Sprecher of Doctors Without Borders said in a printed statement.

Ebola is spread through direct contact with the bodily fluids of victims or corpses. Traditional funerals, in which mourners touch the body, were a major source of virus transmission during the epidemic in West Africa.

The study ran for nearly a year, testing 72 adults and children with confirmed Ebola. The participants included 1 patient in the U.S., plus 12 patients in Guinea, five in Liberia and 54 in Sierra Leone, the



African countries hardest hit in the epidemic that began in December 2013.

Half got ZMapp, which combines three genetically engineered antibodies - substances that help direct the immune system's attack on invading germs. The antibodies are produced in tobacco plants inside greenhouses.

The other half got standard supportive care: intravenous fluids, electrolytes to maintain bodily functions and treatments to control blood pressure and oxygen levels.

In a second report also released at the annual Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infection, two experimental vaccines targeting Ebola induced an immune response against the virus and were well tolerated, according to the infectious diseases institute, part of the National Institutes of Health.

That study also was scaled back from the 28,000 volunteer participants originally planned. Instead, 1,500 people were divided in three equal groups and injected with one of the two vaccines or with saline.

After a month, antibodies were seen in the blood of 94 percent of the participants getting a vaccine called rVSV-ZEBOV. Drugmaker Merck & Co. has licensed rights to eventually sell that vaccine from New Link Genetics Corp., which licensed it from the original developer, Canada's Public Health Agency.

Likewise, antibodies were seen after a month in 87 percent of volunteers given the cAd3-EBOZ vaccine. That vaccine is being developed by drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline PLC and the infectious diseases institute.

Ebola Survivor Study Yields Insights on Complications of Disease

Source: <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/news/newsreleases/2016/Pages/CROI-PREVAI3.aspx>

Preliminary findings from PREVAIL III, a study of Ebola virus disease (EVD) survivors being conducted in Liberia, indicate that both Ebola survivors and their close contacts have a high burden of illness. However, the prevalence of eye, musculoskeletal, and neurological complications was greater among the individuals who survived EVD.

Initial results from PREVAIL III were presented this evening at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Boston by study co-principal investigator Mosoka Fallah, Ph.D., M.P.H., with the Liberian Ministry of Health. PREVAIL III began in June 2015 and is co-sponsored by the Liberian Ministry of Health and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the NIH. The trial is expected to enroll 7,500 people throughout Liberia, including 1,500 EVD survivors of any age and up to 6,000 of their close contacts, with participants followed for up to five years and study visits every six months.

Through February 15, 2016, the study had enrolled 1,049 EVD survivors and 1,034 close contacts with average ages of 30 and 26 years, respectively. On average, survivors enrolled in the study about one year after

experiencing EVD symptoms. Investigators found that as self-reported by survivors, 60 percent experienced eye problems, 53 percent had musculoskeletal problems and 68 percent had neurological difficulties. Close contacts, who were potentially exposed to the Ebola virus but did not become infected, reported similar problems, albeit less frequently: 59 percent reported vision problems, 28 percent had musculoskeletal issues, and 48 percent had neurological issues.

Ninety-seven male survivors provided one or more semen samples for analysis. Overall, 38 percent of these men had Ebola detected in their semen at least once. In one-third of the 69 men who were tested more than once, virus detection in semen was intermittent (negative results then positive, or vice versa). **The maximum amount of time between EVD symptoms and detection of Ebola in a semen sample was 18 months.**

Most survivors reported being sexually active. In a subset of 126 close contacts who reported sexual activity with a survivor, only four percent reported regular condom use, raising concerns about the potential for sexual transmission of EVD. However, so



far, no cases of sexual transmission of Ebola have been detected in the PREVAIL III study.

British nurse who recovered from Ebola back in hospital

Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-ebola-britain-nurse-idUSKCN0VW0W2>

Feb 23 – A Scottish nurse, who recovered from Ebola but then suffered life-threatening complications from the virus persisting in her brain, has been admitted to hospital for a third time, officials said on Tuesday.



Pauline Cafferkey contracted Ebola in December 2014 when she was working in a treatment facility in Sierra Leone at the height of an epidemic of the disease which swept through three countries in West Africa.



Cafferkey was being transferred on Tuesday from the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow to the Royal Free Hospital in London, which has a unit that was specially set up to deal with any Ebola cases in Britain.

"We can confirm that Pauline Cafferkey is being transferred to the Royal Free Hospital due to a late complication from her previous infection by the Ebola virus," the hospital said in a statement.

"She will now be treated by the hospital's infectious diseases team under nationally agreed guidelines."

After being transferred from Sierra Leone to Britain, Cafferkey initially recovered from the Ebola hemorrhagic fever and was sent home in January last year.

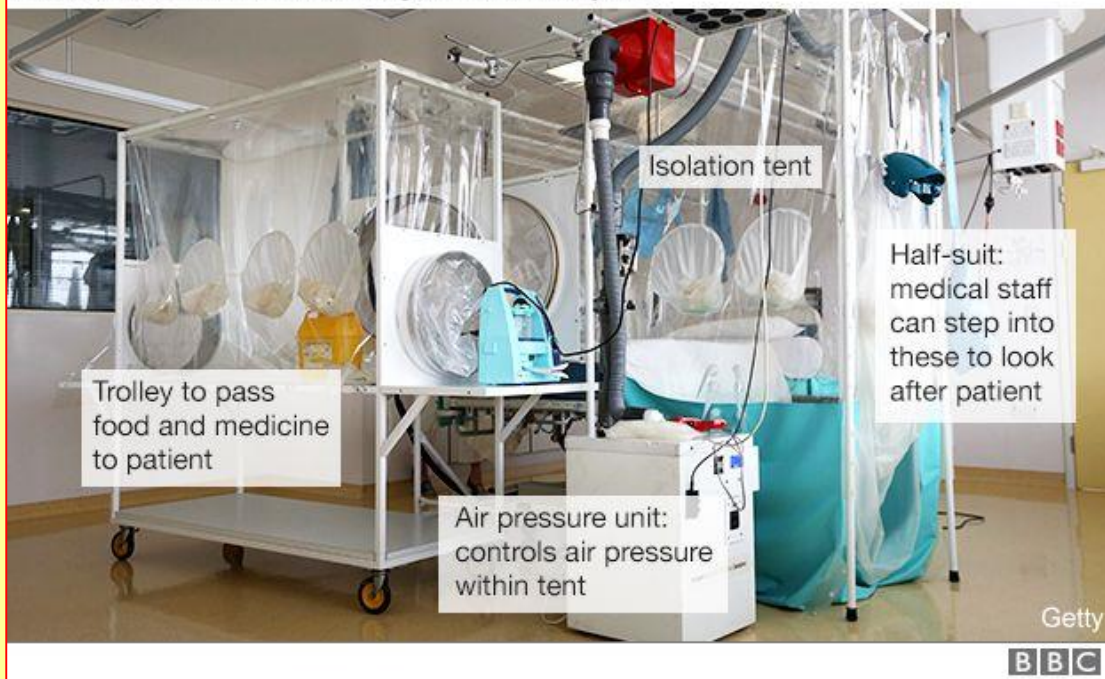
But in October she fell ill again and doctors found the virus was persisting in tissues in her brain. They later said she had developed meningitis caused by the Ebola virus - the first known such case.

She was treated with an experimental antiviral drug



known as GS5734 being developed by U.S. drug-maker Gilead Sciences, although doctors did not disclose whether they thought the drug had improved her condition.

Ebola isolation unit at Royal Free Hospital



She was last discharged from the Royal Free Hospital in November.

The two-year Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia killed more than 11,300 people, according to the World Health Organization.

Texas hospitals developed first rapid tests for Zika virus

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160224-texas-hospitals-developed-first-rapid-tests-for-zika-virus>

Feb 24 – **Two major Texas health centers have developed Scientists at two Texas hospitals – Texas Children’s hospital and Houston Methodist hospital – have developed what they describe as the U.S. first hospital-based, rapid test for the Zika virus. The test can yield results in a matter of hour.**

“With travel-associated cases of the Zika virus becoming more prevalent in the United States, coupled with the looming increase in mosquito exposure during spring and summer months, we must be prepared for a surge of Zika testing demand,” said James Versalovic, pathologist-in-chief at Texas Children’s and leader of test development team.



USA Today reports that the test is designed to reduce testing time, which currently can take days or even weeks. In most cases, the testing would be done by state health agencies or federal authorities such as the Centers for Disease



Control and Prevention (CDC).

For now, the new test is available only at the two Texas hospitals, but the researchers said they were looking to make the tests available in more hospitals.

Brazil is the largest number of Zika cases, but the virus has now spread to more than thirty countries and territories, most of them in the Americas. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Zika a global emergency.

Texas Children's hospital is a not-for-profit health care organization affiliated with Baylor College of Medicine. Houston Methodist comprises an academic medical center in the Texas Medical Center and six community hospitals serving the Greater Houston area.



Study links Zika virus to temporary paralysis

Source: <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2016/03/01/study-links-zika-virus-to-temporary-paralysis.html>

Mar 01 – **Scientists may have the first evidence that Zika can cause temporary paralysis, according to a new study of patients who developed the rare condition during an outbreak of the virus in Tahiti two years ago.**

Zika is currently spreading with alarming speed across the Americas. The World Health Organization declared the epidemic to be a global emergency several weeks ago based on suspicions it may be behind a surge in disturbing birth defects and in Guillain-Barre syndrome, a neurological illness that mostly lasts a few weeks.

Before reaching South America last year, the mosquito-spread Zika had triggered outbreaks in the South Pacific on Yap Island in Micronesia and in French Polynesia, including its largest island, Tahiti.

Researchers in Tahiti, France and elsewhere went back and analyzed blood samples from all 42 adults diagnosed with Guillain-Barre syndrome from the 2013-14 outbreak; nearly everyone showed signs of a previous Zika infection.

They were compared with patients who did not have the condition and did not have any Zika symptoms but were treated at the same hospital for other illnesses. Tests showed only half of that group of 98 had apparently been infected with the normally mild virus.

The research was published online Monday in the journal Lancet.

"The evidence that links Zika virus with Guillain-Barre syndrome is now substantially more compelling," said Peter Barlow, an infectious diseases expert at Edinburgh Napier University who was not part of the study. But he noted in a statement that more research

was needed before reaching the same conclusion about the outbreak in the Americas, where local factors may be playing a role.

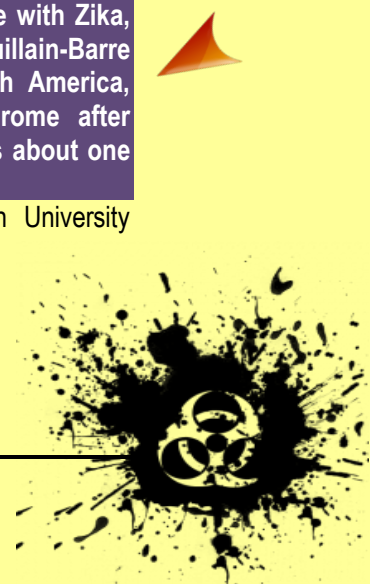
Zika is mostly spread by mosquito bites and in most people causes symptoms including fever, muscle pain and a rash. About 80 percent of people who catch the disease don't report any illness.

Guillain-Barre syndrome is typically seen after a viral or bacterial infection so a possible connection to **Zika isn't entirely unexpected. It occurs when the body's immune system attacks the nervous system, often for unknown reasons. It can cause muscle weakness and breathing problems; about 5 percent of patients die from the disorder.** Of the patients observed in Tahiti, none died and three months after leaving the hospital, about 40 percent could walk unaided.

The study also considered whether Guillain-Barre was the result of people being infected with both Zika and a related tropical disease, dengue, by comparing them with people who had Zika but no neurological symptoms. It found no hint that having dengue upped the risk.

Based on their findings, the scientists estimated that of 100,000 people with Zika, about 24 would develop Guillain-Barre syndrome. In Europe and North America, the average rate of the syndrome after infections like flu and dengue is about one to two people per 100,000.

David Smith of Australia's Curtin University said it was difficult to know exactly how often Zika causes Guillain-Barre syndrome. Smith co-authored an accompanying commentary in the Lancet.



He said in an email that because the Zika virus disappears from the body by the time patients develop neurological complications, there was only indirect evidence — via infection-fighting antibodies — that Zika caused Guillain-Barre syndrome. Zika is thought to be gone from the bloodstream after a week or so. Smith said not all of the Guillain-Barre cases in Tahiti could be blamed on Zika and that the researchers' estimate of the syndrome's incidence was probably inflated.

Still, experts predicted cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome would jump as Zika explodes in the Americas and WHO has warned the disease is likely to spread everywhere in the region except for Canada and Chile.

The study doesn't shed any light on whether Zika is also responsible for the

spike in the number of babies born in Brazil with abnormally small heads, or microcephaly.

"That remains a mystery but our suspicions are very strong," said Jimmy Whitworth, a professor of infectious diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

"Both Guillain-Barre syndrome and microcephaly are neurological conditions, but I don't think it would be the same mechanism that's causing both," he said. "There may be something slightly different happening with microcephaly."

Since the Zika outbreak in the Americas began last year, it has sparked epidemics in about 40 countries, of which eight have reported cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome possibly connected to Zika.

Cloud-based biosurveillance ecosystem

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160302-cloudbased-biosurveillance-ecosystem>



Mar 02 – The Departments of Defense and Homeland Security are developing a system which lets epidemiologists scan the planet for anomalies in human and animal disease prevalence, warn of coming pandemics, and protect soldiers and others worldwide.

The Biosurveillance Ecosystem, or BSVE, is a program of DoD's Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) Joint Science and Technology Office for Chemical and Biological Defense, or JSTO-CBD, the Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical and Biological Defense and Homeland Security's National Biosurveillance Integration Center.

DoD News discussed the BSVE with DTRA scientists Dr. Christopher M. Kiley and Dr. John Hannan.

Biosurveillance ecosystem

The BSVE is a virtual, customizable, collaborative system that uses commercial and government technologies to aggregate and analyze data streams, Kiley said.

"The BSVE ingests a wide variety of data sources — open-source data, social media and diagnostic data, and DoD, interagency, national and international surveillance system data," he added.

Analytic applications and user-designed apps in the BSVE use the aggregated data streams to provide near-real-time modeling, analyses and visualized results, Kiley said.

The BSVE provides automated, intelligently suggested data, tools and analyses, and a user-friendly interface with modern collaboration and reporting features.

While the environment is still in development, Kiley said, "The BSVE exists. We have users on the system providing us feedback."

Open-source approach

Kiley and Hannan said the BSVE is being developed using open-source software and systems that allow easier integration, increased transparency for a broader user base and customizability.

"The BSVE ingests and uses large data streams such as open-source social media feeds, RSS feeds from news organizations and blogs, disease ontologies, de-identified diagnostic results, historic outbreak data, zoonotic data and non-health data," Kiley said.

The system also uses machine learning and natural-language



processing algorithms intelligently to identify aberrations in disease signals, he added.

Sources include the World Health Organization and its many public health and infectious disease networks, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Organization for Animal Health and many more, Kiley said.

Another source is the Program for Monitoring Emerging Diseases, or ProMED Mail, he said, an Internet e-mail service of the International Society for Infectious Diseases used by scientists, physicians, veterinarians, epidemiologists, public health professionals and anyone interested in infectious diseases.

Biosurveillance beginnings

Kiley said two things happened in 2009 that led to the BSVE's creation.

One was the H1N1 swine flu pandemic that began in April, which, Kiley noted, could have been better coordinated as a public health emergency by everyone involved in the global effort.

The other, he said, was an October memo to military department secretaries by Andrew Weber, then-assistant secretary of defense for nuclear, chemical and biological defense programs, directing that emerging infectious diseases would now, along with traditional warfare agents, be part of the chem-bio defense mission.

In 2011 JSTO-CBD held a workshop with U.S. government biosurveillance practitioners to learn about common practices and gaps.

"Following the workshop, we did site visits with each of the participating organizations to observe their analysts during a traditional work day to see how they did things," Kiley said. "That's how we came up with the capability needs for the BSVE."

System prototype

In 2012 JSTO-CBD kicked off a competition among three industry-led teams to design a system prototype. After the down-select process, Kiley said, biomedical and health software company Digital Infuzion of Gaithersburg, Maryland, became DTRA's industry partner.

"The BSVE is designed to foster collaboration and data sharing but it uses a security model

that provides for individual datasets and applications to be restricted to specific users, if necessary," Kiley said.

A broader domain-level security structure is being used by DoD, DHS, other U.S. government agencies and international partners — Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, he added.

"The BSVE is disease agnostic," Kiley said, "so you can look for anything. It will look through the data sources that come into the system and alert you of anything anomalous."

For example, Hannan said, in 2015 "we were testing diagnostic devices in Sierra Leone, not for specifically for Ebola but Ebola hit positive on a couple of the devices. Through what we call our device-to-cloud capability, the results were quickly transmitted to the BSVE," which at the time was still being ramped up.

That wasn't planned, he added, but it showed the ability in real time to rapidly learn about a disease moving into Sierra Leone.

"With this information, an analyst could then use BSVE analytic tools to correlate these data with other BSVE data sources such as social media or open-source information to gain additional context," Hannan said.

Service in the cloud

The BSVE works as a dashboard-like service from the cloud, accessed through an Internet browser, Kiley said.

"The BSVE pulls in data sources and articles and then in real-time, using natural-language processing, highlights keywords of interest to analysts," he added.

Rather than reading through entire articles, analysts can look for highlighted text and summarized results in a tabular or geospatial format.

The BSVE also lets analysts decide what confidence they have in each source and put a higher or lower ranking on this information, and Kiley said they're working on a recommender service that, based on searches, will offer analysts related information to "help them locate relevant information or analytic capabilities more quickly."

Kiley said that to date the scientists have focused mainly on bio, "but the definition the government has adopted for



biosurveillance is 'All Hazards,' so we are actively looking to expand BSVE to support chemical hazards as well."

The BSVE system is easily adaptable, Hannan said, and "other folks can generate their own

applications that can easily be plugged in — that's all been specified very well through a software developer's kit. So part of the idea with BSVE from the get-go is that it would be user driven and sustained."

Ebola survivor study yields insights on complications of disease

Source: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/releases/307010.php?tw>

Feb 24 – Preliminary findings from PREVAIL III, a study of Ebola virus disease (EVD) survivors* being conducted in Liberia, indicate that both Ebola survivors and their close contacts have a high burden of illness. However, the prevalence of eye, musculoskeletal, and neurological complications was greater among the individuals who survived EVD.

Initial results from PREVAIL III were presented at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Boston by study co-principal investigator Mosoka Fallah, Ph.D., M.P.H., with the Liberian Ministry of Health. PREVAIL III began in June 2015 and is co-sponsored by the Liberian Ministry of Health and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the NIH. The trial is expected to enroll 7,500 people throughout Liberia, including 1,500 EVD survivors of any age and up to 6,000 of their close contacts, with participants followed for up to five years and study visits every six months. Through February 15, 2016, the study had enrolled 1,049 EVD survivors and 1,034 close contacts with average ages of 30 and 26 years, respectively. On average, survivors enrolled in the study about one year after experiencing EVD symptoms. Investigators found that as

self-reported by survivors, 60 percent experienced eye problems, 53 percent had musculoskeletal problems and 68 percent had neurological difficulties. Close contacts, who were potentially exposed to the Ebola virus but did not become infected, reported similar problems, albeit less frequently: 59 percent reported vision problems, 28 percent had musculoskeletal issues, and 48 percent had neurological issues.

Ninety-seven male survivors provided one or more semen samples for analysis. Overall, 38 percent of these men had Ebola detected in their semen at least once. In one-third of the 69 men who were tested more than once, virus detection in semen was intermittent (negative results then positive, or vice versa). The maximum amount of time between EVD symptoms and detection of Ebola in a semen sample was 18 months. Most survivors reported being sexually active. In a subset of 126 close contacts who reported sexual activity with a survivor, only four percent reported regular condom use, raising concerns about the potential for sexual transmission of EVD. However, so far, no cases of sexual transmission of Ebola have been detected in the PREVAIL III study.

Protective human-derived antibody against Ebola successfully isolated and characterized

Source: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/releases/307119.php?tw>

Feb 26 – The Institute for Research in Biomedicine (IRB), affiliated to the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI), and Humabs BioMed SA, a Swiss antibody therapeutics company, have **identified, isolated and characterized two Ebola virus neutralizing monoclonal antibodies from the blood of a survivor of an Ebola infection.**

The results were achieved through an international collaboration with leading research institutes. As published in this week's Science, one of the fully human antibodies is



completely protective against lethal Ebola infection - even when given as single treatment and as late as five days after infection. A second publication, also in this week's Science, identifies novel sites of vulnerability on the Ebola virus glycoprotein and reveals the molecular bases of virus neutralization by the human antibodies, providing new clues for vaccine design.

The Ebola virus causes hemorrhagic fever with a mortality rate of up to 90%. There is currently no approved Ebola therapy or vaccination. However, it is known that Ebola infection survivors carry life-long immunity preventing further infections. In a joint effort with researchers from the U.S. National Institute of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), Humabs BioMed and IRB were able to isolate two human antibodies against Ebola from the blood of two survivors of a 1995 Ebola outbreak 11 years after infection. Two antibodies code-named mAb100 and mAb114 demonstrated high virus-neutralizing capacity even when mAb114 was given as a monotherapy five days after infection.

Subsequently, researchers from the U.S. National Institute for Allergic and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth (Hanover, USA) and the School of Medicine Tsinghua University (Beijing, China) in collaboration with Humabs and the IRB characterized the targets addressed by the two antibodies. Both interfere with a glycoprotein that is essential for the binding of the virus to its host cells. This protein contains a certain loop that is being removed before the virus can enter cells. While mAb100 prevents the removal of the loop, mAb114, which is effective as a monotherapy, remains attached to the protein even after the loop is cut out. This is an entirely novel site of Ebola virus vulnerability that has never been reported to date and may open up new possibilities for

the development of further preventive and therapeutic measures.

The lead mAb114 antibody is now being manufactured and developed for clinical testing with the support of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA, Arlington, USA).

"Our Institute is committed to the identification of potent and broadly neutralizing antibodies. This is important not only to deliver new therapeutics, but also to find the Achilles's heel of a pathogen in order to design more effective and safe vaccines," said co-author Antonio Lanzavecchia, Director of the IRB, who has developed the Cellclone technology.

"These are major accomplishments in the search for a cure for Ebola," said co-author Davide Corti, CSO of Humabs. "These data clearly demonstrate the efficiency of the Cellclone technology that delivered already several antibodies against infectious agents currently in clinical development. We believe in the therapeutic potential of mAb114 and we are very much looking forward to its clinical development."

"Once again we have proven that Humabs is able to discover and develop anti-infective antibodies with high speed and remarkable results," said Filippo Riva, CEO of Humabs. "This includes antibodies directed against emerging novel pathogens, such as MERS coronavirus and Zika virus. We will remain committed to developing cures against life-threatening diseases."

Army Scientists Begin First MERS Vaccine Clinical Trial

Source:http://www.domesticpreparedness.com/Government/Government_Updates/Army_Scientists_Begin_First_MERS_Vaccine_Clinical_Trial/

Feb 26 – **Scientists at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research started vaccinations yesterday in the first clinical trial to test the safety and immune response in people of a vaccine candidate to prevent Middle East respiratory syndrome, known as MERS.**

A MERS vaccine would be an important medical countermeasure for U.S. troops in the Middle East and wherever the virus might arise, officials said.



MERS is a severe respiratory disease similar to severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS. Both are coronaviruses. MERS was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012 and has since infected more than 1,600 people.

The coronavirus kills about 40 percent of those infected, principal investigator Dr. Kayvon Modjarrad told DoD News in a telephone interview, “so low prevalence doesn't mean low risk.”

Modjarrad is associate director for the Emerging Infectious Disease Research Program at WRAIR.

MERS Countermeasure

The virus circulates mainly in Saudi Arabia, where most cases have been reported, he said. But the World Health Organization reports that MERS cases infected in the Middle East and exported outside the region have been confirmed in 26 countries, including two in the United States. And last year, South Korea had the largest outbreak outside the Middle East, Modjarrad added.

With about 35,000 U.S. troops on the ground in Middle East countries that make up U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility and more than 27,000 in South Korea, a MERS vaccine would be an important countermeasure for the Defense Department, the infectious disease specialist said.

The most common MERS symptoms are fever, cough and shortness of breath. Older people and those with weakened immune systems are at greater risk for severe disease and death. There are no approved MERS vaccines or specific treatments, according to WRAIR.

First Clinical Trial

“This is a really important step that we've taken to initiate a Phase I trial for MERS, and I'm hopeful that this will inform studies to follow. But I can't say exactly when we expect to have a MERS vaccine ready for licensing,” he said.

Other vaccine candidates have been tested for use in camels, the likely source of the coronavirus that causes MERS, but this vaccine candidate is the first to be tested in people, a WRAIR news release said.

Seventy-five participants will receive the vaccine at WRAIR's Clinical Trial Center in Silver Spring, Maryland. The vaccine, called GLS-5300, is being co-developed by Inovio Pharmaceuticals and GeneOne Life Science Inc.

“Along with the development of countermeasures, we really need to understand the epidemiology and the pathogenesis of this virus better,” Modjarrad said, adding that

scientists are sure camels are the reservoir for MERS, and that there has been limited person-to-person transmission.

“Having said that,” he added, “the whole South Korean outbreak was all human to human.”

One person went back to South Korea from the Saudi Arabian peninsula and infected another 80 people and then eventually, through person-to-person contact, 186 people got infected with this virus, Modjarrad said.

“So there's a great risk that [MERS] could cause major outbreaks even in settings where there are no camels,” he said.

MERS DNA Vaccine

Modjarrad said the MERS vaccine being tested is a DNA vaccine.

“One of the benefits of a DNA vaccine is that you don't need any kind of culture system, like eggs, and you can produce it very quickly,” he explained. “That's why we have a vaccine so quickly, because we have a backbone that has been used for other types of vaccines.”

In the **GLS-5300 vaccine** candidate, the DNA has part of the MERS virus, but it goes into a larger backbone that has been used for other kinds of vaccines, including those for influenza, human papilloma virus and Ebola virus, he added.

Global Health Landscape

DNA technology will shorten the time it takes to produce and ramp up the vaccine once it's been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, Modjarrad said, and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa also plays a part in shortening the time it takes to get the vaccine to patients.

“The landscape of global health and of research and development for vaccines and therapeutics has changed in the post-Ebola world,” he said. “The Ebola outbreak mobilized the global community in terms of resources and political will to get



things moving along faster timelines than would never, ever have been possible or even

conceived before.”

COLLAPSE – The End of Society Simulator

Source: <http://collapse-thedivisiongame.ubi.com/en/#>



Acute myelitis due to Zika virus infection

By Sylvie Mécharles, Cécile Herrmann, Pascale Poullain, Tuan-Huy Tran, Nathalie Deschamps, Grégory Mathon, Anne Landais, Sébastien Breurec, Prof Annie Lannuzel

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In January, 2016, a 15-year-old girl with a history only of an ovarian cyst was admitted to hospital in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, with left hemiparesis. 7 days previously she had presented to the emergency department with left arm pain, frontal headaches, and conjunctival hyperemia, but no fever, signs of meningeal irritation, or sensory or motor deficits. The day of admission, she developed acute lower back pain, paresthesia on the left side of her body, and weakness in her left arm. On admission she had slight left-sided weakness and proximal pain of the left arm and leg, exacerbated on movement, but no fever or signs of meningism, and Glasgow Coma Score (GCS) 15.

Nuanced findings for a large experimental treatment trial for Ebola virus disease

Source: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/releases/307298.php?tw>

Mar 02 – While not conclusive, valuable research generated through researching an experimental treatment for Ebola virus disease in Guinea during the recent Ebola outbreak will support future research into treating Ebola virus disease, according to Prof. Denis Malvy from INSERM, France and a large team of international researchers in a new Research Article published in *PLOS Medicine*.



Ebola virus disease is a highly lethal condition for which no specific treatment has proven efficacy. In September 2014, while the recent Ebola outbreak was at its peak, the World Health Organization released a short list of drugs suitable for Ebola virus disease research that included favipiravir, an antiviral developed for the treatment of severe influenza. To test the feasibility and acceptability of an emergency trial in the context of a large Ebola outbreak and to collect preliminary data on the safety and effectiveness of favipiravir in reducing mortality and viral load in patients with Ebola virus disease, a multinational team of researchers conducted a study in Guinea called JIKI (meaning "Hope" in the Malinke language). Because of the exceptional circumstances of the recent Ebola outbreak the study was a historically controlled multicenter non-randomized trial, in which all 126 participants received favipiravir along with standardized care.

The results of the study indicate that monotherapy with favipiravir is unlikely to be effective in patients with very high viremia (Ebola virus in the blood) and merits further investigation in patients with intermediate to high viremia. This conclusion is based on two findings, namely, the observed mortality rates and the dynamics of Ebola virus RNA measured in the blood of patients on treatment. In patients with very high viremia, mortality was 7% higher than expected based on historical Ebola cases and Ebola virus measurements did not decrease. This suggests that any future trial is unlikely to demonstrate any benefit of favipiravir in these patients. In patients with lower viremia, mortality was 33% lower than expected based on historical

controls and viremia decreased rapidly on treatment but the study was not able to attribute this decrease to favipiravir. The trial was non-randomized and the 95% confidence interval of mortality overlapped with what was expected from historical Ebola patients. Therefore, this finding does not prove that favipiravir was effective in these patients but only suggests that the question remains open and gives some indication on how to better address it.

The authors conclude, "[i]n the midst of an Ebola outbreak, researchers may be faced with elements that make them feel that randomizing patients to receive either standard care or standard care plus an experimental drug is not ethically acceptable. In these rare circumstances, it can be decided to not run a trial and to wait for more favorable conditions, or to run a non-randomized trial. In this pilot experience, we did the latter. Our conclusions are nuanced. On the one hand, we cannot conclude on the efficacy of the drug, and our conclusions on tolerance, although encouraging, cannot be as firm as they would have been if we could have used randomization. On the other hand, we learned a lot about how to quickly set up and run a trial in such unusual circumstances and in close relationship with the community and non-governmental organizations, we integrated research into care so that it improved care, we rapidly generated and shared with the scientific community intermediate data that were useful for designing Ebola research, and we gathered evidence that will allow researchers to base further trials on strong preliminary assumptions."

Ebola virus in breast milk

Source: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/top-stories-2016/en/>



Mar 02 -- **Ebola virus has been detected in the breast milk of survivors up to 16 months after the onset of symptoms.**

Studies into virus persistence in breast milk are ongoing and more evidence is needed to understand the risk of transmission and duration of the virus. The revised guidance recommends that **if Ebola virus is detected in breast milk, lactating survivors should suspend breastfeeding and use a safe breast milk**

substitute until they obtain 2 consecutive negative Ebola tests.



WHO Director-General launches the European Medical Corps

Dr Margaret Chan

Director-General of the World Health Organization

Keynote address at the inauguration of the European Medical Corps

Brussels, Belgium

15 February 2016

Source: <http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2016/european-medical-corps/en/>

When I was a young medical doctor I used to deliver babies. The baby we are delivering today is a very healthy baby.

The response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa has likely been the most intense logistical operation against an infectious disease since smallpox was pushed down to its last case in the



Horn of Africa in 1979.

When the outbreak began more than two years ago, the world and WHO were ill-prepared to mount a response on such a monumental scale. At the start, we had too little of everything, including medical teams. This changed, with support from the European Union playing a decisive role to turn around the Ebola outbreak in West Africa..

Your support was massive. It ranged from the provision of experts and medical teams, to the construction of dedicated treatment centres and bases for operations, from the training of European civil

society organizations, to the use of military aircraft and ships that rushed in desperately needed mobile laboratories, motorcycles, and huge quantities of equipment and supplies.

The support you provided facilitated the response well beyond the European region. Your work to guarantee medical evacuation and care for responders opened the door for the deployment of emergency medical teams and public health experts from all around the world.

The Ebola outbreak was a very brutal wake-up call. The world must never again be caught by surprise, so ill-prepared to cope. All that can be prepared in advance must be done with the utmost urgency.

As part of this preparedness, delegates at last year's World Health Assembly asked me to create a global health emergency workforce. The inauguration of the European Medical Corps is a groundbreaking milestone in achieving that objective. It is the culmination of joint WHO/EU work over the past year to establish standards for quality assurance, classify, and register emergency medical teams.

The Corps we are launching today makes a visible and highly effective contribution to the global health emergency workforce. Thank all of you for all you have done. It embodies far more than public health expertise and medical teams.

It includes medical evacuation teams, logistics teams with the skills to rebuild damaged hospitals, incident managers and information managers as well as mobile laboratories and their supplies. I congratulate you on making the first contribution to the global workforce and also on being the model for others to follow.

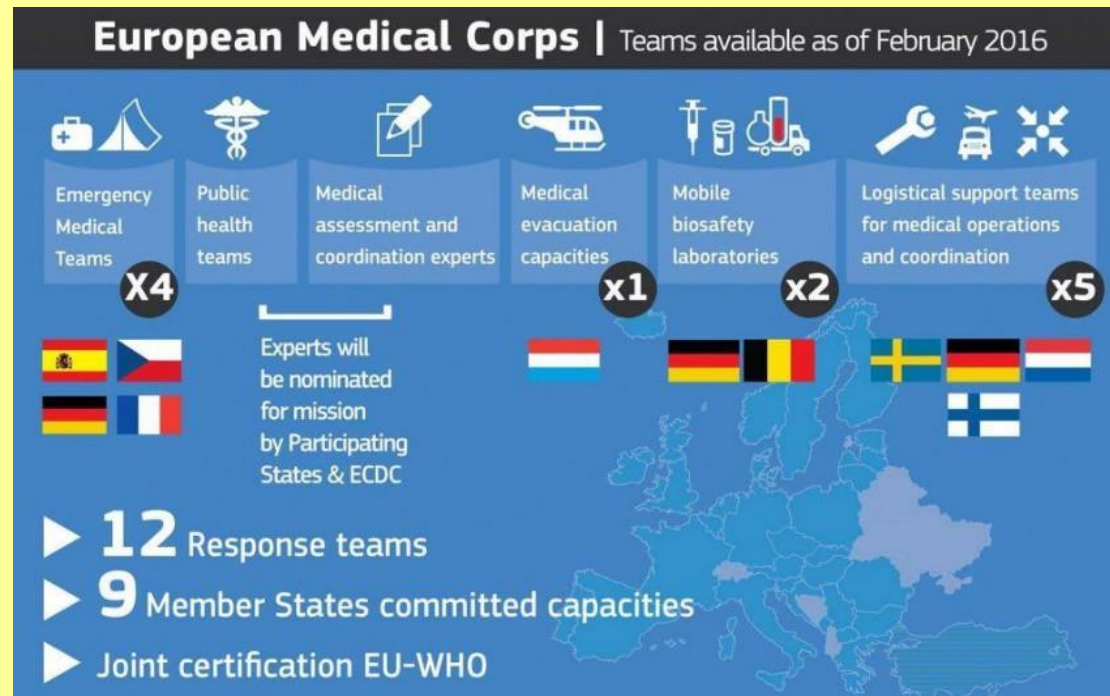
The foundation of a public health system able to respond to outbreaks and emergencies resides at the national level. The European Medical Corps and its "voluntary pool" draw on national capacity for a domestic response that can be offered to others faced with an emergency. Extremely important not just as a regional response capacity but also when global response is needed.

Emergency responses that augment national capacity with regional capacity are always more timely, predictable, efficient, and appropriate.

Ladies and gentlemen,



What the EU and WHO are now jointly doing brings order to a situation that grew chaotic as the number, scale, and severity of health emergencies reached unprecedented levels. The establishment of the European Medical Corps draws on lessons from the Ebola outbreak but also on earlier lessons from the response to sudden onset emergencies, like earthquakes, floods, and tropical storms.



A turning point occurred five years ago, when the earthquake in Haiti brought a massive influx of poorly qualified, uncoordinated, and ill-equipped responders. In the view of many, the Haiti response was a clear case of emergency assistance that did more harm than good.

To end the chaos, a global system was put in place to assure the quality of emergency medical teams, classify their skills, and register them as part of global preparedness for sudden onset disasters. The system allows a quick and close match of specific teams with specific needs and closes the door to uncoordinated and inappropriate assistance.

The system made a night-and-day difference in the responses to typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, and the earthquake in Nepal, where 98% of the 149 medical teams were registered and jointly coordinated by WHO and the Ministry of Health and Population.

These later examples illustrate the power of a global health workforce and the difference it can make. This is global solidarity. Together, we will never allow another virus to run out of control. We owe it to the more than 11,000 people who died from Ebola to be better prepared. I am fully confident that the European Medical Corps will mark a sea-change in global preparedness for outbreaks and emergencies.

Again, this is an achievement with an impact that extends well beyond Europe. Your work is being closely followed by similar efforts in South-East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Western Pacific Region.

Many of you mentioned Zika as the next global crisis. Ebola and Zika have many differences. Ebola is one of the most lethal pathogens on this planet. Zika is not known to be a killer. Since Ebola first emerged in 1976, we have learned a lot about this disease. We know very little about Zika and are just beginning to see its tricks.

The risk is widespread. Zika is transmitted primarily by mosquitoes of the *Aedes aegypti* species resident in many equatorial and sub-tropical countries.



These mosquitoes can breed in very small containers, like a plastic cup or a bottle cap. Responsibility for mosquito control rests with every household. Two-thirds of these mosquitoes reside in households and not outdoors. Every household must help with removing breeding sites. The government cannot do this on its own.

On present knowledge, Zika causes a mild disease in most people, and 80% of those infected show no symptoms. Most recover. We are very worried about pregnant women. If they get infected with the virus, they may give birth to babies with small heads or with other neurological complications. The science is not yet definitive but the evidence is getting stronger and stronger.

On 1 February, WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern because of what we don't know about the disease and the virus and its possible association with birth defects. Can you imagine the stress, the anxiety, and the heart-breaking experience of families who have babies with small heads. These babies are not easy to raise and they create a heavy burden for the family and the community.

WHO was asked to make this declaration on the advice of experts. WHO's job is to coordinate the world's best talents to develop the science that clarifies the link.

Let me mention in particular the case study published last week in the New England Journal of Medicine. This was a series of very sophisticated investigations undertaken by European experts. That study gives us the strongest evidence yet about the possible link between infection during pregnancy and microcephaly.

Ebola required massive logistical support and mobilization of teams and tons of supplies. Zika requires massive mobilization of community action. For now, mosquito control is our most immediate line of defense.

We must also give women the information that empowers them to make some difficult decisions. Evidence is now sufficiently strong that we are advising pregnant women to consider delaying travel to countries where the virus is circulating. It is also important that returning travelers do not donate blood. European countries have very good guidelines for keeping the blood supply safe.

Zika is not a deadly disease like Ebola, but it is a disease that causes heart-breaking events for families.

Thank you.

Indian scientists develop breakthrough dengue drug using Ayurveda

Source: <http://www.dnaindia.com/health/report-indian-scientists-develop-breakthrough-dengue-drug-using-ayurveda-2187470>

Mar 09 – The drug has been made from plant extracts and not chemicals and sought permission from both the Ministry of Ayush and also the Drug Controller of India.

In a breakthrough move that can help in the fight against dengue, a herbal medicine against it is claimed to have been developed by scientists in India, which accounts for 50% of the global population estimated to be at risk from the disease.

Experts are now gearing up for the next step, which is to hold clinical trials and toxicity studies before seeking permission from the Ministry of Ayush and the Drug Controller of India (DCI) for commercial production. The project was undertaken jointly by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), under the Ministry of Science and Technology, the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology and Ranbaxy Research Laboratory (now owned by Sun Pharma), and employed Ayurveda in devising the drug. "Using the knowledge of traditional Indian medicine -- Ayurveda -- we developed a systematic bioassay-guided screening approach to explore the indigenous herbal bio- resource to identify plants with pan-DENV (dengue virus) inhibitory activity.



"Results showed that the alcoholic **extract of *Cissampelos pariera* Linn** (Cipa extract) was a potent inhibitor of all four DENVs in cell-based assays, assessed in terms of viral NS1 antigen secretion using



ELISA, as well as viral replication, based on plaque assays. Virus yield reduction assays showed that Cipa extract could decrease viral titers by an order of magnitude. The extract conferred statistically significant protection against DENV infection," said Navin Khanna, senior scientist at ICGEB and the group leader of the project.

He added that preliminary evaluation of the clinical relevance of Cipa extract showed it had no adverse impact on platelet count and RBC viability. It also showed no evidence of toxicity in Wistar rats, when administered doses

as high as 2g/Kg body weight for up to a week. "We have tested it on rats and have got positive results, but now it needs to be tested on bigger animals," Khanna said.

Mohammad Aslam, senior advisor to DBT, which funded the project, said since the drug has been made from plant extracts and not chemicals, it has sought permission from both the Ministry of Ayush and also the Drug Controller of India.



What would it take to hijack the virus in West Africa and turn it into a bioterror agent elsewhere? 3+1 scenarios

Source: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/weaponized-ebola-is-it-really-a-bioterror-threat/>

Sept 2014 – Ebola's exponential spread has rekindled fears that terrorists may seek to turn the virus into a powerful weapon of mass destruction. Such talk has occurred on Capitol Hill and in national security circles. But the financial and logistical challenges of transforming Ebola into a tool of bioterror makes the concern seem overblown—at least as far as widespread devastation is concerned.

National security and infectious disease experts agree the obstacles to a large-scale assault with Ebola are formidable. For starters, a bioterrorist would have to obtain the virus and be able to grow a massive supply in large vats, an extremely costly endeavor. While the virus is easily spread through personal contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person, it would be difficult to manipulate and control. Put simply, a large amount of Ebola in the hands of a rogue group would more likely end up killing the plotters than making it to the endgame of a bioterrorism mission. To be successful, "it would take a state-type [agent]" with more extensive resources, **Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases**, told a Congressional committee last week.

Already there is historical precedent for states trying—and failing—to tap the virus for bioterror. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was "growing up large amounts of microbes for potential use in bioterrorism. That was known through intelligence," Fauci told *Scientific American*. The Soviets attempted to cultivate smallpox, anthrax, tularemia, botulism and hemorrhagic fevers including Ebola, he says. Yet exactly how the country would have deployed the microbes remains an area of speculation. The Soviets eventually dropped the project, but they were not the only ones interested in the microbe's potential.

The Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo—infamous for setting off sarin gas in a Tokyo subway in 1995—also looked into Ebola as a potential biological weapon. In 1992, they sent a medical group of 40 people ostensibly to help provide aid during an Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Their real purpose, however, was to collect some Ebola virus, as Amy Smithson, a senior fellow at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, noted in her 2000 report *Ataxia*. The effort was a "flagrant failure," she says. "They did not get their hands on a culture."

Even if Aum Shinrikyo had managed to gather samples of the Ebola virus, it would have been extremely difficult to kill large numbers of people in countries with a strong health infrastructure such as Japan. Once the virus had been identified and patients isolated, the pathogen would have been unlikely to spread widely. Still, any terrorist attempting to stoke



fears rather than accrue a high body count could have some modicum of success with Ebola. “When talking about bioterror, it’s more about the terror than it is the bio,” Fauci says. Interviews with Fauci and other infection and security experts suggest that the virus could potentially be used for small-scale Ebola attacks in about three different ways—although each approach would run up against substantial logistical, financial and biological barriers.

Three scenarios

First, Ebola could be weaponized by taking large quantities of it and inserting them into a small “bomblet” that, once detonated, would spray the virus perhaps 30 feet—potentially infecting people as it landed on their faces, on cuts or on hands that they might then touch their eyes with. “That would be like a hundred people simultaneously touching an Ebola-infected person,” says Fauci. Ebola would not need to be altered in any way to make such a plot work. The virus is already so capable of spreading from person to person via contact with bodily fluids that in its natural state it could do some serious damage. “Ebola is a very lethal pathogenic virus,” says virologist Robert Garry of Tulane University. “It’s basically weaponizing itself.”

The **second**, and perhaps easiest, small-scale bioterrorism option would be to recruit individuals for Ebola suicide missions. Such a plan would hinge on injecting Ebola virus into a limited number of people, who would then need to leave West Africa (or wherever the outbreak may be) before becoming symptomatic. Then those individuals would have to get into a public space and projectile vomit or bleed onto others to infect them. Obviously the plot would need to overcome substantial technical challenges including the extreme weakness that arises from Ebola. If it did succeed, this mode of transmission would not kill thousands of people, but it would set off significant fears.

The **third** bioterrorism method appears to be the most unlikely: genetically modifying the virus to enable it to spread more readily,

perhaps through the air. As *Scientific American* reported on September 16, transforming the Ebola virus from a pathogen that primarily affects the circulatory system to one well suited for the respiratory system would be a major research undertaking. While theoretically the microbe could be manipulated to act in that way, it would be a demanding choice for nefarious actors looking to stockpile harmful materials.

Plus one more

By The Editor of CBRNE-Terrorism Newsletter (2016)

The **fourth** scenario takes advantage the survivability of Ebola virus that now is known to be able to survive in semen for 6-7 months or more. Given the fact that West Africa is where Boko Haram is activated, one or more Ebola survivors can travel to a foreign country becoming moving biological bombs. Take for example the highly anticipated Rio 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil. This country known also as a sex paradise can provide many opportunities for bioterrorists to have sex-for-pay in the many red districts of major cities like Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo. Safe sex could not be a burden when “money talks” and a small or bigger outbreak can be leashed from brothels affecting both local and international guests and spectators visiting the country for the Olympics. Bioterrorists can infect a big number of women and then escape travelling legally back to their homelands.

EDITOR’S COMMENT: For the time being, conventional terrorist is enough and do its job extremely well. We tend to believe that terrorists are working on highly sophisticated new methods producing more terror when it is obvious that due to strict national controls and surveillance (when timely possible) implemented there is a shift to more simple methods employing ordinary daily-use weapons such as knives or hatchets. On the other hand we must always keep in mind that terrorists’ struggle for leadership and global power might also drive them to use weapons of mass disruption. In that respect bioterrorism must not be excluded as highly sophisticated and or posing technicalities by Western standards. Simple solutions are better weapons and the basis of asymmetry!



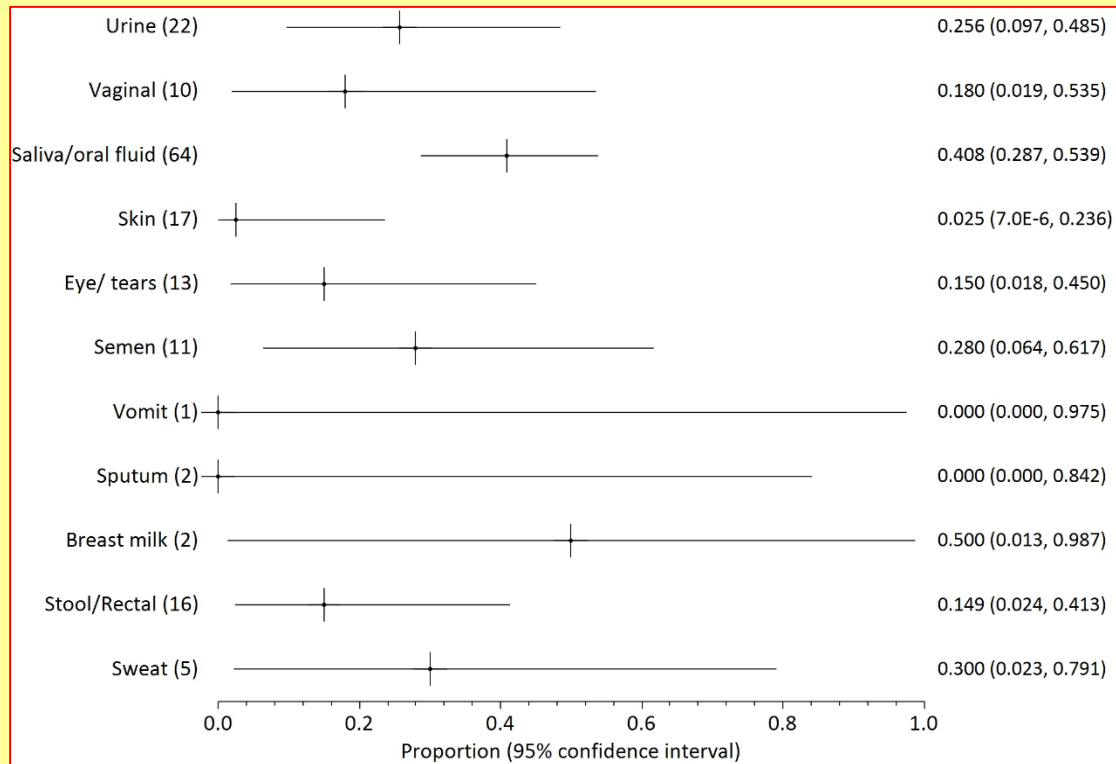


Presence and Persistence of Ebola or Marburg Virus in Patients and Survivors: A Rapid Systematic Review

By Julii Brainard, Katherine Pond, Lee Hooper, Kelly Edmunds and Paul Hunter

Published online: February 29, 2016

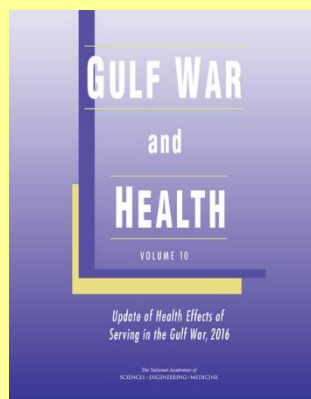
Source: <http://journals.plos.org/plosntds/article?id=10.1371/journal.pntd.0004475>



Probability of positivity for all samples tested by RT-PCR through day 110 of illness onset.

The numbers in parenthesis after each fluid type indicate the number of patients who provided samples for each body fluid. The numbers on the right side are the mean probability for positivity (also shown as a cross mark) with 95% confidence interval in parentheses (shown as lines both sides of the cross).

► Read the full paper at source's URL.



Gulf War and Health: Volume 10: Update of Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War, 2016

By Deborah Cory-Slechta and Roberta Wedge, Editors;

Committee on Gulf War and Health, Volume 10: Update of Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War; Board on the Health of Select Populations; Institute of Medicine; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

Source: <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/21840/gulf-war-and-health-volume-10-update-of-health-effects>

For the United States, the 1991 Persian Gulf War was a brief and successful military operation with few injuries and deaths. However, soon after returning from duty, a large number of veterans began reporting health problems they believed were associated with their service in the Gulf. At the request of Congress, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) has



been conducting an ongoing review of the evidence to determine veterans' long-term health problems and potential causes. The fourth volume in the series, released in 2006, summarizes the long-term health problems seen in Gulf War veterans. In 2010, the IOM released an update that focuses on existing health problems and identifies possible new ones, considering evidence collected since the initial summary.

Gulf War and Health: Volume 10, the final volume of the series, is an update of the scientific and medical literature on the health effects associated with deployment to the Gulf War that were identified in Volumes 4 and 8. This report reviews and evaluates the associations between illness and exposure to toxic agents, environmental or wartime hazards, or preventive measures and vaccines associated with Gulf War service, and provides recommendations for future research efforts on Gulf War veterans.

Refugees have a substantially higher risk of psychotic disorders

Source: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/releases/307874.php?tw>

Mar 15 – **Refugees face a substantially higher risk of psychotic disorders, including schizophrenia, compared to non-refugee migrants from the same regions of origin**, finds a study published in *The BMJ*.

The humanitarian crises in Europe, the Middle East, north Africa, and central Asia have led to more displaced people, asylum seekers, and refugees worldwide than at any time since the second world war.

Refugees are known to be at an increased risk of mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and common mental disorders, compared to non-refugee migrants, but little is known about their risk of psychosis.

So a team of researchers from the Karolinska Institutet and UCL carried out a study to determine the risk of schizophrenia and other non-affective psychotic disorders among refugees, compared to non-refugee migrants, and the general Swedish population.

The researchers used a linked national register data to examine more than 1.3 million people in Sweden, and tracked diagnoses of non-affective psychotic disorders among the population.

On a per capita basis, Sweden has granted more refugee applications than any other high-income country, and in 2011, refugees constituted 12% of the total immigrant population.

The cohort included people born to two Swedish-born parents, refugees, and non-refugee migrants from the four major refugee generating regions: the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Russia.

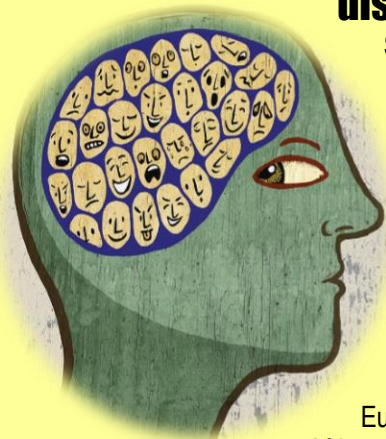
Results showed 3,704 cases of non-affective psychotic disorders during the 8.9 million person years of follow up.

Refugees granted asylum were on average 66% more likely to develop schizophrenia or another non-affective psychotic disorder than non-refugee migrants. In addition, they were up to 3.6 times more likely to do so than the Swedish-born population. Incidence rates for non-affective psychosis were 385 per million in those born in Sweden, 804 per million in non-refugee migrants, and 1264 per million in refugees.

The increased rate in refugees was significant for all areas of origin except sub-Saharan Africa, for whom rates in both groups were similarly high relative to the Swedish-born population.

One possible explanation is "that a larger proportion of sub-Saharan Africa immigrants will have been exposed to deleterious psychosocial adversities before emigration, irrespective of refugee status," suggest the authors.

Alternatively, it's also possible that "post-migratory factors, such as discrimination, racism, and social exclusion" may explain these high rates.



Overall, they say "our findings are consistent with the hypothesis that increased risk of non-affective psychotic disorders among immigrants is due to a higher frequency of exposure to social adversity before migration, including the effects of war, violence, or persecution."

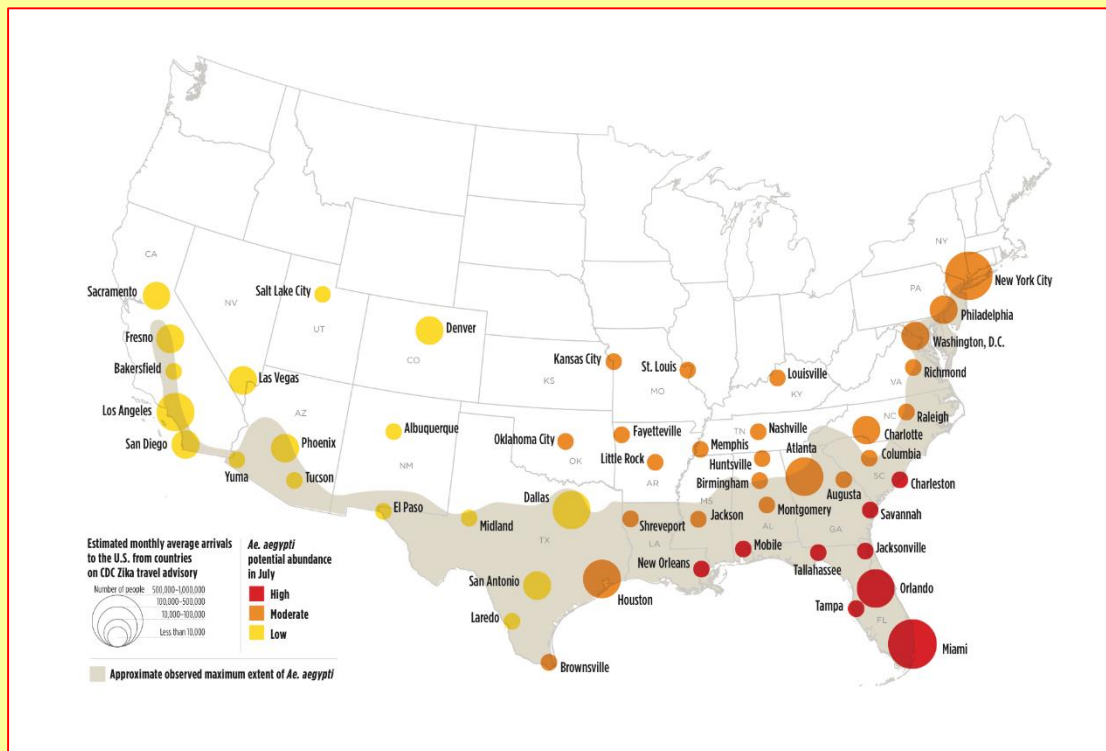
They add the findings emphasize "the need to take the early signs and symptoms of psychosis into account in refugee populations, as part of any clinical mental health service

responses to the current global humanitarian crises."

In a linked editorial, Cornelius Katona, medical director at the Helen Bamber Foundation, says "a robust mental health response to the refugee 'crisis' must lie in a combination of clinical vigilance, recognition of vulnerability factors, and above all, a determination to minimize the aggravating effects of post-migration experiences."

Conditions increasing Zika virus risk present in many U.S. cities

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160317-conditions-increasing-zika-virus-risk-present-in-many-u-s-cities>



[For a high-resolution map, click here](#)

Mar 17 – **Key factors that can combine to produce a Zika virus outbreak are expected to be present in a number of U.S. cities during peak summer months, new research shows.**

The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which is spreading the virus in much of Latin America and the Caribbean, will likely be increasingly abundant across much of the southern and eastern United States as the weather warms, according to a new study led by mosquito and

disease experts at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR).

NCAR reports that summertime weather conditions are favorable for populations of the mosquito along the East Coast as far north as New York City and across the southern tier of the country as far west as Phoenix and Los Angeles, according to computer simulations conceived and run by researchers at NCAR and the

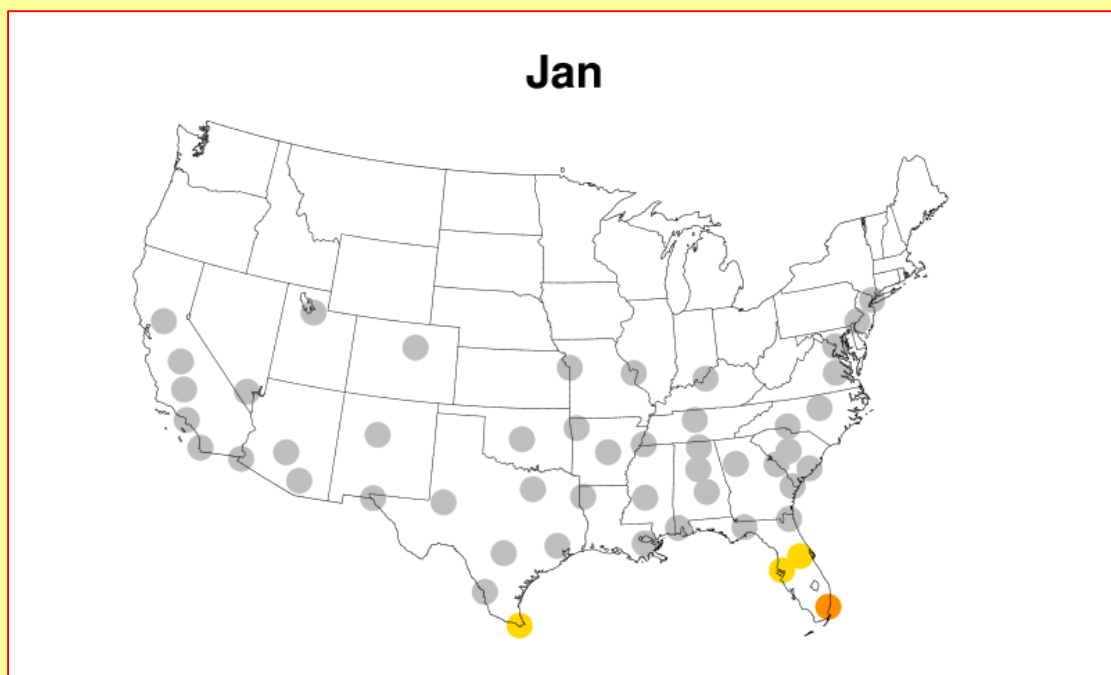


NASA Marshall Space Flight Center. Spring and fall conditions can support low to moderate populations of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito in more southern regions of its U.S. range. Wintertime weather is too cold for the species outside southern Florida and southern Texas, the study found.

By analyzing travel patterns from countries and territories with Zika outbreaks, the research team further concluded that cities in southern Florida and impoverished areas in southern Texas may be particularly vulnerable to local virus transmission.

Although the study does not include a specific prediction for this year, the authors note that long-range forecasts for this summer point to a 40–45 percent chance of warmer-than-average temperatures over most of the continental United States. Monaghan said this could lead to increased suitability for *Aedes aegypti* in much of the South and East, although above-normal temperatures would be less favorable for the species in the hottest regions of Texas, Arizona, and California.

Monaghan stressed that, even if Zika establishes a toehold in the mainland United



[Interactive map](#)

“This research can help us anticipate the timing and location of possible Zika virus outbreaks in certain U.S. cities,” said NCAR scientist Andrew Monaghan, the lead author of the study. “While there is much we still don’t know about the dynamics of Zika virus transmission, understanding where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito can survive in the U.S. and how its abundance fluctuates seasonally may help guide mosquito control efforts and public health preparedness.”

“Even if the virus is transmitted here in the continental U.S., a quick response can reduce its impact,” added NCAR scientist Mary Hayden, a medical anthropologist and co-author of the study.

States, it is unlikely to spread as widely as in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is partly because a higher percentage of Americans live and work in air-conditioned and largely sealed homes and offices.

The study is being published today in [PLOS Currents Outbreaks](#).

Spreading rapidly

First identified in Uganda in 1947, the Zika virus has moved through tropical regions of the world over the past decade. It was introduced into Brazil last year and spread explosively across Latin America and the Caribbean, with more than twenty countries now facing pandemics. About 80 percent of infected people do not have significant



symptoms, and most of the rest suffer relatively mild flu- or cold-like symptoms that generally clear up in about a week. However, scientists are investigating correlations between contracting the disease during pregnancy and microcephaly, a rare birth defect characterized by an abnormally small head and brain damage.

To determine the potential risk in the mainland United States, the research team ran two computer models that simulated the effect of meteorological conditions on a mosquito's entire lifecycle (egg, larval, pupal, and adult stages) in 50 cities in or near the known range of the species. Monaghan and several team members have studied *Aedes aegypti* for years because it also carries the viruses that cause dengue and chikungunya.

Generally, the mosquitoes need warm and relatively stable temperatures, as well as water-filled containers such as buckets, barrels, or tires, for their eggs to hatch. Once a mosquito bites an infected person, it also needs to live long enough — probably a week or more, depending on ambient temperatures — for the virus to travel from the mosquito's mid-gut to its salivary glands. Once in the saliva, the virus can then be transmitted by the mosquito biting another person.

The study results show that, as springtime weather warms, the potential abundance of the mosquito begins to increase in April in the Southeast and some Arizona cities. By June, nearly all of the 50 cities studied have the potential for at least low-to-moderate abundance, and most eastern cities are suitable for moderate-to-high abundance. Conditions become most suitable for mosquito populations in July, August, and September, although the peak times vary by city. Weather conditions in southern and western cities remain suitable as late as November.

Even some cities where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito has not been detected, such as St. Louis and Denver, have suitable midsummer weather conditions for the species if it were introduced via transport of used tires or by other human activities, according to the computer models.

The researchers stressed that additional factors outside the scope of the study could affect populations of the species, such as

mosquito control efforts, competition with other mosquito species, and the extent to which eggs can survive in borderline temperatures.

The study noted that northern cities could become vulnerable if a related species of mosquito that is more tolerant of cold temperatures, *Aedes albopictus*, begins to carry the virus.

Factoring in travel, poverty

In addition to looking at meteorological conditions, the researchers studied two other key variables that could influence the potential for Zika outbreaks: travel from Zika-affected areas and socioeconomic conditions in states that may face abundant mosquito populations.

To analyze air travel, the team estimated the number of passengers arriving into U.S. cities on direct flights from airports in 22 Latin American countries and territories listed on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Zika travel advisory as of 29 January.

Cities that had both high potential numbers of *Aedes aegypti* and a large volume of air travelers included Miami, Houston, and Orlando. Since the scientists were able to obtain passenger numbers for direct flights only, they could not estimate the number of passengers continuing on to smaller cities. They noted that the summertime peak in air travel coincides with the peak season in mosquito abundance.

The study also estimated that nearly five times as many people cross the U.S.-Mexico border per month than arrive by air in all fifty cities. This could indicate a high potential for transmission in border areas from Texas to California, although the Zika virus has not been widely reported in northern Mexico.

NCAR notes that those border areas, as well as other parts of the South where the mosquitoes are expected to be abundant, have a high percentage of households living below the poverty line, according to 2014 U.S. Census data analyzed by the research team. Lower-income residents can be more exposed to mosquito bites if they live in houses without air conditioning or have torn or missing screens that enable mosquitoes to enter their homes more easily. However,



Aedes aegypti populations tend to thrive in densely populated urban areas, while some of the most impoverished areas are rural.

“The results of this study are a step toward providing information to the broader scientific and public health communities on the highest risk areas for Zika emergence in the United States,” said Kacey Ernst, an epidemiologist at the University of Arizona and co-author of the study. “We hope that others will build on this work as more information becomes available. All areas with an environment suitable to the establishment of *Aedes aegypti* should be working to enhance surveillance strategies to monitor the *Aedes aegypti* populations and human populations for disease emergence.”

“This research highlights the complex set of human and environmental factors that determine whether a mosquito-borne disease is carried from one area to another, and how severely it affects different human populations,” said Sarah Ruth, program director in the National Science Foundation’s Division of Atmospheric and Geospace Sciences. “By integrating information on weather, travel patterns, mosquito biology, and human behavior, the project team has improved our ability to forecast, deal with, and possibly even prevent future outbreaks of Zika and other serious diseases.”

— Read more in Andrew Monaghan et al., “On the Seasonal Occurrence and Abundance of the Zika Virus Vector Mosquito *Aedes Aegypti* in the Contiguous United States,” [PLOS Current Outbreaks](#) (16 march 2016).

Federal officials propose removing *Brucella abortus* from bioterror list

Source: http://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/environment/federal-officials-propose-removing-brucella-abortus-from-bioterror-list/article_9ae5ee50-70eb-5406-9be3-b51d7aca356a.html

Mar 17 - Federal officials are looking at removing a bacteria that causes the disease brucellosis from a list for select bioterrorism agents, a move wildlife advocates, agricultural groups and state government officials hope goes through because it would lift burdens on researchers.

The organism *Brucella abortus*, which causes brucellosis, is on a list of select agents that the federal government closely regulates because the organisms listed are believed to have the potential for public harm. The goal of the regulations is to keep the organisms or toxins out of the hands of “individuals who intend to misuse them, such as a bioterrorist.”

The program for regulating select bioterror agents was expanded after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the anthrax attacks of the same year, as fears over terrorism reached fever pitch. *Brucella abortus* has been on the list since the early 2000s.

The list is reviewed every two years, and this time around officials decided that the bacteria could be removed safely. Removing

it from the list would make it easier for researchers to get the field strain of the bacteria for work on developing a better brucellosis vaccine.

Researchers have trouble getting the bacteria because of large amounts of paperwork and the types of travel restrictions that are placed on the organism from being listed. To be moved, it has to be inside a special container. Research has to take place in specific kinds of facilities, and only so much of the bug can be on hand.

“It just made it extremely difficult to get our hands on the field strain of that bacteria,” said Eric Liska, the brucellosis program veterinarian with the Montana Department of Livestock.

If researchers can’t get their hands on the bacteria they need, better vaccines are tougher for them to develop. A vaccine for brucellosis exists, but Liska said it’s not quite as effective as they would like it to be.

Calls to remove the organism from the list have been made for years. Tom Roffe, a former chief veterinarian with the U.S. Fish



and Wildlife Service, said the listing doesn't make sense because it is already prevalent in wild animals, like bison and elk.

"The absurdity is that *Brucella abortus* is an endemic native organism in our environment," Roffe said.

Roffe recalled research he did in the early 2000s on how well the current brucellosis vaccine worked in elk. When the select agent listing happened, he remembered having trouble organizing ways to transport the bacteria to labs around the country to get his work done. He eventually found a way to finish his project, but he remembered it as something of a hassle.

He has also done research on the prevalence of the disease in wildlife, but those studies don't come into conflict with the select agent list. All they do is determine whether an animal has the bacteria in their system, not cultivate it and use it.

"It's the vaccine studies that have been the most hampered by this," Roffe said.

He also said he had been one of the people calling for removing it from the list, but finding

an unwilling culture at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He has heard there might be more flexibility for that now, but isn't sure it will happen.

The idea of taking the bacteria off the select agent list has garnered broad support. Jeff Hagener, the director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, wrote in comments in support of the move. Democratic U.S. Sen. Jon Tester has also pledged his support. Nick Gevock, the conservation director for the Montana Wildlife Federation, said his group supports the move because it "will really open the doors for research."

Jay Bodner, the natural resources director for the Montana Stockgrowers Association, said they support it for essentially the same reason.

"We would like as much robust vaccine research done on it as possible," Bodner said.

A formal public comment period on the proposal ends Monday. After that, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service will make a final decision.



West Africa's Ebola-affected countries face Zika threat

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20160318-west-africa-s-ebolaaffected-countries-face-zika-threat>

Mar 18 – **Rapid testing for the Zika virus is a critical need in the recent Ebola-affected countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, says a Georgetown University professor, because of the recent Zika outbreak on nearby Cape Verde and the similarity in symptoms between Zika and early Ebola.** GUMC [reports](#) that in his *Health Security* commentary published online today, infectious disease specialist Daniel Lucey urges both surveillance for Zika and prospective studies to monitor for microcephaly and other neurologic disorders in West Africa, citing the close travel links with Cape Verde.

"The clinical presentation of ZIKV [Zika virus] infection, although extremely mild compared with typical Ebola virus disease, could cause initial confusion clinically because both can have fever, muscle and joint pain, red eyes, and rash," writes Lucey. "If a patient with ZIKV infection were to raise initial concern about a potential Ebola virus infection, then a cascade of unnecessary medical, public health, societal, and political issues could be triggered."

In February 2016, a World Health Organization risk assessment of the Zika virus in Africa placed Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea in either a high or moderate risk category. Lucey points out that

critical information learned about Zika in the brief time since the report was issued warrants a change. He proposes three additions: "(1) an explicit strong recommendation for prospective epidemiologic studies to monitor for microcephaly following every known ZIKV outbreak....; (2) explicit discussion of the potential confusion in initial differentiation of the clinical presentations of ZIKV infection and (mild) Ebola virus disease; and (3) making available rapid PCR testing for ZIKV as soon as possible in 2016, especially in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, as well as Guinea-Bissau."



GUMC notes that Lucey, an adjunct professor of Medicine at Georgetown University School of Medicine and senior scholar with the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law, spent several months in West Africa treating patients with Ebola in 2014.

"Bearing witness to the suffering caused by Ebola has led me to call for early action now for Zika and microcephaly in West Africa, as well as action against the panepidemic in the Americas," Lucey says.

Inhalation Anthrax Treatment Approved

Source: <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/articles/2016-03-21/inhalation-anthrax-treatment-approved>

Mar 21 – **Anthim (obiltoximab) has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat inhalational anthrax,** a rare disease stemming from infected animal products. *Bacillus anthracis* spores also pose a deadly bioterrorism threat if released intentionally.

Anthrax toxins can cause severe tissue damage and death, the FDA said Monday in a news release. Anthim, combined with certain antibacterial drugs, is designed to neutralize the toxins. The medication's effectiveness was evaluated in studies conducted on animals, since it wasn't ethical or feasible to conduct such trials with human volunteers, the agency said.

The drug's safety was evaluated in 320 healthy human volunteers. The **most common side effects** included headache, itching, upper respiratory tract infection, cough, nasal congestion, hives and injection-site reactions including swelling, bruising and pain.

Anthim's label includes a boxed warning of a potential severe and possibly fatal allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis. "However, given that anthrax is a very serious and often deadly condition, the benefit for treating anthrax is expected to outweigh this risk," the FDA said.

Anthim was developed by Pine Brook, N.J.-based Elusys Therapeutics, with assistance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority.

