SMA Reach-back Report

Prioritized Iranian Interests in the Middle East

Question (R6.9): *How does Iran prioritize its influence and presence in the region?*

Contributors

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Executive Summary

Sarah Canna, NSI Inc.

How Iran Prioritizes its Influence and Presence in the Region
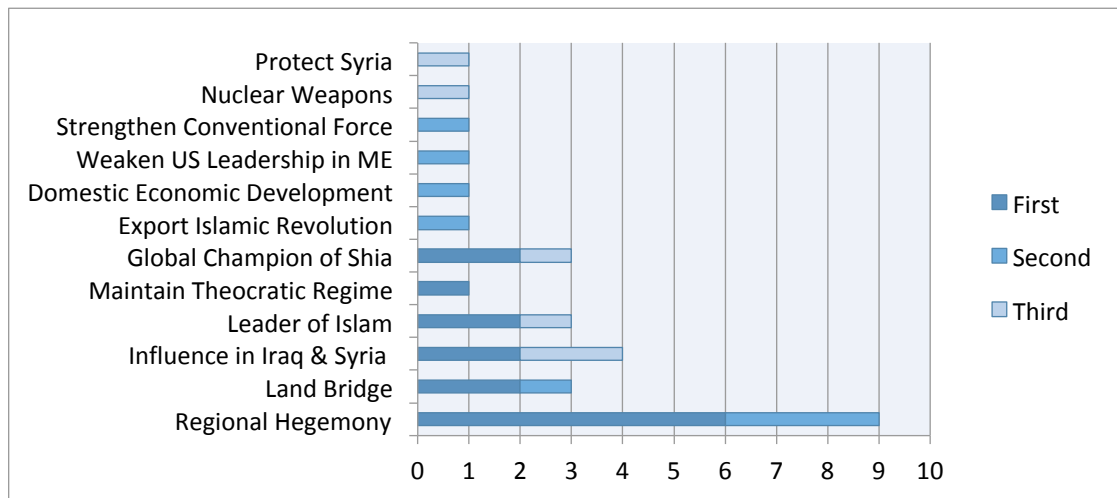

Figure 1 Iran's strategic interests in the Middle East

Hoping to answer the question of how Iran prioritizes its influence and presence in the Middle East, we asked fifteen experts to list—in rank order—Iran's key interests, how it seeks to realize those interests, and how successful it is likely to be in the next 18-24 months.[1] As is evident in Figure 1, a clear majority of experts consulted identified **regional hegemony** as Iran's primary regional goal.[2] However, while listed only once as a top three interest, Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy of the University of London argues that the primary objective of the Iranian government is the **continuity of the theocracy** in power in Iran. "Everything else flows from this," he writes. Indeed, many of the other interests listed in Figure 1 could be construed as mechanisms for establishing and expanding Iran's desire for regional hegemony and, more importantly (and implicitly), regime continuity.

Appendix A briefly describes the interests listed in Figure 1. The task of identifying and grouping interests from the expert contributions was complicated because 1) many of the interests are interrelated, 2) some are policies or tactics that are the means to achieving higher objectives, and 3) some are at different levels of generality. However, the interests listed do tend to cluster around four key areas—Islamic identity, national security, regime security/continuity, and domestic support. Iran's interests and how they choose to prioritize and implement them is a complex system perhaps best represented by a loop diagram, see Figure 2.

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[1] Multiple Reach Back responses also address Iran's strategic interests in the Middle East. Select responses can be found in the contributions section under Allison Astorino-Courtois and Sabrina Pagano. The complete responses dealing with Iranian interests are listed in Additional Works Cited.
[2] Coates-Ulrichsen, Gulmohamad, Jeffrey, Kluver, Maye, O'Shaughnessy, Ostovar, Sager, Smith

Iranian Interests as a System

Strengthen conventional force

Regime security/ continuity

Export revolution

Islamic identity

National security

Maintain nuc weapons program

Global champion of Shi'a

Weaken US/ KSA influence

Regime Legitimacy (not mentioned but implied by nearly all)

Leader of umma

Land bridge

Protect Syria

Maintain influence in Iraq and Syria

Domestic support
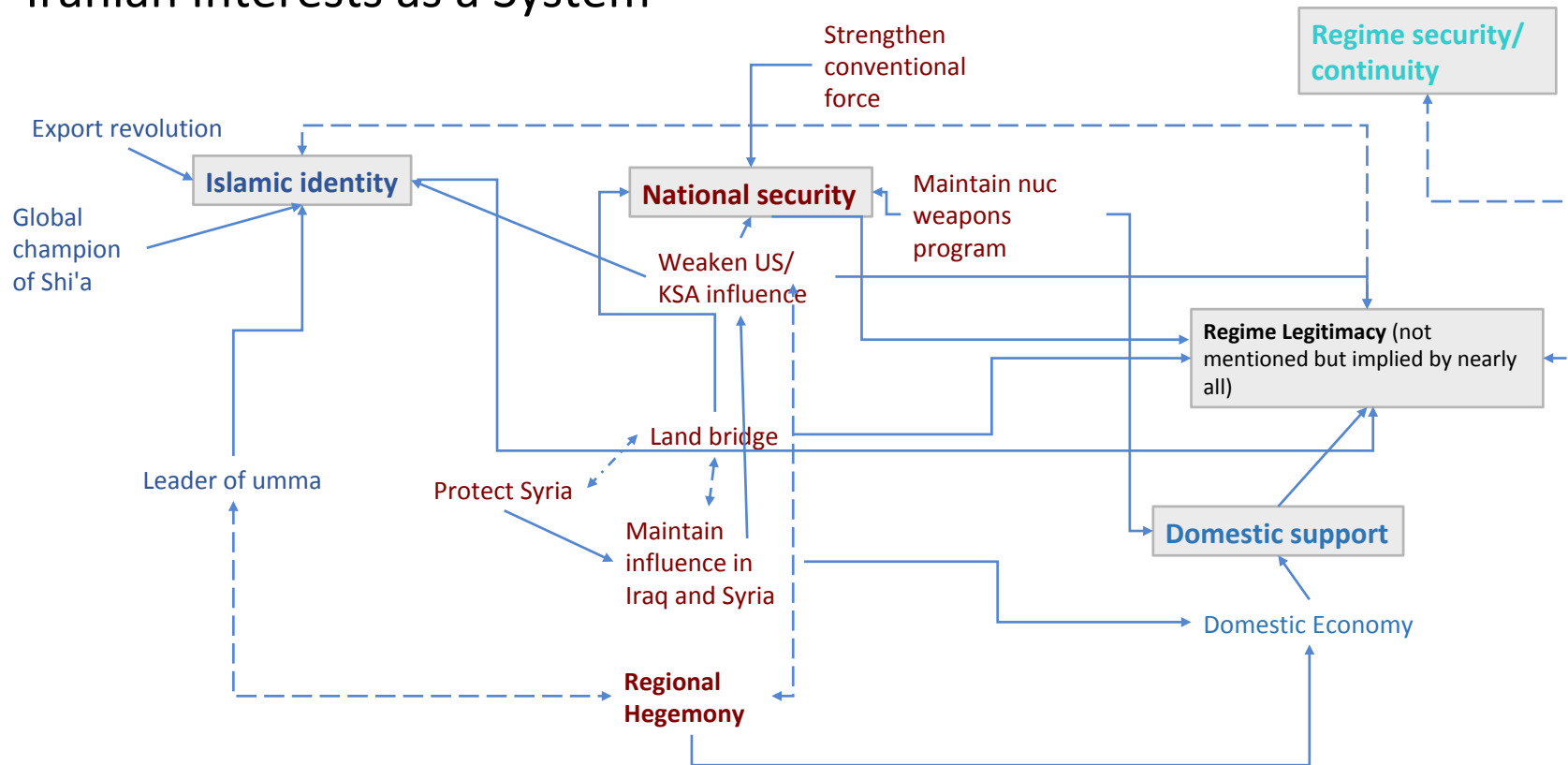
Domestic Economy

Regional Hegemony

Figure 2 Loop diagram of Iranian interests as a complex system

Once you have interests mapped into a looped diagram—representing Iranian interests as a complex system—it is possible to dive more deeply into the related factors driving, hindering, and complicating a particular interest or tactic. For example, based on the high-level information provided by experts in their contributions, Figure 3 shows how Iran's pursuit of regional hegemony is linked to other factors, tactics, and policies. This visualization is an example of how Iran's interests might best be displayed in a diagram. We did not ask the experts to explicitly support this kind of visualization, so it is primarily a notional representation. The SMA team in conjunction with the experts could complete the loop diagram as part of a future reach back effort.

Drill Down: Regional Hegemony

Regime security/ continuity

Islamic identity

National security

Weaken US/ KSA influence

Iran would like to weaken, but not eradicate, US and Coalition presence and influence in the Middle East, according to Dr. Skye Cooley and his team. US and Coalition forces create a stabilizing force in the region that paradoxically allows Iran to increase its influence in Iraq while at the same time casting doubt on the US as a stable, long-term partner in the Middle East.

Regime Legitimacy (not mentioned but implied by nearly all)

Leader of umma

Iran has successfully used Shia militias (Watkins) to defend both Sunni and Shia religious sites in Iraq and Syria (Luce). Not to do so "would force Iran to forfeit any claims to leadership of the entire Muslim *umma*."

Domestic support

Domestic Economy

Regional Hegemony

After years of economic sanctions, reviving the domestic economy is a pressing concern. The economic challenges facing Iran are made even worse by projections suggesting zero population growth by 2036.
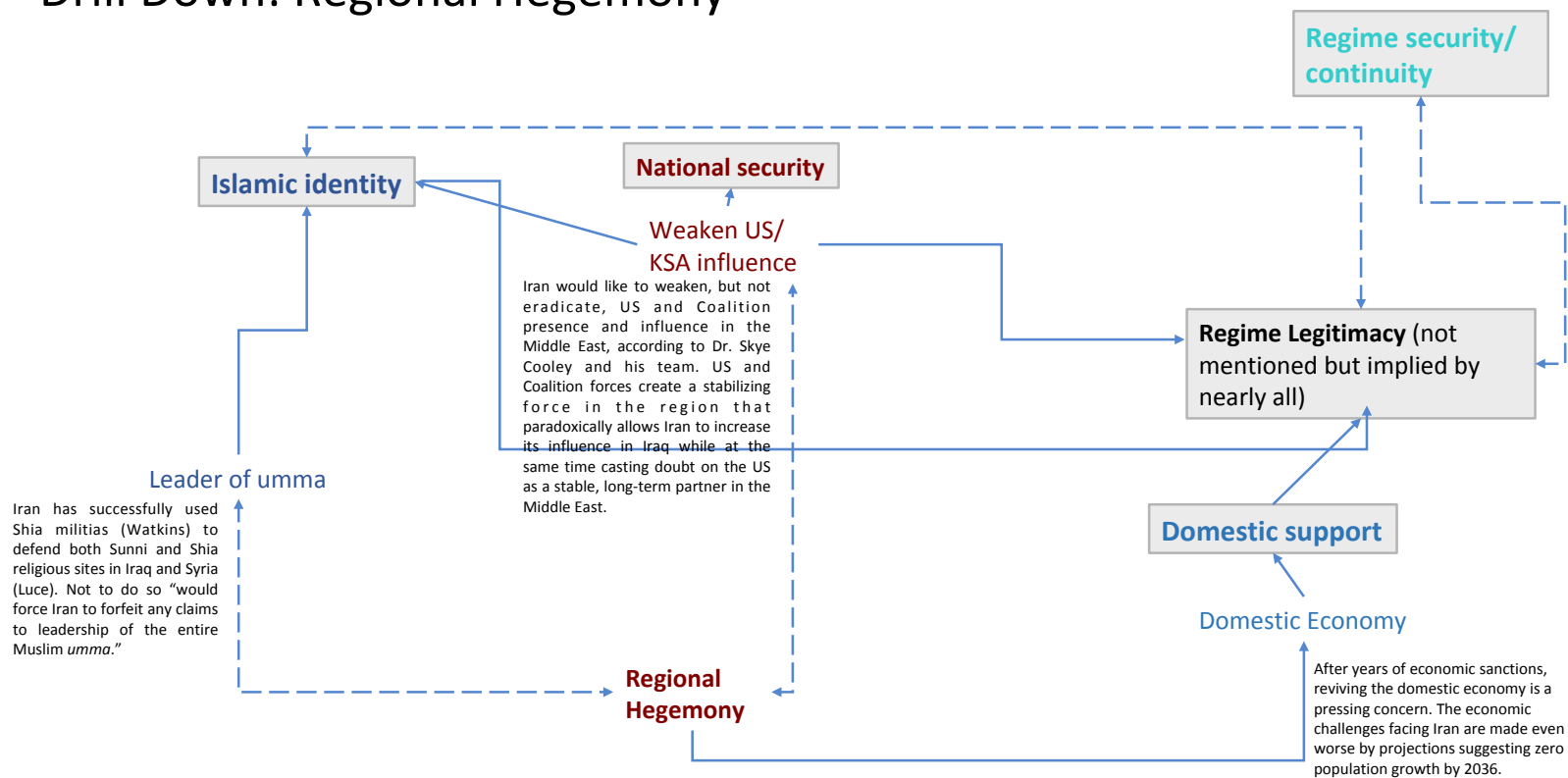
Figure 3 Loop diagram of Iranian interests as a complex adaptive system, continued

Appendix A: Brief Description of Interests Identified by Contributors

Land Bridge
The Iranian idea of creating a land bridge to Lebanon through Iraq and Syria is closely linked with Iran's goal of reducing US influence in the region (Ostovar). Maintaining this block of allies is crucial not only for reducing US influence and maintaining deterrence leverage against Israel but for denying Saudi Arabia a platform to expand its influence among Sunni populations, particularly in Iraq (Biglari, Ostovar). However, Dr. Zana Gulmohamad of Sheffield University would caution that Iran is not rigid in only working with Shia groups. He writes, "Iran does not necessarily look for actors that are similar (Islamic Shia) or have the same sectarian visions or doctrines as this would ease and facilitate its hegemony (Gulmohamad). Rather, it aims to expand its power and influence with other actors that have similar interests, which would bolster its influence in the region. Therefore, it is willing to cut deals with any external power that serve its interests, but Iran's interests also serve its religious doctrines as well as the elites in Tehran."

Influence in Iraq and Syria
Closely related, Dr. Ostovar contends that Iran tends to view the region in black and white terms, making long-term US presence and influence untenable to the Iranian government. However, Mr. Biglari notes that Iran has "no qualms coordinating and cooperating with the US and US-back forces when and where it advances their purposes."

Leader of Islam
Mr. Mubin Shaikh, a regional expert, argues "Iran sees itself as the cultural superior to the Arabs, which they believe are wrongly seen as automatic inheritors of the Islamic tradition." To reinforce its leadership role in the Islamic world Iran has successfully used Shia militias (Watkins) to defend both Sunni and Shia religious sites in Iraq and Syria (Luce). Not to do so "would force Iran to forfeit any claims to leadership of the entire Muslim *umma*."

Global Champion of Shia
AMB Jeffrey observes that Iran sees itself as both a state and cause: it is a nation-state with sovereignty and obligations to the people it governs, but it is also a defender of Shia everywhere. This is seen as their destiny, which brings Iran into direct conflict with Sunni traditions—particularly Wahhabism—seeking the same path. Therefore, the best way to deter attacks against Shia is to develop and project Iran's hard power image primarily by expanding Iran's military, para-military, and defense forces, Dr. Mark Luce states.

Export the Islamic Revolution
It is not enough to be the defender of Shia Islam; the Iranian government seeks to export its particular form of theocratic governance known as *Waliyat-al-Faqih* (Gulmohamad). In this interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, Iranian leadership has a duty to bring its form of government to Shia populations, particularly those in nearby Iraq and Syria. They do this through soft power: by protecting Shia religious sites, providing resources and services to the impoverished, refurbishing mosques, and appealing to emotion, tradition, and shared experience, Dr. Diane Maye of Embry Riddle Aeronautical University notes.

Domestic Economic
Going back to the point made in the first paragraph, first and foremost, the Iranian leadership seeks to maintain its form of governance and stability in Iran (O'Shaughnessy). After years of economic sanctions, reviving the domestic economy is a pressing concern, Dr. Luce argues. The economic challenges facing Iran are made even worse by projections suggesting zero population growth by 2036.

Weaken US Leadership in Middle East
Similar to the objectives of Expanding Influence in the Iraq and Syria and Creating a Land Bridge to Lebanon, Iran would like to weaken, but not eradicate, US and Coalition presence and influence in the Middle East, according to Dr. Skye Cooley and his team. The US and Coalition forces create a stabilizing force in the region that paradoxically allows Iran to increase its influence in the Iraqi government while at the same time casting doubt on the US as a stable, long-term partner in the Middle East.

Strengthen Conventional Forces
Dr. Frederick Kagan and Ms. Katherine Zimmerman of the American Enterprise Institute suggest that Iran is using its efforts to uphold the Assad regime to develop and test conventional force capabilities as well as improve joint operations and command and control efforts. Developing a strong conventional capability acts as a deterrent as well as serves its interest in establishing regional hegemony.

Develop Nuclear Weapons
Dr. Maye believes that Iran continues to desire the development of nuclear weapons, nuclear power, and the ability to enrich uranium. This goal is interesting because it speaks to ambitions on the international stage as well as on the domestic or regional front. Developing even a latent capability provides diplomatic gravitas and strengthens its bargaining position against stronger governments and institutions.

Protect Syria
Dr. Kagan and Ms. Zimmerman write about Iran's existential interest in protecting its long-standing ally in Syria. It is likely to continue to provide diplomatic support for the Assad regime and pursue favorable political resolution through the Astana talks. A favorable political resolution is one in which Iran may sustain deployments of IRGC, Shia militias, Hezbollah, and other proxy forces in the region as well as minimizing US presence and influence in the country.

Conclusion
By and large, our experts conclude that Iran is likely to continuously and incrementally increase its role and influence in the Middle East. Dr. Luce warns that "[a]bsent a serious effort (e.g. equivalent to JCPOA, Iraq Surge, post-Nov '15 ops against ISIS level) the U.S. will fail" to halt the spread of Iranian influence and power in the region. He suggests that instead of playing into the sectarian tensions in the region—and attempting to balance or influence which side wields the most influence—the USG should have as its motive "the preservation of a rules-based security order in the turbulent Middle East."

Expert Contributions

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

National Security Innovations Inc. (NSI)

Question (LR2): *What will be Iran's strategic calculus regarding Iraq and the region post-ISIL? How will JCPOA impact the calculus? What opportunities exist for the US/Coalition to shape the environment favorable to our interests?*

Executive Summary
Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Iran's Approach in Iraq
A number of the Iran SMEs who contributed to this Quick Look characterized Iran's approach in Iraq as "flexible" and "opportunistic," rather than determined by a strict set of guidelines or strategies. Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights of the Washington Institute find Iran's "strategic style" in Iraq to be "subtle and thrifty," for example, in pursuit of what Alex Vatanka, an Iran scholar from the Middle East Institute, highlights as its ultimate security objective. That is, to prevent Iraq ever becoming a state that could threaten Iran as was done during the Iran-Iraq War—a time that remains in recent memory for many Iranians. This does not mean a failed state in Iraq, but does imply a militarily weak Iraq. In this regard, Iran could see US and Coalition efforts to build the Iraqi security forces into an inclusive and strong national force as a direct threat to its security.

Iran's Post-ISIL Strategic Calculus
Cognitive decision researcher, Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI), points out that an actor's strategic calculus is context-dependent, and implies that a choice of behaviors is under consideration. There is therefore not a single strategic calculus that would explain the range of Iranian foreign policy choices and behaviors that US analysts and planners are likely to encounter. The good news is that while Iran's tactics may change slightly, there is little to suggest that Iran's key <u>strategic</u> interests will change with ISIL defeat: Iran saw what is perceived as Saudi-backed Sunni extremism as a significant threat before the emergence of ISIL, and surely will be prepared for the emergence of similar groups in the future.

The contributors to this Quick Look identified the following enduring strategic interests that should be expected to feature in almost any current Iranian calculus, as well as after the immediate threat of ISIL violence has weakened considerably. These are:

Safeguarding Iran's national security *by:*
- Ensuring Iranian influence in the future Iraqi government, Syria, and the region as a whole to maintain the leverage to defeat threats to Iran posed by a pro-US and/or Sunni-inclusive Iraqi government
- Mitigating the security threat from Saudi Arabia and Gulf states, and decreasing Saudi influence throughout the region
- Eliminating the existential threat to Iran and the region's Shi'a or Iran-friendly minorities from Sunni extremism, violent Wahhabism, and the re-emergence of ISIL-like groups
- Retaining and growing its influence in Lebanon and Gaza as leverage against Israel

- Combatting US regional influence in general

Defending Iran's internal sovereignty *by:*
- Managing public dissatisfaction within Iran; quelling unrest
- Securing Iran's borders and seacoast

Relieving economic stress and associated public discontent *by:*
- Defending Iranian economic assets and investments in Syria and gaining a foothold in the post-conflict economies (e.g., via construction contracts) in Syria and Iraq
- Working with other suppliers to increase global oil prices
- If and when Reformists are given leeway by the clergy and conservative forces in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), opening economic relations with the EU[1]

Defending the Islamic identity and leadership of the regime *by:*
- Clergy and Supreme Leader balancing the independent political influence of the IRGC against popular and reformist views in the government

Impact of JCPOA

Although as reported in SMA Reachback V6, other experts disagree on this point, Eisenstadt and Knights (The Washington Institute) believe that an unintended consequence of the JCPOA has been greater Iranian assertiveness in the region, and that "the more the US steps back in Iraq, the more Iran will step forward." As a result, they argue, deterioration in US-Iran relations—perhaps as the result of a JCPOA-related crisis—could prompt an increase in Iranian challenges to US vessels in the region and arming of proxies. The implication is that the JCPOA may have increased the IRGC's ability to argue for a more assertive regional policy, and that a new nuclear crisis could further strengthen their hand in this regard.

A political football? The success or perceived failure of the JCPOA may have important domestic political implications in the run-up to Iran's May 2017 presidential election. Specifically, the perceived failure of the Agreement to produce widely anticipated improvements in the Iranian economy is a point on which President Rouhani and other reform-minded thinkers will be particularly vulnerable to advances by conservative opponents. [2] In fact, Gallagher et al. (2016) reported this summer that, although Rouhani was still the front runner, his lead over former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had dropped to a narrow margin largely on account of Rouhani's perceived failure to improve the economy—a for significant basis of the popular support – including that of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – for the JCPOA. This fall, apparently at the express request of Khamenei, Ahmadinejad announced that he would not run in May 2107 citing a meeting he had had with the supreme leader in which he was told that his candidacy would not serve the interests of the country. (Quds Force commander Major General Qasem Soleimani who also had been mentioned in the press as a potential candidate has similarly

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[1] Even Iranian officials perceived as more moderate, such as Abbas Araghi, a senior nuclear negotiator, have consistently stressed that "enmity between . . . [Iran] and America is still in place. . . . America from our view is still the Great Satan and nothing has changed." From: http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/22/elusive-equilibrium-america-iran-and-saudi-arabia-in-changing-middle-east-pub-55641

[2] When it was first concluded, the JCPOA was a domestic win for Rouhani and Reformist voices in Iran, and Rouhani saw a large spike in already high public approval, while approval of conservative politicians declined (Gallagher et al. 2015). At the time, polls indicated that the Agreement was overwhelmingly popular with Iranians, many of whom anticipated rapid improvements in their quality of life as a direct result. By summer 2016, however, support had fallen but remained greater than 50% of those polled. Gallagher et al. (2016) surmise that this drop-off occurred because a majority had not seen expected improvements in their standards of living.

announced that he does not intend to run.) Speculation is that the Khamenei is determined to both avoid a repeat of the 2009 popular protests following Ahmadinejad's divisive "stolen election", and to put up attractive conservative candidates to challenge the relatively moderate Rouhani. However, there is also conjecture that Khamenei, who has been a vocal opponent of the JCPOA and a number of Rouhani's other policies may not approve Rouhani's run for re-election either. The official, vetted candidate list will be announced in April 2017.

Finally, Eisenstadt and Knights (The Washington Institute) argue that to compensate the IRGC for acquiescing in the JCPOA, it has been given greater latitude to "(flex) its muscles abroad to demonstrate that it remains in control of Iran's regional policies."

Shaping Opportunities
The SMEs offer a number of suggestions for opportunities to:

Counter Iranian influence in Iraq
- Ensure long-term, multi-national commitment and funding to security in Iraq lasting beyond the war against ISIL (Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights, Washington Institute)
- Help the Iraqi Government resist Iranian pressure to institutionalize the PMUs as a military force independent of the Iraqi Security Forces (Eisenstadt and Knights, Washington Institute)
- Encourage Arab states to view the current Iraqi Government and press for influence on the basis of their common Arab identity, rather than continue to see the government as Shi'a first, and thus an inevitable ally of Iran (Alex Vantaka, Middle East Institute)

Increase stability in the region
- Provide Iran incentives for "positive behaviors" that reinforce its perception that it is succeeding in "re-creat[ing] the international order" (Bob Elder, GMU and Hunter Hustus, HQ USAF)
- Recognize that Iran views the Syrian War as "an existential matter for the Alawites in Syria and Shiites in neighboring states" and adjust US and partner activities to allay Iranian perceptions of sectarian threats (Bob Elder, GMU and Hunter Hustus, HQ USAF)
- Coordinate with Iran on pursuing the US shared interest in shoring up the stability and legitimacy of the Abadi government among Sunni Iraqis to reduce the appeal of violent jihadism among disaffected Sunni Iraqis (Bob Elder, GMU and Hunter Hustus, HQ USAF)
- Provide security/prestige guarantees to Iran in exchange for its encouraging sincere efforts at sectarian power-sharing by the Abadi government in Iraq (Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI)

Contributors: Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy); Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute; Jamestown Foundation); Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI); Robert Elder (George Mason University) and Hunter Hustus (HQ USAF); Alireza Nader (RAND)

Editor: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)

Mr. Nader Biglari

Geographic Services Inc.

12/18/17

A brief review of the Islamic Republic of Iran's behavior on the international arena and foreign policy decisions during it's almost forty years of existence leads to the conclusion that the clerical leadership of Iran assigns high priority to promotion and implementation of its pronounced revolutionary ideals while adjusting her stance vis-a-vis those goals with a combination of *realpolitik* and tactical retreat. The revolutionary Iran has relentlessly pursued her paramount foreign policy aims, most significantly, opposition to Israel's policies with regard to the Palestinian issue, and opposition to the United States' military presence in the Persian Gulf region, exhibiting little or no flexibility towards achieving those goals. However, two remarkable military events close to her borders, the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003, clearly demonstrate how Iranians would relinquish their revolutionary stance and adopt a more conciliatory approach. Most foreign policy analysts agree that the United States inadvertently removed two of Iran's most implacable enemies by toppling the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Realizing the long term benefits of such unexpected, yet welcome, developments, Iranians adopted a pragmatic stance by standing on the sidelines, and better yet, by playing a somewhat cooperative role in America's efforts to remove regimes Tehran considered as dangerous foes and existential threats.

The success of the Islamic revolutionaries, and the ascendance of the anti-western clerics in Iran, brought about a fundamental shift in Iran's foreign policy. With the fall of the regime of the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979, Iran's traditionally pro-western foreign policy gave way to a fundamentalist and revolutionary approach to how Iran dealt with the outside world. The revolutionary clerical regime, since its inception, has based its foreign and regional policies on two major pillars that, almost forty years later, still hold sway. The Islamic regime in Tehran has embraced as its *raison d'être*, permanent enmity with the United States, or in current Iranian parlance, the "Great Satan." Confrontation with America and resistance to Washington's presence in the region has been one of the pillars of how Tehran formulates and implements its foreign policy goals. The other important element and major pillar for Iran's foreign rationale is the "illegal" existence of the state of Israel. The dream of the liberation of Qods (the occupied Holy Land) is the second major element that influences Iran's behavior, regionally and internationally.

Soon after coming to power, the fledgling clerical regime in Tehran embarked upon spreading its generally anti-western message throughout the Middle East by targeting what it saw as corrupt and co-opted Arab regimes that it believed had failed to address the Palestinian cause. Arab monarchies, namely Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, and Jordan, and secular dictatorships in Iraq, Yemen, and Egypt were blamed by Iran for failing to promote and protect Islam by kowtowing to the United States and failing to stand-up to Israel. Fear generated by Iran's revolutionary message alarmed Sunni Arab governments in the region culminating in the invasion of Iran by Saddam Hussein's military that was bankrolled by the wealth of the Saudis and Kuwaitis. Iranian leaders back then were of the belief, albeit mistakenly, that the suppressed Shi'ite populations, as well as the disenfranchised Arab "street" would rise up and welcome Iran's revolution and topple seemingly vulnerable Arab monarchies. The wake-up call for the Iranian revolutionaries came when the Iraqi Shi'ites that constituted the majority in Iraq by and large failed to rise up. The ensuing destructive long war between Iran and Iraq brought about a wholehearted shift in how Iran prioritized its aims and foreign policy goals. It had become clear to Iran's leadership by then than revolutionary zeal and fervor are no substitute for long-term planning and adopting a foreign and regional policy that was a mixture of ideologically driven goals and a bit of *realpolitik*.

Emerging from the ruins of the disastrous war with Iraq in 1988, Iranian leadership focused on spreading its influence among the Shi'ite populations of Sunni-dominated Arab countries by creating networks and infrastructures that enabled those populations to assert themselves and be counted upon as reliable fifth column allies of Tehran. Iran's success in the establishment of Hezbollah as a dominant political and military force in Lebanon is the clear result of Tehran's successful strategic shift. Alongside that change, Iranians began to see all regional conflicts as a zero-sum game where it was possible to engage in quid-pro-quo with other dominant regional and international powers. Iran's cooperation with Washington during the US invasion of Afghanistan is a clear example of how Iranians weigh their interests and act upon them. They saw the defeat of Taliban as a welcome development that would advance Iran's interests, hence playing along and facilitating America's military operations in Afghanistan. The fact that the U.S. would have military bases next to Iran became of secondary importance.

The current situation in Levant and Mesopotamia also provides another window into how Iranians prioritize and pursue their goals and policies in the region. While Iran's ultimate goal is to secure a reliable land line to Lebanon and her ally Hezbollah, it has no qualms about coordinating and cooperating with the US and the US-backed forces when and where it advances her purposes. Liberation of Mosul and General Soleimani's Qods Forces' timely intervention to save Kurdish areas from DAESH's onslaught further demonstrate Iran's willingness to engage tactically with its foes, while pursuing her long term objectives. Iran's costly intervention in Syria, in terms of blood and treasure, is not out of love for Bashar Assad or even to protect Shi'ite holy sites in and around Damascus and Aleppo. Syria is seen by Iranians as, more or less, a staging ground or a giant warehouse to supply their allies in Lebanon. Tehran's dominant role in Iraq is also the by-product of its long-term goal of securing its foothold in Lebanon, as well as neutralizing Saudi machinations and the US domination of the region.

Jebel Amel, the Shi'ite South Lebanon has a special place in the Iranian psyche. There is an affinity between the people of South Lebanon and Iran that goes back five hundred years. When Shi'ism became Iran's official religion in the early 1500s, it was Lebanese Shi'ite Ulema (religious scholars) who came to Iran to teach people what Shi'ism was all about. Even during the reign of the pro-west, pro-America, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, Iran provided steady financial and humanitarian aid to the people of South Lebanon. For the revolutionary, rabidly anti-Israeli clerics in power in Iran today, however, Lebanon serves and added yet very critical purpose. It sits on Israel's northern borders and allows Iran to project power and threat of military force against its mortal enemy.

It is worth noting that when it comes to their ultimate survival, Iranian leaders behave in all manners possible to ensure their regime's longevity. When the crippling US-led economic sanctions began to bite, Iranians signaled their willingness to negotiate a deal to resolve the nuclear issue in exchange for sanctions relief. While their revolutionary naval elements talk tough and threaten to annihilate the US Navy patrolling in the Persian Gulf, occasionally behaving in threatening manners, Iranians make sure to avoid a direct confrontation with Americans. Even in their confrontations with their archenemy, Israel, Iranian go out of their way to avoid a major military backlash by their powerful rival. Such contradictory behavior is an indication that Iranians are not suicidal and realize when they need to stop pushing the envelope. Tehran's self-restraint in the face of Saudi hyperbole and aggressive posture over Yemen, Qatar, and Lebanon is yet another example of how Iranians attempt to appear as non-combative and prone to pursuing good neighborly policies, even while at the same time, their proxy militias are busy eliminating Saudi-financed groups in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Iran sees the other hotspot in the region, Yemen, simply as a conflict of convenience. Iran's influence over the Houthi rebels has always been in doubt, but the stalemated war provides a perfect opportunity for Iran to pressure her regional rival, Saudi Arabia, with minimum effort and cost.

From the long border war with Iraq to the US invasion of Afghanistan, and from the US invasion of Iraq to international efforts to defeat and eradicate Islamic State, not to mention the Nuclear Deal with the P5+1 (JCPOA), Iranian leaders have demonstrated that their revolutionary and idealistic goals of the early years of the revolution have gradually given way to a mélange of priorities that range from self-preservation to the promotion of their national interests, and from messianic and divine guidance to the pursuit of earthly objectives.

Dr. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen

Rice University

Please list Iran's strategic objectives in the order of importance that you believe Iran assigns to them. Please be as descriptive as possible in the cells below (unlike the example below).

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
Remain a power broker in Iraq and Syria post-ISIS	Direct and indirect support to state organizations and non-state actors	Covert and overt	To maintain control of the strategic corridor from Iran to the Mediterranean that links Iran's major proxy battlegrounds	Yes, Iranian-backed groups have been far more effective than groups backed by Gulf actors (Saudi Arabia and Qatar)	Iran is likely to continue to work closely with Russia and Turkey to ensure they can put 'boots on the ground' in ways that far outmatch their Gulf adversaries (and the United States)
Keep Saudi-led coalition troops tied down in large numbers in Yemen	Transmission of relatively small amounts of munitions, financial support, and material assistance to Houthi rebels in Yemen	Covert	Saudi-led coalition forces blundered into Yemen in 2015 by over-egging Iranian support and reading too much into Houthi advances (in cooperation with Ali Abdullah Saleh, not Iran). For a relatively minor investment in Yemen, Iran has managed to	Yes. Saudi and Emirati forces have not been able to achieve major operational success in Yemen, are bogged down without a realistic political or military endgame, and hopes that Saleh might	Yes, very likely, if only because political tensions between the Saudis and Emiratis, and between the coalition and local leaders, are likely to intensify if and when an end to the

			bleed the coalition in terms of men and finance far out of proportion.	turn on the Houthis were badly misplaced.	military campaign looms into sight.
Widen cracks in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)	Reach out selectively to individual member states (Kuwait, Oman, Qatar)	Overt	To ensure that the split between the Saudi/Bahrain/UAE axis and the other three GCC states results in a permanent schism	Yes, although more by accident than by design (the GCC split was precipitated by GCC actors, rather than by Iran)	Quite likely because the Saudi/UAE/Bahrain axis shows no sign of willingness to compromise, and Omani and Kuwaiti officials fear they may be next

Dr. Skye Cooley and Team (Contribution 1)

Dr. Skye Cooley, Ms. Alyssa Adamson, Dr. Randy Kluver,
Oklahoma State University

Dr. Robert Hinck
Monmouth College

Dr. Ethan Stokes
University of Alabama

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
Ex. Create land bridge to Lebanon	Fund Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon	Covert but largely acknowledged	To prevent Sunni influence/attack against Shia homeland	Yes, Iran is expanding its influence (Iraq elections, Assad staying)	Yes, because…
Delegitimize Saudi leadership in the region	Highlight humanitarian crisis in Yemen while blaming Saudi Arabia as its cause.

Place Saudi Arabia in larger frame of reference as leading and causing conflict | Largely overt: Iranian leadership and government-supported media clearly showcase their anti-Saudi position, although at times covert in that these government backed positions appear to originate from more | Iran views Saudi Arabia as its principle geopolitical rival or challenger in the region. | Internally Iran appears to be achieving moderate to high success: Narratives of Saudi leadership as detrimental to the region are prevalent and consistent within Iranian media; these | Iran will mostly likely remain somewhat successful: Domestic, anti-Saudi and pro-Iran support will likely be maintained, but regional support for Iran |

	throughout the region both today and historically. Portray Saudi Arabia as in bed with US and international institutions, raising doubt on Saudi intentions and authenticity. Portray Saudi Arabia as the promoter of sectarian strife in the region by funding, supporting, and stirring Sunni-Shia conflict, supporting "radical" Islamic sects, and criticizing Wahhabism.	popular support rather than elites.		narratives likely resonate with Iranian population. <u>Externally, Iran appears to be achieving little, but some success</u>: Middle Eastern news sources do highlight problems with Saudi leadership but place more blame on Iran or other actors in these efforts, diverging from Iranian media portrayals of Saudi.	and criticism of Saudi Arabia will likely remain low.

Weaken, but not eradicate, US leadership role and coalition efforts in ME	Reduce US credibility: Publically question US resolve by casting doubt on whether US has long term interests or staying power in the region; frame US as only involved in the short term.

Maintain some coalition support: Recognize some positive elements of US and coalition led support and stabilization of the region.

Strategically manage anti-Western stereotypes to limit support of US activities while maintaining some US presence. | Overt: Statements and media narratives are publically stated. | Iran wants to maintain US presence and coalition support in the region, however, does not want the US or others to gain significant power or influence.

US and coalitional forces create a stabilizing force that allows Iran to increase its influence in Iraqi government and compete with Saudi Arabia.

Casting doubt on US long-term role enables Iran to increase their influence by winning over actors who come to see Iran as the long term ally/power in the region. | Somewhat effective: Iranian and ME media outlets question US resolve and portray coalitional forces as both somewhat needed and effective, but also at times ineffective, meddlesome, and without the region's best interests at heart. | Iran will most likely continue this strategy and be effective in maintaining limited support for US and coalitional efforts and raising doubts on US long-term interests. |
| Increase Iranian influence in Iraqi government | Public opinion pressure, both domestically and regionally by:

1. Emphasize the need for inclusive Iraqi governance when discussing parliamentary elections, regulations, and policies.

2. Couch support for Iraqi politics in democratic and participatory language; | Largely overt, but intentions can come off as more genuine than what they are. | Iranian leadership believes it can support and gain greater political representation and voice in Iraqi government if there are little restrictions on funding and types of parties allowed to participate. In doing so, they can place and influence Iraqi politicians and parties to support Iranian interests. | Somewhat effective: Some criticism and distrust of Iranian influence in Iraqi politics is clearly reported in ME media and stated as a serious concern. However, arguments in support of more inclusive policies and practices is rhetorically difficult to combat, while current Iranian influence helps curb some attempts at | Most likely Iran will continue to be effective in maintaining and gaining influence amongst Iraqi government officials, unless some major scandal or external force rallies an anti-Iranian populist movement in Iraq to curb Iranian support of Iraqi politicians. |

				stricter participation and regulations.	
	label attempts or criticisms of undue Iranian influence as corrupt or illegitimate attempts to dampen Iraqi democracy/effective governance. Leverage current ties within Iraqi government to support more open, inclusive policies/regulations regarding Iraqi democracy.				
Increase Iranian influence/prestige in resolving conflict in region	Bolster public opinion to create support for Iranian foreign policies by: 1. Positioning Iranian intentions as capable and altruistic. 2. Demonstrate Iranian capabilities and need for Iranian intervention by highlighting Iranian strength and severity of regional problems. 3. Portray Saudi Arabia as significantly gaining influence to the detriment of regional governments such as Iraq and Yemen, thus	Largely overt in that these are positions aligned with Iranian government's, but somewhat covert in the persuasive process in that individuals come to agree with these positions by drawing their own conclusions, albeit with premises already setting up those conclusions.	Maintain domestic support and cohesion for foreign policies.	<u>Domestically effective, but regionally only somewhat effective.</u> Iranian influence and power is viewed as capable and useful in dealing with regional instability, but Iranian intentions appear more suspect. Iran is sometimes viewed positively as wanting some peace in Lebanon, but blamed for supporting sectarian strife throughout the region, including: meddling in Bahraini politics, causing in part the conflict in Yemen, and	Over the next 18-24 months, these attempts will likely be effective in persuading the region that Iran is a major player needed to be consulted if conflict is to be resolved, but ineffective in gaining greater public opinion support for Iranian policies. These efforts will most likely serve to sustain current levels of support both home and abroad rather than

				possessing too much political influence in Iraq.	effectively increase support for further Iranian interventions.
	4. Demonstrate Iranian prestige and capability in resolving regional conflicts; highlight positive examples where Iran has done so in the past.				There exists a potential for decreasing effectiveness in maintaining domestic support if Iranians come to view their domestic issues as more pressing than foreign, and if foreign threats fail to materialize in the ways Iranian officials explain.
Legitimize Iranian domestic leadership and economic growth	Highlight regional conflicts and instability in other governments as tacit reminder of Iran's relative success/effective system of government. Officials recognizing criticisms of slow economic growth and high unemployment and promising more transparency, investment, and greater reforms. Emphasis on poor	Overt discussions in the media.	Open discussion and debate over Iranian policies and presidential leadership allows continued support of populace. Allowing criticism helps placate domestic criticism and provides alternative policy leadership albeit still within Iranian system of governance.	Somewhat effective: Iranian media showcases a clear narrative, likely to resonate with Iranians that, relative to other countries in the region, Iran is a functioning country with modest economic success. Slightly effective: Public debate between conservative and progressive parties helps relieve some political pressure for Iran's lackluster	Most likely this strategy will remain somewhat effective in building support for whichever policy direction Iranians choose; however, potential ineffectiveness could occur if public opinion breaks significantly one way and the leadership decides to ignore the shift.

				economic growth.	
	economic growth as short term; references to current bottlenecks with expectation of future growth. Open debate between Rouhani and Khamenei over economic reforms primarily contrasting more market, international trade policies versus a conservative reversal of such policies.				

Additional comments:

Project design:
- Qualitative analysis comparing Arabic (n = 84) and Farsi (n = 107) media sources' discourse on Iranian influence (search term: "Iran+influence")
- Qualitative analysis of Farsi media description of Iranian economy (n = 28; search term: Iran economy)
- Quick dive, word frequency and co-occurrence assessments on: Iran nuclear, coalition, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Saudi coalition, US influence, Hormuz, Mohammad bin salman, stability, instability, Khamenei, nuclear, Iraqi military, militia, ISIL, daesh
- Date range: 9/24/2017 to 12/24/2017

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Dr. Skye Cooley and Team (Contribution 2)

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Additional Report on Iranian Media
Coverage of 2017-2018 Protests

Dates of Data Collection: 12/28/2017 – 01/04/2018
Search Terms: Iran Protest
Total Articles Pulled: 189
Total Articles Code: 63
News Sites: *Akhbar-Rooz (n=12), Asre Nou (n=6), Fars News Agency (n=7), IRNA (n=3), Kayhan News (n=6), MehrNews (n=7), Radiofarda (n=14), Tabnak (n=8)*

Overall, the protests are shown as legitimately arising out of economic turmoil, specifically commodity prices in regional areas. The spread of the protests is explained by the dissatisfaction of youth with the government, expansionist costs and burdens put on the population by the regime, and foreign powers intentionally attempting to cause the regime to fold (the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia specifically). The consequences of the protests are discussed in terms of the need for the government to address the will of the Iranian people, the international attention of the protests forcing government concessions, and the willingness of the Iranian regime to work with its citizens toward mutual dialogue and constructive development. Iranian unity in the face of external pressures and the unity of protesters in bringing their demands to the regime are also major themes of coverage. Finally, the goals of the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia to reduce Iranian regional influence and, for the U.S. specifically, overthrow the Iranian regime are highlighted as serious threats that all Iranians should pay attention to and consider. Iranians are encouraged to look to warning examples of neighboring countries on the consequences of spilling into civil war with external powers involved. Russia, when mentioned, is mentioned as an ally and as supporting Iranian claims of external interference in their domestic affairs.

Themes of Coverage:

- **Protests Spread from Initial Economic Purpose**- virtually all of the coverage of the protests agree that the initial wave of protests started over economic conditions and the prices of goods like eggs. The cause of the spread of the protests were attributed by differing news outlets to different causes:

    o   Dissatisfied Youth and Millions in Poverty Turn Against a Corrupt Regime: These articles attribute the spread of the protests to unemployment, widespread government corruption, large poverty lines, discrimination of women, rising unemployment and social crises facing the youth of the country. The regime is blamed for using religion as a tool to consolidate political authority and repressing the will of the people. The protests erupt as people feel repression for voicing their dissatisfaction. Youth are said to be tired of being oppressed, violence to suppress protesters further exacerbates the problem. There is a focus on government abuses of power, abuses of the natural environment, and abuses of the Iranian people that show the masses ready to openly oppose the rule of the Islamic Republic. Violence through protests is shown as the only viable way to address the repressive regime. It is claimed that 90% of those who were arrested at some protests were young and adolescents, with an average age of under 25, and generally with no prior history of arrest or detention.

    o   Iranian Government Expansionism Protested: These articles attribute the spread of the protests to a rejection of Iranian expansionist policies in Lebanon and Syria that accumulate massive expenses that are passed on to the Iranian people. These articles claim that Iranians wish the government to stop intervention in areas like Syria and address domestic issues, and argue that maintaining the strategic depth of the Islamic Republic in the region has put a heavy burden on Iranian people. There is a focus on having the government spend its energies and capital on the Iranian people, not foreign wars.

    o   Foreign Government, U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, Intentionally Promote & Incite Protests: These articles attribute the spread of the protests, and in some cases the underlying causes of the protests to begin with, to interventionist foreign actors; specifically, the United States. The U.S. sanctions are often cited in these stories as directly contributing to the economic devastation of Iran, and the U.S. is said to be intentionally putting Iran under siege. The U.S. administration is blamed for intentionally attempting to turn the protests into an insurrection against the state. Trump is shown as a hypocrite who one month calls all Iranians terrorists, then another month claims his friendliness to Iranian protesters. Both Israel and the U.S. are accused by Iranian officials in these stories of using social media to promote civic unrest in Iran and intentionally trying to spark revolution. The goals of the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia are seen as the promotion of internal instability within Iran, while externally limiting Iranian regional influence.

- **Consequences of the Protests** – many of the articles focused on the aftermath of the protests, what the ultimate goals of the protests were, and what the protests themselves revealed about the future of Iran.

o Iranian Government Must Listen to Its People and Offer Them Hope: These articles claim that both government and reformist leaders were caught off guard by the protests because both are equally out of touch with the population. The protests are seen as a warning to government to protect the public's interest. The loss of trust in the state, as revealed by the protests, must be acted on by the government in order to restore faith, hope, and trust in the regime; if not, there is concern for serious challenges in the future.

o International Attention Forces Iranian Regime to Respond to Protesters: These articles claim that the international media spotlight may force concessions from the Iranian government to the protesters. These articles note the calls by international actors for the Iranian government to do more to protect protesters, stop committing acts of violence against protesters, and demands that protesters voices be allowed to be heard. Calls on Iranians to use the support behind the protests to get actual political concessions from the government while they have numbers.

o Iranian Regime Uses Protests to Address the People: These articles make a point to show members of the regime using the protest to address the needs of the people. The regime is shown as wanting constructive, peaceful, dialogue with its citizens and points out that the Iranian people are free to demonstrate. Reformist positions related to government actions are also discussed in these articles, such as reinvesting in educational programs for youth, combating poverty and corruption. Ultimately, the message of these articles follows the following line of thought: people in Iran have a right to be upset about the economic conditions, but should work with government to solve them. Protests should be toward constructive dialogue, not revolution. The Iranian government is charged with the need to address the economic needs of the people and to listen to their complaints, which the regime is shown as willing to do. Government is shown as seeing the protests as an example of the freedoms available to citizens.

- **Iranian Unity**- these articles take a cautious stance towards the potential escalatory divisiveness such protests can have and strongly warn against the descent into civil war. Both internal and external forces are taken into account by these articles, the lessons from other regional state collapses are often referenced. There is a concern that a divided Iran will be to the political advantage of nations like the United States.
  o Requests for Media/Social Media to Stop Fueling International and Internal Outrage: These articles feature religious leaders and other civic leaders requesting that the media attempt to balance its coverage of the protests, rather than providing ammunition for Western nations to disrupt Iranian unity. While sources are quoted from the West demanding social media accounts not be restricted in Iran, the stories mostly concern themselves with not allowing internal disputes to be played upon by external agents that descend the nation into civil war.

  o United Outcomes from Protesters: These articles point out the critical need for the protesters to have some sort of internal structure and hierarchy to present clear, unified demands toward reforms. There are calls to unite educators and other civic

leaders to the causes of the protesters in order to actually affect change. There is a concern that without unity and leadership the protests will accomplish little in the long-term.

- o Caution Against Trust Outside Agents of Change: These articles argue that, regardless of the changes needed internally in Iran, soliciting or accepting the aid of outside actors should be guarded against. Particularly noted is that the United States is only concerned with overthrowing the Iranian regime, not with the welfare of Iranian citizens.

- **Iran's Allies and Enemies Through as Revealed Through the Protests**- the articles attempt to position the international community in relation to their ambitions in Iran, their ambitions in the region, and their desired outcomes from the protests.
  - o The United States Administration's Desire to Overthrow the Iranian Regime: the focus of these stories, and there are many, is on the goal of the Trump administration to discredit, undermine, and, if possible, overthrow the Iranian regime. The vocal calls by the Trump administration in support of the protests is covered at great length. Part of the Trump administration's agenda is seen as reversing the trend of the Obama administration of being silent during previous protests in Iran. The U.S. administration's regional goals are all shown as intentionally targeting Iran and attempting to limit its influence; creating internal instability within Iran is shown as another tactic by the U.S. to destroy the regime. Iran is shown criticizing U.S. intervention in Iran in a letter to the United Nations.

  - o Israel & Saudi Arabia Partners in the U.S. Plans: These stories most often included mention of the U.S. in its desire to overthrow the Iranian government, but focus more on the concerted effort between Israel and Saudi Arabia to join the U.S. in its plans. Israel very specifically is mentioned as intentionally promoting unrest through social media channels targeting Iranian youth.

  - o Russia as Iranian Ally: Russia is shown on numerous occasions as warning the U.S. and other foreign actors to stop interfering in the internal politics of Iran. Russia's stance highlights the legitimacy of the complaints made by Iranian leadership that the U.S. is bent on overthrowing the Iranian regime.

Dr. Zana Gulmohamad

University of Sheffield (UK)

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
Iran's strategic objective is regional hegemony that has an expansionist nature including but not limited to Iraq, the Arab Gulf states, Syria, Lebanon, and pushing back the West, Israel and regional actors and powers that pose a threat or are rivals to its domination.	Iran's tools and methods are material as well as ideological and religious (*sectarian*). Materials include logistic support, equipment, providing training, combat expertise, and weaponry to its proxies, allies and clients. Ideologically their religious doctrine is largely based on the Islamic Shia doctrine *Wilayat al-Faqih*. Iran pursues a great degree of loyalty from the actors who receive support. Moreover, Iranian ideological slogans posses anti-Western rhetoric and empower Shia communities across the Middle East against their	Iran utilizes soft (e.g. cultural and economic drivers) and hard power (e.g. materials, military and clandestine network) to reach its goals. These actions are **covert** and **overt**. For example, Iran utilizes soft and hard power to influence Iraqi Shia communities in southern Iraq by consolidating economic and cultural ties (e.g. Iranian infrastructure corporations; investments in Iraq; Iranian religious tourism to Iraqi Shia Shrines in the south; Shia religious institutes or centers in Iraq and religious scholarly networks). These spheres are strengthening its hard power that includes	Iran is seeking regional hegemony and expanding power and influence that serves its interests. Partly, Iran is driven by its religious doctrine *Wilayat al-Faqih*. Nonetheless, hegemony as well as political and security ambitions that transcend beyond its borders are to create a buffer zone that could extend Iran's powers and influences beyond its borders. Iran does not necessarily looks for actors that are similar (Islamic Shia) or have the same sectarian visions or doctrines as this would ease and facilitate its hegemony. Rather, it aims to expand its power and influence with other actors that have similar interests, which would bolster its	Iran is seeking regional hegemony and expanding power and influence that serves its interests. For the last decade Iran has managed – to a certain degree – to reach its goals (for example, increasing the number and strength of its proxies in Iraq) and Iran's success is evident in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.	Measuring or evaluating Iran's influence and interference in the Middle East indicates a gradual increase in its power and success. However, regional actors such as the KSA and its allies in the region can disrupt these increases.

	suppressors or rulers and the latter's allies.	supporting Iraqi pro-Iran militias and figures. Thus, the support to Shia militias might appear **covert** because they are not declared officially but the militias openly express their allegiance to the Iranian Supreme leader as well as **overtly** displaying Khamenei's image in their offices. Thus, Iran's operations are mainly **covert** but have some **overt** elements.	influence in the region. Therefore, it is willing to cut deals with any external power that serve its interests, but Iran's interests also serve its religious doctrines as well as the elites in Tehran.		
Ex. Create land bridge to Lebanon	Fund Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon	Covert but largely acknowledged	To prevent Sunni influence/attack against Shia homeland	Yes, Iran is expanding its influence (Iraq elections, Assad staying)	Yes, because…

Mr. Faysal Itani

Atlantic Council

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
Ex. Create land bridge to Lebanon	Fund Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon	Covert but largely acknowledged	To prevent Sunni influence/attack against Shia homeland	Yes, Iran is expanding its influence (Iraq elections, Assad staying)	Yes, because…

Prevent a hostile regime from controlling Iraq	Fund shia militias; economic leverage over state; covert military action; proxy military action; infiltration of bureaucracies; direct relationship with key Shia players; close cooperation with and influence over Iraqi military; countering of US local allies	Covert and overt, including through funding of militias and direct military presence (as observed during anti-ISIS campaign).	Iraq is Iran's historical rival. Iran retains a collective national trauma over the eight year war with Iraq and the unrelenting hostility of Saddam Hussein. Iraq I is also a potential rival Shia power. It's hydrocarbons wealth magnifies all the above risks. It is also Iran's 'gateway' to the Levant including Syria and Lebanon.	Yes. The United States is no longer in a position to seriously contest Iranian influence in Iraq, including over the Iraqi central government as demonstrated by the joint Iraqi-Iranian assault on Kurdish US allies.	Unless the United States dramatically increases its military presence in Iraq or the Iraqi government somehow manages to bring Iraq's resources and population under its full and effective control, Iran is very likely to achieve its goal.
Preserving the Assad regime	Financial and military assistance to regime forces; creation and training of pro-regime militias; deployment of Hezbollah to fight Syrian insurgency; direct Iranian military presence; mil-mil relations.	Iran claims it is in Syria in an advisory capacity. This is demonstrably untrue. Additionally, Hezbollah's presence there makes this essentially an overt campaign.	Syria is Iran's only Arab ally. There is also a Shia connection to the Alawite community and Lebanon's adjacent Shia community,. Syria also affords Iran a potential second front (in addition to Lebanon) against Israel. Most critically however, preserving the Syrian regime is crucial to preserving the posture of Hezbollah in Lebanon, due to: Syria's role as a supply line to Hezbollah;		

			Syria's offering strategic depth to Hezbollah that has tended to place it out of reach of Israeli attack (this has changed amid Syria's descent into civil war); and the fact that no faction can thrive in Lebanon if the regime controlling Syria is hostile to it. In this case, that faction is Hezbollah, which offers Iran a first line of defense and deterrence against Israel from Lebanon. Iran calculates that any regime that replaces the current Syrian regime would be hostile to Hezbollah.		

Ambassador James Jeffrey

Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
Ex. Create land bridge to Lebanon	Fund Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon	Covert but largely acknowledged	To prevent Sunni influence/attack against Shia homeland	Yes, Iran is expanding its influence (Iraq elections, Assad staying)	Yes, because…
Protect Shia populations throughout CENTCOM AO	Direct support to such groups; creation of 'parallel' states, services and security systems within states more loyal to Teheran than own state. Lebanese Hezbollah the model.	Largely open and known but—especially use of violence and undermining of law and political systems—'non-attributable' and deniable. This is an important Iranian tactic.	Both religious and 'realpolitik' (to pursue hegemony), reflecting Iran's dual nature as state and cause. Both defensive (to protect those populations but by their power projection capabilities—Hezbollah, Houthi missiles--protect Iran), and offensive— expand power and	Very much so. Iraq and Yemen latest examples.	Yes. Unless it is stopped by a coordinated U.S.-led "all-elements-of-power" which inhibits regional go-it-alone efforts (KRG independence; Hariri; Qatar). Absent a serious

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			threaten competitors. More generally to establish Iran, not Najaf, as the dominant force in Shia Islam.		effort (e.g. equivalent to JCPOA, Iraq Surge, post-Nov '15 ops against ISIS level) the U.S. will fail. But U.S. must also avoid making containment of this Iranian goal an issue of favoring Sunni over Shia Muslims. Rather motive is the preservation of a rules-based security order in the turbulent middle east.
Become the hegemon of the Middle East between Pakistan and Egypt	The above. The 'end state' was best defined in the Introduction to Seyed Hussein Mousavian's book "the Iran Nuclear Crisis." (And he is considered a moderate.)	Both but emphasis as above on actions 'everyone' knows Iran directs but with deniability so as to exploit the international legal system while undermining it.	All potential regional powerhouse regimes (Saddam and Nasser in Middle East; Milosevic in Balkans)have been tempted to follow this strategy if not integrated into/controlled by a functional regional security system. In addition Iran's Shia religious (see above) and Islamic ambitions are served by this.	Yes, See First above.	Yes, see above.

Dr. Mark Luce

Cultural Intelligence Cell, 4th MISG (A),
1st Special Force Command (provisional), USASOC

Iranian Strategic Objective	Influence Mechanism	Action Covert or Overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful over the next 18-24 months?
#1 – To project its hard power image, expanding its military and defense forces.	Iran's missile program and expansion of its asymmetrical warfare capabilities act to deter attacks on the Iranian homeland.	Overt and covert	To deter attacks against the Shia homeland	Yes	Yes
#2- Expand its economy and trade relations and to increase immigration	Inviting foreign investment, promoting trade and exporting its specialized technical expertise , providing foreign aid and assistance – granting citizenship to foreign fighters	Overt	In order to grow the economy, create jobs and to re-enter the international market. Demographics project "zero pop. Growth" in 2036 unless there are drastic changes.	Iran is facing major opposition from KSA, the UAE and the US. A 15 point plan for pop. Growth has been implemented.	This is a long term problem with no relief in sight.
#3- To project a key leadership image to all Muslims and reinforce power to protect co-religionist, particularly Shiites.	Defend Shiite religious sites and populations in the region (Syria and Iraq)	Overt	To not attempt to defend these religious sites and populations would force Iran to forfeit any claims to leadership of the entire Muslim *umma*.	Yes, Iran has increased its standing in the region, gaining adherents through its Iraqi, Afghan & Pakistani militias.	Yes
#4- Project Soft Power to promote Muslim unity by advocating religious tolerance and speaking against extremism.	Expand its intern'tional education institutions, online courses, foreign tv & radio broadcasts, social media & pubs such as those printed by Ahl al-Bayt Foundation.	Overt	Iranian messaging attempts to reduce sectarian strife & counter extremism. This narrative includes messages against Foreign domination & Israel	It has had some success but KSA and Emirati, Egyptian, Israeli and US messaging characterize	This is an on-going battle of the narrative.

			– making common cause with Hamas, Hezbollah & the Palestinians as well as anti-"	Iran as a malign presence.	
#5- Preservation of the status quo in Syria and Iraq, as well as support for Hezbollah & the Houthis in Yemen	Providing military & economic assistance as well as training and supporting proxy militias.	Overt & covert	To assist co-religionists and allies in resisting sectarian violence and ethnic separatism (Kurds)	It has emerged as the dominant power in the region.	Yes, unless unforeseen events initiate armed hostilities w/KSA and its allies.

Dr. Diane Maye

Embry Riddle University

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
(1) REGIONAL HEGEMONY	*See below:* Iran achieves this through a mix of infiltration in religious institutions, bankrolling politicians and power-brokers, securing supply-lines to the Mediterranean, supporting drug/organ/human trafficking organizations, laundering money, extortion, thwarting Saudi ambitions; denouncing Israel, and pushing for nuclear power.	Both	Prestige & Power	Iran's success was hindered during the 1980-88 Iran/Iraq war, but it truly accelerated after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Once U.S. forces left Iraq, Iran had carte blanche to pursue regional hegemony.	YES

(2) Export Islamic Revolution	Soft power amongst the impoverished; Islamic charity work; bankrolling mosque refurbishment; holy sites, appeal to emotion/tradition	Overt	Prestige, Power with the masses, control over client states through the power of religious institutions, religious dogma	YES	YES
(3) Nuclear weapons, nuclear power, uranium enrichment capability	Push & pull with diplomatic efforts; collaboration with rogue regimes	Covert but largely acknowledged	Power on the international stage; strengthen bargaining position		Yes
(4) "Shi'ite Crescent" (corresponding with the land corridor)	Fund Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, work supply lines; infiltrate nefarious organizations	Covert but largely acknowledged	Economic power; influence; control over logistics in region	Yes	Yes
(5) Surround Saudi Arabia by training Bahraini Shi'ia & supporting Houthi rebels in Yemen	Funding militias, subversive groups, organizing resistance, supplying arms, weapons, training, supporting rebel factions	Covert but largely acknowledged	Security: prevent Sunni influence/attack against Shia homeland; strengthen bargaining power	Yes	Yes
(6) Unhindered access to ports in Lebanon & on Mediterranean (land corridor across Iraq & Syria in Lebanon)	Fund Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon	Covert but largely acknowledged	Economic power; Access to Mediterranean	Yes	
(7) Continuation of drug trade, weapons trafficking, human trafficking & organs into Europe & South America (and back) via shortest land route (Afghanistan-Iran-Iraq-Syria-Lebanon, on to Europe-South America-Africa)	Fund criminal enterprises in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon; launder money, work with South American, Eastern European cartels & West African businesses	Covert	Economic power	Yes	Yes

(8) Unhindered access & profit from key Shi'ia religious sites in Iraq	Fund mosques/ threat of force/ extortion	Covert	Political & Religious: Popular support of Shi'ia underclass; profit, tourism, economic power	Yes	Yes
(9) Promote narrative that U.S. & Israel are malicious actors	Psychological operations; narrative setting; rhetoric	Overt	Political power; prestige, strength	Yes	Yes
(10) Keep regional militias dependent on Iranian weapons/ military advice	Paramilitary forces, religious & traditional rhetoric, appeal to emotion; funding; weapons	Covert	Security: Prestige, influence, power	Yes	Yes

Dr. Nicholas O' Shaughnessy

University of London (UK)

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
To assert and expand and guarantee the continuity of the theocracy in power in Iran. Everything else flows from this object of.	Foreign policy success, internal policing, repression at home and nationalism abroad, funding of large armed forces, continued cultivation of the Revolutionary Guard as state- within a state	Overt and covert	Intelligible in terms of its history and ancient history, as well as more recent antagonisms arising from the overthrow of Mossadegh and the rule of the Shah- injured pride etc. Iran is a case of toxic nationalism	Yes: the regime is strong despite enormous domestic problems eg drugs, unemployment , emigration of talent etc	Very definitely
To be the principal power in the Middle East, in challenge to Saudi Arabia.	Via proxy wars in Yemen etc, Hezbollah, Assad, subversion, via exaggerating the US and Israeli 'threat'. Also to influence and control the government of Iran and push it in a shia-sectarian direction.

Via image building | Overt primarily | As a way of dealing with perceived threats- and often imaginary ones- to its own security. Also the motive of national self-aggrandisement, hypersensitivity to perceived slights, and sectarian anti-Shia motives | Yes, very successful: the Houthis have not been vanquished in Yemen, Assad is triumphant, Hezbollah has emerged as one of the most terrifying fighting forces in the middle east | Will continue this success trajectory over the next two years |

To be the global champion of the Shia.	and propaganda	Overt plus deceitful propaganda	To assert an assumed manifest destiny and to pursue a sectarian conflict with the Sunni by assertions of Shia hegemony	Incremental success in this role: could eventually lead to war with Saudi	Will continue as incremental success
Continue to build a negative image of Israel in order to produce its own power profile.	Israel's own pr own-goals and further evolution of global antagonism to Israel. Specifically, to blame the US for everything Israel does.	Overt and covert, especially propaganda	Israeli is a useful bogeyman to 'oppose' and generate favourable propaganda	Blunders by the Netenyahu government have helped it succeed here	This successful trajectory will continue
To be the major Muslim global power.	By fostering an image of power, ruthlessness and fundamentalist rigour. By defying and threatening non-Muslim nations, arresting their citizens on flimsy charges etc, by military provocations	Overt primarily; also the role of espionage and sabotage and subversion	As a way of asserting the supremacy of Shia over Sunni: Iran's motives are always deeply sectarian. Also as a way of repairing the impotence of Islam since the demise of its last big champion in 1918, the 'last caliphate', Ottoman Turkey	Globally Iran's formidable self-assertion translates into an image of a resurrected and potent Islam which cannot be kicked around by unbelievers any more	Iran is feared and respected, which is what it wants, and this will continue
To continue to humiliate the United	Via a public posture of defiance and offensive rhetoric and gestures, via selective	Overt and covert, especially sabotage and	Iran actually needs a non-Muslim enemy to pit its strength against and to endow it with the lustre	It is not finding it that easy since recently there does not seem	

States.	provocations and the manufacture of 'straw men',	propaganda	of champion of Islam. Also the regional profile of the US in the middle east eg the sixth fleet make it a rival and therefore target	to have been an incident eg alleged incursion of US vessel into Iranian waters that it can exploit	The removal of the US embassy to Jerusalem is a great propaganda opportunity for it to exploit
To assert dominance at home via an aggressive posture overseas and in the region	Via the appearance of inflexibility, the maintenance of large armed forces and supply of proxies, via rhetorically challenging US power and via rituals of denunciation	Overt and covert	Paranoia; perception of US as regional rival; vast overestimate of US power; constant attribution of malign motives to the 'great Satan' USA	It has been far from entirely successful in this- but successful enough for it to matter	Trajectory will continue
To be perceived as the champion of 'oppressed' Muslims throughout the globe, and to assert the supremacy of the Shia over the Sunni	The one objective is entwined with the other. Principal vehicles are their large military and surrogates, and willing to be interventionist- against ISIS, against the Saudi proxies in Yemen, in Lebanon via	Overt and covert, the two strategies work in tandem	The wish to be THE important global Muslim power and thereby vindicate the rectitude of Shia Islam. Also we cannot neglect straight nationalist motives, awareness of heritage, of being the heirs to the	The impact is regional rather than global, but the regional impact is high	Continues to enjoy incremental success

	Hezbollah		Persians etc		

Dr. Afshon Ostovar

Naval Postgraduate School

The following is an unedited transcript from a panel discussion session hosted by the Naval Postgraduate School in support of the SMA/CENTCOM Reach Back Effort.

Glenn Robinson: We're going to turn it over now to Professor Afshon Ostovar, who is a relatively new addition to the NPS faculty. Finally, for the first time in all the years that I've been in NPS, we actually have a serious Iran scholar. Without further ado, **[0:32:35 inaudible]**.

Afshon Ostovar: Well, thanks for having me. I'm just going to stick to question nine for now and then other questions on Iran or… I have comments that affect the Middle East more broadly. But I'll leave those for the Q&A. I'm just going to briefly do question nine and we can move on for everybody else. When we get to Q&A, hopefully, we can broaden the discussion. **[Audio out]** prioritize its regional influences.

I look at this question in strategic terms, less in terms of economics and politics. They're all related **[0:33:07 inaudible]** driven. Much more regionally by strategic concerns and priorities than anything else, economics and politics are the background. But strategy, I think, is what's driving Iran's behavior. One way to answer this is to look at Iran's goals and what they're meant to achieve. Iran's primary and strategic objectives are simple.

One is to challenge, counter, and eventually defeat US dominance in the region. This is the main sticking point in US-Iranian relation. If one side wants to sees you as their enemy, as through north, as their motivation in the morning, it's hard to get past that and be friends. For Iran, this means shifting the status quo of the region away from the dominance of pro-US states towards states and entities allied Iran. Iran sees the region in a black and white perspective. It sees a US side, which is primarily the GCC with the exception of Oman, Jordan, sometimes Turkey, sometimes not Turkey, Egypt, et cetera. Those are sort of the hostile states, if you will. Israel is also influenced.

On Iran's side is Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, and Lebanon and all of Iran's armed clients in Syria and Iraq as well. Iran's ongoing hostility with Israel and Saudi Arabia are part of that larger ambition of shifting the status quo away from a, let's say, pro-US dominance. Iran has invested the most pressure on Israel at a historical post-1979 investment in that area. Hezbollah is the key to that, so is Syria. Putting pressure on Israel remains a priority for Iran. Expanding the stability's pressure, Israel from Lebanon and Syria, like I said, it's key to that strategy. Gaza is secondary because Iran had left direct influence in Gaza. But it's still important.

Establishing a contiguous built of ally states and policies, let's say in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, to allow Iran to see some fruition in its effort to shift dominance in the region away from US backstage. Even though the region itself might still

be primarily pro-US, there's a swath of contiguous geography, which is more or less in Iran's camp, and this has been a big plus for Iran. Maintaining that block of allies will be key for Iran to counter defense by rivals, especially Saudi Arabia, to reassert themselves in the region.

From Iran's perspective, it would seem sort of a titleship in the region of washing away a pro-US sentiment in these areas. It does want regional rival to be able to reassert their influence in areas where Iran has made gain, so Iraq and Syria and Lebanon in particular. This makes the futures of Iraq and Syria vital to Iranian strategy. It really should not be… it's hard to minimize or understate how important Iraq and Syria are from Iran's perspective. They're vital not only to Iran's regional strategy but to Iran's own national security. I haven't mentioned Yemen yet and that is to say because… compared to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, I see Yemen as a lower tier priority for Iran. Yemen keeps Iran's rivals, primarily Saudi Arabia and UAE, occupied and distracted from Syria in particular. Iran gains from Yemen's conflict as long as it persists because it keeps out Arabia and the UAE occupied and busy. If **[0:37:02 hookies]** win, all the better for Iran and have a more stable front to pressure Saudi Arabia. But if the hookies lose, Iran really wouldn't have lost all that much because its real interest lies north. That is to say, while Syria and Iraq are must-haves, Yemen would be nice to have for Iran.

To summarize all of this, where did Iran place its priorities? I see three main thrust in Iran's decision-making in terms of where they put their… what areas or literally geographic places they put their emphasis on. I'll say first, their primary privatization are in places that Iran already has sustained direct influence and wants to safeguard that influence. Right? That would be Lebanon, for example. Second, I would say places that Iran has direct influence and wants to expand that influence. I would put Syria and Iraq in those categories. Third, areas that Iran can influence with a high degree of effectiveness to inflict cost on its rival while staying below the threshold of escalation. Yemen to me would be in that category **[0:38:20 inaudible]** that would also be in that category. Also, in that category, you can say sort of a smaller sort of cohort operations that happen in the region. But that's how I see how Iran prioritizes everything.

In terms of the question that was asked before, **[0:38:38 inaudible]** that I might as well response with now, about the protest in Iran. We can talk more deeply about them. Is it an earthquake or not? Well, earthquakes come in different shapes and sizes. I think it's certainly an earthquake for the regime. The reason why it's an earthquake for the regime, it's because you are seeing unrest in places where unrest does not usually happen. You're seeing that unrest articulated in ways that unrest has not been articulated in the past. Iran has had lots of economic-related protest in the past. They had strikes. They had labor protests all throughout the country ever since the Islamic republic was established and beforehand. They had a long history of that. It had strong guild, strong trade unions, and all of them routinely strike and protest over wage and economic status.

What you're seeing happening now or over the last couple of weeks is different. We don't exactly know what it is. But we do know it's rooted. Probably in

economic it is rooted. Probably in some measure of dissatisfaction and discontentment of regime, but it is also outwardly and explicitly political. In ways, it's been anti-regime in ways that other protests have not been in the past. Even the 2009 protest, well, they escalated to let's say anti-regime rhetoric, they did not begins there. They would essentially protests over a vote. They were pro-**[0:40:14 democratic]** protest, not anti-regime protest. These protests are far less coherent and we understand them far less.

But even though it's an earthquake, even though it's fundamentally, I think, problematic for the regime, and I think the regime worries about it probably more than they're willing to admit because this is essentially happening in those provinces where the regime has had its strongest support, these are, in other words, **[0:40:43 inaudible]**. These are people that voted for **[0:40:46 inaudible]**. In fact, he was indeed blamed for these protests. He was not responsible for them. But state voting is so popular in Iran.

But because they happen in places where the regime sees sort of added support base, that's inherently problematic for the regime. But for outside of service, what's difficult to gauge is even though we know that these protests were geographically widespread, we really have no idea of their scope. I mean we're looking at snapshot literally from telephone, shaky video of police, of people with placard, they really don't have any idea of how many people are involve. This could be one in 2,000 people in these villages. There could be tens and thousands. It could be hundreds of thousands that that took part altogether. We don't really know.

But one of the things I would suggest is even though these protests were widespread, a lot of people were not involved. This is sort of a new generation of protesters. This was not everybody protesting. I certainly… it gives me pause in thinking of what it actually means for the regime. My takeaway is, is that the regime has some serious work to do if problems… its internal problems are being exposed. Even though it is quasi democratic, it is not a democratic country and there's a lot of discontent. There's a lot of corruption. There's a growing disparity between the middle class, the upper class, and everyone else. I think you're seeing that come apart a little bit.

I don't think it's an **[0:42:33 inaudible]** moment for Iran, but that given how surprising the **[0:42:39 inaudible]** was, I wouldn't be surprised if they continue to grow over the years. But I don't think it's the moment, just to say it, for the US or other outside powers to get involved. I think this is something that is domestic and should stay domestic for it to have any meaningful change or success in Iran. I'll leave at that.

Question:	I have just a generic question after listening to all this, which is in terms of the **[1:20:09 inaudible]** is here I realize you made a comment about the thought instrument of air power and at the same time we got this problem when we put our ground forces in, it appears to be an occupation. That's kind of two extremes. Any thoughts from the speakers on are we employing our military forces and our allies the best way now or based on your insight, is there a better way for us to be approaching what we do in the region?
Afhson Ostovar:	I have some comments. I mean just about the diplomatic angle. I think we don't use diplomacy nearly as strong enough in the region as we should. I think over the last two administration, this administration perhaps too new to comment on this. But we speak often more in euphemisms when we talk about American priorities, American interest. I think we should just be more clear cut about them to help us articulate both to our partners, to our allies, and also to our adversaries on what exactly we're trying to achieve. Let's just take Iran for example. One of the things that we often sort of accuse Iran of is supporting terrorism or terrorist groups, and that is true. But what we mean by that is that Iran has longstanding intent to be aggressive towards Israel and that it funds groups that are essentially in permanent war with Israel. In some ways, this has been a manageable situation for the United States. But what will make it non-manageable situation is if Iranian clients and proxies, if you will, Hezbollah, Iraqi groups in particular are left remaining in Syria in a post-conflict scenario.

While I agree and I've written a recent foreign affairs piece on this that, Iran has essentially proved to be on victorious side of Syria and you can't extract sort of… or wish away Iran's position in Syria. They have a strong position. They're always or at least over the foreseeable future will have a stronger position in Syria. But one thing that we can push forward is not for Iran to no longer have influence in Syria but for it's no-state clients to no longer have a footprint in Syria, particularly in Southern Syria near the boarder of Israel, if we want to prevent another war from happening after Syria, which is a tri-state war between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon, which is more than likely to happen should Iran's clients remain there who have already expressed intent to attack Israel. Whether they did or not, it doesn't really matter; it's a threat is on Israel's border.

If we could just be vocal about that and have that as a redline, this would give us some ammunition in diplomatic comments when settling for a political solution in Syria that we're not going for a complete reversal of the status quo but rather a more reasonable re-articulation of the security environment in Syria itself. For me, it's more about the US being clear cut and vocal about its interest and also making those interests refined and defined so that they are something that the US aim to achieve but also something that adversaries have to deal with. So long as they're maximalist or broad or vague or euphemistic, they're very difficult to achieve and they're very easy to undermine for our adversary's position. I guess for me it's more about a diplomatic language and a diplomatic effort that needs to be strengthened.

Dr. Sabrina Pagano

National Security Innovations Inc., NSI

Competition Short of Armed Conflict with a Regional Power: Lessons from the Gray Zone (and Beyond) for US-Iran Relations

Question (R6.7): *Are there examples from US history of competition short of open conflict[5] with a regional power? What lessons exist that may be applied to resolving competing US/Iran objectives short of open conflict? Which examples are most relevant—pre- or post-World War II?*

Contributors[6]
Ms. Alyssa Adamson, Oklahoma State University; Dr. John Arquilla, Naval Postgraduate School; Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI; Mr. William Cabán, Federal Emergency Management Agency; Dr. Skye Cooley, Oklahoma State University; Dr. Robert Hinck, Monmouth College; Ambassador James Jeffrey, The Washington Institute for Near Easy Policy; Dr. Randy Kluver, Oklahoma State University; Dr. Diane Maye, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University; Dr. Spencer Meredith III, National Defense University; Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, University of London; Dr. Abdulaziz Sager, Gulf Research Center; Dr. Ethan Stokes, University of Alabama

Executive Summary
Dr. Sabrina Pagano, NSI Inc.

The experts drew on a wide range of examples from US conflicts and moved beyond a focus solely on competition short of armed conflict (CSAC or "gray zone") to other strategies or forms of competition executed by the US. The examples offered rich source material from which to extract lessons applicable to current US-Iran relations. Lessons might be learned from relations with Iran itself beginning with the Revolution to the present; the US-Soviet Cold War; the US and North Korea (1953-present); the US and Great Britain during the 19th Century, when the US was a rising regional power and Britain was a global power; the US and China during the Taiwan Straits Crisis (1954-55); US-Cuba (1959-now); the US and Venezuela (1998-present); Central America in the 1980s; and conflict in the Balkans (1991-2000). At the most basic level, these conflicts were battles over regional security or global influence (US vs. Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, Great Britain, or USSR) or ideology/ideological influence (US vs. Iran, USSR, North Korea, China, Cuba, Central America, or the Balkans). By and large, the most relevant examples were those from the post WWII period.

Iranian versus US Interests
Most expert contributors saw US and Iranian core interests as fundamentally opposed,[7] and identified several interrelated factors that are likely to be ongoing impediments to US-Iran relations. These included the perceived—or actual—divides between the two nations in terms of culture and values (Cabán), the persistence of each side's view of the other as malevolent (Kluver and team), and the persistence of old grievances (O'Shaughnessy). The expert inputs[8] mentioned five types of distinct but sometimes interrelated interests: 1) protecting Iran's national security, 2) defending Iran's internal sovereignty, 3) minimizing economic stress and

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[5] The gray zone is a conceptual space between peace and war, where activities are typically <u>ambiguous</u> or <u>cloud attribution</u>, and <u>exceed the threshold</u> of ordinary competition, yet intentionally <u>fall below</u> the level of large-scale direct military <u>conflict</u>. Bragg, B. (2017). Integration report: Gray Zone conflicts, challenges, and opportunities: Retrieved from: http://nsiteam.com/integration-report-gray-zone-conflicts-challenges-and-opportunities/

[6] The present report also references the following work, previously conducted for Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA): Astorino-Courtois, A. (2016). Iran's post-ISIL strategic calculus. Retrieved from: http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-irans-post-isil-strategic-calculus/

[7] For an overview of these core Iranian interests, along with associated objectives/activities to support these interests, please see Table 1 below.

[8] Note: Inputs also referenced prior SMA Reach-back reports relevant to the current question (see Astorino-Courtois reference in footnote 1). As Astorino-Courtois noted, "while Iran's tactics may change slightly, there is little to suggest that Iran's key <u>strategic</u> interests will change with ISIL defeat."

associated public dissatisfaction, 4) defending Islamic identity and championing the Islamic worldview, and 5) regional hegemony. As summarized in the table below, the majority of Iranian objectives or activities intended to realize these interests are directly opposed to the interests of the US.[9] Dr. Spencer Meredith III of the National Defense University provided a nuance to this view, noting that "Conflict with Iran today is not a harbinger of perpetually conflicting relations, even though it remains necessary for the foreseeable future to define interests clearly and harden US positions in opposition to Iranian ambitions and actions… This does not preclude a potential later broaching of areas of coordination against other common threats, to include a Saudi reorientation towards the PRC, and/or a deeper, more formal Turkish reorientation towards Russia."[10]

Table 1: Contrast Between US and Iran Regional Interests in the Middle East

Iran interests	SME(s)	Conflict with US Interests?
SAFEGUARD IRAN'S NATIONAL SECURITY		
Ensure Iranian influence in Iraqi government Keep Iraqi militias dependent on Iranian weapons and military advice	Astorino-Courtois; Maye	Yes
Mitigate security threat from KSA Surround Saudi Arabia by training Bahraini Shi'a & supporting Houthi rebels in Yemen	Astorino-Courtois; Maye	Yes
Eliminate existential threat to Iran from Sunni extremism & related	Astorino-Courtois	Neutral
Retain and grow influence in Lebanon & Gaza Unhindered access to ports in Lebanon and on Mediterranean (land corridor across Iraq and Syria in Lebanon)	Astorino-Courtois; Maye	Yes
Combat US regional influence	Astorino-Courtois	Yes
DEFEND IRAN'S INTERNAL SOVEREIGNTY		
Manage public dissatisfaction with Iran; quell unrest	Astorino-Courtois	Neutral
Secure Iran's borders and seacoast	Astorino-Courtois	Yes
RELIEVE ECONOMIC STRESS / ASSOCIATED PUBLIC DISCONTENT (THROUGH LICIT & ILLICIT MEANS)		
Defend economic assets & investments in Syria; gain foothold in post-conflict economies in Syria & Iraq	Astorino-Courtois	Yes
Work with other suppliers to increase global oil prices	Astorino-Courtois	Yes
Open economic relations with the EU (if and when Reformists given leeway by clergy & IRGC)	Astorino-Courtois	Yes
Nuclear weapons, nuclear power, uranium enrichment capability	Maye	Yes
Extraction of economic resources from Iraqis, Syrians, Yemenis, & Lebanese	Maye	Yes
Continuation of drug trade, human trafficking & organs into Europe & South America via shortest land route (Afghanistan-Iran-Iraq-Syria-Lebanon)	Maye	Yes
DEFEND ISLAMIC IDENTITY		
Balance political influence of the IRGC with popular / Reformist views in	Astorino-Courtois	Neutral

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[9] For a detailed overview of US interests as perceived by Iran (and presented in their media) and varied by context (e.g., Syria, Yemen, nuclear deal, etc.), see the contribution from Dr. Randy Kluver.

[10] One such prospect for cooperation is offered in a previous CENTCOM Reach-back report in which the author noted the potential for coordination between Iran and the US in "shoring up the stability and legitimacy of the Abadi government among Sunni Iraqis to reduce the appeal of violent jihadism among disaffected Sunni Iraqis."[10] Ultimately, as Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy noted, the best strategy moving forward with Iran may be—a "blend of coercion [and] seduction," while working to avoid the military option, and providing Iran with face-saving opportunities, ultimately allowing both sides to claim victory. As in the uneasy partnership between the US (rising regional power) and Britain (global power), shared values [or superordinate goals] can be sought to facilitate collaboration, even when viewing each other as adversaries (Arquilla).

the government		
Defend the dignity and essentialism of Shia Islam	O'Shaughnessy	Yes
Protect Shia communities	Jeffrey	Neutral
Export Islamic Revolution	Maye	Yes
Champion classic Islamic world view	Jeffrey	Yes
Present US actions related to nuclear agreement as demonstration of victimization of Iran (media presentation)	Kluver and team	Yes
Present Lebanon as threatened by alliance between US, KSA, & Israel / Hezbollah as a legitimate political force that fights terrorism	Kluver and team	Yes
REGIONAL HEGEMONY		
Expand as regional hegemon (informed by role in Shia Islam, and role as claimant to Islamic heritage)	Jeffrey, Maye, Meredith	Yes
End US-led regional security order	Jeffrey, Meredith	Yes
"Shi'ite Crescent" (corresponding with the land corridor)	Maye, Meredith	Yes
Unhindered access & profit from key religious sites in Iraq	Maye	Yes
To be the dominant power in the Middle East, and a mighty counterweight to KSA	O'Shaughnessy	Yes
Present Iran as victorious in its efforts in Syria	Kluver and team	Yes
Present Yemen conflict as US/Saudi-led war on Houthi legitimacy causing humanitarian crisis, while Iran acts as stabilizing presence	Kluver and team	Yes
Need for stability in Syria against efforts to undermine Assad	Kluver and team	Yes

Table Note: Major Iranian interests are presented in dark blue; Iranian objectives or activities intended to meet those interests are presented in alternating light gray and white.

Strategies

Given the variety of seemingly competing US and Iranian differences identified by the experts, it is perhaps unsurprising that tools or strategies discussed by the contributors as successful favored more direct and aggressive approaches (e.g., threat of force, sanctions), whereas strategies such as diplomacy and containment were less frequently emphasized. The experts' inputs revealed, for example, that when diplomacy and containment were successful, they typically were part of a multi-faceted strategy (e.g., Venezuela) or larger multi-lateral effort (Balkans). As Cabán noted, "Venezuela has attempted to compete with the US for regional hegemony in the political, economic and social realms." The US has met this competition with a combination of diplomatic, information, military, and economic sources of national power. In the Balkans, the US employed both military and diplomatic strategies, but was also part of a much broader international endeavor to quell the conflict. Successful US strategy also benefits from international alliances that support US-led initiatives, and from strongly limiting interference with these initiatives from any other states (Jeffrey). Though mixed strategies fully employing diplomatic, information, military and economic sources of national power (DIME) have been successful in conflicts such as that between the US and Venezuela, key differences were noted in comparison to the current conflict with Iran (Cabán).

Lessons from the Past

As noted above, the contributors provided a broad range of examples in response to this question. Table 2 below lists these examples, along with associated US strategies and lessons that might be applied to current relations between the US and Iran.

Table 2: Historical Examples, US Strategies, and Associated Lessons Applicable to US - Iran Relations[11]

Conflict	SME(s)	Strategies Used	Lesson(s)
Lessons from Prior US Engagement with Iran			
US vs. Iran (1953-present)	Jeffrey; Maye; O'Shaughnessy	**Successful Actions/ Relevant to Current Context:** •Sanctions for JCPOA/indirect support to forces fighting Iran •Threat of force (1980 – 1981) •Competition for influence in Iraq: o Fought Iranian proxies o Supported Iran's sectarian agonist, KSA o Classified Iran client Hezbollah as a terrorist force o Pursued mix of diplomacy, soft power, hard power (int'l sanctions) to lure Iran to negotiating table over nuclear weapons o Supported Israel with weapons aid •Enabling regional conflict (between competing hegemons, Iran & Iraq) (1981 – 1990) •Propping up a weak buffer zone (post Gulf War no-fly zones over Iraq) (1991 – 2000) **Unsuccessful** •Diplomacy & covert action to return US diplomats (1979–1980) •'Strategic Pause' (2001 – 2012) **Limited Success / Not Relevant / Unknown** •Containment Propping up a "strong man" (1953-1979)	•Sanctions/indirect support to forces successful due to: o Strong engagement by President o Broad international alliance o Direct, punishing impact o Limited US/alliance 'asks' •Threat of force successful and relevant to current context •Mix of influence sources in competition for Iraq has been successful (led to nuclear weapons deal), due to: o Proper "blend of coercion [and] seduction o Rejecting military option o Providing Iran with face-saving devices for its domestic and Middle Eastern audiences, allowing both sides to claim victory •Enabling regional conflict had moderate success, though might be useful long-term strategy (e.g., enabling KSA & Iran conflict, playing both sides). However, "this strategy has a malevolent undertone." •Buffer was initially successful, but economic sanctions severely weakened the Iraqi populace. Probably the most ethical option—i.e., propping up a stronger (but not too strong) Iraqi gov't to act as a buffer zone between KSA, Turkey, the Kurds, and Iran •Diplomacy + covert action was unsuccessful; do not pursue •'Pause' was mostly unsuccessful. Following US departure of US forces from the region, Iran had carte blanche to insert themselves into Iraqi politics. Do not pursue this strategy; it has enabled Iran to become a regional hegemon and undermine US interests •Containment only partially successful given Iran targeting of weak states/ ungoverned areas/terrorist movements. Further, pain inflicted "has not reached decisive levels." •"Strong man" approach had limited success. While US had unrestricted access to oil / strategic location, the Shah's

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[11] Other examples offered by the subject matter experts, for which no specific lessons learned were noted, include: China vs. Malaysia (over Spratly Islands); India vs. Pakistan (over Kashmir); China vs. India (border issues); Britain vs. Spain (over Gibralter); Turkey vs. Greece (over Cypress); and the US vs. Iraq [O'Shaughnessy; Sager]. As such, these examples are not included in the table. Dr. Meredith also cites Britain vs. Russia in Crimea, which similarly was omitted from the table, as this conflict naturally did not focus on US strategies. Finally, conflicts for which outcomes/lessons are too early to tell (e.g. Cold War 2.0; Maye) are also omitted.

		• Diplomatic effort (2012 – 2016)	extravagance propelled the Iranian revolution. Tool offered some utility for protecting economic interests but would be difficult in current political environment • Recent diplomacy: Limited success. US renegotiated JCPOA and sidestepped Iranian support of Iraq's PMU's in the fight vs. ISIS, but Iran grew stronger
Lessons from Prior US Engagement with Other States			
US vs. Great Britain	Arquilla	<u>Successful Actions/ Relevant to Current Context:</u> • Security cooperation (via Monroe Doctrine)	• Look to [any] shared values and vision to facilitate partnership, even when viewing each other as adversaries

US vs. Venezuela (1998-present)	Cabán; Maye	<u>Limited Success /Less Relevant</u>
		• Diplomacy
		• Information: Rhetoric targeting regime legitimacy
		• Military
		  o security cooperation
		  o foreign internal defense
		  o persistent military presence
		  o joint training with regional actors
		• Economic
		  o Cooperation with US regional allies
		  o Sanctions
			• Joint strategy (DIME) associated with Venezuela's weakened economic position and "delegitimiz[ation] of social democratic ideals/policies" <u>but</u> Venezuelan collaboration with Iran and other US adversaries is uninterrupted
			• While the US is similarly employing multiple instruments of power vs. Iran, there are <u>two key differences</u>:
			  o US did not relinquish frozen assets to Venezuela
			  o US did not sign one-sided deals in their favor
			• Security cooperation with LA countries effective in part due to shared cultures (e.g. religion, thought processes). <u>Less likely with countries neighboring Iran</u> due to greater cultural disparity, particularly given lack of separation between religion and government throughout the region

Balkans 1991-2000	Jeffrey	<u>Successful Actions/ Relevant to Current Context:</u> US and allies/partners: • Military • Diplomatic	• The Balkans had political, economic & ethnic/religious fissures akin to those in the CENTCOM AOR. However, "successful US-led strategies did not involve, beyond marginal programs and commitments, major transformational economic, political, and reconciliation assistance from outside." • US success was in large part due to preventing any outside power from intervening to undercut US-led initiatives. When this did not occur (e.g., Korea 1950, Vietnam, Afghanistan post-2001, Iraq post-2003), success has been much harder to achieve
Central America 1980s	Jeffrey	<u>Successful Actions/ Relevant to Current Context:</u> • Economic, military, diplomatic assistance to nation states allied with it in this area • Support for insurgencies vs. USSR/Cuba client state(s)	• US almost universally successful, due in large part to its neutralization of outside power's intervention (aimed at undercutting US-led initiatives) due to distance, US resistance, etc. • Once again, when this has not occurred, success has been impeded
US - USSR Cold War (1945-89)	Maye	<u>Successful Actions/ Relevant to Current Context:</u> • 'Spheres of influence' • Containment • Military: Threat of MAD	• These strategies were successful, as the US achieved position as regional hegemon; led to stability/prosperity for Western Europe.
US - DPRK (1953–now)	Maye	<u>Limited Success</u> • Containment • Isolation • Working with regional allies	• These strategies have been associated with periods of heightened tension and a failing economy in North Korea
US - China (Taiwan Straits Crisis (1954-55)	Maye; O'Shaughnessy	<u>Successful Actions/ Relevant to Current Context:</u> • Military: Threats of nuclear strike (deterrence)	• China backed down as a result of this strategy • Taiwan has also experienced stability and economic prosperity

US-Cuba (1959-now)	Maye	**Successful Actions/ Relevant to Current Context:** • Containment • Isolation • Diplomatic efforts	• These strategies have been associated with a failing economy in Cuba

Dr. Glenn Robinson

Naval Postgraduate School

Glenn Robinson:	Thank you very much, Craig. Let me end. This may take maybe 10 minutes or so to make three sets of comments and then we'll open it up for Q&A for all of us.

Three sets of comments. The first set of comments on quite likely or possible shocks over the next two years. These are all the strategic environment over the coming couple of years, so likely shocks to the system. Second set of comment is about persistence of sources of instability. Then a third set of comments on kind of how we see the new Middle East Cold War evolving over the next couple of years.

Again, let me begin with what maybe likely shocks to the system. Over the next couple of years, it is quite possible that up to three significant leaders in the Middle East will die simply because of age because people know Slack. First and foremost, you have King Salman of Saudi Arabia who is 82 and is reportedly not in particularly good health, including mental… potential declining mental acumen, and whether he dies or there's been a lot of speculation. Maybe he just might abdicate in favor of his son, Mohammad bin Salman, but it will create a moment in Saudi Arabia that I think is going to be extraordinarily important in terms of the strategic environment, both in Saudi Arabia and in the region.

The issue is, can his son, Mohammad bin Salman, survive without his father's protection? I think the answer is probably yes. I'm like betting on two to one. But that is still a significant possibility that Mohammad bin Salman has antagonized so many cousins within the very large royal family, the number of Saudi princess is estimated anywhere from 10 to 15,000. Most of them are rather minor, but there are a lot of significant Saudi princess that have been antagonized, given Mohammad bin Salman's behavior, both internally in terms of arresting many of them and marginalizing others but also what is widely perceived as a fairly reckless and unsuccessful foreign policy campaigns, whether it'd be Yemen or Qatar or Syria.

Up to this point, he has his father's protection. He has the king's protection. He has been able to consolidate many of the avenues of coercion within the Saudi State. But I think when his father dies or abdicates, this will be a moment of serious challenge. Given what we've seen over the last couple of years of the shift from essentially a family corporation running Saudi, I mean an extended family corporation of corporatist approach of ruling the kingdom, to a nuclear family approach with the Salman, I think there's a possibility that we could see, possibly see, some internal conflict in Saudi Arabia surrounding the succession in a way that we haven't seen in any of the other successions during the 20th and early part of the 21st century. King Salman's likely or quite potential either death or abdication in the next couple of years can have significant impacts on that strategic environment.

The second person is Mahmoud Abbas who's also 82, I think in somewhat better health, but not in great health, of the Palestinian Authority in the PLO. There is no tested succession path. The transition from Arafat to Abbas back in 2004, 2005 was essentially an extra-constitutional affair. There is a legal path for succession that's laid out in the Palestinian Authority that goes through the speaker of parliament that then holds elections. On paper, there is a pathway for a succession. There is no clear successor that is waiting in the wings. The most popular choice amongst Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is Marwan Barghouti, but he's spending three lifetimes behind Israeli prison bars. The Americans and, to some degree, the Gulfies and the Israelis would like to see Mohammed Dahlan who currently lives in the Emirates and is seen as major rival to Abbas. But he has very serious baggage that may preclude him becoming president as well. Does Israeli use the potential of ensuing chaos or instability with Abbas' death to create new facts on the ground? The Israeli Likud Party in the right wing and Israel under Netanyahu who clearly believe they have a moment with Mr. Trump in the White House to create new facts on the ground that would preclude a two-state solution and would leave the West Bank and Israeli ends in perpetuity.

The death… possible death in the next couple of years of Mahmoud Abbas or Abu Mazen could put all that to the test. That is another quite possible shock to the system that could significantly alter the strategic environment.

The final person, the young blood amongst the three, Ali Khamenei, their Rahbar or supreme leader of Iran, is 78. Again, it's been reported not in great health in recent years, perhaps prostrate cancer.

There is, in the case of Iran, a tested institutional path for succession of the Rahbar and we saw that in operation when Ayatollah Khomeini passed. The question there for me at least is "Who?" Who succeeds? Who gathers the political support in this process to become the next Rahbar? Is it somebody from the reform camp or **[1:04:14 inaudible]** himself has been mentioned as a possible successor for this position? Is it somebody from the hard line camp? Is it somebody that takes a more traditional view of **[1:04:25 inaudible]** or clerical rule in Iran or somebody that is… takes sort of radical ominous type of interpretation of **[1:04:35 inaudible]**? How will the IRGC receive the new supreme leader, whoever it is?

I think the potential death of Ayatollah Khamenei in the next couple of years, again, raises a potential Pandora's box of issues inside Iran and will be extraordinarily consequential both for Iran and for the region of who takes over that role with Khamenei's death.

[…]

Final set of comments is on the second Middle East Cold War, the new Middle East Cold War between the Saudis and the Iranians. Recall the first cold war in the region, era of cold war in the 1950s and 1960s, led by Egypt and the republics backed by the Soviet Union on one side versus the Saudis, the monarchies backed by the Americans on the other side. That was a cold war

that was ultimately won fairly decisively by Saudi Arabia as a result primarily of the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 that really flipped the strategic landscape in the Arab world and catapulted the Saudis as really the top dog in the region and displaced the Egyptians from that role.

This new Middle East Cold War that's been going on, you can date it from different timelines, I suspect. But certainly, that became very heated with the 2003 and the displacement of Iraq from the Saudi camp essentially to the Iranian camp that really put this Cold War on steroids. Now, what will happen to if over the coming couple of years? My best guess is it will intensify. I think Mohammad bin Salman will be successful in consolidating power and he is a principle driver on the Saudi side, the principle driver on the Saudi side of a hardline approach to the Iranians. The Iranians for their point, as Afshon, I think, correctly identified, have strategic interest in the region and have acted upon those strategic interests in a very aggressive way. They also have the largest pool of reserves of natural gas in the world, so I don't think there's going to be a shortage of funds available to the Iranian regime to continue to carry out its national interest.

That said, I think there is the potential for fairly wide variability in how this new Middle East cold war plays out over the next couple of years. I think the intensification scenario that I just laid out is the likely result that it's not going to get better. It's going to get worse. But I think there is a plausible, not likely but a plausible scenario for some easing of the cold war tensions between the Saudis and the Iranians. That would have to do with internal developments in both countries in the case, linking back to my first of comments, if you have a successor is… Ali Khamenei's successor is Rahani, for example, or some other more modern and reformed-minded individual, you might see a desire on the Iranian regime side to kind of ratchet down the tensions a bit for their own purposes.

If, on the death or abdication of King Salman in Saudi Arabia, if Mohammad bin Salman is not successful in consolidating power and there is some more kind of corporatist approach that wants to, again, for Saudi's interest, ratchet down the tensions with Iran, vis-à-vis, and its various playgrounds of Qatar and Yemen and elsewhere, then I think you might be able to see a somewhat of a change of ratcheting down of tensions on the Saudi side as well. So there's a plausible but not likely scenario that this new Middle East Cold War will not intensify but could in fact ease.

The final comment on that that I'd like to make, and I'll just wrap up there, and I'm going to be intentionally provocative here to make a point very clear. With regard to this new Middle East Cold War and the role that Iran plays and particularly its internal constitution, in my judgment, Iran continually gets misread in DC as a weak state on the verge of collapse. The recent protests have been used by some commentators in this regard as evidence that the regime is weak and teetering on collapse, that it won't take much for a full-on counterrevolution to do regime change into Iran. These are the same sorts of people that then advocate for the US to give that a little bit of a push.

This is a false narrative. This is simply a misreading of the Iranian regime. As Afshon detailed, it's got lots of problems like lots of other regimes in the region has, but Iran frankly is one of the more functional states. It's one of the relatively… I want to underline the world relative here, relatively strong states in the Middle East. The regime may reform. There have been changes in the regime behavior, internal behavior in the past depending on certain situations. But for those people that are looking for the regime to essentially collapse or be pushed over, that's simply not going to happen. The protests in the last couple of weeks are not evidence that this is on the cusps of reality.

I would just caution CENTCOM not to buy into some of this rhetoric coming out of DC about the inherent fragility of the Iranian regime. It is not fragile. It will, in my judgment, still very much be around. There are maybe changes again particularly with the potential death of Khamenei. There may be wide-ranging changes inside Iran, but it's not… these are reforms, not some sort of revolutionary upheaval that is on the verge of happening.

With that, that concludes my set of comments. We have about 15 minutes or so for any kind of Q&A. So I'll turn it over to CENTCOM. Over.

Dr. Abdulaziz Sager

Gulf Research Center

How does Iran prioritize its influence and presence in the region?

Iran uses sectarian loyalty propagated mostly through the use of militias as the key component to stretch its influence throughout the region. Priorities are to reach out to past and current allies and those states where a substantial Shia population exists. Overall, the use of these instruments by Iran has proven to be highly successful with little investment, even on the human resource front. It is a low-cost, high-benefit strategy. The result is that Iranian credibility is currently higher than US credibility as Iran is seen as never having abandoned the Assad regime in Syria, the Hizbullah group or any of the Iraqi Shi'a groups.

Mr. Mubin Shaikh

Independent Consultant

How does Iran prioritize its influence and presence in the region?

It can be argued from one perspective, that:

1) Iran sees itself as the cultural superior to the Arabs, which they believe are wrongly seen as automatic inheritors of the Islamic tradition. The roots of this are based on the so-called Wahhabi brand of Islam that has been the bane of Shia existence since the attack on Karbala in the early 1800's in which several thousand were killed and all the antiShia sentiment that has come out of Saudi Arabia since.

2) This antiWahhabi sentiment is shared by other Muslim powers such as Turkey, who are similarly competing for branding as a "great Muslim power" and who also have history of rule in the region particularly Turkey's time as the Ottoman Caliphate. There are ancient glories in both, that are frequently referred to in the national identity matrix. This is important to know so as to view Iran's overtures to Turkey and Turkey's growing cooperation with it in return beyond the Kurdish issue. Bluntly, there are some concerns being raised over Turkey's loyalties here, should a significant escalation with Iran occur as it may not be seen to be in the national Turkish interest to do so.

3) A concern also exists for Pakistan which also has cordial relations with Iran and extremely high anti-American sentiment already present in Pakistan will ensure that Iran is able to counter CENTCOM moves even through Pakistan and into Afghanistan as a result of perceived action by the U.S. and where Iran will look to in order to push back.

4) The issue of Israel and Palestine as a lightning rod issue dominates Iran's overtures to the Muslim world at large, especially as it would prefer Sunni Muslim states leave the Shia alone and look to Israel as a common adversary instead. The narrative is a powerful one with core, scriptural significance and recent political news over United Nations voting and Jerusalem embassy decisions has acted as a catalyst for many other countries to begin contemplating how to strategize against the U.S. and its ability to act against Iran's interests in the region.

"Anonymous" Smith

Anonymous Contributor

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
To be the dominant regional hegemon to ensure regime survival. While seemingly two goals, they go hand in hand – one cannot be achieved without the other from IRI perspective. This was realized during the Iran-Iraq War: To survive domestically, they need to eliminate regional threats. Only way to do this is by being the	Political ideology, network of militias, Cultural/Ideological Influence through bonyads and faith organizations, nuclear ambitions; military expansion and domestically produced weapons, largest in domestic military manpower, strong IO campaign via internet/cyber army, other forms of media in multiple languages with many target audiences.	Both on all fronts.	If they are not the strongest regional power, state survival is threatened. Iran has learned the best defense is a good offense. It's not necessarily about eliminating enemies. It's about eliminating the likelihood of their threats by having extensive leverage against them.	Yes; network of regional influence is strong and expanding (although retracting in some areas), as well as strong ideological network; stable/functioning domestic political system; winning the narrative against arch enemy KSA (KSA portrayed as a corrupt pro-US/Israel Monarchy while IRI represents a populist political ideology where Muslims were victorious against imperialism, Israel/US, and injustice); Influence high in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and growing in Yemen, Bahrain	Yes – influence may be retracting in some places, i.e. Iran getting a bad rep in Syria for cultural issues with Arab counterparts and for being seen as meddlers, especially politically in Iraq. However, Iran has solidified its network and as long as 1) Iran is financially capable of being a patron and 2) collapse of state authorities

dominant power with lots of 'leverage' options regionally.				among others; Although Iran's fleet may not be as sophisticated as Gulf neighbors, military manpower and ideologically motivated domestic/foreign militias far outnumber opponents' – they are influential and effective.	or simply state failures to address grievances continue, Iran will always exert substantial influence throughout the region to arguably be the regional hegemon.

TRADOC G-27 Athena Study Team

Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Round Six – Deep Dive:

Prepared by the
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for
CENTCOM
and
THE STRATEGIC MULTILAYER ASSESSMENT
Office of the Secretary of Defense J-39

19 January 2018

The overall classification of this document is UNCLASSIFIED

Summary of CENTCOM Deep Dive Core Challenges

On 11ᵗʰ December 2017, General Joseph Votel, Commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) and the Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) J39 office requested that the TRADOC G-27 Operational Environment Laboratory conduct an Athena simulation to assess the effects of state actor dynamics within the CENTCOM AOR over the next 18-24 months. In response to this request, the TRADOC Athena Study Team examined the interplay of state actors in Yemen.

Yemen has witnessed varied levels of foreign involvement since 2008 and has been the site for strategic competition between regional powers Iran and Saudi Arabia. The governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia dedicate money, manpower, and military effort to shape the government of Yemen while strengthening local proxies and undermining local rivals.

This report provides an overview of assumptions and conditions, insights, and results drawn from Athena simulation runs focused on the next 18-24 months in Yemen.

Assumptions and Conditions

The Athena Study Team conducted this study in response to SMA Deep Dive Question #9: How does Iran prioritize its influence and presence in the region?

The Athena Team began with the following assumptions to inform the study.

- Iran will support Shia minorities in the Middle East and abroad. This support will be a combination of financial, military, and humanitarian aid.
- Iran will seek a role for Shia political parties in the governance of the countries where they reside.
- Accordingly, Iran can exercise the most influence with the least negative repercussions in countries with a republican or electoral system.
- In countries with an electoral system, Iran will enable activist Shia political parties to act as national powerbrokers. Iran does not seek to control foreign parliaments, but rather to have a veto in the political process of foreign countries. Iran needs approximately 30 percent influence in the parliament of countries where it commits resources to realize this vision.
- In countries with Shia minorities that cannot or do not participate in the political process, Iran will seek to undermine the political system, at times violently (through proxy groups).
- Iran will actively fill any power vacuum in the Middle East with political and military proxies.
- In countries with weak central governments, Iran will expand its proxy support.

The Athena Study Team set the following conditions in order to examine the Use Cases:

- The simulated study period begins on 01 January 2018 and ends on 01 January 2020.
- The government of Iran retains its structure as an Islamic Republic. Ali Khamenei, who has led Iran as Supreme Leader for nearly 30 years, may pass away or abdicate in favor of a successor but the fundamental organization of government of the Islamic Republic will remain unchanged.
- King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud remains the king of Saudi Arabia for the study period. Muhammad bin Salman al-Saud remains the crown prince of Saudi Arabia.
- President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi remains as the internationally recognized leader of Yemen.

- The Government of Iran is unable to increase its level of involvement in Yemen without experiencing political repercussions. Its level of intervention throughout all Use Cases of the study remains static.
- The Governments of Saudi Arabia and the US are able to increase or decrease their level of intervention in Yemen.

Determining Yemen's Possible Futures

According to the Athena Study Team's assumptions, Yemen is an area in the Middle East where Iran will seek to maximize its influence. Because of proximity, Saudi Arabia will also seek to maximize its influence in Yemen. The US desires a resolution to the Yemen conflict that leaves the Government of Yemen intact under President Hadi. The US hopes to curtail the influence and freedom of movement of violent extremist organizations (VEO)s such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Houthi faction in Yemen.

The Athena Study Team modeled Use Cases to answer one over-arching question: Is it possible to realize a unified, pacified Yemen by January 01, 2020?

Since 1962, Yemen has experienced a major conflict within its territory approximately every 7 years. These conflicts last 4.5 years on average. The current Yemeni Civil War began in 2015. With history as precedent, there is an opportunity for a cessation of hostilities in Yemen within two years from January 1, 2018. However, any peace accord in Yemen likely will be short-lived.
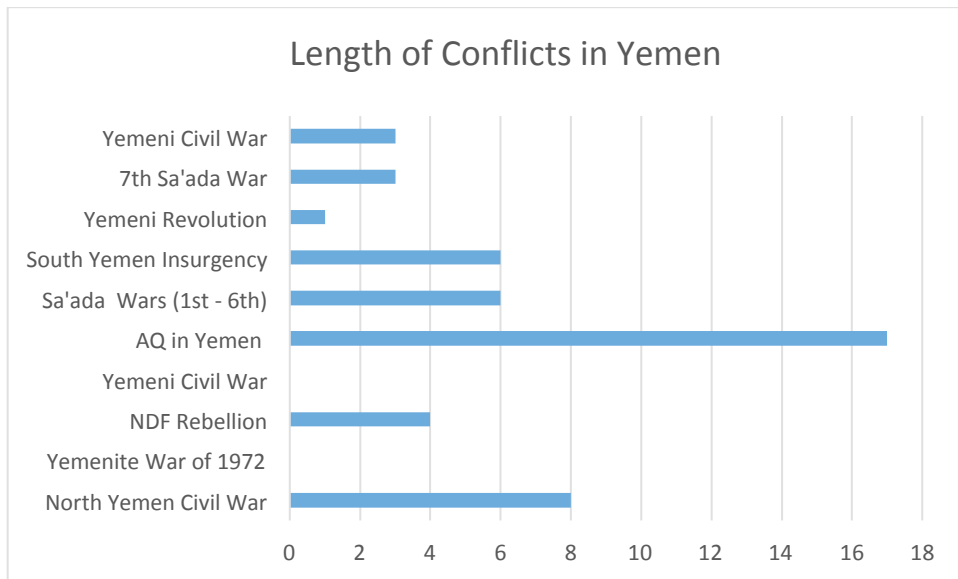
Insights from Athena Use Cases

The Athena Study Team built a database to model the current level of involvement of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the US in Yemen. The team then defined the maximum plausible level of involvement of each country in Yemen and compared the effects of the simulated maximum level of involvement to the current (baseline) level of involvement.

Based on a comparison of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the US's current (baseline) involvement in Yemen and a plausible maximum level of involvement, the Athena Study Team generated the following insights from analyzing the outputs of the Athena simulation.
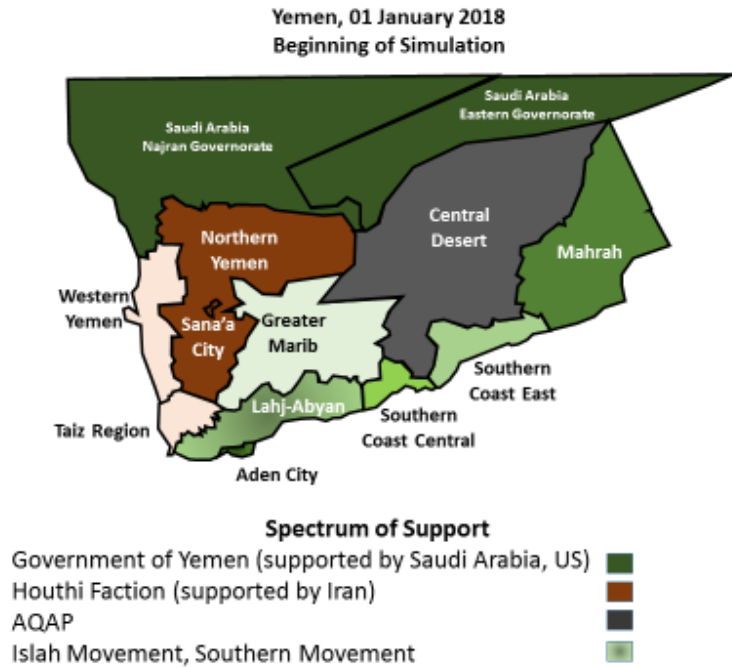
Most Likely Outcome Based on Simulated Two Year Time Period

No belligerent, including the Government of Yemen, is able to control the entirety of Yemen's territory within the simulated two year time period. In the areas they control, the Houthi faction and AQAP experience a steady decline in support from the local population.

The Government of Yemen receives tepid support from the populations in Lahj and Abyan. It is unable to gain the full support of the populations in these areas without aid from coalition countries Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. The Government of Yemen maintains its highest levels of civilian support along the border with Oman and the central and eastern coast of the country.

The majority of the population in Sana'a does not support the Government of Yemen.

Best Case Outcome Based on Simulated Two Year Time Period

The Houthi faction is at its weakest and the Government of Yemen is at its strongest between October 29th, 2018 and December 2nd, 2018 in the simulated time period in all Use Cases. During this time period, the Houthi faction has lost the support of the population in the area it controls and there is an opportunity for the Government of Yemen to force a peace accord. After this time period, the Houthi faction slowly grows in strength relative to the Government of Yemen.

Maximum US intervention leads to expansion of Government of Yemen control of the central desert region.
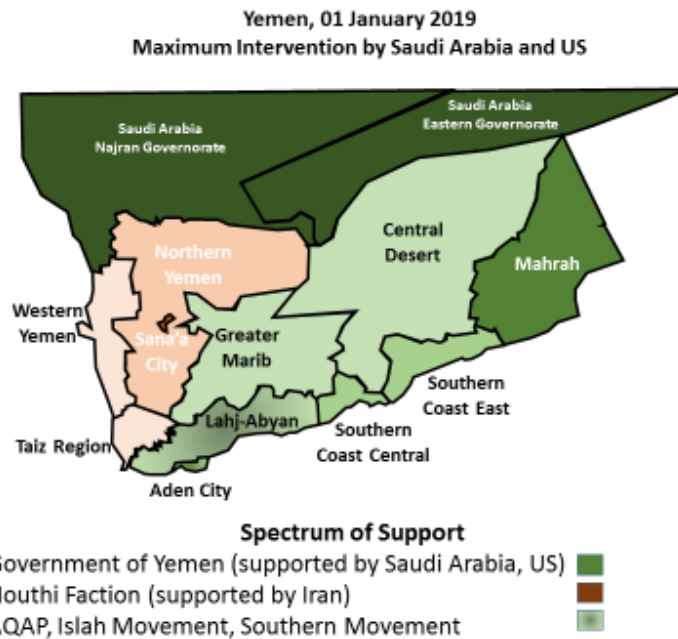
Worst Case Outcome Based on Simulated Two Year Time Period

Baseline US intervention in the central desert erodes AQAP control of the region and undermines AQAP support by the local population. However, this erosion in AQAP control creates a window for the Houthi faction to expand to the east and erode Government of Yemen control of Marib.

In-fighting among the member countries of the coalition supporting the Government of Yemen in Lahj and Abyan leads to hostilities between the Islah Movement and the Southern Movement, Yemeni proxies of the Government of Qatar and the Government of the UAE, respectively. Hostilities lead to a third front in the Yemeni Civil War, in addition to the north and central desert. The Government of Yemen is overwhelmed and the Houthi faction becomes further entrenched in the north of the country.

Yemen, 01 January 2019
Status Quo Intervention by Saudi Arabia and US
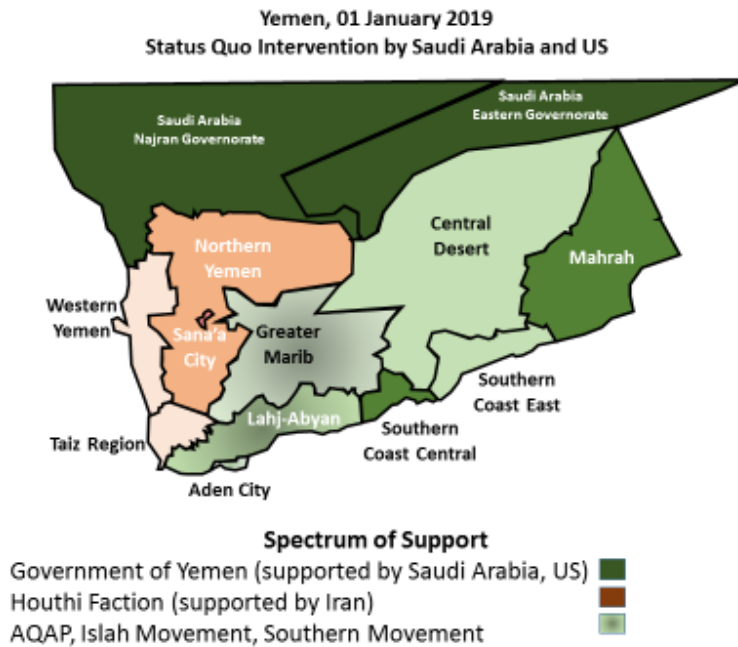
Dr. Eric Watkins

Independent Consultant

How does Iran prioritize its influence and presence in the region?

Iran's chief priority and long-term aim in the region is to assume the role as leader of Islam. In that regard, it has targeted two existing states, which house the three most important mosques in Islam: Saudi Arabia, home to the two holy mosques at Makkah and Madinah and Israel, home to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Iran is working with other states, as well as non-state parties, both in the region and outside the region, to accomplish its aim.

To the north of Saudi Arabia, Iran has been working hard to create allies in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The aim of these alliances is two-fold: to create pressure on Israel through Syria and Lebanon and to create pressure on Saudi Arabia through Iraq. While this Iranian effort is clearly important, Tehran's top priority actually lies in developing the threat to Saudi Arabia from its southern neighbor, Yemen.

In Yemen, Iran has been supportive of the Ansar Allah movement, otherwise known as the Houthis. For years, decades even, Saudi Arabia has been wary of a hostile Yemen along its southern border. Saudi Arabia long supported a divided Yemen, believing that two Yemeni states hostile to each other meant less of a threat to Riyadh. The Saudis preferred to believe that it was better for the two Yemeni states to aim weapons at one another than to have a single Yemeni state aiming all of its weapons northward. Now, however, with Yemen a unified state, the Saudis have much concern, especially if that unified state comes to be governed by a proxy or puppet of Iran. That concern has been justified by the recent launch of Iranian-made missiles from Yemen toward Saudi Arabia, aimed at the capital, Riyadh.

Apart seeing from a hostile presence along its southern border, Saudi Arabia also views Iran – through its proxies in Yemen – as capable of exerting a threat against shipping through the southern straits of the Red Sea, also known as the Bab-el-Mandeb. On several recent occasions, reports have emerged of attacks on shipping in the Red Sea by the Yemeni-based forces of Ansar Allah. These attacks have included missiles, as well as water-borne craft, and represent a growing threat. Iran also has a potential presence across the Bab-el-Mandeb through the construction of a new military base by its ally, China. Forces hostile to Saudi Arabia on both coasts of the Bab-el-Mandeb would be worrisome.

Equally worrisome is the possibility of eventual attacks on Oman coming eastward from a hostile, Iranian-backed government in Yemen, as well as destabilization efforts coming westward from Iran itself. Even the threat of hostilities in the Strait of Hormuz would be enough to raise insurance rates of oil tankers and effectively shut down trade. If Oman were to come under the governance of an Iranian-backed government, Teheran would control both coasts along the Strait of Hormuz. Even the new oil facilities at Fujairah, which are meant to bypass the Strait of Hormuz, would come under Iranian rule.

The takeover of Yemen by an Iranian proxy could thus create an east-west line that could be used to interdict shipping to and from the Red Sea, to and from the Strait of Hormuz, and all along the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Such a line could be of considerable benefit to Iran and to its ally China. Without the need to involve themselves directly in any interdiction effort, both China and Iran could quietly encourage or, at least, turn a blind eye to efforts by Ansar Allah or, for that matter, any number of non-state organizations, including terrorist groups or even outright pirates. Such interdiction of oil shipping would quickly weaken Saudi Arabia, making it amenable to the advances of Iran for religious control of Islam and China for exclusive access to cheap Saudi oil.

The Battle for Market Share
https://www.abo.net/en_IT/topics/watkins-eng.shtml

Ms. Katherine Zimmerman and Dr. Frederick Kagan

American Enterprise Institute

Iranian Strategic objective	Influence mechanism	Is this action likely to be covert or overt?	Why is Iran seeking this goal?	Has Iran been successful in achieving this goal to date?	Will Iran continue to be successful in achieving this goal over the next 18-24 months?
1. **Support and expand the "Axis of Resistance."**	Sustain political and material support to Axis members, including continuing to fund Shi'a militias and groups in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Sustain deployments of IRGC, Artesh, Fatemiyoun, and Zeinabiyoun units to Syria in support of the Assad regime. Maneuver forces and proxy forces to establish a "land bridge" from Iranian	The majority of the support to members of the Axis of Resistance is likely to be covert, though Iran will move to create mechanisms by which some of the support is through legitimate channels. The incorporation of PMF units into the ISF in Iraq is one such mechanism. Iran will maneuver forces in Syria as part of the Assad regime anti-ISIS coalition in order to secure the land bridge.	To support the grand strategic objective of establishing Iranian regional hegemony. The strengthening of the Axis of Resistance also increases Iran's ability to deter Israel and the US from taking action against the Iranian regime inside of Iran and in the region.	Yes. Iran's influence in the region has increased due to the Axis of Resistance. Hezbollah is empowered in Lebanon and is a critical part of the Assad regime coalition in Syria. The Assad regime would be significantly weakened without Iranian support. Iranian proxy forces have penetrated the ISF in Iraq.[1] Iran is	Yes. The US policy of retrenchment and withdrawal from intervening in the region has enabled Iran's success in expanding its Axis of Resistance. The US has not given any indication that it is prepared to reverse this

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[1] Jessa Rose Dury-Agri, Omer Kassim, and Patrick Martin, "Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle," Institute for the Study of War, December 1, 2017, http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraqi-security-forces-and-popular-mobilization-forces-orders-battle.

	border to Lebanon in order to facilitate the movement of materiel and supplies to Hezbollah. The Iranian requirement for securing a land bridge is lower than that of the US or its allies, as Iran is willing to accept more risk along its supply routes than the US is.			actively seeking to shape the outcome of the 2018 parliamentary elections in Iraq.	policy.
2. **Develop a conventional force projection capability.**	Iran will use its participation in the Assad regime coalition to develop and test conventional force projection capabilities, as well as the reconfiguration of its militaries' chain of command to improve joint operations.	Structural changes to the Iranian militaries will be overt in Persian media. The deployment of units and testing of conventional capabilities will be covert.	To support the grand strategic objective of establishing Iranian regional hegemony. The development of such a conventional capability also serves to deter regional adversaries.	Yes. Iran already reoriented its forces traditionally focused on defensive operations into an expeditionary force in Syria.[2] Iran's military cooperation with Russia has served as a classroom for Iranian military leaders to learn how to plan and conduct complex conventional	Yes. Syria will continue to provide Iran with opportunities to test the fielding of its conventional forces. Iran's 2018 defense budget will almost certainly increase to support changes to the

[2] Paul Bucala, "Iran's New Way of War in Syria," AEI's Critical Threats Project, February 3, 2017, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/irans-new-way-of-war-in-syria.

				operations from their Russian partners.[3] IN 2015-2016, Iran began testing the deployment of small cadres drawn from IRGC conventional units in Syria to implant and in cases command militia groups.[4]	militaries.
3. Protect Iran's client regime in Syria.	Continue to provide diplomatic support for the Assad regime and pursue a political resolution to the Syrian civil war through the mechanism of the Astana talks, which favor the Iranian, Russian, and Turkish interests. Sustain deployments of IRGC, Artesh, Hezbollah, Fatemiyoun, and Zeinabiyoun units to Syria in support of the Assad regime.	The extent of Iran's support to the Assad regime will be covert in nature, though the broad contours of how Iran is providing support will be overt.	To support the expulsion of the US and its allies from the Middle East.	Yes. The Iranian-Russo alliance in Syria has strengthened the Assad regime's position and made more likely the establishment of at minimum a rump Syrian state under the Assad regime with Idlib and parts of northwest Syria under contest. The successful narrative of an anti-ISIS coalition in Syria helped to enable	Yes. Current trends favor the staying power of the Assad regime.

[3] Paul Bucala and Genevieve Casagrande, "How Iran is Learning from Russia in Syria," AEI's Critical Threats Project and Institute for the Study of War, February 3, 2017, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/how-iran-is-learning-from-russia-in-syria.
[4] Paul Bucala and Frederick W. Kagan, "Iran's Evolving War of War: How the IRGC Fights in Syria," AEI's Critical Threats Project, March 24, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/irans-evolving-way-of-war-how-the-irgc-fights-in-syria.

					Iranian successes on this front.	
4.	**Replace the U.S. as Iraq's primary security partner.**	Influence the outcome of the 2018 parliamentary elections to increase the influence of Iraqis under Iran's influence inside of the Iraqi government. Support the incorporation of PMF units into the formal ISF chain of command.	Iranian influence over the Iraqi elections is likely to be covert in nature, though indicators of its occurrence will appear through regular media sources. Such indicators include meetings of politicians with known Iranian proxy groups or officials. Iranian proxy groups may also participate in shaping materials that could bias the electorate in favor of a particular candidate.	To support the expulsion of the US and its allies from the Middle East.	Yes. Iran's ability to influence national-level politics in Iraq remains high.	Yes. The US retreat from the region and less-robust support for partner governments leaves an opening for Iran to continue to exploit.
5.	**Defeat Salafi-jihadi threat to Iran and allies.**	Sustain deployments of forces and proxy forces in Iraq and Syria to combat ISIS and al Qaeda in Syria. Support Russian efforts to replace the US as a leader in the anti-ISIS fight. Iran may continue support for the Afghan Taliban as a partner against ISIS Wilayat Khorasan,	The fight against ISIS and al Qaeda will likely be overt, though Iran will seek to shape the narrative about its other activities to pull them under the umbrella of counterterrorism actions.	To protect Iranian territory and people. The pursuit of this strategic objective, which is in line with US interests, enables Iran to achieve additional strategic objectives that run against US interests, such as the strengthening of Iranian influence in the region.	Yes. The success of Operation Inherent Resolve against ISIS, particularly in Iraq, has likely decreased the ISIS threat within Iranian borders. Iranian security forces also remain vigilant.	Maybe. The manner by which Iran, Russia, and even the American coalition is fighting ISIS and al Qaeda creates a likely possibility that Salafi-jihadism spreads in the region as the

	though the move risks re-empowering the Taliban in Afghanistan.				core conditions that led to the original strengthening of the Salafi-jihadi movement remain unaddressed, and in the case of Syria, worsened.

Please provide any additional comments below.

The strategic objectives of Iran in Iraq and Syria are mutually reinforcing, as the regime's strengthening and expansion of its so-called "Axis of Resistance" (Hezbollah, the Assad regime, Iraqi Shi'a proxies, and the Yemeni al Houthi movement, among others) also has the effect of strengthening Iran's relative position in Iraq and Syria and decreasing the ability of the United States to operate freely or exert influence in US interests.

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Biographies

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois is Executive Vice President at NSI, Inc. She has also served as co-chair of a National Academy of Sciences study on Strategic Deterrence Military Capabilities in the 21st Century, and as a primary author on a study of the Defense and Protection of US Space Assets. Dr. Astorino-Courtois has served as technical lead on a variety of rapid turn-around, Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) projects in support of US forces and Combatant Commands. These include assessments of key drivers of political, economic and social instability and areas of resilience in South Asia; development of a methodology for conducting provincial assessments for the ISAF Joint Command; production of a "rich contextual understanding" (RCU) to supplement intelligence reporting for the ISAF J2 and Commander; and projects for USSTRATCOM on deterrence assessment methods.

Previously, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007) where she served as a STRATCOM liaison to U.S. and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX (1994-2003) where her research focused on the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. She has received a number of academic grants and awards and has published articles in multiple peer-reviewed journals. She has also taught at Creighton University and as a visiting instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Astorino-Courtois earned her Ph.D. in International Relations and MA in and Research Methods from New York University. Her BA is in political science from Boston College. Finally, Dr. Astorino-Courtois also has the distinction of having been awarded both a US Navy Meritorious Service Award and a US Army Commander's Award.

Mr. Nader Biglari

Nader Biglari joined Geographic Services, Inc. as a senior linguist and area expert working on Iran-related projects. Prior to joining GSI, he served as an international affairs analyst for the Voice of America, an independent US government agency tasked with promoting public diplomacy. During his 18 year service there, Nader Biglari focused on news and analysis pertaining to the Middle East, with particular focus on Iran. He also served at the United Nations' headquarters in NY, leading a team of rapporteurs at the Division of Public Information, writing and reporting on the international body's Security Council and General Assembly deliberations. Nader Biglari has a master's degree in Middle East studies from American University in Washington, DC.

Dr. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, Ph.D., is a Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East. Working across the disciplines of political science, international relations and international political economy, his research examines the changing position of Persian Gulf states in the global order, as well as the emergence of longer-term, nonmilitary challenges to regional security. Previously, he worked as senior Gulf analyst at the Gulf

Center for Strategic Studies between 2006 and 2008 and as co-director of the Kuwait Program on Development, Governance and Globalization in the Gulf States at the London School of Economics (LSE) from 2008 until 2013.

Coates Ulrichsen has published extensively on the Gulf. His books include "Insecure Gulf: the End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-Oil Era" (Columbia University Press, 2011) and "Qatar and the Arab Spring" (Oxford University Press, 2014). In addition, he is the author of "The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East, 1914-22" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and "The First World War in the Middle East" (Hurst & Co, 2014). His most recent book is "The Gulf States in International Political Economy," published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2015. Currently, he is completing a book entitled "The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics, and Policymaking" for Routledge for publication in late 2016. Coates Ulrichsen's articles have appeared in numerous academic journals, including Global Policy and the Journal of Arabian Studies, and he consults regularly on Gulf issues for Oxford Analytica and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center. He also writes regularly for the Economist Intelligence Unit, Open Democracy, and Foreign Policy, and authors a monthly column for Gulf Business News and Analysis.

Coates Ulrichsen holds a doctorate in history from the University of Cambridge.

Dr. Skye Cooley

Skye Cooley (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is an assistant professor in the School of Media and Strategic Communications at Oklahoma State University. His research interests are in Russian political communication, global media and digital democracy, as well as civic deliberation online. Dr. Cooley holds certifications of accreditation in public relations (APR) and civilian service peace keeping operations (POTI). He has traveled actively through Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa; publishing and presenting research on international political communication.

Dr. Zana Gulmohamad

Zana Gulmohamad earned his PhD in Politics from the Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield, UK. His thesis title is "The making of Iraq's foreign policies post-Saddam." He has an MA in Global Affairs and Diplomacy from the University of Buckingham, UK, and a BA in Political Science from the University of Sulymania – Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Dr. GUlmohamad worked for six years (2005-2011) in the Kurdistan Region Security Council – Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq. Currently, he is teaching in the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield.

His articles have been published by journals, international platforms and think tanks, such as CTC Sentinel at West Point, the Jamestown Foundation "Terrorism Monitor," The National, Open Democracy, E-International Relations, Global Security Studies, Your Middle East, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed (The New Arab), and Middle East online. Dr. Gulmohamad has been invited to give talks and interviews with various platforms such as BBC radio and Sheffield live radio & TV, I24News, Morgenbladet, and other media and NGOs. He is a regular visitor to the Middle East, Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq and is based in the UK.

Mr. 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. He is also an adjunct professor of Middle East politics at George Washington University.

 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*.

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.

Ambassador James Jeffrey

Ambassador James F. Jeffrey is the Philip Solondz distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute where he focuses on U.S. diplomatic and military strategy in the Middle East, with emphasis on Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.

One of the nation's most senior diplomats, Ambassador Jeffrey has held a series of highly sensitive posts in Washington D.C. and abroad. In addition to his service as ambassador in Ankara and Baghdad, he served as assistant to the president and deputy national security advisor in the George W. Bush administration, with a special focus on Iran. He previously served as principal deputy assistant secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the Department of State, where his responsibilities included leading the Iran policy team and coordinating public diplomacy. Earlier appointments included service as senior advisor on Iraq to the secretary of state; chargé d'affaires and deputy chief of mission in Baghdad; deputy chief of mission in Ankara; and ambassador to Albania.

A former infantry officer in the U.S. army, Ambassador Jeffrey served in Germany and Vietnam from 1969 to 1976.

Dr. Frederick Kagan

Frederick W. Kagan is the Christopher DeMuth Chair and director of the Critical Threats Project at AEI. In 2009, he served in Kabul, Afghanistan, as part of General Stanley McChrystal's strategic assessment team, and he returned to Afghanistan in 2010, 2011, and 2012 to conduct research for Generals David Petraeus and John Allen. In July 2011, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen awarded him the Distinguished Public Service Award, the highest honor the Chairman can present to civilians who do not work for the Department of Defense. He is coauthor of the report *Defining Success in Afghanistan* (AEI and the Institute for the Study of War, 2010) and author of the series of reports *Choosing Victory* (AEI), which recommended and monitored the US military surge in Iraq. His most recent book is *Lessons for a Long War: How America Can Win on New Battlefields* (AEI Press, 2010, with Thomas Donnelly). Previously an associate professor of military history at West Point, Dr. Kagan is a contributing editor at the *Weekly Standard* and has written for *Foreign Affairs*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other periodicals.

Dr. Randy Kluver

Dr. Randy Kluver (Ph.D., University of Southern California) is the Dean of the School of Global Studies and Partnerships at Oklahoma State University. Dr. Kluver conducts theoretically driven research on political communication (including rhetorical and new media approaches), and global and new media. His work explores the role of political culture on political communication, and the ways in which cultural expectations, values, and habits condition political messaging practices and reception in a variety of contexts.


Dr. Mark Luce
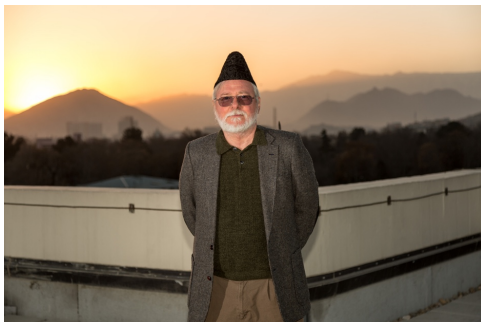
Dr. Mark Luce was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghazni, Afghanistan. He holds a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago. His specialization is in Islamic Thought and Persian literature, with regional expertise in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf and Yemen. He speaks Persian (Dari, Farsi, Tajik), Pashtu and Arabic. He has lived and worked in the Middle East and South Asia for more than 25 years (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, the U.A.E., Jordan, Yemen, Qatar, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia). His current interests and projects are ISIS, Trans-regional Threat Streams and Sunni-Shia sectarian strife. Dr. Luce is an analyst for the Cultural Intelligence Cell, 4th MISG (A), 1st Special Force Command (provisional), USASOC at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Dr. Diane L. Maye

Dr. Diane Maye is an Assistant Professor of Security Studies and International Affairs at Embry- Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, and an affiliated faculty member at George Mason University's Center for Narrative and Conflict Analysis. She also served as a Visiting Professor of International Affairs at John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. Diane teaches undergraduate level courses in International Relations, Homeland Security, American Foreign Policy, Counterterrorism Analysis, Arabic, and Middle Eastern Affairs.
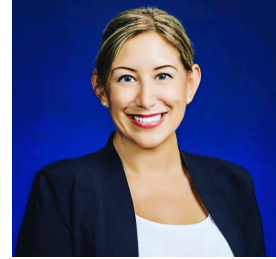
Prior to her work in academia, Diane served as an officer in the United States Air Force and worked in the defense industry. Upon leaving the Air Force, Diane managed projects in foreign military sales, proposal development, and the execution of large international communications and physical security projects for military customers. During the Iraq war, she worked for Multi-National Force-Iraq in Baghdad, managing over 400 bi-lingual, bicultural advisors to the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Department of Defense. She is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Naval Postgraduate School and earned her Ph.D. in Political Science at George Mason University.

Dr. Nicholas O'Shaunnessy

Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy is Professor of Communication at Queen Mary, University of London, UK and latterly director of their Marketing and Communications Group; Visiting Professor (2016-) in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, and a Quondam Fellow of Hughes Hall Cambridge University. Earlier in his career he taught for eleven years at Cambridge. Nicholas is the author or co-author or editor of numerous books on commercial and political persuasion.

Ultimately his concern is with the 'engineering of consent'- the troubling matter of how public opinion can be manufactured, and governments elected, via sophisticated methodologies of persuasion developed in the consumer economy.

A co-authored book, Theory and Concepts in Political Marketing, was published in April 2013 with Sage. Selling Hitler: Propaganda and the Nazi Brand (Hurst) was published in September 2016, and a second volume – Marketing The Third Reich: Persuasion, Packaging and Propaganda- has been out since September 2017 with Routledge. 'Key Readings In Propaganda' (with Paul Baines, four volumes, Sage London 2012): Volume One: Historical origins, definition, changing nature. Volume Two: The psychology and sociology underpinning Propaganda. Volume Three: Propaganda in military and terrorism contexts. Volume Four: Advances and contemporary issues in Propaganda.

Other topics in propaganda are pursued in numerous journal articles such as Selling Terror: The Symbolization and Positioning of Jihad (with Paul Baines), Marketing Theory Volume 9 (2) (pp 207-221) 2009. The Dark Side of Political Marketing, Islamist Propaganda, Reversal Theory and British Muslims with Paul Baines et al, European Journal of Marketing.V44 3/4 2010. Al Qaeda message evolution and

positioning, 1998- 2008: Propaganda analysis re-visited, Baines and O'Shaughnessy, Public Relations Inquiry pp 163-191 May 2014 .Putin, Xi, And Hitler: propaganda and the paternity of pseudo democracy. Defence Strategic Communications (the official journal of NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence) Vol 2 Spring 2017. The Politics of Consumption And the Consumption of Politics**:** How Authoritarian Regimes Shape Public Opinion By Using Consumer Marketing Tools. Journal of Advertising Research, June 2017, 57 (2).

His perspective has always been that persuasion is the hidden hand of history, its core dynamic. And certainly it is the case that propaganda has become again an important part of our global public and civic discourse.

Dr. Afshon Ostovar

Dr. Afshon Ostovar is an Assistant Professor of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School. He has come to NPS after a decade of experience working on Department of Defense and federally-funded projects related to national security and the Middle East. He was most recently a Research Scientist in the Center for Strategic Studies at CNA, a not-for-profit research organization in the Washington D.C. area. Previously, he was a Fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and has taught at Johns Hopkins University.

Dr. Ostovar's research focuses on conflict and security issues in the Middle East, with a specialty on Iran and the Persian Gulf. His book, *Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards* (Oxford University Press, 2016), examines the rise of Iran's most powerful armed force—the IRGC—and its role in power politics, regional conflicts, and political violence. The book is both the first comprehensive history of the IRGC and a thematic history of the Islamic Republic, from the roots of its revolutionary system in the Islamic revivalism of the 19th century, to the impact of sanctions and the Arab Spring on Iranian foreign involvement.

Other publications include, *The Rebel Alliance: Why Syria's Armed Opposition Has Failed to Unify*, a report that looks at how outside private funding encouraged fracturing within Syria's rebellion and emboldened Salafi and Jihadist groups; and "Iran's Basij: Membership in an Militant Islamist Organization," which explores the recruitment, training, and incentives for membership in Iran's largest pro-regime organization, the Basij popular militia. He currently has three articles and book chapters in preparation examining the visual culture of jihadist organizations, sectarianism and Iranian foreign policy, and Iran's way of war in Syria and Iraq.

Dr. Ostovar is a contributor to *War on the Rocks* and *Lawfare*, and his commentary regularly appears in *Politico*, *Foreign Policy*, *Vox*, *The Guardian*, and other popular media such as *New York Times*, *Reuters*, *Bloomberg*, and National Public Radio. He earned a B.A., *summa cum laude*, in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Arizona and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Michigan.

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MA - University of California, Berkeley, 1988
BA - University of California, Berkeley, 1982

NPS EXPERIENCE:

- Associate and Assistant Professor

OTHER EXPERIENCE:

- 1991 - present - Research Associate, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Univ of California, Berkeley.
- Associate Editor, Middle East Studies Association Bulletin.
- Research Fellow, Truman Institute of the Hebrew Univ of Jerusalem
- Fulbright Scholar, Univ of Jordan in Amman
- Johns Hopkins SAIS Fellow at Yarmouk Univ in Jordan
- Committee on Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa
- Works with USAID on numerous development projects in the Middle East.
- 2003, Senior Political Scientist, The RAND Corporation

TEACHING INTERESTS:

- Middle Eastern Area Studies
- Political Violence
- Islamic Fundamentalism
- Arab-Israeli Conflict
- State-building

RESEARCH INTERESTS:

- Relationships between regional peace and domestic disorder in the Middle East.
- Collective action (i.e., revolutions, rebellions, and social movements) in Muslim Societies, especially Islamic Fundamentalism.
- The political economy of authoritarianism and democratic transitions.

AWARDS:

- Outstanding Research Achievement, NPS, 1997
- Outstanding NPS Instructor, 1997, 2001

BOARDS/MEMBERSHIPS:

- Middle East Studies Association
- Committee on Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa
- American Political Science Association

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS: (View an extended list)

- *Building a Palestinian State - The Incomplete Revolution* (Indiana University Press, 1997).
- Various articles published in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *The Middle East Journal*, *Middle East Policy*, *Survival*, *Current History*, and *Journal of Palestine Studies*.

KEYWORDS/TECHNOLOGIES:

- **Keywords:** Middle East, Political Violence, Islamic Fundamentalism, Palestine, state-building

Dr. Abdulaziz Sager

A Saudi expert on Gulf politics and strategic issues, **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager** is the founder and Chairman of the Gulf Research Center, a global think tank based in Jeddah with a well-established worldwide network of partners and offices in both the Gulf region and Europe.

In this capacity, Dr. Sager has authored and edited numerous publications including Combating Violence & Terrorism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The GCC's Political & Economic Strategy towards Post-War Iraq and Reforms in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Feasible Solutions. He

is also a frequent contributor to major international media channels and appears regularly on Al-Arabiya Television, France 24 and the BBC. In addition to his academic activities, Dr. Sager is actively engaged in track-two and mediation meeting. For example, he has chaired and moderated the Syrian opposition meetings in Riyadh in December 2015 and November 2017.

In addition to his work with the Gulf Research Center, Dr. Sager is President of Sager Group Holding in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is active in the fields of information technology, aviation services and investments. Furthermore, he holds numerous other appointments including on the Makkah Province Council, Advisory Board of the Arab Thought Foundation, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Faculty of Economics and Administration at King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Ministry of Education, Geneva Center for Security Policy and German Orient Foundation. Dr. Sager has also sat on the advisory group for the UNDP Arab Human Development Report, and participates in the Think Tank Leaders Forum of the World Economic Forum and the Council of Councils of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Dr. Sager holds a Ph.D in Politics and International Relations from Lancaster University and an M.A. from the University of Kent, United Kingdom and a Bachelor Degree from the Faculty of Economics and Administration of King Abdulaziz University.

Mr. Mubin Shaikh

Born and raised in Canada, **Mubin Shaikh** grew up with two conflicting and competing cultures. At the age of 19, he went to India and Pakistan where he had a chance encounter with the Taliban before their takeover of Afghanistan in 1995. Shaikh became fully radicalized as a supporter of the global Jihadist culture, recruiting others but the 9/11 attacks forced to him reconsider his views. He spent 2 years in Syria, continuing his study of Arabic and Islamic Studies and went through a period of full deradicalization.

Returning to Canada in 2004, he was recruited by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and worked several CLASSIFIED infiltration operations on the internet, in chat-protected forums and on the ground with human networks. In late 2005, one of those intelligence files moved to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) for investigation. The "Toronto 18" terrorism case resulted in the conviction of 11 aspiring violent extremists after testifying over 4 years, in 5 legal hearings at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

Shaikh has since obtained a Master of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (MPICT) and is considered an SME (Subject Matter Expert) in national security and counterterrorism, and radicalization & deradicalization to the United Nations Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate, NATO, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), CENTCOM, various special operations forces, the FBI and others. He has appeared on multiple U.S., British and Canadian media outlets as a commentator and is extensively involved with the ISIS social media and Foreign Fighter (including Returnees and rehabilitation) file. Shaikh is also co-author of the acclaimed book, *Undercover Jihadi*.

TRADOC G-27 Athena Study Team

The Athena Study Team is a part of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command G-27. Athena is a decision support tool designed to increase a commander's understanding of the effect of PMESII-PT variables (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Physical Environment, and Time) on a given area over time.

Athena models DIME-FIL (Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Law Enforcement, all elements of national power) interventions within a PMESII-PT context to enable a user to anticipate second- and third-order effects upon noncombatant groups, force groups, government and non-government actors. The primary outputs of Athena are trend lines that indicate changes in non-combatant populations' mood, the level of volatility and stability within a discrete area, control over an area, and the relationships between civilian groups, force groups, government and non-government actors.

Dr. Ethan Stokes

Ethan Stokes (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is an assistant professor of in advertising and public relations in the College of Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama. Dr. Stokes' research interests are in political communication, digital media, and open source intelligence systems. His work examines how narratives move and alter across global media

Dr. Eric Watkins

Dr. Eric Watkins, who writes under the pen name of Hippalus, is a specialist in oil, shipping and terrorism. Watkins spent more than 25 years as a foreign correspondent, 13 of them on the Arabian Peninsula, with eight years in Saudi Arabia and five in Yemen. Watkins also reported on events in Africa, Central Asia and Europe. Watkins's work appeared in The Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Economist, as well as Lloyd's List, Middle East Economic Survey, and other specialist media. During 2014-15, Watkins was a Visiting Fellow at the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. There, Watkins advised on relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council and Northeast Asian countries, as well as on oil developments in East Africa. In 2015, Watkins was commissioned by the Italian National Oil Company (ENI) to write an analysis of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (See link below). Watkins currently resides in southern California, where he continues to research and write on international affairs.

The Battle for Market Share
https://www.abo.net/en_IT/topics/watkins-eng.shtml

Ms. Katherine Zimmerman

Katherine Zimmerman is a research fellow at AEI and the research manager for AEI's Critical Threats Project. She is the senior analyst focusing on the global al Qaeda network and also covers the Salafi-jihadi movement, as well as related trends in the Middle East and Africa. She specializes in al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen, as well as al Shabaab in Somalia and al Qaeda in the Sahel. Her analyses have been widely published, including in CNN.com, FoxNews.com, *The Hill*, The Huffington Post, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. She helped create and now manages CTP's open-source intelligence team of 15 staff and interns as they collect and analyze thousands of documents from local media in Arabic and other languages. Ms. Zimmerman has testified before Congress about the threats to US national security interests emanating from al Qaeda and its network. She has also briefed members of Congress, congressional staff, and US military, diplomatic, and intelligence community personnel at many echelons within the United States and in Europe.

Ms. Sarah Canna

Sarah Canna applies her open source analytic skills to regions of vital concern to US Combatant Commands, particularly the Middle East and South Asia. To help military planners understand the complex socio-cultural dynamics at play in evolving conflict situations, she developed a Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa^{TM}) tool, which is designed to rapidly respond to emergent crises by pulsing NSI's extensive subject matter expert (SME) network to provide deep, customized, multidisciplinary analysis for defense and industry clients. Prior to joining NSI, she completed her Master's degree from Georgetown University in Technology and Security Studies. She holds a translation certificate in Spanish from American University and has been learning Dari for three years.