

SMA Reach-back

Question (V6): *What are the strategic and operational implications of the Iran nuclear deal on the US-led coalition's ability to prosecute the war against ISIL in Iraq and Syria and to create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability?*

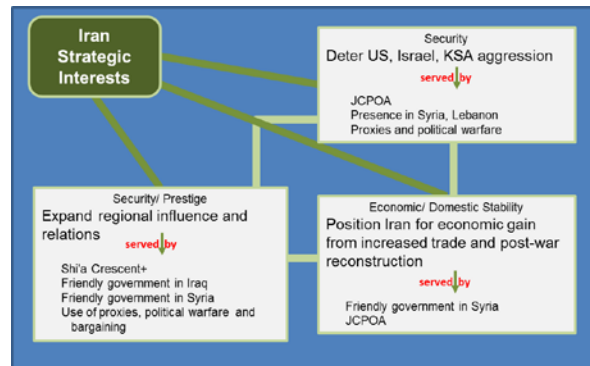
Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Prior to the signing of the Iran Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2014, Iran watchers tended to anticipate one of two outcomes. One camp expected a reduction in US-Iran tensions and that the JCPOA might present an opening for improved regional cooperation between the US-led coalition and Iran. The other camp predicted that Iran would become more assertive in wielding its influence in the region once the agreement was reached.

Implications of JCPOA for the Near-term Battle: Marginal

Iran experts in the SMA network generally believe that JCPOA has had negligible, if any, impact on Iran's strategy and tactics in Syria and Iraq.¹ While Iran does appear to have adopted a more assertive regional policy since the agreement, the experts attribute this change to regional dynamics that are advantageous to **Iran, and Iran having been on "good behavior during the negotiations"** rather than to Iran having been emboldened by the JCPOA. Tricia Degennaro (TRADOC G27) goes a step further. In her view, the impact of the JCPOA on the battle against ISIL is not only insignificant, but concern about it is misdirected: "the JCPOA itself will not impede the Coalition's ability to prosecute the war ... and create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability. Isolation of Iran will impede the coalition's mission."



Richard Davis of Artis International takes a different perspective on the strategic and operational implications of the JCPOA. He argues that Saudi, Israeli and Turkish leaders view the JCPOA together with US support for the Government of Iraq as evidence of a US-Iran rapprochement that will curb US enthusiasm for accommodating Saudi Arabia's and Turkey's own regional interests. Davis expects that this perception will "certainly manifest itself in the support for proxies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Specifically, it means that Saudi Arabia and Turkey will likely be more belligerent toward US policies and tactical interests in the fight to defeat ISIL."

Implications of JCPOA for Post-ISIL Shaping: Considerable Potential

¹ Alireza Nader (RAND) explains that the reason we are unlikely to see a "cooperation dividend" emerge from the agreement, and why Iran's regional strategy will not change even following the Spring 2017 election is that Rouhani and moderate voices are simply unable to overcome the power wielded by the Ayatollah Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards and other "reactionary or conservative forces in Iran."

The SMA experts identified two ways in which the JCPOA could impact coalition efforts to stabilize the region in the mid- to longer-term: 1) if Iran were to use it as a means of generating friction in order to influence Coalition actions for example by convincing Coalition leaders that operations counter to Iranian interests (e.g., in Syria) could jeopardize the JCPOA; and, 2) indirectly, as having created the sanction relief that increases Iranian revenue and that can be used to fund proxy forces and other Iranian influence operations.

Provoking Friction as a Bargaining Chip. A classic rule of bargaining is that the party that is more indifferent to particular outcomes has a negotiating advantage. At least for the coming months, this may be Iran. According to the experts, Iran is likely to continue to use the JCPOA as a source of friction – real, or contrived – to gain leverage over the US and regional allies. The perception that the Obama Administration is set on retaining the agreement presents Tehran with a potent influence lever: provoking tensions around implementation or violations of JCPOA that look to put the deal in jeopardy, but that it can use to pressure the US and allies into negotiating further sanctions relief, or post-ISIL conditions in Syria and Iraq that are favorable to Iran. However, because defeat of ISIL and other groups that Iran sees as Saudi-funded Sunni extremists,² the experts feel that if Iran were to engage in physical or more serious response to perceived JCPOA violations, they would choose to strike out in areas in which they are already challenging the US and Coalition partners (e.g., at sea in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea; stepping up funding or arms deliveries to Shiite fighters militants in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Yemen) rather than in ways that would actually impede ISIL's defeat.

Increased Proxy Funding. Iran has often demonstrated a strategic interest in maintaining its influence with Shi'a communities and political parties across the region, including of course, providing support to Shi'a militia groups (Bazoobandi, 2014).³ Pre-JCPOA sanctions inhibited Iran's ability to provide "continuous robust financial, economic or militarily support to its allies" according to Tricia Degennaro (TRADOC G27). An obvious, albeit indirect implication of the JCPOA sanctions relief for security and political stability in Iraq in the longer term is the additional revenue available to Iran to fund proxies and conduct "political warfare" as it regains its position in international finance and trade.⁴ It will take time for Iran to begin to benefit in a sustainable way from the JCPOA sanctions relief. As a result it is not as likely to be a factor in Coalition prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Syria, but later, in the resources Iran can afford to give to both political and militia proxies to shape the post-ISIL's region to its liking.

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² Nader clarifies that because of its ambitions for pan-Islamic leadership, Iran is careful to identify ISIL and like groups that they oppose as "takfiris" – Wahhabis that maintain that Shi'a are not true Muslims.

³ Bazoobandi, S. (2014). Iran's Regional Policy: Interests, Challenges, and Ambitions (Analysis No. 275). ISPI. Retrieved from http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/analysis_275_2014_0.pdf

⁴ An expert in the Iranian business sector, reports that with the signing of the JCPOA "after years of sanctions and limitations on business interactions" the agreement has engendered "a new hope in Iran for a revival" of its pre-1979 economic vitality. Still, the economic situation in Iran has yet to improve as a result of JCPOA and "there's a lot of public dissatisfaction."

SME Input

Implications of JCPOA on the Fight against ISIL

Tricia Degennaro, Threat Tec, LLCI

The Iran Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is the international agreement to halt the nuclear program in Iran.⁵ Under the agreement Iran contracted to eliminate programs that the international community suspected could lead to the production of nuclear weapons. The agreement does not prevent Iran from producing, purchasing or refurbishing weapons as long as they are not of categories under the WMD guidelines.⁶

Iran does have forces in the operating environment (OE) along with the US, US Arab partners, Russia, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon (Hezbollah), and Israel. Iran's forces are specifically to advise, train and assist military maneuvers that directly support Syria's Assad regime. In Iraq, Iran is also supporting the Iraqi military fight against ISIL.

Many of the pre-JCPOA sanctions on Iran inhibited its ability to give continuous robust financial, economic or military support to its allies. If the US-led coalition's strategic aims are focused on regional stability, it is important to consider that Iran can now constrain efforts to foster political, humanitarian and security sector stability. It can do so by continuing to support the Assad regime in combat, targeting U.S.-backed rebels fighting against Assad, and making cohesive operational implementation an impossibility. The upside is that coalition members do not have to be concerned with Iran using WMD.

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In light of the situation in theater, it would behoove coalition partners to work with Iran to conduct stability operations that lead to conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability in the region. The challenge for the coalition is current US policy on the Syrian leadership not the JCPOA. The question that remains is: in what way can the coalition engage Iran in order to find a path to stability when the field is cluttered with parties with opposing end games.

⁵ The agreement was signed in Vienna on 14 July 2015 between China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and Germany, <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/jcpoa/>

⁶ Iran is signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and can be held accountable for its obligations to halt all production of WMD. This is reiterated in the JCPOA.

It is in Iran's immediate and long-term interest to bring stability to the combat operations of all parties in Syria. Iran, however, has no interest in losing its alliance with Syria, Iraq, Turkey or Russia. Iran is situated in a Sunni-dominated region which exerts pressure on the Iranian regime.⁷ More importantly, Iran is at odds with Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners not about religion, although religion is used quite strategically by both parties to create divisions; rather, it is about the ability to be seen by the region's population as a legitimate authority. Again, the Shi'ite/Sunni card is often used to exert power to shape and influence the behaviors of regimes, monarchies, populations and non-state actors alike.

For its part, ISIL is no fan of Iran. In fact, many ISIL followers view Iran as an entity worse than Israel. The ideology ISIL preaches is opposed to all people of any faith, including Muslims, who do not follow the strict ISIL interpretation of Islam. Although monies from Gulf countries are funneled to this ruthless organization, ISIL does not view any of the monarchies as legitimate either. What can the US and coalition forces do in order to help stabilize the region?

For the purposes of this paper, I am assuming that some U.S. leaders are in contact with their Iranian counterparts in order to avoid direct chaotic military confrontation. Therefore, US and coalition forces may want to consider a few of the following:

Consider leveraging Iran's relationship with Turkey

Iran has three main objectives in Syria: 1) keeping Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in power, 2) preserving the structure of governance in Syria, and 3) combating terrorism, which includes ISIL, Jabhat Fatah al Sham (formerly Jabhat al Nusra) and any other non-state actors fighting against the Syrian regime. Turkey's main objectives include maintaining the integrity of Syria and preventing a Kurdish state from forming there. This is also a main strategic interest for Iran. Turkey may not want Assad in power, however they are willing to consider leaving him in power for a time based on talks with Iran,

Turkey has a very strong relationship with Iran. It could be beneficial to conduct operations that mirror some of the Iranian initiative by strengthening the Turkish partnership to assure Ankara that the US is committed to Syrian and Iraqi sovereignty. The implication is that CENTCOM would focus its efforts on helping to liberate towns from ISIL, both in Syria and Iraq. Further CENTCOM can move quickly to ensure that people have the ability and support to enhance security so people feel safe and can return home and, more importantly support Baghdad's legitimacy by restoring government services (e.g., water, electricity etc.). This will signal that the US is working to support the populace in opposition to the reputation it currently has on the ground.

Pay attention to narratives and Iranian leadership rhetoric

Narrative is powerful in many domains. In the Middle East the feeling that the US has rejected the desires of the people and has abandoned them is paramount. The American withdrawal of support to the Kurds during the Clinton Administration, US ardent support for Israel, and the continued meddling in government leadership (Hussain, Assad, Ghaddafi,

⁷ The American backed coup against democratic elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh is fresh in the Iranian regimes mind. To date, right or wrong, Iranian leaders are convinced that U.S. intentions are to overthrow the regime. This is reinforced with the rush to remove Saddam Hussain and now Bashar al-Assad.

Mubarak, Saleh and others) has directly reinforced these beliefs. Reading into the greater narrative can inform actions.

For example, when the Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Ghasemi, welcomed the US-Russia deal, he told reporters in Tehran that “Iran has always welcomed a cease-fire in Syria and the facilitation of humanitarian access to all people in this country.” He added, “The cease-fire needs to be sustainable and enforceable, not providing the terrorists with any opportunity to beef up [their forces] and [re-equip].”⁸ Interpreting these words, one can surmise that Iran will continue to fight non-state group actors fighting against Assad whom they are labeling terrorist much like the US labels Hezbollah (although one can argue that Hezbollah is legitimately part of the Lebanese government, this argument cannot hold true with the non-state anti-Assad groups in Syria). Further, Iran expected that the US will halt any support given to anti-Assad groups and hold them to the cease fire. This did not happen. Perhaps the halt of hostilities is not within US control; however, the flow of US arms to the region and the fact that non-state groups are using them is all the information they need.

Further, the Khan Touman battle on May 6, following the Feb. 27 cease-fire, saw dozens of soldiers fighting under Iranian command being ambushed, killed and some captured. Back then, Iranian officials thought that the cease-fire was “merely an opportunity for the recruitment and reinvigoration of the terrorist groups by the governments that support them.”⁹ The “governments that support them” refers to the US and Israel by proxy much like the Iran is blamed for arming of the Houthis in Yemen. Foreign military assistance is one thing arming rebel groups is another. This should be rethought if populations are going to be influenced by US and coalition forces and, in return, weaken Iran’s hold in the region or, move to strengthen Iraq, to equalize Saudi and Iranian influence so it is less destructive.

Please note that the coalition is in an information environment (IE) where it is not about judging if these impressions are right or wrong, it is about how forces look outside of themselves and engage this narrative reality to shape and influence actors.

Commit to Iraq and Syria sovereignty

Supporting a unified Iraq creates a safeguard between Iran and Saudi Arabia and proves that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was not in vain. It will weaken ISIL and reinforce that the US is not a party to creating the violent group. Moves to reinforce unity, which is desired by a majority of the Iraqi population, will give Iran less reason to fear Saudi Arabia and weaken their ability to ramp up their influence in Iraq. Despite our efforts, Iran will have influence in Iraq. The two countries are interlinked by economic, cultural, and familial ties. The challenge will be to reinforce these ties and deter military alliances from gaining ground. The coalition must look at how to inform this situation by immediate integration of forces supported by Iran, pushing the Kurds back to territorial integrity with Iraq, and reintegrating Baathist into the governance fold.

Summary

⁸ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/us-russia-syria-agreement-iran-unfazed-collapse-truce.html#ixzz4N4FR8Agh>

⁹ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/us-russia-syria-agreement-iran-unfazed-collapse-truce.html#ixzz4N4Fm10Sv>

The US is at a disadvantage due to its separation of policy and current reliance on military power. The JCPOA is an opportunity for the U.S. and coalition forces to find new and innovative ways of engaging Iran and positioning themselves to prevent further defensive military engagement in the region. The JCPOA itself will not impede the coalition's ability to prosecute the war against ISIL in Iraq and Syria and create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability. Isolation of Iran will impede the coalition's mission. Only when aligning interests can nations move forward to greater security or stability. Therefore, it benefits commanders to structure a well thought out, comprehensive, and strategic mission to influence areas that can strengthen the US and steer its policy from the top down and the bottom up. It will take time and patience; however, a solid strategy can reduce the stages of continued combat.

Transcript of 9/29/2016 SMA Speaker Series Telecon with Alireza Nader (RAND Corporation)

Moderated by Meg Egan, SRC

Meg Egan, SMA Office: Today, we have Mr. Alireza Nader, and he is a senior international policy analyst at the Rand Corporation and an author of *The Days After the Deal with Iran: Continuity and Change in Iranian Foreign Policy*. His research is focused on Iran's political dynamics, elite decision making, and Iranian foreign policy. Prior to joining Rand, Nader

“We often think of the conflicts in the Middle East as being between the Shia and the Sunni, but Iranian officials see it differently. They don't like to emphasize the difference between the Shia and Sunni ... Iran is very careful not to emphasize sectarian divides in the region because the Shia are a minority, and Iran still aspires to leadership of the Muslim world -- the entire Muslim world, especially the Muslim Middle East and not just the Shia.”

served as a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses. He is a native speaker of Farsi. He also received his MA in International Affairs from the George Washington University. Today, Ali is going to discuss Iran's regional policy after the nuclear agreement.

So Ali, I'll turn it over to you now.

Alireza Nader, RAND: Thank you very much, and Good Morning. I want to give a brief presentation, then we will open up the discussion to questions and answers so we can have more of a discussion. I want to briefly talk about Iran's approach towards the United States after the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA or the nuclear agreement) and then really focus on what Iran has been doing in the Middle East, Iran's threat perceptions, its military and national security doctrine, and what we could potentially expect in the future.

There was a lot of talk after the nuclear agreement that either Iran's approach to engaging the United States would change after President Hassan Rouhani became president and delivered the nuclear agreement. A lot of people, in Washington DC especially, argued that

the nuclear agreement provided a ripe opportunity for Iran and the United States to engage each other and cooperate in the Middle East, whereas a group of people argued that Iran would be emboldened or empowered by the nuclear agreement and that it would gain more power in the Middle East. I don't think either approach is entirely correct. The nuclear agreement hasn't provided the dividends that were expected in terms of US-Iran cooperation, and there are a number of reasons, but, I think, largely, Hassan Rouhani in Iran has not been able to reshape Iran's foreign policy. Iran's political system is largely led by the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the revolutionary guards and a number of other reactionary or conservative forces in Iran, and they have been driving Iran's policy from the very beginning. The Supreme Leader in Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, stated his belief that even with the nuclear agreement, the relationship with the United States would not change, that fundamentally, the Islamic Republic and the United States had major ideological and national differences. We see today that the United States and Iran may have reached some sort of a *détente*, if you will, in the region, but they are still opposed to each other on a number of issues.

But I don't want to really focus too much on the US-Iran relationship but instead talk about how Iran sees the region. I would argue, for now anyhow, that Iranian leadership does not view the United States as the most immediate threat to Iran's interests in the Middle East but rather, the biggest threat from Tehran's perspective is Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism (or Takfirism as Iran defines that), and Daesh or ISIS or the Islamic state, whatever you want to call it (I'll call it Daesh). Those are the most immediate threats to Iran's national security interests, and today, we see that the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran is increasing every day, and I think Iran's focus is very much on defeating jihadi forces in the Middle East through a variety of means. Today, I'll talk more about Iran's use of political warfare to combat Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism. We often think of the conflicts in the Middle East as being between the Shia and the Sunni, but Iranian officials see it differently. They don't like to emphasize the difference between the Shia and Sunni; rather, the divisions for them are between what they call *takfiris* or Saudi-supported Wahhabis that maintain the Shia are not true Muslims. So, Iran is very careful not to emphasize sectarian divides in the region because the Shia are a minority, and Iran still aspires to leadership of the Muslim world -- the entire Muslim world, especially the Muslim Middle East and not just the Shia. However, Iran's strategy is often dependent on the Shia; it's very much isolated in the Middle East among the Sunnis, and it relies on Shia militant groups to expand its power. But, I think it's important to remember that the Islamic Republic of Iran has always had pan-Islamic aspirations and sees itself more than just the Shia revolutionary power.

Now, I'd like to focus on two specific areas where Iran is very active in terms of its political warfare strategy and expanding influence: Iraq and Syria. I'm sure many of you are very familiar with both, and some of the information I'm going to present is not going to be new to you, but in terms of Iran's strategy in Iraq, as you know, Iran has gained a lot of power in Iraq since the 2003 US invasion and the ascendance of Shia parties in Baghdad. I argue that the rise of Daesh actually has been beneficial to Iran because it has allowed it to expand its power in Iraq. The failure of the Iraqi Shia-led military forces in countering Daesh in the very beginning ... really helped Iran expand its power in Iraq because a lot of the Shias turn to Iran for support, and Iran was really one of the first countries or parties to directly get involved in the fight against Daesh. If you remember, in the Kurdish regions, Iran really stepped up its support for the KRG or the Kurdish regional government, and there were reports even of Iran sending troops and military equipment into those areas in Iraq, and both the Shia in Iraq and the Kurds were very much appreciative of that.

Iran is pursuing a multi-prong warfare strategy in Iraq. It has cultivated relations with a number of Shia and even non-Shia political parties, and I think when you look at Iran's strategy, it plays kind of a divide and conquer game because a lot of Iraqi Shia are suspicious of Iran; they don't approve of the Islamic Republic, ... or rule of the supreme leader. But, Iran does rely on a few key Iraqi Shia militias to maintain power, and whenever one party gets too powerful, Iran expands support for another Shia militia. Overall, Iran does not want the Iraqi Shia to be a monolithic force that might oppose Iran. Although Iran's sponsors political parties and wants them to vote in a bloc, Iran knows that it has certain vulnerabilities in Iraq and faces a lot of opposition. Iran isn't particularly worried that if Ali al-Sistani passes away that a more anti-Iranian figure will take power in Iraq; so, it has, in addition to sponsoring militias, has trained many junior Iraqi clerics and has expanded its religious influence ... something it's been doing since 2003. So, I've been working on this for a very long time, and I think when Sistani passes away, then Iran is going to have a large role in shaping who succeeds him because it has so much soft and hard influence in Iraq.

When we look at Iraq today, the many Iraqi Shia militias in that country are going to play a very big role once ISIL or Daesh has been defeated from Mosul and has been mostly conquered in Iraq. If you look at Iraq today, there are many Iraqi militia leaders who look to Iran as a model and even talk about emulating the paramilitary forces and the revolutionary guards in Iraq, and many of them have very close ties to the revolutionary guards ... So, I wouldn't be entirely surprised if a parallel state structure or militia structure like the revolutionary guards emerges in Iraq, and I think that we're witnessing that today actually. My guess is that it's going to become much stronger in the future, and you can make the argument that the United States doesn't have a plan really to address that in the future. You can argue against me on that point.

I'm going to briefly turn to Iran's strategy in Syria in terms of political warfare. I think, in terms of Iran using political warfare and religious influence in Syria, it has faced many more challenges than it has had in Iraq. Syria has been tough for Iran in terms of expanding its ideological influence, but it has done certain things in Syria that we find in other places, like Iraq. For example, Iran played a big role in setting up the national defense forces in Syria, and it has attempted to indoctrinate the national defense forces with Iran's revolutionary ideology, probably not with much success. As you know, Syria has a very, very small Shia population, about 300,000 people (that is an estimate). The Alawites are not really truly Shia; they're depicted as being Shia, but religiously, they're very different than the Iranian Shias ... The Alawite elite tend to be secular, so Iran has had a difficult time indoctrinating the largely Sunni and Alawite and Christian populations in Syria. It has even tried indoctrinating some of the Christian forces fighting with the Syrian regime. However, one area in which Iran has been very successful is using religious appeal to attract foreign fighters to Syria. One of Shia Islam's holiest sites is near Damascus, the Zaynab shrine, and Iran has used the Zaynab shrine to motivate Shia fighters from Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and of course Iran to come and fight on behalf of the Syrian regime. So, in that regard, Iran's political warfare has been relatively successful because it has created what I call a foreign legion in Syria to fight for it.

Iran has also taken advantage of Syria's terrible economic situation to create an economic dependency on Tehran; there have been reports of Iran providing billions of dollars to the Assad regime. I haven't found very precise figures, but I think it would be safe to assume that Iran is providing a lot of economic assistance to Syria, and if the conflict ends in Syria, I

think the Syrian government is going to be economically dependent on Iran to a large extent.

In terms of public diplomacy, I think Iran has had less success than it has in Iraq ... I think even though Iran faces popular hostility in Iraq, Iraqi Shia to some extent identify with Iran, whereas I don't think Syria's population naturally would identify with Iran in any shape or form. So, overall, Iran has been more successful in terms of political warfare in Iraq and less so in Syria, but it has made some inroads into Syria. Once the conflict ends, we're going to see a weak Syrian central government with many militias funded and trained by Iran, which tends to be Iran's MO throughout the region.

Now, what can we expect in the future? I made the argument that Iran's policies are largely driven by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the revolutionary guards. I think, even if President Rouhani is reelected in 2017, his chances of reshaping Iran's foreign policies are very minimal, and I would expect US-Iran relations to actually potentially become more hostile with the next US president coming and with the fact that forces that shape Iran have not changed. It will be interesting to see what happens when Ayatollah Khamenei dies and his successor is chosen. Right now, there are not any major indications of radical change after Khamenei, although I don't really think we can predict what happens after him. So, that will be interesting to watch. In terms of the Saudi-Iran competition, once Daesh recedes and becomes less of a threat, we can actually expect the Saudi-Iran rivalry to heat up even more. Looking at the Saudi leadership, there is really very little enthusiasm for engaging Iran or even communicating with it, and while figures in Iran like President Rouhani were in the past eager to engage Saudi Arabia, I don't think chances of that are high even if Rouhani is reelected. With that, I'd like to open the discussion to questions on any issue that you may have. Thank you.

Meg Egan: Great, thank you very much, Ali. Alright, at this point, we're going to go into our questions and answers session. If you have a question, please state your name and your organization.

Question 1: Sir, ... [could you] speak a little on the IRGC's role in the Syrian conflict, just kind of a general question?

Alireza Nader: Sir, I think the revolutionary guard is really the premiere force shaping everything Iran does in Syria, from military strategy to economic assistance to intelligence cooperation to political warfare. We've seen them appear repeatedly in key battle fields ... Iran is in a lot of ways driving the Syrian regime's military strategy against the opposition in tandem with Russia. ... So, the revolutionary guards play a huge role in shaping Iran's policies in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and elsewhere, and when we look at the guards, this is a very important institution in Iran. It is the most powerful internal intelligent security force in Iran. It has huge business interests in Iran, and it's also the most powerful military force. It gets a large share of the budgets, the military budget, and big resources to develop missiles and a number of other equipment. So, really, the guards are the key to understanding Iran's regional policies and also a lot of its domestic politics as well, even though there is a "moderate" president in Iran today.

Question 2: I am originally from Syria, and I have two questions. First is do you think that the rival of Shia militias, like the NPU's in Iraq, are an answer for the rise of Sunni extremists like ISIS and AQ? Second, talking about the economic dependency, many articles in Arabic

are stating that the Iranians are buying land in the heart of Damascus and are resettling Shia Iraqi families. In that regard and the Russian of taking over the airport, do you think that along the way, if we manage to stop the armed conflict, do you see along the way some kind of clash between Iran and Russia on a piece of the cake? Thank you.

Alireza Nader: Those are both very good questions, and yes. There are many reasons for the rise of Daesh and Sunni jihadism, and not all of them have to do with Iran and the Shia, but I think Iran sectarian policies in Iraq and Syria and throughout the Middle East do contribute to the rise of Sunni jihadi groups. I can never really separate the factors and say what Iran does contributes the most, but it is a big factor, and when we look at Iran's involvement and Iraq's especially, but to a smaller extent in Syria, Iran does use religion as a motivating force to get people to fight for it. So, that's definitely a factor. I've also read that Iranians are buying a lot of land around Damascus and probably close to the Zaynab shrine, part of it is probably because Iran wants to have a lot of influence after the conflict.

In terms of differences with Russia, I think right now, Iran is more of a junior partner to Russia and Syria. Iran tried to keep the military balance against the opposition, but it didn't really succeed before the Russian era of intervention in Syria. So, Iran is very much dependent on Russia and Syria, but I'm not sure if the differences between the two countries are going to lead to an overt clash because even before the conflict in Syria, both Russia and Iran had a lot of influence in Syria, and they were able to coexist and respect each other's sphere of influence. So, I'm not necessarily sure that they're going to clash over Syria once the conflict ends.

Question 3 (Doc Cabayan): Thank you so very much for briefing us today; it's much appreciated. My question to you is, I guess, very simplistic. What is Iran's long term view of itself and its neighbors, particularly to the West? I mean, does it realistically believe, and you mentioned all the moves they were making in Syria, is it realistic for them to expect to have that degree of influence that they would like to have in Iraq through Syria and Lebanon? Do they believe that's sustainable or are they trying to get the best they can during this turmoil so when this situation stabilizes, say years from now, they have a pretty good geopolitical position in the region? What are they thinking long term?

Alireza Nader: That's a great question, and the short answer is yes. They think they can be predominant in the region or in places like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon... areas where the Shia are either a majority or have a lot of influence or are a strong minority. I would argue right now that because of the weakness of central states like Iraq and Syria and Lebanon, Iran is able to gain a lot of influence in those countries. So, it's not so much because Iran is very strong because Iran also has its own problems; economically, the situation hasn't really improved since the nuclear agreement, the country is divided, there's a lot of public dissatisfaction in Iran, but because the surrounding states are so weak, and that gives Iran a lot of leverage. I think Iranian officials are at a point where they're very comfortable with their position in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. I would make the argument actually that right now, the military balance is tipped in Iran's favor in Syria and Iraq, of course, and in terms of negotiating Assad's departure, Iran can maintain a much more firm position and not really have to give in. It's not really because of the nuclear agreement per say; I don't think that has empowered Iran as much as the regional dynamics.

I think Iranian officials are still very worried about Saudi Arabia. There's a genuine fear in Iran that Wahhabi forces and *Takfiris* pose a major threat to Iranian national security. So,

yes; Iran sees itself as a natural power in the Middle East, but also, there's a major sense of insecurity because when we think of Iran, we have to remember that it fought an 8-year devastating war with Iraq, and during that war, the Saudis and a lot of other gulf states supported Iraq. You can debate who deserves blame for that conflict, but Iran worries that in the future, a major Sunni bloc is going to wage war against them, and it was to make sure that places like Iraq and Syria and Lebanon don't fall to Sunni forces backed by Saudi Arabia. So, Iran's strategy is defensive but in a sensitive way, if you will. Iranian officials, a lot of them have talked about fighting Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabis in Syria and Iraq so they don't have to fight them on Iran's borders or even within Iran.

Question 4: You mentioned how, well, we've heard for a while that Khamenei has had terminal cancer, and he said that the situation would be interesting given who his successor is, are there any inklings in Iran as to who has been chosen to be or groomed to be his successor, or is that something that has yet to be determined?

Alireza Nader: That is something that has to be determined. There is not a lot of public discussion about Khamenei's successor, and I think if Khamenei indicated who would succeed him, it would undercut his authority right now. It's not clear if he has terminal cancer; there have been rumors about his health. He had a prostate surgery, which was very much publicized 2 or 3 years ago, but there's an expectation that like everyone else, he's going to die one day, and that might be soon. Now, one figure that's often mentioned lately is Ayatollah Raisi, who just took over the shrine foundation in the city of Mashhad, but there have been other figures like Ayatollah Shahroudi who have been discussed as a potential successor to Ayatollah Khamenei. Shahroudi is an Iraqi, Ayatollah, former head of the judiciary in Iran, but also former head of the Islamic supreme council of Iraq. Although, some argue that he can't become Iran's leader because he's not even really Iranian; he's Iraqi, but I think that both the process and the outcome are very unpredictable. If you're interested, a few years ago, I wrote a study on this called "The Next Supreme Leader." It's on RAND's website, and I describe or discuss some of the factors that would shape succession in Iran. This study's a little dated, but it will give you a good idea of how succession has worked in the past and how it might work once Khamenei passes away.

Question 5: What do you believe Iran sees in terms of the effectiveness of the United States to make a difference in the region from its perspective? How do you see it evaluating the US as an adversary?

Alireza Nader: I think that there is a great amount of respect and fear and distress for the United States among Iran's elite. I think that there are different approaches toward the United States. For example, Khamenei and much of the guards and more conservative forces think that Iran should be aggressive towards the United States, whereas president Rouhani and foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif argue for a more diplomatic, pragmatic approach towards the United States and see the United States more as a traditional rival than a hardcore ideological competitor, which is really Khamenei sees in the United States. I don't get any indications that the Iranian leader still thinks the United States is about to go away from the Middle East, that its position is fundamentally in decline in the region necessarily, although Iranian officials have exploited opportunities in Iraq and Syria to extend their power. In terms of the next US president, Iranian officials are not hopeful that major changes will come. Khamenei always says that it doesn't matter who is president of the United States, whether it's a democrat or republican; the fundamental US position towards the Islamic Republic will not change. So, I think for the immediate future

and for the long term future, Iran's leadership views the United States as a rival to be countered, and that rivalry is not going to go away any time soon. So, a lot of Iran's approach toward developing its military is going to be focused on combatting the United States and US allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel in the future.

Questioner: Yes, a follow up. What I'd really like to try to understand is how you believe how effective they think the United States is in the region in taking on their own interests.

Alireza Nader: I think they believe the United States is still very effective. I mean, in the United States, there's this discussion of the US withdrawing from the Middle East and not being interested in the region. That's not the way that Iranian officials really perceive the United States because they still believe the US maintains a very strong alliance with Saudi Arabia and Israel and that the US is still a worthy competitor in the region. So, I think they still view the United States as being very effective, but they also believe they have effective ways of countering the United States through political warfare, ideological warfare, soft power, supporting "proxy militias." So, yes, the United States is powerful, but so is the Islamic Republic.

Question 6: I wondered... our speaker used the term political warfare a couple of times. I'm wondering as to how he defines it so that we can define how it differs from other types of warfare, military particularly.

Alireza Nader: Well, in terms of political warfare, I'd define it basically as anything non-kinetic, so, Iran's support for political parties for non-governmental organizations throughout the Middle East, Iran's economic activities, its support for religious institutions ... its use of the Zaynab shrine in Syria. So, it's, you know, a very broad description, but really, anything non-kinetic Iran does in the region. So, I didn't really talk about what kind of weapons Iran provides to the various militias or how it's fighting the military or it's conducting its military strategy in Syria and Iraq.

The Fall of Mosul, the Next Sunni Insurgency, and Iran's post-JCPOA Role in Iraq

By Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Abstract: Neither the JCPOA nor the eventual defeat of ISIL in Iraq will likely prove game changers. The future of the nuclear agreement remains uncertain, and Iran will probably continue the more assertive regional policy it adopted in its wake. And barring major changes in Iraqi politics, the defeat of ISIL will most likely herald the rise of "the next Sunni insurgency." Historically, developments in Iraq have been the main driver of Iranian actions there, though U.S. actions have also shaped Iranian behavior. Accordingly, the more the U.S. steps back in Iraq, the more Iran will step forward. For this reason, the U.S. should lock-in the multinational Coalition's support for Iraq via a

"The negotiations with Iran over the JCPOA are not over. Rather, the 'negotiations after the negotiations' are likely to continue, with ambiguities in the implementation of the JCPOA being ironed out, while Iran presses forward in other areas in order to see what it can get away with."

multi-year ITEF II package, rethink how to be a more effective Security Force Assistance partner, help Baghdad resist pressure by Tehran to institutionalize the PMUs as a separate, parallel military organization, and bolster deterrence against Iranian-sponsored proxy attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq.

The JCPOA has not altered the fundamentals of the U.S.-Iran relationship, or Iran's policy toward Iraq and the region; in fact, post-JCPOA, the IRGC has succeeded in moving Iran in a more assertive direction, ramping up support for the Assad regime (in part by convincing Moscow to intervene and by deepening cooperation with Russia), increasing harassment of U.S. ships in the Gulf, conducting highly publicized missile tests, and continuing with arms shipments to regional allies (the last two in violation of the spirit, if not the letter of UNSCR 2231, which gave international legal force to the JCPOA). Tehran, moreover, still hopes to diminish the threat posed by a U.S.-backed government in Baghdad or by U.S. forces there (a threat that it fears may increase once ISIL is defeated), and it continues to work to ensure the predominance of the Shiite community, to minimize the influence of the Sunni Arab states, and to be the most influential outside power in Iraq.

Iran, Iraq, and the JCPOA

The negotiations with Iran over the JCPOA are not over. Rather, the “negotiations after the negotiations” are likely to continue, with ambiguities in the implementation of the JCPOA being ironed out, while Iran presses forward in other areas in order to see what it can get away with. A decision by the new U.S. administration to take a tougher line after January 2017 regarding JCPOA implementation or to support the Syrian opposition with arms, safe havens, or no-fly zones could cause Iran to respond with countermoves in Iraq (once Mosul has been “liberated”) or elsewhere in ways that might put the JCPOA under pressure. A new Iranian administration that could take office in the wake of the May 2017 elections might likewise take steps that could further strain the fragile nuclear accord.

Iran’s strategic style in Iraq is subtle and thrifty. It does not push on closed doors: it rarely asks Iraqi leaders to take actions that are clearly opposed to Iraqi interests. Instead it works with the grain as often as possible, helping Iraqi leaders to achieve their objectives where they broadly coincide with Iran’s. This strategy of pushing on open doors or half-open doors has served them well, and will continue. The IRGC, which oversees policy in Iraq, has many commercial interests there, particularly in religious tourism, but Iran does not have ambitious economic goals in Iraq. Development of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) into an IRGC equivalent would be a plus for Tehran, giving it more leverage in Baghdad, but it is not a driver of Iranian policy. In this sense, Iranian policy in Iraq is “solution-agnostic.” As long as the aforementioned objectives are furthered, the Iranians will work with (and if need be, abandon) any faction in Iraq.

One area to watch are the so-called Iranian “red lines” that Tehran’s allies like Hadi al-Amiri regularly communicated to the United States in 2015. One red line was U.S. involvement in combat operations in Iraq; this line seems to have been crossed when the U.S. launched Special Forces raids and artillery fire missions from Iraqi territory. Another red line was U.S. unilateral bases, but this line was substantively crossed in locations like the Kara Soar Base (previously Firebase Bell). But Tehran’s non-response to the crossing of these “red lines” has more to do with the Iraqi government’s urgent needs and stated policies (and Iran’s desire to see the most urgent of these needs met), rather than any constraints imposed on Iran by the JCPOA.

If Iran-U.S. relations were to deteriorate significantly, perhaps due to a JCPOA-related crisis, Iran might double down in areas where it (or its proxies and partners) are already challenging the U.S. and its allies: harassing U.S. vessels in the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa; providing arms and EFPs to Shiite militants in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia; and transferring advanced weapons (such as anti-ship cruise missiles) to Shiite militias in Lebanon (Hezbollah) and Yemen (the Houthis). In Iraq too, the driver of Iranian conduct is likely to be related to Iraq or, after the fall of Mosul, internal power struggles in Iran, with the IRGC flexing its muscles abroad to demonstrate that it remains in control of Iran's regional policies and to show that "the age of missiles" has not passed, as former president Rafsanjani recently claimed. The U.S. knows how Iran tends to escalate in Iraq, which is likely to use proxy warfare to try to hasten a U.S. drawdown in Iraq after the battle of Mosul. Iran's leaders are creatures of habit, and generally operate from a well-worn playbook. Their repertoire of actions is fairly predictable, even if the course of action they decide on in any particular case is not.

Impact of the eventual fall of Mosul

The success of the coalition campaign against ISIL in Iraq will likely result in their being driven underground, rather than out of Iraq; this will create opportunities for Iran. To the degree that ISIL has a fair amount of Baathist DNA in its makeup (a significant number of its leaders are former Iraqi military and intelligence officers), it will likely go to ground to fight another day—as previous generations of Baathists did after the 1963 pro-Nasserist coup, the 2003 U.S. invasion, and the 2007 U.S. surge—rather than fight to the death. ISIL has shown that it can function very well as an underground terrorist network (as it did between 2011-2014) and that Baghdad lacks the capabilities to deal with this threat. Unless there is a fundamental change in the nature of Iraqi politics, the fall of Mosul (and its potentially messy aftermath) may simply pave the way for "the next Sunni insurgency"—whether ISIL 2.0, son of al-Qaida in Iraq, a revived neo-Baathist JRTN organization (the Army of the Men of the Naqshabandi Order), or something else. This will be especially so if ISIL remains ensconced in Syria, and can use its presence there to stage operations in Iraq.

Such an outcome will likely ensure that there is an enduring need on the part of Iraq for a capable security assistance partner/provider, whether Washington or Tehran. The United States has a keen interest in being that partner of choice, but the realities of geography and questions about America's steadfastness ensure that Iraq will hedge with Iran in any case. Meanwhile, Tehran's local proxies will continue to engage in the sectarian cleansing of "liberated" areas in order to secure critical lines of communication and safeguard isolated or beleaguered Shiite communities.

Iran will also try to supplement its air corridor to Damascus--which it uses to resupply Hizballah and the Assad regime and to project power in the Levant--with an overland route through Iraq to Syria. Iran generally seeks redundant lines of communication to provide resiliency to its network of proxies and partners. And while the air corridor will, in most circumstances, remain its route of choice, a land corridor will broaden its options in the (unlikely) event that the U.S. eventually establishes a no-fly zone over Syria, or that Israel closes down Damascus airport during a future war with Hezbollah.

Drivers of Iranian Conduct

The key driver of Tehran's conduct in Iraq will not be a change in Iran's perception of the U.S. threat there; the IRGC already considers America a threat but is unlikely to act as long as Iraq needs America as an ally. Instead of being threat-focused, Iran will likely be

opportunistic. The U.S. should therefore focus on the kinds of opportunities in Iraq that might present themselves to Iran in the years ahead. These might include:

- The defeat of ISIL in Mosul and their elimination as an overt threat might lessen Baghdad's need for the U.S. and hence Tehran's incentive to restrain its proxies in Iraq. Thus, the post-Mosul phase could bring with it certain dangers for U.S. personnel in Iraq. This may especially be the case if the defeat of ISIL is seen as a triumph for the kind of professional military forces that the United States is trying to create in Iraq, versus Iran's militia proxies.
- A surge of popular support for PMU-linked politicians in Iraq, including former premier Nouri al-Maliki, in the 2017 provincial elections and 2018 national elections (assuming they are held as planned) might cause Iran to provide them money, media and political support.
- A repeat rapid drawdown and disengagement of Coalition forces from Iraq (as occurred previously in 2009-2011) might tempt Tehran to become more assertive in Iraq. Moreover, if the multinational aspect of CJTF-OIR were to dissolve in the wake of the fall of Mosul and to once again become a unilateral U.S. effort, Iran would find it easier to foment domestic opposition to the U.S. military presence in Iraq.
- The death of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani could offer opportunities for Tehran to support actors in the political and religious establishment who are closer to it. This is a moment that Iran has been preparing for, though it is possible that less change may occur during a post-Sistani transition than expected.

The above analysis suggests that developments in Iraq will be the main driver of Iranian actions there, though the defeat of ISIL may reduce Tehran's incentive to restrain itself, and may create the potential for events in Iraq to be influenced by developments elsewhere—for instance, as a result of changes in U.S. policy toward Syria, or Iran's evolving perceptions of the benefits that the JCPOA has, or has not yielded.

US Actions and Options

In this respect, U.S. actions are one of the most important shapers of Iranian behavior in Iraq. The more the U.S. steps back, the more Iran will step forward. The less the U.S. is cloaked within the multinational effort of CJTF-OIR, the more Iran can afford to treat the coalition as a U.S. proxy rather than as an assembly of the world's most powerful economies and diplomatic actors, as it currently is (including EU countries that Tehran hopes will invest in and transfer technologies to Iran, **now that nuclear sanctions have been lifted**). Finally, Iraq's government and religious establishment is the key shaper of Iranian policies in Iraq. The stronger the U.S. relationship with Baghdad, the better protected U.S. equities in Iraq will be.

For these reasons, the U.S. should consider four steps to counter Iranian influence in Iraq and prevent the return of ISIL: First, the United States should lock in the international Coalition's commitment to Baghdad, helping it to secure its borders (especially with Syria) and to deal with the heightened terrorism threat that is almost certain to emerge in the wake of ISIL's defeat as a quasi-conventional military force, to create the basis for a multinational security venture that will outlast the current phase of the war against ISIL. CJTF-OIR should be extended and maintained as a broad-based multinational coalition, and not be allowed to shrink back into a U.S. mission with a few allies as "window dressing." A new three-year Iraq Train and Equip Fund II funding package for the Iraq Security Forces (ISF)

should be approved to cover 2017-2020, to supplant the first three-year ITEF which covered 2014-2017.

Second, the CJTF should rethink its approach to Security Force Assistance, building on the training successes of the last year to create a more effective ISF counter-insurgency force by considering new approaches that do not try to create a miniature U.S. military but that account for local cultural realities, and that deal more effectively with an incentives structures that breeds corruption and prevents the ISF from training and preparing properly for combat and stabilization operations. Beyond political change in Baghdad, this would be the best way to stave off the return of ISIL, and the growth of Iranian influence via the PMUs.

Third, Washington should help Baghdad resist inevitable pressure from Tehran and its Iraqi proxies to institutionalize the pro-Iranian PMUs as a large, well-funded parallel military force as a rival to the ISF. The continued presence of a robust and effective SFA effort is probably the best way to accomplish this. U.S. attention to the situation of the many Counter-Terrorism Service officers in the senior ranks of the ISF is important. The U.S. will have no greater long-term partners than these U.S.-trained officers and they need to be listened to, protected against militia intimidation, and supported in their careers.

Finally, Washington should seek to deter Tehran by quietly indicating that it will not tolerate attacks on its personnel in Iraq by the latter's proxies there, and that doing so will have adverse consequences for Iran's own trainers and advisors in the region, as well as for the future of the JCPOA. To bolster the credibility of such warnings, the United States should continue to push back against the destabilizing activities of Iranian partners and proxies in the region, such as Houthi efforts to disrupt freedom of navigation in the Bab al-Mandeb.

To this end, an inform and influence campaign documenting malign Iranian activities in Iraq—including unfair business practices, undue influence in politics, and sponsorship of violence against Iraqis—might provide leverage against Tehran, especially if such information were used as warning shots and released via non-U.S.-leaning media outlets. In particular, Iraqis might be interested to know how expensive Iranian military support and gas and electricity imports can be, the violence that underpins Iranian domination of the religious tourism industry, or the impact on Iraqi farmers of customs-free Iranian food exports to Iraq.

Comments on the Implications of JCPOA

Alex Vanatka
Air University

The analytical point of departure in this context has to be that all power factions in Iran – including the IRGC generals that oversee Iran's extensive military operations in Iraq and Syria – are committed to keep the JCPOA alive. All fundamental Iranian decisions involving the US (i.e. posture toward US military operations in Iraq or Syria) will be reached with this simple objective in mind. In other words, to keep the nuclear agreement alive, the Iranian actors are incentivized not to act (the extent possible) recklessly in other arenas involving the US. This includes Iranian behavior toward the US military presence in Iraq.

As long as the US military campaign is by and large in tandem with the Iraqi central government, which Tehran supports, then it is hard to see how the Iranians will want to be a major spoiler. While they will continue the propaganda war against the US – including propagating the nonsense that the US is keen to have ISIS flee from Mosul to Syria to keep the movement alive, they will in terms of tangible action be disinclined to confront head-on US operations.

From their perspective, that could well be crossing an American red line, which in turn could jeopardize the nuclear deal and any other gains in US-Iran relations in recent years. In fact, they might be willing – for example in the case of humanitarian efforts – to cooperate closely with the US if and when there is mutual interests at play.

Comments on the Implications of JCPOA

Richard Davis
Artis International

The leadership in Saudi, Israel and Turkey believe that the rapprochement by the US to Iran through the Nuclear Deal and to a lesser extent, support for Baghdad, means that the US is less interested in accommodating regional policies coming out of Ankara or Riyadh. This will certainly manifest itself in the support for proxies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Specifically, it means that Saudi Arabia and Turkey will likely be more belligerent toward US policies and tactical interests in the fight to defeat ISIL.

What is more challenging to the US approach in the region comes from the fact that hardliners in Iran and Saudi Arabia want the Iran Nuclear Deal to fail... At a time in which sub-state and trans-state groups are emerging and consolidating gains within states that are failing or weak, the great nations are embroiled in proxy warfare in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Mortal enemies like Iran and Saudi Arabia are deeply involved in these conflicts, both believing that the outcome may determine the survivability of their respective regimes. In discussion with leaders from Iran and Saudi Arabia, we have learned that both believe that nuclear capability, including weaponization,

is essential to their nation's future and regime survival if the other seeks such capability. Layered on top of this, the leaders tell us that aggression by the other across the region represents the danger to their own regime and proves that the other cannot be trusted. The international community has attempted to prevent nuclear proliferation within Iran by negotiating a nuclear deal that normalizes relations between Iran and the West in exchange for Iran scaling back its nuclear program. But, leaders in Israel told us in face-to-face interviews that the Iran Nuclear Deal ensures that there will be war with Iran at some-point in the future. Leaders from Saudi Arabia say that the Deal ensures a nuclear Iran and that when this happens they will have no choice but to build a weapons program.

“... leaders in Israel told us ... that the Iran Nuclear Deal ensures that there will be war with Iran at some-point in the future. Leaders from Saudi Arabia say that the Deal ensures a nuclear Iran and that when this happens they will have no choice but to build a weapons program.”

The signatories of the Nuclear Deal (P5+1) state that the agreement strengthens the moderates within Iran and provides a bulwark against hard-liners wanting to end the rapprochement with the West, particularly the United States, and their quest to achieve nuclear weapons capability. This premise is based upon the construct that the international community will open investment into Iran and reduce the sanctions that were choking the Iranian economy, resulting in improving productivity and significantly increasing GDP. Naturally, the hard-liners in Iran were skeptical of the agreement and the economic outcomes that it promised. Low oil and natural gas prices and little investment from the West have undermined the good intentions behind the agreement and have prevented the Iranian economy, largely dependent upon petroleum exports, from benefiting as a result of the thawing of relations with the West. Hardliners in Iran claim that Saudi Arabia and the West have manipulated the oil and gas markets to depress petroleum prices and prevent investment in Iran; that both are using economic warfare against Iran and are actively trying to undermine the agreement. As a result, the Iranian hardliners have been growing in power and have recently had a key member of the Iranian negotiating team arrested on espionage charges.

“... factions and spoilers have an outsized role in international security and the affairs of many states, particularly in the fight to defeat ISIL and to stabilize Syria and Yemen.”

Concurrently, hardliners in Saudi Arabia also represent a significant threat to the Iran Nuclear Deal. If the deal collapses, Saudi Arabia will be seen to have legitimacy to pursue a nuclear weapons program that counters the nuclear breakout capability of the Iranians. The emergence of “anti-Nuclear Deal factions” in Iran and Saudi Arabia underscore the critical problem in understanding the implications of these

influences on regional conflict and international stability. The complex alignment of interests and alliances in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen demonstrate that factions and spoilers have an outsized role in international security and the affairs of many states, particularly in the fight to defeat ISIL and to stabilize Syria and Yemen.¹⁰

Author Biographies



Tricia Degennaro

Patricia (Tricia) DeGennaro is a Senior Geopolitical Risk Analyst for Threat Tec., LLC. She currently supports the US Army TRADOC G27 as an analyst in the Advanced Network Analysis/Attack the Network Directorate. DeGennaro has lectured at West Point and New York University on International Security Policy and Civilian and Military Affairs. She was selected as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) on the

¹⁰ Artis is collecting data as we speak on this issue in Saudi Arabia and Iran and should have more relevant data in the coming weeks, including much more information on the hardline groups that would like to see the deal fail.

Middle East, Iraq, and Afghanistan for various projects under the TRADOC G2, the commander of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq, commander of the Special Operations Command Central, and the US Department of Defense Strategic Multilayer Assessment program. DeGennaro was nominated by the US Department of State as a Franklin Fellow where she served in USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance - Office of Civilian and Military Cooperation (DCHA/CMC) as a Senior Policy Advisor to support the Office and an Agency-wide Civilian-Military Cooperation Steering Committee in an extensive revision to the Agency's Civilian-Military Cooperation Policy. DeGennaro capitalizes on over twenty years of experience as an academic, author and consultant in international security. Much of her work focuses on stabilization in the Middle East and surrounding region, countering violent extremism, and transitioning nations from war.

DeGennaro has published several articles on US foreign policy and national security topics. Her focus is to encourage an integrated international policy that looks beyond war and the use of force. She is often an expert commentator for CNN, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, Fox News, BBC and various nationally and internationally syndicated radio programs. She holds an MBA in International Trade and Finance from George Washington University and an MPA in International Security and Conflict Resolution from Harvard University. She speaks fluent Albanian and has a basic knowledge of Italian, Arabic and Dari.



Michael Eisenstadt

Michael Eisenstadt is the Kahn Fellow and director of The Washington Institute's Military and Security Studies Program. A specialist in Persian Gulf and Arab-Israeli security affairs, he has published widely on irregular and conventional warfare, and nuclear weapons proliferation in the Middle East. Prior to joining the Institute in 1989, Mr. Eisenstadt worked as a military analyst with the U.S. government.

Mr. Eisenstadt served for twenty-six years as an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve before retiring in 2010. His military service included active-duty stints in Iraq with the United States Forces-Iraq headquarters (2010) and the Human Terrain System Assessment Team (2008); in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Jordan with the U.S. Security Coordinator (USSC) for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (2008-2009); at U.S. Central Command headquarters and on the Joint Staff during Operation Enduring Freedom and the planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom (2001-2002); and in Turkey and Iraq during Operation Provide Comfort (1991).

He has also served in a civilian capacity on the Multinational Force-Iraq/U.S. Embassy Baghdad Joint Campaign Plan Assessment Team (2009) and as a consultant or advisor to the congressionally mandated Iraq Study Group (2006), the Multinational Corps-Iraq Information Operations Task Force (2005-2006), and the State Department's Future of Iraq defense policy working group (2002-2003). In 1992, he took a leave of absence from the Institute to work on the U.S. Air Force *Gulf War Air Power Survey*. Mr. Eisenstadt earned an MA in Arab Studies from Georgetown University and has traveled widely in the Middle East. He speaks Arabic and Hebrew, and reads French.



Dr. Michael Knights

Michael Knights is a Lafer fellow at The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and the Gulf Arab states.

Dr. Knights has traveled extensively in Iraq and the Gulf states, published widely on security issues for major media outlets such as *Jane's IHS*, and regularly briefs U.S. government policymakers and U.S. military officers on regional security affairs. Dr. Knights worked as the head of analysis and assessments for a range of security and oil companies, directing information collection teams in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. He has worked extensively with local military and security agencies in Iraq, the Gulf states, and Yemen.

Dr. Knights has undertaken extensive research on lessons learned from U.S. military operations in the Gulf during and since 1990. He earned his doctorate at the Department of War Studies, King's College London, and has worked as a defense journalist for the *Gulf States Newsletter* and *Jane's Intelligence Review*.



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.

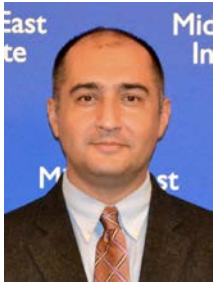
Previously, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007) where she served as a STRATCOM liaison to U.S. and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX (1994-2003) where her research focused on Middle East politics and 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.



Alireza Nader

Alireza Nader is a senior international policy analyst at the RAND Corporation and author of *The Days After a Deal With Iran: Continuity and Change in Iranian Foreign Policy*. His research has focused on Iran's political dynamics, elite decisionmaking, and Iranian foreign policy. His commentaries and articles have appeared in a variety of publications and he is widely cited by the U.S. and international media.

Nader's other RAND publications include *Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry*; *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran*; *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy*; *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*. Prior to joining RAND, Nader served as a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses. He is a native speaker of Farsi. Nader received his M.A. in international affairs from The George Washington University.



Alex Vatanka

Alex Vatanka is a Senior Fellow at the *Middle East Institute* and at *The Jamestown Foundation* in Washington D.C.

He specializes in Middle Eastern regional security affairs with a particular focus on Iran. From 2006 to 2010, he was the Managing Editor of *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*. From 2001 to 2006, he was a senior political analyst at Jane's in London (UK) where he mainly covered the Middle East. Alex is also a Senior Fellow in Middle East Studies at the US Air Force Special Operations School (USAFSOS) at Hurlburt Field and teaches as an Adjunct Professor at DISAM at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

He has testified before the US Congress and lectured widely for both governmental and commercial audiences, including the US Departments of State and Defense, US intelligence agencies, US Congressional staff, and Middle Eastern energy firms. Beyond *Jane's*, the *Middle East Institute* and *The Jamestown Foundation*, he has written extensively for such outlets as *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *The National Interest*, the *Jerusalem Post*, *Journal of Democracy* and the *Council of Foreign Relations*.

Born in Tehran, he holds a BA in Political Science (Sheffield University, UK), and an MA in International Relations (Essex University, UK), and is fluent in Farsi and Danish. He is the author of *"Iran-Pakistan: Security, Diplomacy, and American Influence"* (2015), and contributed chapters to other books, including *"Authoritarianism Goes Global"* (2016). He is presently working on his second book *"The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy: Contested Ideology, Personal Rivalries and the Domestic Struggle to Define Iran's Place in the World."*



Richard Davis

Richard Davis is the Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder of Artis International. Artis is an interdisciplinary field-based scientific research and development institution working with various governments, NGOs, universities and private sector entities in risk management and conflict resolution and mitigation efforts across the globe through four divisions: 1) Field Based Conflict Research, 2) Energy & Natural Resources, 3) Cyber Defense and 4) Health & Medicine.

Richard holds several active appointments, which include: Founding Fellow at the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at the University of Oxford; Senior Research Fellow, Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford; Senior Research Associate, Centre for International Studies, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford; Senior Research Associate, Department of Anthropology, University of Oxford; Professor of Practice, Arizona State University; Member, Permanent Monitoring Panel on Terrorism, World Federation of Scientists; Chairman, Black Mountain Private Equity; and Chairman, WG Henschen (aerospace).

Richard served at The White House as the Director of Prevention (terrorism) Policy. Prior, he was the Director of the Task Force to Prevent the Entry of Weapons of Mass Effect (framework for the prevention of the smuggling of nuclear materials) and the Director of the Academe, Policy and Research Senior Advisory Committee for two different Secretaries at the United States Department of Homeland Security.

Richard has been a Senior Policy Fellow at RTI international, a Senior Associate at the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, led a non-profit international development organization dedicated to the education and development of youth, including crime prevention, prevention of radicalization and conflict mitigation, and a school administrator and teacher. Richard has authored or co-authored articles and publications on energy, international security, political violence and terrorism. He is the author of a book entitled: Hamas, Popular Support & War in the Middle East that was published by Routledge in February 2016. Richard has a PhD from the London School of Economics; an MPA from Harvard University; an MA from the Naval War College; and an MA from Azusa Pacific University. He holds Baccalaureate Degrees in Finance and Social Science from Hope International University.