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November 7, 2013

Dear Colleagues,

Attached please find the first of three papers on Syria. I had thought to make them into a book to be entitled *Understanding Syria* as part of my trilogy, *Understanding Iraq* and *Understanding Iran*. But two things caused me to put them out in this form: first, my agent said that there are a number of “I saw this and he said that...” books coming out on Syria and publishers like those better than the kind of analytical books I write. Second, I thought that with the upcoming Geneva II conference – now apparently indefinitely delayed – it would be useful to put in one place what I think needs to be considered there, in the several capitals and among intelligent citizens. Hence the haste.

The enclosed paper deals with the “basics” of Syria, the historical legacy, ramifications and current events of the Syrian civil war.

In Part 2, I will deal with attempts by outsiders to cope with the war and/or to use it to achieve their own objectives and then show what I believe to be the best approach now possible to end the conflict.

Part 3 is itself really three essays, appendices of background materials: the first is an analysis of the changes that have taken place in the perception of Islam and that guide

the insurgents in Syria by the Egyptian theologian Sayyid Qutub. His work has been read by scores of millions of Muslims all over the world. It is really one of the most important bodies of thought and propaganda of our times. It needs to be understood by us too, but I suspect that very few non-Muslims have even heard of Qutub. The second appendix is a summary of the chemical weapons issue that nearly got us into an attack, made light of by President Obama as a “shot across the bow.” Had the US fired the missiles, each armed with half a ton of high explosives, I believe the act would almost inevitably have been a step in a process leading toward ‘boots on the ground’ in Syria. And the third is an analysis of the law, international at the start and now domestic American, on intervention.

Some of you have teased me for writing long papers. I confess. But they have mostly dealt with problems that have caused tens of thousands of lives and trillions of dollars. If they were simple, they would at least have cost less. And, in our age of sound bytes and photo ops, I am lost. I was recently asked by the BBC to discuss Syria in 6 minutes and by NPR in even less time. I cannot. So I fall back on my last excuse: ‘...but I write short books!’ Perhaps I can ask you to treat these three essays as a disconnected book.

You will receive the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> batches in about a week.

None of these papers is copyright. They are my *pro bona* contribution to the citizen’s duty. I hope you will scatter them as widely as possible.

Sincerely,

William R Polk