

SMA Reach-back Report

Risks of Security Situation Outpacing Diplomacy in Syria & Iraq

Question (R5.2): *What are the risks associated with the security situation in Syria/Iraq outpacing diplomatic progress and policy in the region? What should be done about it?*

Contributors

Hala Abdulla, Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL), USMC University; Gawdat Bahgat, National Defense University; Anoush Ehteshami, Durham University (UK); Global Cultural Knowledge Network Staff, US ARMY TRADOC G2; Zana Gulmohamad, University of Sheffield (UK); Sabina Henneberg, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies; Faysal Itani, Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East; Vern Liebl, Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL), USMC University; Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Executive Summary

Sarah Canna, NSI Inc.

Our experts noted that we cannot say with certainty what the future security environment will look like in the Middle East. The region “is highly fluid. And fluidity means that alliances are temporary and that it’s very difficult to draw any long-term or even medium-term perspectives on what might happen,” Dr. Ehteshami noted. Limited visibility into the future is compounded by the sheer number of inflection points facing actors in the region as each tries to shape the environment in its favor.

The concern that security developments could outpace diplomatic efforts is well founded. The table below identifies the inflection points—or catalysts—discussed by contributors where security developments could outpace the ability of local and regional actors to respond.

Inflection Catalyst	Potential Responses Associated Risks	US Responses to Mitigate Risks
Region: Lack of US leadership/diplomacy ¹	Russia & Iran could fill void; allies doubt/unclear about US commitment; increased friction among coalition partners	Fully engaged Western diplomacy & clearly stated US objectives in region
Region: Iran and Turkey hegemonic ambitions ²	Permanent loss of US influence	Fully engaged Western diplomacy, to include potentially using diplomatic back channels if necessary
Iraq & Syria: Assad's consolidation of power in Syria & expansive Iranian influence in Iraq ³	Strong counter-reaction by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and UAE and thus exacerbating sectarian conflict in region	Creation of inclusive political institutions
Iraq & Syria: ISIS transformation to insurgency ⁴	ISIS safe havens in ungoverned areas; ISIS resurgence	Regional security cooperation to combat ISIS and reduce poorly governed spaces
Iraq: Disputed territories ⁵	Conflict, particularly between Peshmerga & PMF	Negotiated settlement facilitated by USG
Iraq: Kurdish referendum ⁶	Increased regional and sub-state tensions could lead to conflict; could completely change political scene in region	Negotiated settlement of disputed territories facilitated by USG; engage with Iran to minimize sectarian conflict in Iraq
Iraq: Unexpected positive shift among Sunnis towards govt ⁷	Decrease sectarianism, increase govt legitimacy, reduce appeal of ISIS	US promote stable governing institutions, encourage reconciliation among elites
Iraq: Post-conflict reconstruction ⁸	Failure to promptly support reconstruction of largely Sunni regions increases risk of political instability and support for ISIS-like groups	US promote rebuilding and reconstruction of destroyed provinces
Syria: Post-conflict reconstruction ⁹	Failure to ensure post-war Syria not dominated by Assad and Iran	US to do "whatever it can" to have some influence over the shaping of post-conflict Syria
North Africa: US favoring counterterrorism efforts over human rights ¹⁰	US counterterrorism support in countries with significant human rights abuses increase appeal of	US define clear objectives in North Africa, uphold human rights, increase bilateral relations

¹ Abdulla, Bahgat, Ehteshami, GCKN, Serwer

² Abdulla, Bahgat, Ehteshami, GCKN

³ GCKN

⁴ Abdulla, Gulmohamad

⁵ Gulmohamad

⁶ Abdulla, GCKN, Gulmohamad, Serwer

⁷ Abdulla, Liebl

⁸ Abdulla, GCKN

⁹ Serwer

Catalysts, Risks & Responses

According to Daniel Serwer, one of the few remaining options for the US in Syria is to work to ensure that Assad and Iran do not dominate post-war Syria. This is because, as Faysal Itani notes, the United States has accepted that the “regime and its partners have essentially won the war” in Syria.

As Hala Abdullah notes, “everything seems to be happening in Iraq at once.” In fact, most of the issues and risks identified in the table above focus on Iraq. According to Vern Liebl, potential catalysts in Iraq range from the re-emergence of ISIS as an insurgency to a sudden positive shift of Sunni attitudes towards the Iraqi government. Many of the catalysts listed are interrelated in a highly complex system, which is why the potential responses to these problems are strikingly similar; they all require US diplomatic and policy actions. It is worth noting that the catalyst most frequently cited by contributors is the lack of US leadership and clearly stated goals in the region (Abdulla, Bahgat, Ehteshami, GCKN, Serwer).

¹⁰ Henneberg

Expert Contributions

Hala Abdulla

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Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, Marine Corps University
habdulla@prosol1.com

R5 #2. What are the risks associated with the security situation in Syria/Iraq outpacing diplomatic progress and policy in the region? What should be done about it?

R5 #4. How should United States foreign policy evolve in the region post-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria? What are the dynamics in the region and what will be the implications of this for the USG?

Response:

For both questions, I will address the Iraq portion, as it seems interrelated.

A true Middle East expert would know that there is no certainty when it comes to predicting the course of event in the region. I often like to remind myself of this aspect when asked about matters related to Iraq and the region. However, there are current events and indicators at play that suggest several scenarios, none of which could be guaranteed.

First, we would be misled if we thought that defeating ISIS militarily in Iraq, would in fact completely eradicate the ideology of groups like ISIS and al-Qaida from those their strongholds. There will always remain a small number of core believers that will try to regroup and recharge by capitalizing on the Iraqi government's weaknesses, corruption, and dysfunctionality. However, a nationwide poll carried out by al-Mustakilla for Research Group back in April 2017 in Iraq, shows that for the first time since 2003, "Sunni Arab public opinion in Iraq is very positive about the political situation in the country, while the Shiite Arab view of politics has grown more negative."¹ 51 percent of Sunni Arabs believed the country is headed in the right direction, while only 36 percent of Shi'a shared the same views. What does this mean and how will it affect the upcoming elections and the Iraqi scene in general? Most of this positive Sunni sentiment could be attributed to the way the Iraqi Forces, particularly, Iraqi Special Forces ISOF and Counter-Terrorism Services ICTS (the "Golden Division"), fought against ISIS in Mosul and other provinces. Moreover, the way ISOF evacuated civilians, offered them aid, food, and medical assistance, while ISIS held them as human shields, left a very positive impression among those civilians. After all, those ISOF officers and soldiers are Iraqis, regardless of their ethnic or sectarian background, a sentiment widely reflected among Iraqis, particularly Sunnis on social media and other communication platforms. Video clips from Mosul showing kids with their families being liberated from ISIS, running towards ISOF officers to hug them and ask for their uniform badges and flags,² all of which are indicators of this striking positive shift among Sunnis towards the Iraqi forces and the government in general. What does this mean for the near future in Iraq? It means Sunni Arabs in Iraq, for the first time since 2003,

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/14/iraqi-sunnis-are-impressed-by-the-defeat-of-isis-heres-what-that-could-mean/?utm_term=.eb7bbc087b5a

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75ZyFbr4CII>

feel the sense of inclusion, despite the hardship they endured living under brutal ISIS's control. After years of Sunni boycotts and rejections to join the Iraqi forces, we are witnessing a surge among young Sunni men who want to join the armed forces. Commanding general of Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service, Gen. Talib al-Kinani,³ in an interview with the U.S. based al-Hurra TV said that the ICTS had opened the door for young men to join the service, as the need was for 1000 new recruits only, but ICTS had received 300k applications of young men from all over Iraq to join their ranks. Among those are many Sunnis who saw a role model in the ISOF/ICTS that on one hand ferociously fought ISIS door to door in the old city of Mosul, and on the other hand evacuated civilians and provided humanitarian assistance. Another indicator, from the local level demonstrating the emerging positive view towards the ISOF and its celebrity-like officers, was reflected in the artwork of local young artists that were displayed in several of the recent local festivals.⁴ In the "First Reading Festival in Mosul"⁵ that took place in eastern Mosul,⁶ countless paintings of famous officers that led the offense against ISIS were displayed to the public. Among them were Gen. Abdul Wahab al-Saaidi,⁷ known to be a very humble officer, and who is loved by people of Mosul and Iraqis in general.⁸ ⁹ The man is known to be of a Shi'a background, but that did not affect his status among local Mosulis. Same goes for Col. Haidar al-Obaidi, another ISOF officer praised and loved by the public in these liberated provinces.

Also, this positive shift in Sunni Arab sentiment will undoubtedly be reflected in the upcoming elections in Iraq in 2018. With a more active role and larger participation, the actual size and voices of Sunni population in Iraq will be reflected in the election's outcome, allowing for a more dynamic representation in the government.

Meanwhile, the negative sentiment expressed by the Shi'a reflects the majority's dissatisfaction towards the government's performance and its endemic corruption. The average Iraqi Shi'a is in fact suffering lack of services and is living in poverty. Most young Shi'a men left their daily jobs and joined the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) following the fatwa of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to fight ISIS. Whether they were ideologically motivated, already in uniform, or sincerely responding to the call of their homeland facing the danger that is ISIS, black signs mourning those young men killed in the fight against ISIS have been piling in Shi'a-majority provinces. In fact, the largest cemetery in the world, Wadi al-Salam, in the holy city of Najaf, has been receiving tens if not hundreds of coffins carrying the bodies of those young Shi'a men killed in the battlefield since 2014. Pictures of those killed, also known as martyrs by Iraqis, are hung on the poles of street lamps, large billboard and on buildings; and the families of those killed among the PMF often receive no compensation. Although there is no actual fighting in Shi'a-majority provinces, the burden, depression, and exhaustion of this war is clearly felt in these provinces.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BUH094KoA>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-jxNjJlcC8>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/mosul.festival.for.reading/>

⁶ http://www.huffpostarabi.com/hares-elabasy/-13261_b17942380.html?ncid=engmodushpimg00000003

⁷ <http://www.qoraish.com/qoraish/2017/01/%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3/>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tlj6gDA7Ayc>

⁹ <http://www.almadapaper.net/ar/news/534789/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%A5%D9%84>

It is safe to say that both Shi'a and Sunni Arabs bore the brunt of the ISIS-phase in Iraq and the price was too high for both. People realize that Iraqi politicians are behind what happened; however, if the Iraqi political scene will not offer new faces, then people will either boycott the upcoming elections or just surrender to vote for the same faces. With that being said, more and more Iraqi politicians are representing themselves as secular, non-religious and technocratic individuals. A way of rebranding themselves. One thing that can be noted is that both Shi'a and Sunni Arabs are satisfied with PM Ibadī's policies, charisma, and diplomatic maneuvering. Although the man falls under the prominent Shi'a religious Da'awa party, so far he has distanced himself from his party's objectives and has acted as a professional, secular, and skilled statesman. His openness to Iraq's Arab neighbors such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Jordan offered him greater legitimacy and respect among both Sunni Arabs and non-ideological Shi'a Arabs. They both view him as a man who has led Iraq to victory against ISIS, following former PM al-Malaiki's disastrous policies that led to ISIS occupation of one third of Iraq.

The Kurdish referendum and its outcome, and whether there will be a Kurdish state separate from Iraq has been a topic of recent wrangling between Iraqi politicians, which had regional and international powers involved. Despite the fact that an independent Kurdistan state could lead to possible conflict particularly on the disputed territories, mainly Kirkuk, those who are monitoring the news out of Iraq, can sense a united front among Shi'a and Sunni Arabs on this regard. This is a stance and an accord that hasn't been witnessed in Iraq since the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. This could have the potential of changing the Iraqi political scene drastically, regardless of whether the Kurds decide to proceed with their independence or stay within Iraq. However, there are several Sunni opposition groups, claiming to represent Sunni Arabs, who have announced their willingness and intentions to, not only support a Kurdish state, but to be included within its territories, that is the "Sunni-majority provinces." This is an indicator that Sunni Arabs are not quite united under one front, whether its tribal, political or religious. Since 2003, the Sunni Arab population in Iraq has always lacked a prominent leadership. No one group, political or tribal personality, can in fact claim to represent all Sunnis. Internal divisions within the Sunni front have always been present; between those who are part of the government, groups opposing the political process (inside and outside Iraq), and those who chose to resort to an insurgency-type of resistance. All this left the average Iraqi Sunni hopeless, frustrated, and vulnerable to the agendas of these competing groups, which eventually led to the ISIS occupation of their towns.

Everything seems to be happening in Iraq at once; the defeating of ISIS in its last strongholds, the Kurdish referendum, and Iraq's openness to its Arab regional neighbors and environment. It is safe to assume that Iraq might witness an Arab-Kurdish conflict, although not as serious as many experts are suggesting. On the other hand, there are many opportunities for the central Iraqi government to capitalize on and the world powers that support it. One of which is the Sunni Arabs warming towards the government and their positive sentiment and satisfaction with the way the government is headed. A vital aspect, that can prevent a resurgence of ISIS-like groups who have always capitalized on Sunni's anger, frustration, distrust, and dissatisfaction for years.

The U.S. government should promote a stable end state, by urging Iraq's political elites to reconcile and integrate groups who participated in the fight against ISIS into government's institutions, both Sunni and Shi'a. Let us not forget that the main triggering point that led most Sunni tribal fighters of the Awakening Councils of al-Anbar aka (Sons of Iraq) from 2006, to go back into joining AQI which later became ISIS, was the failed promises made by al-Maliki's regime to integrate them into government institutions and offer them employment. Another opportunity for the U.S. to promote a stable state is by promoting the rebuilding and reconstruction of the destroyed provinces, mainly the Sunni-majority

provinces that were once held by ISIS and have witnessed the most fighting and destruction. The Iraqi government has yet to compensate those who lost their homes because of the fighting, and most people are still living in either refugee camps or have gone back to live in the ruins of what used to be their homes. An opportunity for the Iraqi government to gain the trust of the Sunni population is by compensating them and allowing them to return to their homes after clearing these neighborhoods.

The international implications of a faltering U.S. diplomatic process would be incalculable but undoubtedly adverse to U.S. interests. A fully engaged Western diplomatic process backed up by a robust military force -- made clear to all that the will to use it is present -- is absolutely required. A diplomatic void will allow the Russian/Iranian axis to establish a permanent presence in Iraq (think the phase of post U.S. withdrawal from Iraq following 2011), and Syria and exercise considerable influence inimical to US interests in the region. The influence of the Iranian special military units and agents in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq is well documented. Their alliance, overt or otherwise, with Russian ambitions is palpable. Meanwhile Assad's war against ISIS is close to success, and he is beholden to Russia and Iran for his survival. The continuance of his regime will also increase tensions with Israel, some Gulf States, and certain segments of the population in Lebanon. Moreover, the defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq has not totally eliminated the threat, and in fact may make it more amorphous and difficult to combat. The largely Sunni extremist movements from al-Qaeda to ISIS have shown remarkable resilience and ability to rise from the ashes, as we've seen over the years. The huge expanse of desert between Iraq and Syria will continue to provide ample territory, hideouts, and possible strongholds for the extremists to operate and grow if not combatted ideologically, as well as in a vigorous counter-insurgency campaign, carried out over a number of years. Meanwhile, the Turks and Iranians, both with hegemonic ambitions in the region, will be rivals aggravated by the Kurdish push for independence. In short, the current power vacuum in the region will be filled by international and regional powers, none of whom can be considered friends of the U.S.

Gawdat Bahgat & Anoush Ehteshami: Iran's Defense Strategy

Gawdat Bahgat
National Security Affairs
National Defense University
Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Study

Anoush Ehteshami
Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies (IMEIS)
School of Government and International Affairs
Durham University (UK)

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[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

Nicole:

First I'd like to thank everyone for dialing in to the SMA CENTCOM speaker session about Iran's defense strategy. I would like especially to thank Anoush Ehteshami and Gawdat Bahgat for taking the time to present today. Professor Anoush Ehteshami is a Professor of International Relations in the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University. He is also the Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Chair in International Relations and Director of the *HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Programme in International Relations, Regional Politics and Security*. He is, further, Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies (IMEIS) at Durham, one of the oldest and noted centres of excellence in Middle Eastern studies in Europe.

Anoush:

Dr. Gawdat Bahgat is a professor of National Security Affairs at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies. He's an Egyptian born specialist in Middle Eastern policy, particularly in Egypt, Iran, and the Gulf region. His areas of expertise include energy security, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counter terrorism, Arab Israeli conflict, North Africa, and American foreign policy in the Middle East. Now Anoush and Gawdat over to you.

Thank you very much indeed and good morning everyone, it's glad to know that there're callers interested in what Gawdat and I have done. Gawdat and I did a slight arrangement conversation of our own, so we agreed that I would kick off by providing a bit of a background and then Gawdat will bring us up to date with more recent developments and then we open it up hopefully to some fruitful conversations with colleagues across the table. Is that all right?

Nicole:

Sounds great.

Anoush:

Okay, so Iran's defense strategy. I think the starting point is what was happening before the revolution and how has it changed since revolution. Very briefly as you know much of the period 1970s was spent on creating a major conventional force by the Pahlavi regime.

Almost entirely dependent on the West and within the United States for hardware, Iran was purchasing hardware that was not available even to NATO, F14 Tomcat is a good example for that. I think the only other country with access to it at the time was Canada. Into the 1970s the plan of expansion was to continue into the 1980s and it was in the 80s that Iran would have developed by then a nuclear power program had the revolution not happened. There was considerable momentum built into the Irani military systems prior to the revolution. The revolution effectively halted virtually all of that for two reasons.

One was the revolutionary leaders no longer wanted to be a dependent on the West and the Shah had been. Secondly due to the policies and their behavior taking the American diplomats hostage for example, terrorism and such like, the US and the West decided to turn its back on Iran's military. In a sense they froze in time as far as the relationship with the West was concerned from 1979, 1980 onwards. The war started in 1980, September of 1980 and I think that has had a very dramatic impact on Iran's armed forces and on Iran's old defense strategy.

What do I mean by this? There are several ways of analyzing this. The first is that this was Iran's first conventional war in over 200 years. Iran has had skirmishes, had its paratroopers intervening in Oman for example in '74 to save the throne of Sultan Qaboos. Iran has sent some observer missions during the Vietnam War to South East Asia and it had exercised with Turkey and Pakistan and others. Iran Iraq war was the first time that Iran armed forces were actually engaged in anger. Many of their leaders of the military had already been killed or had taken exile and Iran had a very youthful command structure by now leading the war.

The second element was that Iran realized very quickly how expensive war is and how quickly its resources, the materiel get exhausted. They started drawing down all the stockpiles that the Shah's regime had built up but they were not able to replace this as quickly because of sanctions and because of Iran's lack of access to major suppliers in the west. The direct consequence of that was Iran had to cannibalize so much of the hardware that had been accumulated already first and secondly it began to find alternative ways of defensive and offensive posture. Many of the things that Gawdat will talk about have arisen from this particular dilemma that Iran was facing.

The third element of the experience of the 1980s, the war years, was that Iran felt almost completely isolated from the rest of the international community. Remember at the time the Soviet Union was actually back in Iraq, France was back in Iraq in the war, the US and the rest of the NATO was at best agnostic about this. What was actually leaning towards Iraq and Iran couldn't really get their supplies in place and had to find alternative ways of getting the supplies from third countries, and it is there that it begins to develop relationships with North Korea with Syria, with Libya amongst many other countries that

provided Iran with weapons which included of course Brazil and Chile as well.

This solitary lesson begins to shape Iran's defense strategy. Which was (A) not to rely as much on its commissioned forces and it had been. Secondly to invest heavily in a ballistic missile program that it can use offensively but also use it as a core deterrent mechanism. Thirdly to develop a massive military industrial complex at home to service the existing hardware but also for Iran to develop a whole range of new research and new weapon systems. Many of the fruits of which you're now beginning to see come into the surface in terms of the aircraft, submarine development, surface naval weapons as well of course the short range, the medium range, and now we have with the Khorramshahr missile last week what is effectively the longest range of missile that Iran has been able to develop.

The nuclear program went on holiday if you like from 1980 and while Iran's interest in a nuclear program continued behind the scenes it was actually back in 1984 that I can trace, where Iran began to think about revisiting the nuclear program that Shah had put in place. Iran initially talked to Germany who was not interested, France which was not interested and then started to talk to China and Russia as potential technology suppliers for its nuclear program. That took much, much longer to come on line and it was actually... well it was in 1990 and the end of the Iraq War that Iran felt comfortable with pursuing that line because many of you will know Iraq actually bombed the Bushehr power plant during the war, so it was hardly safe or secure for Iran to pursue that during the war years.

In the 2000, that has become the flash point of much of Iran's interactions with the international community. Within Iran itself, the nuclear program sits very comfortably in the spectrum of priorities and they don't put the nuclear program in their defense profile. Nevertheless, the core of the decision making structure is the National Security Council that is presided over by the president but has representatives on it from across the Iranian establishment. The leaders' office has two representatives on it. The defense minister is present, interior is present, where usually Revolutionary Guard leadership is present as well as their regular armed forces the Artesh. All of them in many ways collectively decide the pace and the fate of Iran's defense strategy. These decisions are not taken in isolation, they are not taken only by the leader, and the leader rarely makes the unilateral decisions without consulting the Supreme National Security Council or indeed his advisors who happen to sit on the council.

Beyond the council, you have other vested interests. The parliament is particular example of this, which has a very powerful defense committee that oversees Iran's defense activities. It was that committee that only three weeks ago voted to increase the defense budget of President Rouhani with a particular mandate of investing in Iran's R&D and ballistic missile development. You know this is not North Korea, the decisions are made much more broad based and there is a degree of

public discussions that filters both upwards and downwards in terms of what the priorities should be. I think that's about ten and half... eleven minutes. If I may I will pause there and hand over and I look forward to further comments later.

Bahgat:

Thank you Anoush and I would like also to thank Sam, Nicole, and Sarah and everybody who participated who helped us to put this together. Would like also to make it clear that our research is based on open sources available to everybody. I want to add a few points to what Anoush said, how Iran articulated its defense policy. It is very important to understand how the Iranians think, big part of it in Iran strategic thinking—their strong belief in victimization. There is a perception that the country has been abused by regional and global powers and has been denied what the Iranians believe is its rightful place. Basically that Iran was supposed to be the dominant regional power in the region and has been denied this by global powers from the British Empire to Russia to United States. This is how the Iranians think.

Another important point here also, the Iranians like everybody else, they watch what happens in their neighborhoods and take notes, learn lessons that Iran Iraq War—one big lessons the Iranians learnt that they cannot challenge the much more powerful American military. Another big lesson the Iranians learned from our war with Iraq was how United States was able to destroy Saddam's Hussein's army in very short period of time. Iranians failed each year is communication. The Iranians learnt that they should give the commanders in the field the power to make decisions, basically decentralization of decision making process.

In Iran as we put in our study, there are basically two military establishments, the traditional one that Shah Artesh and the Sepah or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard. Iran is not different from other countries. In Saudi Arabia we have national guards and traditional military, in Iraq it was the same. Basically one army with the responsibility to defend the country from foreign threats and the other army mainly to defend the regime. The main goals of Iran's defense policy is first to protect the country, second to protect its allies, second to prevent any attack of any received aggression and third to project power. The Iranians take great pride of their scientific achievement and they were to know about this. This is why there is over reliable connection between the three pillars we examined: the naval forces, the cyber capability, and the missile.

In the three areas the Iranian basically understand that in traditional war against US and its allies, they would lose. The Iranians learnt when their navy was destroyed by US during the Iran Iraq War at the end of the war when United States protected Kuwait and other Gulf states navies. The Iranians understand they're no match to US. This is why the small boats, they cannot destroy the United States but they make it very hard for United States to pursue its objectives. The same thing about missiles, the Iranians understand they cannot defeat the United States or Saudi Arabia by missiles, but they make the price high. This is why countries would think twice before going to war with Iran. The third

about cyber, Iran has been investing heavily in its cyber capability and Iran probably now is number four or five. The United States is number one, Russia China and Iran is not very far. Basically because cyber gives Iran other countries a great potential; it is much cheaper than conventional weapons, and it can make a lot of harm to the perceived enemy.

To summarize and I believe it's better to spend time and question and answers. I believe strongly that in any military conflict with Iran, United States will win. But it is important to define the concept win. What winning means. I do not believe there is winning at any price. Asymmetric warfare is war of will, it is how to make the perceived enemy pay very high price. The Iranian military strategy has succeeded making any military conflict very expensive, very costly. This is why... again, as far as I know, United States has the military capability to completely destroy Iran. United States has by far the strongest military force of the world, but at what price? This is the big question in my mind and what Iran has now and what Iran is investing in is making such thinking about going to military conflict with Iran very expensive, and they have succeeded. I will stop here and will be glad Anoush and me to take any question. Anoush would you like to add anything to what I said?

Anoush:

No, just on the line the points you've made.

Nicole:

All right, so thank you both. Now it's the time for question and answer portion of the telecon. If you have a question please make sure to state your name and your organization. If you're not asking any question, make sure your phone is still on mute. Do we have any questions for Anoush and Gawdat?

Question:

I wonder if the recent discovery that the Artesh has been involved in Syria if that reflects a new evaluation of the role between the Artesh and the Revolutionary Guards in this asymmetric warfare?

Bahgat:

For sure there is a great deal of coupe of the nation between them. There are two armies, two military establishments but they do not work against each other or in isolation of each other. It is clear that the Revolutionary Guard is better funded, better trained, better armed but also the traditional military has many advantages and it is also... it plays important role in the broad Iranian military strategy. For Syria, the Iranians do not perceive Syria as foreign war. It is Iran's national security, it is part of the Iranian military thinking, military strategy, which is interestingly similar to Israel. It is taking the war outside the country, not waiting till the country is attacked. This is one reason why Iran is involved in Syria in Iraq and Lebanon, to defend the country before the war comes to Iran.

Question:

Thank you.

Anoush:

Also I think the regulars are there because President Rouhani's government does not want to relinquish the Syria policy completely to the Revolution Guard. They actually want the regulars involved with this at the command level as well as, if you like, deployments to ensure that there is a degree of accountability and that the government can be

much more--if it can't pull this off--involved in determining the fate of Iran's involvement with Syria post war. This is a bit for a domestic re-jigging of deployment and priorities in terms of defense presence there.

Nicole:

Okay, do we have any other questions?

Question:

I guess we pretty much know what from the Iranian perspective what the nightmare scenario would be back to when they were facing a Saddam like situation. Obviously they don't want to go back there. Realistically, what are they thinking the Middle East would be like in the next decade or whatever, something more to their liking. I mean are they making realistic assumptions about what they would like the future to be or is this an ever expanding desire to control and kind of keep the conflict that would occur way away from their geographical borders. What's this thinking about the future for the region basically?

Bahgat:

The Iranians believe time is on their side. They believe in recent conflicts, they took the right side of history against Saddam Hussein, and then Arab countries and the United States turned against Saddam Hussein. Again the Taliban in Afghanistan and then they were to follow them, this is the Iranian perception, Foreign Minister Zarif just gave a recent interview and highlighted these points. In the future they believe eventually Arab countries and Western powers will accept their argument. The Iranians are a big winner of the conflict between Qatar and its Arab allies. The Iranians perceive the referendum in Iraq today as efforts by Israel and Saudi Arabia to divide Iraq to weaken Iran. For Iran also, there are many accusations that Iran is trying to intervene in Arab affairs' agenda to control the region.

I believe from realistic point of view, Iran, like any country, is trying to promote its interest in the region and around the world. In this case Iran is not different from any other country. Saudi Arabia is all the same, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, every country in the world tries to promote its perceived national interest. The difference, Iran's concept is that Iran is trying to promote Shiism—ideology is taking back seat in Iranian policy. Like revolutions all over history. In the beginning the Iranians were interested in exporting the revolution. Iran created Shia allies in many countries. In studying Iranian foreign policy and defense policy, it is a combination of ideology and national interest. Very much like American foreign policy: combination of American values and American interest. Gradually, ideology is taking the back seat and national interest are taking the lead. I believe Iran is trying to promote interest, trying to intervene, but everybody else does.

Anoush:

Yeah, I think that's absolutely the case, there are things that they are proactive about and there are things that like most of the countries they are in no better position than to merely react to it. I think if you take a ten year horizon, what was initially wishful thinking, say ten years ago, was that America will run out of steam, United States forces will find the region too troublesome, or that they'll be defeated, and that eventually they'll walk away from it and leave the theatre open for the regional, legitimate powers like Iran to acquire their rightful place. At one level you could argue that actually having waited, things are going their way.

That in many ways the Obama administration made it clear that it was not going to fight the fight of the Middle East and its problems. The Trump's administration is picking its fight very carefully, in some instances playing with fire as well. All they have to do is hold tight, from Iran's perspective, and they will ride away. The problem, however, is that there are too many moving parts in this theatre for Iran to control. That is when you see it behaving in some ways against its own national interest. For instance given that economy the priority, the last thing they want is the high defense budget, and yet that is exactly what they've had to do.

Given that economic development and creating and employment opportunities for the youthful population is an absolute priority for the Rouhani administration. He is having to celebrate alliances with other countries and rushing to defense of the North Koreans or in Syria and so on. There are these contradictions in the regime and it's partly because of this sense that it needs to prove itself to its own people but also through the region. Partly because it is really excited by the opportunity that are presenting themselves in two ways: one is this profound Arab weakness that the Arab world is so badly fragmented that there is space for Iran penetrate and manipulate. Secondly that by keeping itself closer to its Asian allies and that include Russia it will be able to push through an alternative Middle East separate from Americas grip. These things really do drive policy in Iran.

Question:

I guess the question I have, is there a stable situation that we could just be striving for in this region? Could we draw new boundaries and causes the region to become stable or work some other mechanism that would cause it to occur?

Bahgat:

Yeah. I would say the way I see the Middle East now, most Arab countries are going through a new phase, trying to reform their economic systems--the reaction to the Arab spring succession crisis and several gulf estates. The way I see it the modern Arab Middle Eastern countries are much more stable than the heart of the Middle East, the Arab world. Israel with all the reservations on Israeli democracy and the corruption cases against the prime minister. But Israeli is a functional democracy and close ally of the United States and there is a great deal of stability in Israel.

Turkey, despite the attempt failed coupe and how Turkey is moving away from democracy, but Turkey still is a large country with a lot of potential and what happened in two years is short period in a long Turkish history. I would say Turkey is more stable than most Arab countries. Iran, since the revolution, has held regular elections. For sure Iran is not Norway, is not the liberal democracy we would love to see. As Anoush mentioned, it is North Korea, it is Saddam Hussein. It is ruled by consensus, there are different factions. The Majles, the Iranian parliament, has very strong discussion debates about different issues. The president most of the time does not get his way even their Supreme Leader has some challenges. Iran has the largest hydro-carbon reserves in the world. I believe that for stability, as far as United States is

concerned, it is important to work with Israel, Turkey, and Iran. Give our countries the space they need to put their house in order.

Anoush:

I think the region is highly fluid and the fluidity means that alliances are temporary and that it's very difficult to draw any long term or even medium term perspectives on what might happen. While some places might appear stable today, they can very easily be dismantled tomorrow or fined for conditions under which the stability is then severely tested. Referendum today in Iraq Kurdistan today is an example of this. Though this is a symbolic political gesture the outcome we can anticipate as being very strongly in favor of independence. That will in itself have a ripple effect brought across the region and will create unintended consequence of itself. There is no particular group of countries or country holding the line anywhere in the region. That is why it is so volatile and that is why it's so dangerous for outside countries to try and intervene with the best of intentions to protect, to preserve, defend their national interest of their allies, because it is very difficult to draw hard and fast lines in these rather shifting sands that we find in the region. The countries, which have got strong internal structures, are the ones that are standing. They fall into two camps, the ones which have got popular legitimacy and which have got very strong Shia leadership. These are the only ones that are able to behave in way which is beyond their borders.

Question:

I have two questions, one is you've described as I understand Iranian strategy is primarily defensive in nature. One question is, because one person's concept of defense is seen as another person's concept of offence. What would trigger a more aggressive offensive move on the part of Iran? The second question is, what are they learning from the situation in North Korea? Thank you.

Anoush:

You're right, I think there is a fine line between defense and offensive and when you're testing a 2000 kilometer range ballistic missile that can suspiciously look as a very offensive aggressive act particularly if you're sitting in Israel and in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. I entirely, entirely agree with you. From their perspective though, they are showing off the capability that they're actually able to bring mayhem to countries that might threaten them. This is where I think they differ from North Korea. They don't have a death wish; they don't see escalation of a crisis with the United States in their national interest or in the regime's interest. What they would like to do is show off their capability in the hope that they will get a credible diplomatic response and not a military escalation.

What they seem to continuously miscalculate is that so long as the rhetoric is offensive, the rest of the world is now going to need to draw a clear distinction between rhetoric and reality. I think the judgment on that falls very much on the recipients of Iran's message. As you see the European countries are fairly comfortable with continuing to deal with Iran at very high diplomatic levels while Iran is carrying all of these military activities. While United States for its own reasons obviously isn't. Iran is therefore in a position to pick and choose a little bit here.

Again this differs very much from North Korea, which is now almost entirely isolated. I think Iran has never been isolated. Since the nuclear deal of 2015, it is positively integrated regionally and internationally. If you only saw the interactions that Rouhani and Zariff had in New York with other heads of state and foreign ministers, you will understand how engaged the rest of the world is now with Iran. Given what they've achieved so far, they're not on a suicide mission, they don't think that provocation at this stage is in their interest.

Again sitting in Iran if there is a clear revision of strategy in Washington, they're not going to sit on their hands. They want to do things that can influence thinking in Washington and to try and deter Washington from adapting a more aggressive posture towards them. The only way that they think they can do this is by show of their military powers. That is what they seem to be doing at this moment.

Question: Let me follow up real quick, what would you be doing if you were the US to get your desired objective, given what you just said?

Anoush: If the desired objective is not the regime change in Iran, then I would say, use the good offices of European countries to engage in low key dialogues. After all it's been done before, the nuclear deals effect is owed to the dialogue that the Omani established while Ahmadinejad was president for goodness sake. We know it can happen, I would say, use good access to Iran to open a back channel of communication.

Bahgat: If I may add to your points to what Anoush said, the line there between defensive and offensive weapon system is not very clear and what will force Iran to act like any country is there is a threat to regime survival. The Iranians like any other people, like any other countries, they are interested in keeping their regime in power. With this background I believe the Iranians will be very sensitive to and will not accept Sunni dominated government in Iraq or threat to Hezbollah in Lebanon or the defeat, not having access to Hezbollah, friendly government in Syria under Assad or somebody else. This kinds of Iran's redlines and basically the bottom line is the regime survival. For North Korea, as Anoush said, there are many differences between Iran and North Korea, probably just as president Trump's speech in UN and how the leader of North Korea reacted and how President Rouhani reacted. President Rouhani was very guarded in his response. He did not call name, he did not... he was very guarded and I believe there is a big difference between Iran and North Korea.

Another big difference, Iranian economy is much more diversified than North Korean economy. It is much easier to impose effective economic sanctions on North Korea. Talking about sanctions and what the United States needs to do to achieve its goals, I believe sanctions are counterproductive. They will not work; they will empower the hardliners in Iran. It is in the United States' best interest to have Iran integrated in its regional system to have Iranian economy developing strong, expanding middle class. Isolated Iran, poor Iran, stagnated economy in Iran is against stability in Iran's stability in the entire Middle East.

The nuclear deal is very important not to sabotage the nuclear deal. As many leaders at your end, many European leaders made it very clear that a nuclear deal is working. The nuclear deal also has lessons to North Korea. North Korea will watch if United States sabotages the nuclear deal, what is the point about reaching deal with US? The recent conflict with Qatar shows instead of trying to build alliance with Sunni Arab countries against Iran, which is not working, it is important to somehow find a way for Sunni Arab countries, Israel, Turkey, and Iran to work together. I believe it is not in our best interest to take sides in the Shia-Sunni conflict in the Islamic world. Sectarianism does not drive American foreign policy. We do not take sides.

Question:

Okay, my question is just going to take it a little bit more internal with the ever increasing reach of Iran globally nowadays. What have you seen or have you experienced in terms of what's happening with religious and ethnic minorities? Are they being able to access for instance high level positions in government, military as a result of the increased needs now that the reach is grown? What is your view of this?

Answer:

It is a lot easier for ethnic minorities to climb the ladder of positions than it is for religious minorities. Though the regime speaks about pluralism in religion and such like, actually the constitution is very specific about what it allows the minorities, who they are first and what it gives them, and it gives them a certain percentage and therefore certain seats in parliament that is numerically assessed, not universally. Once you do that of course then you're creating a two-tier system where the Shia population is by right a dominant population and not the other religious minorities. You will find then a practice, most of the positions are held by Shia population of Iran. When it comes to ethnic minorities, the country is actually very much better integrated. The boundaries of the ethnic group are less sharp than they were 30-40 years ago, unless geography plays a part in determining of the ethnic boundaries.

For example the Kurdish population given that they are mountainous populations are less visible in several layers of government than say the Turkish population. The Turkish population is large by any measure and they are present up and down the echelons of power, that's one. The other is some of the ethnic groups like the Baluchis for example are so remote from central powers that they tend to keep to themselves by and large. The same also applies to Iran's Arab minority population in Southwest of the country who also tend to keep to themselves. In more recent time though, we've had this convergence if you like of the grievances of those minorities who also happen to be Sunnis being articulated because of wider regional tension. The Arabs and the Baluchis are particular examples of this.

The government of Rouhani is quite sensitive to this. It is trying to address it. But the more that the states gives its population means of articulating their views, the harder it is for Iran to justify discrimination amongst the religious minority. That I think is something that will not go away and regional tensions would probably only deepen that. Ethnic

minorities, pending what happens in Iraq Kurdish, even though they occupy Iran's borderlines are... it seems to me much less politicized than you might expect and are not looking for independence or even autonomy from central government. The only case that seems to apply to is the Kurdish population who have been politicized for generations. And they continue to demand a degree of autonomy. They now have the rights of the language for example and media in Kurdish language but that doesn't give them the political leverage that they want. Central government of Iran is like most of its neighbors and it's terrified of giving up any of the levers of powers that it holds. Clearly they're in a bind in terms of how to accommodate the needs, the interest of the minorities without appearing to be weak at the center.

Bahgat:

I would add, Iran has one of the oldest nation states in the world, has very strong national identity and Iran is probably more sensitive to ethnic minorities. The only Kurdish state ever existed was in Iran 1946 for a very short period of time when Soviet Union supported it and the Iranian reaction to the referendum in Kurdistan today also shows their concern about the Kurdish question. For religious and sectarian minorities, Iran is much more tolerant than most of its Arab neighbors. Iran has the second largest Jewish community in the Middle East after Israel. For sure there are claims of discrimination, but Jewish community in Israel is represented in the Iranian parliament. Christians also enjoy religious freedom or they can practice their religion. Christians and Jews in Iran can drink alcohol; it is legal in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There is a great deal of tolerance towards religious minority in Iran.

Nicole:

Question:

All right, do you have any other questions?

I would like to shift our attention towards the East. I read every once in a while that Iran plays a key role in Chinese thinking about OBOR... this one belt, one road strategy. While we're preoccupied what's happening to the west of Iran Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, all of that, slowly we will wake up and find out that China is playing a very predominant role in Iranian economy and its relationship with Iran and all the countries in between.

Bahgat:

The Iranians perceive the 21st Century is an Asian century and from American European perspective this is not completely accurate. We are still very important player. It is true the Chinese economy has been the first growing economy in the last 20, 30 years or so. In some other countries the perception is Asian powers, especially China, and to a less degree India are on the rise. Already Iran has very close relationship with China and Iran is part of this one belt initiative. Probably from American perspective, I believe we should not see it as zero sum game, it is either China or the West. United States does a lot of trade with China and other countries. The bottom line is Iran kind of gave up on United States. Iran has not given up on Europe. After the nuclear deal Iranian European Cooperation is growing at a high speed. Iran is working very closely with Asian powers China, India, Japan, South Korea and Russia for sure. From American perspective, again, it is not zero sum game and we can work together. Anoush would you like to add anything to it?

Anoush:

Iran started the revolutionary regime with the slogan of neither east nor west in an attempt to carve for itself a third way. In many ways its policies in the 80s and also this desire to put a distance between the country and the west inevitably has pushed it eastwards. The sanctions throughout the 80s and the 90s and 2000s have meant that every time Iran has tried to take a step forward, it has been almost compelled to look eastwards to try and make a headway. These have over time become much more structural in the way that played out.

Had China and East Asia and India not risen so fast economically as they have done, that might have just remained one of the parallel areas that Iran would have worked with. Given what has happened globally and given the rise of East Asia and South Asia as this new potential power houses in case of India certainly. Iran feels again like its landed on its feet. That being West Asia is most important economy gives it by right and natural seat at the high table in Asia and gives it going forward in the 21st century, the future of Asia. They are very much dependent on the development of Asia for their own prosperity. Bahgat has rightly said, Iran will not turn its back on the West if it doesn't have to and it will continue to look to Europe and it would like to look to United States for high-tech engagement. The US would lose Iran by itself not because Iran wants to work it from the United States. All you have to do is look at the European gains in just two years since the nuclear deal, to appreciate the opportunities that are being opened up.

Question:

Thanks very much for this presentation. I think it's extremely important considering that we often don't really talk about Iran and its interest and how we can engage more and I really appreciate the high tech engagement point that you just made. I think that these are areas where we can take advantage after this deal. I think one of the questions I have are two-fold. I will say that I'm not sure that Israel is a stable actor in any part of the Middle East considering it's also supporting the independence of the Kurds but you guys could think about that and... in my perspective at least in studying this for a long time and watching this situation for a long time, it seems to be that Iran in particular and really in the past several years is that Zariff, has been very forthcoming and how they feel, how they're acting, why they're acting in certain ways and they haven't really hid anything. They've talked about why they're testing ballistic missiles. Why they're acting defensively militarily, why they're in Syria. I mean that is just this weekend on Fareed Zachariah was talking about why they're in Syria and why they're supporting Hezbollah, Palestinians etc.. I guess my surprise is that they have been very clear and we've not very understood and from your purview, can you see what's happening in the US administration or US foreign policy decision makers about why this is the case? It seems that Iran is very pragmatic and it's Saudi Arabia and others that seems to be continuously misleading us in the region. I'd appreciate that, thank you.

Bahgat:

Thank you Anoush. Iran has very sophisticated soft power; to some extent I believe it's almost unfair to compare Iran with its Gulf Arab

allies. Iran is one of the oldest, has the civilization and very sophisticated, well educated population and the Iranians are very proud of their culture and it's amazing to follow how Iran tries to get its message out. Iran has many newspapers posted online in English. They're very interested to let the world know how they think, their opinions. Comparing for example with Arab countries, most Arab countries now have one or two English newspapers online. The Iranians has tens. Iranian movie industry is another example of this first power. Iran won the Oscar twice. The Iranians are very sophisticated in getting their message out. Foreign minister Zarif spent a great deal of his time giving interviews to American and European media. Again this is what I refer to the concept of victimization--who are, rightly or wrongly, the perception who are victim and we want the world to know about our case.

Anoush:

I think it's a fair enough question, why does the US see Iran differently compared to the rest of the world and I think there is the kind of historical parallels. Look how long it took for the US to establish relations with its closest neighbor Cuba, for example. Look how long it took for the Unites States to be able to heal the wounds opened during the Vietnam War, another example.

Look how tense relations continue to be between US and Russia, US and China as well. I think these things will take time. There is a particular problem in Washington and that is Congress seems to continue to harbor a very negative perception of Iran. Some Congress men and women who have tried to be more valiant and indeed as you know they've actually travelled there in order to try and break this log jam and they have not managed to do so. So long as that what seems to be ideological hostility in Congress continues, I can't see any way anyone in the white house with all the goodwill in the world who can change the elite mindset in United States.

Then you ask where that needs to be done, probably I think Iran can make some gestures to realign American thinking if you like. You could argue that both Prime Minister Zarif and President Rouhani have tried in their own way of course to do this but they have not been able to reach or get the message across clearly enough for it to make an impact in Washington. Given that they have flown the American flag, they have let the American flag sit beside the Iranian flag. A flag that they have been burning and defacing for years, both very clear signal to me that they are ready to respect American state. Not just this notion of American people. It's a question of, how can then they be encouraged to develop that because there would inevitably be a backlash from Iran's own hardliners against any softening oppositions with the United States. They need a bit of a rope that they can climb out of this hole and that rope seems to be held by Congress in Washington and not by the White House. There is a degree of adjustment therefore that needs to take place there but also on the Iranian side. So long as Iran continues to abuse Israel, it would be very difficult for anybody to speak in its behalf or highly of it in America and get away with it. We have structural

problems on both sides and both seem to become prisoners of their own ideological positions.

Question: One follow up question about the discussions we had earlier on North Korea. Do you guys see collusion with or working with between Iran and North Korea, do you think the two are working together in ballistic missiles and or the nuclear front?

Bahgat: For sure, based on open sources there has been military cooperation especially in the area of missiles between Iran and North Korea. Again our research was based on open sources. I suppose all countries have classified information, but based on open sources I am comfortable saying that there is a great deal of cooperation between North Korea and Iran. How deep is the cooperation, I do not know.

Question: Why are they cooperating?

Anoush: I don't think that it's as easy for them to collude as it is for them to cooperate. Iran has never hidden the fact that it's actually got considerable amount of knowhow from North Korea. That its interest in its missiles seem to shadow each other on so many levels. Also Iran has economic ties with North Korea as well, that the current leader when he was president, established way back in the 1980s and so he's very proud of the connections that he's made with North Korea.

Nicole: All right, well it looks like we've reached the end of our session. I'd like to thank everyone for calling in and I'd like to thank Anoush and Gawdat for giving this fast presentation. Thank you.

Bahgat: Thank you.

Anoush: Thank you very much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

Global Cultural Knowledge Network Staff

US Army TRADOC G2, Ft. Leavenworth, KS

jennifer.v.dunn.civ@mail.mil

The table below represents responses from four anonymous experts recruited by the Global Cultural Knowledge Network (GCKN) staff.

Asad's growing power in Syria coupled mounting Iranian influence in Iraq will prompt a strong counter reaction by the Saudi, Egyptian, and UAE axis, thus exacerbating the sectarian conflict in the region. Stability is dependent on the creation in both countries of inclusive political institutions.

First, military success is outpacing reconciliation and reconstruction efforts. This challenge is certain to damage the already weakened social contract in both Iraq and Syria. Citizens of those countries did not trust their national governments to distribute goods and services fairly before the arrival of ISIS. The fact that certain areas are receiving aid or reconstruction in unequal measure will exacerbate this problem. Second, each participant is moving toward an objective endstate of advancing their national, ethnic, or sectarian interests. The US government does not seem to have specified interests post conflict. As such, Iran, Kurds, Shia militias, etc. are conducting themselves in such a way as to obtain the influence or the control that they desire post conflict. Some of the US allies are leery of the US abandoning them as they are uncertain of our long-term interests and commitments. The closer the campaign moves toward objective completion then the greater will be the increase of intra-coalition and inter-coalition friction.

The major risk associated with the security situation in Syria and Iraq is the role that Iran will play in post-conflict Syria-Iraq. Iran's efforts to expand its influence – in Syria and Iraq and in the region as a whole . The gains made by the Assad regime (with Russian and Iranian help) over the past eight months enhance the disturbing prospect of a Syrian government remaining in power in Damascus that is dependent on Iranian funding, Iranian military support, and the importation of Iranian-backed militias. Almost the same scenario happened in Iraq as the Iranian leadership including the Iranian military helped the Iraqi government to fight ISIS. The fight against ISIS helped Iran to involve more deeply in the Iraqi government. For example, Iran helped the Iraqi government to make a new section of army called AL Hashid El Shabby which is mixed of the Iraqi Shia- Iranian soldiers .

The popular mobilization units, hashd ashaabi, exacerbate the security situation faster than coalition and Iraqi/Iranian efforts to mitigate ISIL. This is not new, but our policy and response to the units does not seem to have any effect on the Iraqi govt. We should engage more directly with the Iranians that oversee the units to minimize antagonizing sectarian relations in Iraq.

Sabina Henneburg

Johns Hopkins University
School of Advanced International Studies

As the Assad regime and its backers appear to be gaining control over Syria, and as Iraqi and Kurdish forces continue to drive the Islamic State (IS) out of its major strongholds in Iraq, political deals that would calm the fighting and the humanitarian situations remain more distant. This imbalance between the security situation in Syria/Iraq and diplomatic and policy progress also has implications for the rest of the Middle East and North Africa. This Strategic Multilayer Assessment contribution focuses on the effects of the imbalance in the five countries of North Africa: Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. It argues that, as the threat posed by IS persists elsewhere in the region, the United States faces even greater urgency in defining clear policies and diplomatic positions in North Africa.

U.S. policy towards Libya, Egypt and the Maghreb under the current administration has been largely stagnant. Yet related extremist movements continue to operate in these countries (and their Sahelian neighbors), and remnants of IS hold the potential to reappear.¹ In Egypt, policy progress and diplomacy have not gone hand in hand. Trump has embraced President Abdelfatah al-Sisi rhetorically, but Congress in August denied Egypt nearly \$100 million in aid and withheld an additional \$195 million until the country improved its human rights record, although experts contend that this does not imply an end to the strong American-Egyptian partnership.² The marked rise in the number of attacks by extremist groups since President al-Sisi has taken charge suggests that effective policy should be centered around *discouraging* the current practices of the al-Sisi regime, as the recent withholding of aid did.³ In the meantime, Egypt has indicated a desire to assert its own influence in affairs elsewhere in the region, in close coordination with Russia.⁴ As in Syria, this calls for the U.S. to engage in dialogue with Russia while also holding firm to its own principles (countering Iran in Syria; upholding human rights in Egypt.)⁵

The risks associated with the security situation in Syria and Iraq outpacing policy and diplomatic progress in Libya are also myriad. As in Egypt, the growing involvement of actors such as Russia and France will weaken the U.S.'s ability to shape the situation and guide it in a stable direction.⁶ This is

¹ International Crisis Group, "How the Islamic State Rose, Fell, and Could Rise again in the Maghreb," July 24, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/178-how-islamic-state-rose-fell-and-could-rise-again-maghreb>.

² Hatem Maher, "Sisi and Trump's Good Relations Don't Define U.S. Policy" *MENASource blog*, September 1, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/sisi-and-trump-s-good-relations-don-t-define-us-policy>.

³ See Allison McManus, "Measuring Success in Egypt's War on Terror," *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*, July 27, 2017, <https://timep.org/commentary/measuring-success-in-egypts-war-on-terror/>.

⁴ Anna Borshchevskaya, "From Moscow to Marrakesh: Russia is Turning its Eyes to Africa," *The Hill*, September 21, 2017, <http://thehill.com/opinion/international/351684-from-moscow-to-marrakech-russia-is-turning-to-africa>; Oren Kessler, "Egypt Picks Sides in the Syrian War", *Foreign Affairs*, February 12, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-02-12/egypt-picks-sides-syrian-war>; Mattia Toaldo, "Russia in Libya: War or Peace?", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, August 2, 2017, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russia_in_libya_war_or_peace_7223.

⁵ See Andrew J. Tabler, "Russia Crosses the Euphrates: Implications," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Policy Analysis*, September 18, 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russia-crosses-the-euphrates-implications>.

⁶ Toaldo, "Russia in Libya"; Jalel Harchaoui. "How France is Making Libya Worse." *Foreign Affairs*, September 21, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/france/2017-09-21/how-france-making-libya-worse>.

because these actors, too, support policies that favor counterterrorism over human rights⁷ -- again, creating an environment in which extremist movements, having been militarily defeated in the Levante, would likely find favorable.⁸ A more sustainable approach to restoring stability in Libya is working with the international community, led by United Nations Special Envoy Ghassan Salamé, within a political framework that includes all actors in the negotiations.⁹

Finally, in the three countries of the Maghreb (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco), developments in the security situation in Syria and Iraq without corresponding policy progress similarly risks perpetuating instability and creating space for violent extremism. All three of these countries are undergoing significant political flux and/or face political uncertainty, and countering extremism requires strong bilateral partnerships with each.¹⁰ Once again, these partnerships must be founded on principles of democratic leadership and reforms if they are to be part of a larger regional strategy that seeks to create stability. As in Egypt and Libya, this entails supporting the protection of human rights and avoiding support for autocratic regimes, leaders or tendencies.

Moreover, the three countries of the Maghreb (and Libya) continue to serve as launching points for transmediterranean migrants--a phenomenon which has rapidly become a major security risk for Europe. This underscores the role of North Africa as a bridge between Europe, the Middle East, and the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, and thereby its importance in fostering wider regional stability. The need for policy and diplomatic progress and clarity in North Africa thus may be equally as urgent as progress toward a political resolution to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See for example Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "From Al-Qaida to ISIS, a Blind War on Terrorism will Mean an Endless War", *World Politics Review*, August 9, 2017, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/22910/from-al-qaida-to-isis-a-blind-war-on-terrorism-will-mean-endless-war>.

⁹ See International Crisis Group, "Restoring UN Leadership of Libya's Peace Process," September 18, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/restoring-un-leadership-libyas-peace-process>; Mattia Toaldo, "Salameh's Difficult Task in New York", *Asharq al Awsat*, September 16, 2017, <https://english.aawsat.com/mattia-toaldo/opinion/salamehs-difficult-task-new-york>.

¹⁰ For example, see Sarah Feuer and David Pollock, "Terrorism in Europe: The Moroccan Connection," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Policywatch* 2852, August 24, 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/terrorism-in-europe-the-moroccan-connection>

Faysal Itani

Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East
Atlantic Council

I will speak to Syria in particular: The security situation has outpaced diplomatic progress throughout the entire war. In fact, the only reason we are backing talks on 'de-escalation zones' in Syria is that the regime and its partners have essentially won the war. There was no meaningful diplomatic activity during the height of the conflict when either side could have won in theory. Diplomatic progress is simply catching up with the military balance, meaning there are little to no risks given that the United States has accepted the war's current trajectory. Risks would increase if a coalition were to emerge that could jeopardize the regime's superior position in Syria. That is an unlikely scenario due to lack of intent.

Vernie Liebl

Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

Marine Corps University

vliebl@prosol1.com

In assessing risks, the security situation and all inherent in the above question, there is one aspect that should be examined more closely which should be identified and considered in addressing the future regional diplomatic and political situation, specifically in how the United States approaches the future in regards to Iraq.

To set up the question, some context is important. The Battle of Mosul, or Operation “We Are Coming, Ninevah”, began 16 October 2016 and officially concluded on 20 July 2017, although Islamic State fighters continued to resist, at much reduced levels, in isolated pockets and to conduct small unit or individual offensive actions and suicide bombings, for nearly three weeks after the official end of the operation. It is that continued resistance, in fact the entire spectrum of resistance in time, effort and extremity, which can be examined.

Looking at simple and often unreliable statistics, most of which are “guesstimates” due to Iraqi government censorship, Islamic State propaganda, the inadequate documentation of refugees/survivors, and the very destructive nature of urban combat (i.e., the inability of reclassifying the missing as the bodies may have been destroyed by crushing rubble, repeated explosive impacts and the scavenging of animals). Still, there is a possibility to reconstruct some numbers.

Looking at the number of forces deployed against Mosul by Iraq, the committed forces are comprised roughly of the following:

Iraqi Security Forces (inclusive of Army, CTS, Federal Police and Emergency Response forces) and various Hashd (PMU/PMFs) were approximately 75,000. If the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, who mainly played a logistical and/or rear area security role at the request of the Baghdad government, that adds another 40,000 personnel. So, a rough total of 75,000 or 115,000. For the Islamic State, the numbers are even more difficult to ascertain with estimates ranging between 3,000 to in excess of 21,000. Hence, a reasonable guess could be a range between 7,000 to 10,000 (or maybe even up to 12,000) but it is unlikely that one will ever fully know. However, for the sake of this discussion, assume a 10:1 Iraq Security Force combat personnel ratio to Islamic State defenders.

So, the Islamic State forces, isolated in a city of likely less than a million civilians (Mosul was estimated to have approximately 2.5 million residents in 2010) and subjected to sustained assault by a much larger attack force employing massive amounts of high explosives in an increasingly indiscriminate manner as the assault went on, and with a limited manpower force, still held out for over 9 months. How was this possible?

Not only did they actively resist but they survived in an increasingly apocalyptic-like environment, inveterately tactically offensive until almost the end. Why?¹ This is not at all like what the United States

¹ See: Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, “The battle for Mosul: ‘I have never seen such hard fighting like this’, The Guardian, 31 Jan 2017. www.theguardian.com/world/2017/Fed/01/battle-for-mosul-iraq-isis-fighting. Accessed 21 Sep 2017.

military has come to expect from Islamic terrorist groups. The rapid deposing of the Taliban from rule of Afghanistan in a 9 week campaign in 2001, the ultimately rapid re-conquest of Fallujah in 2004 (despite a false start in April 2004), even the Iranian-supported retaking of Tikrit from the Islamic State (Mar-Apr 2015) was accomplished fairly rapidly. Even with ferocious resistance in the case of Islamic State forces, no resistance anywhere extended beyond 10 weeks, even if the correlation of forces was not as overwhelming as the 10:1 ratio at Mosul.

Sure, reference can be made to the Taliban still being around, but they rarely engage in prolonged toe-to-toe engagements. Likewise, Mogadishu is considered a Somali National Army/AI Qaeda victory but the disproportionate casualty ratio - 105 UN personnel (of which 19 were American KIA and 73 WIA) versus an approximate 1,200, showed that if the UN forces had desired a rematch it would likely have gone very much against the SNA/AI Qaeda.

Which takes us back to Mosul and the ferocity of resistance. The scale of destruction, especially of western Mosul, has been called akin to Stalingrad. Likewise, the scale of casualties has been compared to Stalingrad. Again, it is estimated that there was an approximate 21,000 ISF/Hashd/Coalition casualties (killed, wounded and missing) as opposed to 7,000 to 10,000 Islamic State casualties (killed, captured). It is estimated that somewhere around 25,000 civilians were killed or injured (possibly as high as 40,000 or as low as 10,000). These are significant numbers and should not be minimized, as the potential total losses of killed, wounded and missing may be as high as 71,000. This does not include a possible one to two million people who fled, or were dispossessed, and are now refugees, suffering further loss not included within the Mosul chapter.

As severe as these losses are, let us compare it to Stalingrad. The battle of Stalingrad extended over a 5 month period, with approximately 740,000 Axis casualties and in excess of 1.1 million Soviet casualties. The city and suburbs of Stalingrad were utterly destroyed. To draw further comparisons to other urban fights, the Battle for Leningrad lasted 24 months and saw approximately 500,000 Axis casualties versus in excess of 2 million Soviet casualties. Looking within the Middle East, the Battle of Hama in 1982 lasted 3 weeks and saw somewhere between 10,000 to possibly in excess of 30,000 dead. Further afield, but looking at what can be termed "Islamist" resistance, the 6 week battle for Grozny saw approximately 7,300 Chechen combatant casualties, approximately 6,600 Russian casualties and an estimated 35,000 civilians killed. So, when talking about the "unprecedented" destruction and death totals of Mosul, historical context is important.²

Still, the resistance was ferocious and prolonged, and despite all the given context, it still begs the question of why. There are some potential answers that have been discussed in previous rounds of SMA questions and therefore I will not explore it.³ However, an important question should be raised: why did the forces of the Baghdad government, i.e., Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior forces, as well as the affiliated Hashd (PMU/PMFs) fight so long and hard to drive the Islamic State forces out of Mosul?

² If one wants to examine a single instance from the history of Iraq, witness the Mongol siege and destruction of Baghdad in February 1258. In the 13 day siege and subsequent sack, it is estimated a minimum of 200,000 and possibly in excess of a million people were killed by the Mongols. See: Ian Frazier, "Invaders: Destroying Baghdad", *The New Yorker*, 25 April 2005. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/04/25/invaders-3, accessed 22 Sep 2017.

³ I believe it primarily involves religious fanaticism of the Islamic State defenders, and rarely goes much beyond that; the precursor training, indoctrination, religiosity, political background or even rejectionism are more frequently explored but it is the guy in the fighting hole, who has just a shirt between him and death, whose motivations need to be better explored.

The cultural expectation of Arab/Muslim state military forces, by U.S. and Western military personnel, is fairly low.⁴ The repeated historical record of Arab and/or Muslim national forces has been of spectacular failure (think 1967 Ramadan/Yom Kippur War) or mediocre (think the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988⁵). Even those successes, such as the 1973 Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal, was followed by operational inertia which allowed an Israeli victory.⁶ Russia, arguably being the staunchest ally Syria has had in modern times, still does not stop Russians from being frequently and openly disparaging of their Syrian “clients”.

One of the leading Iraqi military units is the Golden Division⁷, which has directly subordinated itself to the Prime Minister although it is nominally subordinate to the Ministry of Defence. This unit, also called the CTS or ISOF (Iraq Special Operations Force), is composed of three brigades of Special Forces, is the government maintenance and security force, as its leaders are resolutely (so far) loyal to the current government in Baghdad. As such, traditionally, such a force would have as its mission to “Protect the regime, not the country”.

However, unusually in the Middle East, this national government maintenance force was committed to prolonged combat against the Islamic State, proving to be very effective. In the battle to retake Ramadi (November 2015 to February 2016), the Siege of Fallujah (February 2016 to May 2016) and the battle for Mosul, the Golden Division started with 18,000 personnel, received 8,000 combat replacements but suffered 16,000 total casualties. This unit, the only trustworthy force within the Baghdad government in the eyes of the U.S., has suffered almost 90% casualties yet remains in the fight. This is almost unheard of in the modern Middle East. Is it because an American ethos has been transmitted to the unit (or more correctly, a “Western SOF”-way of war as some of the training comes not just from Americans but Australians, New Zealanders, Spanish, Belgian and French)? Or is it truly a nationalistic unit with pride in itself and has made the leap to “owning” its country, not just loyalty to a regime or tribe? Maybe this is it because not only do they seem to fight very well, they also will unhesitatingly provide whatever immediate humanitarian assistance to Iraqi civilians/refugees needs, providing real succor to those they are seemingly now obligated to protect.⁸

⁴ See: Kenneth Pollock, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991*, Studies in War, Society and the Military, Sep 2004, Bison Books, Lincoln, NE. See also: Norvell De Atkine, “Why Arabs Lose Wars”, *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol VI, Iss. 4, December 1999.

⁵ A war involving high tech aircraft, armor, artillery and medium-range missiles, it essentially became a reprise in many ways of World War 1 tactics, with human wave assaults and the mass use of poison gas. In almost 8 years of fighting, minimal ground ended up being exchanged and the casualties were immense; Iraq suffered in excess of 700,000 while Iran suffered in excess of 1.1 million.

⁶ For further reading, see: Abraham Rabinovich, “The Yom Kippur War: Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East”, Shoken (Random House), NY, 2005; and Saad el Shazly, “The Crossing of the Suez”, American Mideast Research, CA, 2003.

⁷ This unit is the Special Forces unit created by coalition forces after the 2003 invasion. The forces, directed by the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service, consist of the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Command, which has three brigades subordinate to it. The Counter Terrorism Service (*Jihaz Mukafahat al-Irhab*, originally translated as Counter Terrorism Bureau) is funded by the Iraq Ministry of Defence. Many of the personnel in the Golden Division received extensive training by U.S. and Coalition SOF. Prior to 2016, the individual brigades operated separately and earned a disreputable reputation due to numerous actual or believed atrocities. They have managed to overcome that past and are now widely admired within Iraq.

⁸ From my experience, most elite forces in the Middle East, and elsewhere throughout much of the world, have an elitist viewpoint and generally will not deign to engage in humanitarian assistance; that is for others to do.

A majority of Iraq Army forces, specifically those who have received “Advise and Assist Training” from U.S./Coalition forces, seem to have absorbed some of this Golden Division ethos, although at a far less capable level. It likely is not due to the western style training so much as the example(s) being set by the CTS/ISOF. Following Iraqi social media, it has become the desire of many young Iraqi men to be accepted into the ranks of the CTS.⁹ More importantly, has the Golden Division, and increasingly reflected in better trained units of the Iraq Army, become a transformative mechanism in Iraqi society? I believe this may be so.

If it is indeed a transformative mechanism, it needs to be explored. Because if it is transformative, transformative to what? It may lead to a better, more professional, more humane nationalist force, one which can become a stabilizing force within Iraq and to the Middle East at large. Whatever it might lead to, it clearly behooves U.S. civilian, diplomatic and military leadership to understand that once the Islamic State presence is diminished, “business as usual” as conducted in Iraq since the 1950s (at least) may be over.

⁹ Joining the CTS is extremely selective. It is rumored that for every Iraqi man accepted into the CTS training, almost 300 applicants were reviewed, such is the immense competition to be in the Golden Division. Initially most of the applicants were Shia, however, as the Mosul campaign went on and then afterward, an increasing number of Sunni Iraqis have been seeking to join.

Daniel Serwer

Johns Hopkins University
School of Advanced International Studies

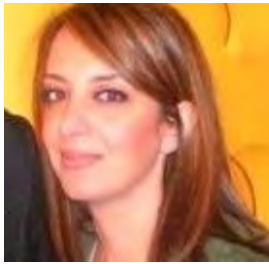
A: You are seeing the risks every day: death, destruction, and radicalization. Even in Iraq, there is no clear evidence that the government will be able and willing to establish in liberated areas inclusive governance that can proceed apace with reconstruction. The September 25 Kurdistan independence referendum will make things far more difficult, as it will distract the Iraqi government from the vital work of reintegrating and reconstructing liberated areas.

In Syria, the situation is much worse: the regime there is expelling its political opponents and reestablishing political control over those who remain in areas it gains control over. The Turkish/Russian/Iranian talks in Astana have produced the deconfliction zones and some sort of monitoring/observing/enforcing mechanism, but it is far less than what is needed, though the U.S. administration may be happy to be excluded from the burden-sharing.

The first thing to do about it in Iraq is to get President Barzani to postpone the referendum. If that proceeds, Sunnis will be left in an 80% Shia country without territory they claim as their own. Even if independence is postponed for two years, as the Kurds say will happen to allow time for negotiation, the Sunnis will come out with the short stick and resent it enormously. In Syria, the main challenge for the Americans should be ensuring inclusive and stable governance in Raqqa that can resist both PYD domination and regime/Iranian assault. Washington also needs to do what it can to ensure that the post-war period in Syria is not dominated exclusively by Bashar al Assad and the Iranians. That won't be easy.

Biographies

Hala Abdulla



Hala Abdulla joined USMC Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL) in September 2010 as the CENTCOM regional researcher and Subject Matter Expert under the Regional Cultural Language Familiarization (RCLF) team. Prior to 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), she worked for al-Arab daily International Newspaper in Baghdad office. Following OIF, she worked for four years as a journalist and cultural advisor with the U.S. Army Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (JPOTF) in Baghdad's Green Zone. Since coming to the United States twelve years ago, she has worked from (2007-2009) as an online Content Manager and team leader for Iraqi/Arab journalists and reporters under a CENTCOM-sponsored Transregional Web Initiative (TRWI), an Iraq-focused website. Hala also worked from (2009-2010) as a Social Media Analyst under USSTRATCOM's 'Foreign Media Analysis' initiative. Hala was born and raised in Baghdad, and is a native Arabic speaker, fluent in five regional dialects. She holds a B.A. in English Language and Literature from al-Ma'amun University in Baghdad (1996), and an M.A. in Strategic Communications from American University in Washington D.C. (2013). She authored 'Iraq's Mosul: Battle of Psychological War. Quantico Sentry, June 2014, and Co-authored 'The Struggle for Democracy in Iraq: from the inside looking out,' American Diplomacy, April, 2010.

Gawdat Bahgat



Dr. Gawdat Bahgat is professor of National Security Affairs at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Study. He is an Egyptian-born specialist in Middle Eastern policy, particularly Egypt, Iran, and the Gulf region. His areas of expertise include energy security, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counter-terrorism, Arab-Israeli conflict, North Africa, and American foreign policy in the Middle East.

Bahgat's career blends scholarship with national security practicing. Before joining NESA in December 2009, he taught at different universities. Bahgat published ten books including *Alternative Energy in the Middle East* (2013), *Energy Security* (2011), *International Political Economy* (2010), *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East* (2007), *Israel and the Persian Gulf* (2006), and *American Oil Diplomacy* (2003). Bahgat's articles have appeared in *International Affairs*, *Middle East Journal*, *Middle East Policy*, *Oil and Gas Journal*, and *OPEC Review*, among others. His work has been translated to several foreign languages.

Bahgat served as an advisor to several governments and oil companies. He has more than 25 years of academic, policy and government experience working on Middle Eastern issues. Bahgat has contributed to CNN, BBC, Washington Post and Al-Jazeera. He has spoken at Tufts University, Columbia University, London School of Economics, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Swiss Foreign Ministry, Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul, Qatar University, Kuwait University, Oman Diplomatic Institute, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (Saudi Arabia), Griffith University (Australia), India School of Business (Hyderabad, India), Institute of Military-Aeronautic Sciences (Florence, Italy), University of Viterbo, (Rome, Italy), and Institute for International Political Studies (Milan, Italy).

Anoush Ehteshami



Professor Anoush Ehteshami is Professor of International Relations in the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University. He is the Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Chair in International Relations and Director of the HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Programme in International Relations, Regional Politics and Security. He is, further, Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies (IMEIS) at Durham, one of the oldest and noted centres of excellence in Middle Eastern studies in Europe.

Global Cultural Knowledge Network, TRADOC G2



The Global Cultural Knowledge Network (GCKN) is a part of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command G2. Our mission is to enable a holistic understanding of potential future operational environments (OE) through the collection of expertise and information and the development of products/services to enhance OE understanding at the operational level. GCKN combines the intellectual capacity of military, academic, and industry experts and brings it to the Army's next mission.

Zana Gulmohamad



In February 2013 I began my PhD at the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield, UK, where I am currently teaching. My research title is: "Iraq's foreign policies post-2003". I am a former Research Fellow at the American University of Kurdistan. I have an MA in Global Affairs and Diplomacy from the University of Buckingham, UK, and a BA in Political Science from the University of Sulaymaniyah - Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I worked for six years (2005-2011) in the Kurdistan Region Security Council - Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

I had substantial responsibilities as executive manager and a security analyst in matters related to security, intelligence, data analysis, security technology, foreign relations (receiving delegations and official trips abroad) and training staff. My capabilities have built up over years of training and interaction with security corporations, governments and their security and intelligence services. They include states such as the US, the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

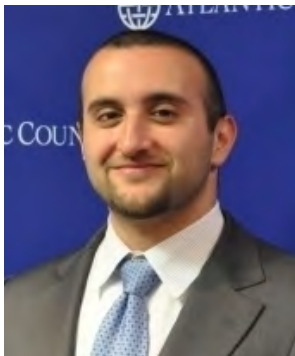
My articles have been published by journals and think tanks such as CTC Sentinel and the Jamestown Foundation's "Terrorism Monitor", The National, Open Democracy, E-International Relations, Global Security Studies, Your Middle East, The New Arab, and Middle East online. I have presented conference papers in the UK, the US and the Middle East. Please go to my website to view the links to my articles www.zanagul.com: www.zanagulmohamad.com

Email: zana.k.gul@gmail.com

Sabina Henneberg

Sabina Henneberg is a Ph.D. candidate in the African Studies program of the Johns Hopkins University School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, D.C. Her doctoral dissertation is on the current political transformations in North Africa. Ms. Henneberg has worked for Creative Associates International in international education and civil society development in Africa and the Middle East and with other organizations on human rights and gender issues. She also taught English for two years at Nankai University in Tianjin, China. Ms. Henneberg is a 2015 Cosmos Scholar and Boren fellowship recipient. She holds a Bachelor's degree in international political economy from Colorado College and a Master's degree in International Relations from SAIS.

Faysal Itani



Faysal Itani is a resident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, where he focuses primarily on the Syrian conflict and its regional impact.

Itani was born and grew up in Beirut, Lebanon and has lived and worked in several Arab countries. Before joining the Atlantic Council, he was a risk analyst advising governments, corporations, and international organizations on political, economic, and security issues in the Middle East. Itani has repeatedly briefed the United States government and its allies on the conflict in Syria and its effects on their interests. He has been widely published and quoted in prominent media including *The New York Times*, *TIME*, *Politico*, *The Washington Post*, *CNN*, *US News*, *Huffington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

The Washington Post, *CNN*, *US News*, *Huffington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Itani holds an MA in strategic studies and international economics from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, a certificate in public policy from Georgetown University, and a BA in business from the American University of Beirut.

Vernie Liebl

VERNIE LIEBL, M.A., M.S.

Middle East Desk Officer

Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

vliebl@prosol1.com

703-432-1743

Degrees:

- M.A. National Security and Strategic Studies
- M.S. History
- B.A. Political Science



Areas of Interest:

- Culture and History of Middle East
- Culture and History of South Asia
- Culture and History of Islam

Profile:

Vernie Liebl is an analyst currently sitting as the Middle East Desk Officer in the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL). Mr. Liebl retired from the Marine Corps and has a background in intelligence, specifically focused on the Middle East and South Asia.

Prior to joining CAOCL, Mr. Liebl worked with the Joint Improvised Explosives Device Defeat Organization as a Cultural SME, and before that with Booz Allen Hamilton as a Strategic Islamic Narrative Analyst. He has also published extensively on topics ranging from the Caliphate to Vichy French campaigns in WW2.

Mr. Liebl has a Bachelors degree in political science from University of Oregon, a Masters degree in Islamic History from the University of Utah, and a second Masters degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College (where he graduated with "Highest Distinction" and focused on Islamic Economics).

Daniel Serwer



Also a scholar at the Middle East Institute, Daniel Serwer is the author of *Righting the Balance* (Potomac Books, November 2013), editor (with David Smock) of *Facilitating Dialogue* (USIP, 2012) and supervised preparation of *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* (USIP, 2009). *Righting the Balance* focuses on how to strengthen the civilian instruments of American foreign policy to match its strong military arm. *Facilitating Dialogue* analyzes specific cases and best practices in getting people to talk to each other in conflict zones. *Guiding Principles* is the leading compilation of best practices for civilians and military in post-war state-building.

As vice president of the Centers of Innovation at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Serwer led teams working on rule of law, peacebuilding, religion, economics, media, technology, security sector governance and gender. He was also vice president for peace and stability operations at USIP, overseeing its peacebuilding work in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Iraq and Sudan and serving as executive director of the Hamilton/Baker Iraq Study Group.

As a minister-counselor at the U.S. Department of State, Serwer directed the European office of intelligence and research and served as U.S. special envoy and coordinator for the Bosnian Federation, mediating between Croats and Muslims and negotiating the first agreement reached at the Dayton Peace Talks; from 1990 to 1993, he was deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Rome, leading a major diplomatic mission through the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War.

Serwer is a graduate of Haverford College and earned masters degrees at the University of Chicago and Princeton, where he also did his PhD in history.