



## SMA Reach-back

**Question (V7):** *What are the strategic objectives and motivations of indigenous state and non-state partners in the counter-ISIL fight?*<sup>1</sup>

*\* This Reach-back write-up consists of tables listing the strategic interests, descriptions of those interests and types for 21 regional actors directly or indirectly involved in the counter-ISIL fight. These may be used as a data source for further analysis. The following presents some results of the interests-based regional futures assessment for which most were developed.*<sup>2</sup>

### Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The following are high-level results of a study assessing Middle East regional dynamics based on the alignments and conflicts among three critical drivers: actor interests, resources and resolve. Expected outcomes are based on the strategic interests of regional actors.

#### **ISIL will be defeated in Syria and Iraq**

Based on the balance of actor interests, resolve and capability, the defeat of Islamic State organization seems highly likely (defeat of the ideology is another matter). Specifically, the push for ISIL defeat in Syria is led by Iran and the Assad regime, both of which have high potential capacity and high resolve relative to ISIL defeat. Only ISIL has high resolve toward ISIL expansion in Syria. Iran, Jordan, Iraqi Kurds, Saudi Arabia, and Shi'a Hardline & Militia, show highest resolve for ISIL defeat in Iraq.

#### **Conflict will continue in Syria following ISIL defeat; will escalate significantly with threat of Assad defeat**

Whether Syrian civil conflict will cease in the context of an ISIL defeat is too close to call. Assad, Russia and Iran have strong untapped capability to drive an Assad victory against the remaining Opposition although none show high resolve (i.e., the security value gained by an Assad victory versus continued fighting in Syria is not widely different. This reflects the Assad regime's competing security interests (i.e., one interest is better satisfied by continued conflict, another by Assad victory). Even when we assume the defeat of ISIL in Syria as a precondition, unless actor interests change dramatically, the number of interests served by continued conflict and the generally low resolve on both sides suggests that we should be skeptical of current agreements regarding the Syrian Civil War. Moreover, resolve scores rise sharply when continued conflict is replaced by the possibility of Assad defeat. Together these results suggest that unless Assad's, Iran's and Russia's perceived security concerns are altered significantly, these actors have both the capacity and will to engage

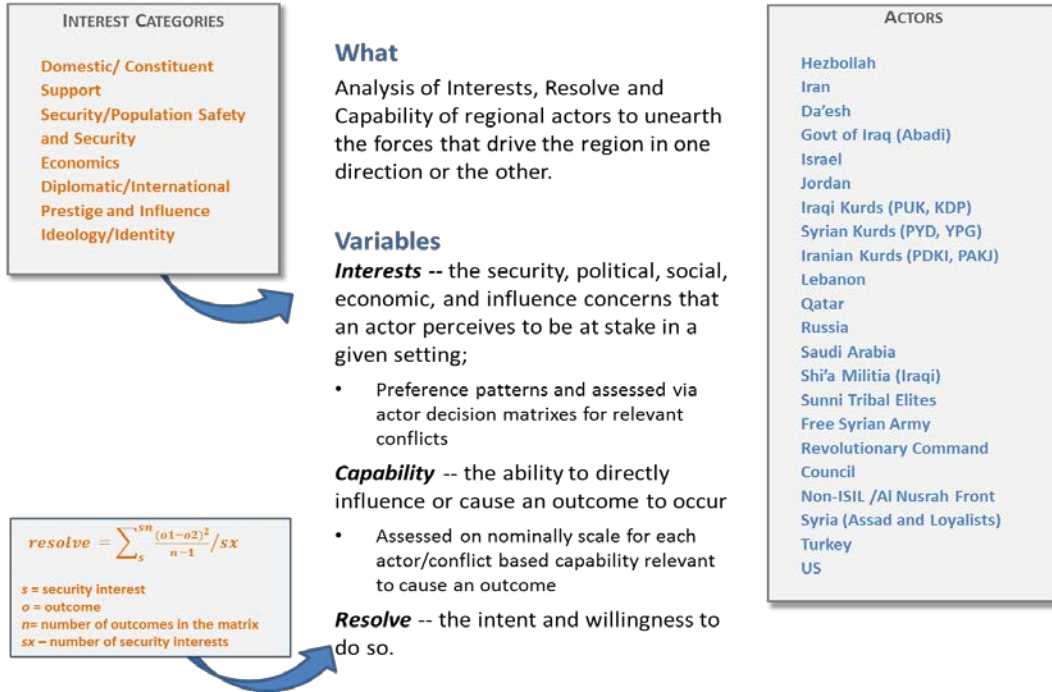
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<sup>1</sup> This white paper does not represent official USG policy or position.

<sup>2</sup> The study, Allison Astorino-Courtois (2015) *Analysis of the Dynamics of Near East Futures: Assessing Actor Interests, Resolve and Capability in 5 of the 8 Regional Conflicts* is available on request.

strongly to avoid an impending defeat. The high resolve of the three actors to avoid defeat should be taken as a warning of their high tolerance for escalation in the civil conflict.

### Basis of Conclusions: Identifying ME Regional Dynamics



**Implication:** Tolerating Russian-Iranian military activities in Syria and redirecting US resources to humanitarian assistance of refugees in and around Syria has greater value across the range of US interests and aligns more fully with the balance of US security interests in the region.

### GoI lacks resolve to make concessions to garner support from Sunni Tribes

While the majority of regional actors favor the Government of Iraq (GoI) making concessions to Sunni and Kurdish groups following defeat of ISIL, only the Government of Iraq, Shi'a Hardline and Militia, Sunni Tribes and Iraqi Kurds have significant capability to cause this to happen or not. Unfortunately, the GoI and Shi'a have high resolve to avoid reforms substantive enough to alter Sunni factions' indifference between GoI and separate Sunni and/or Islamist governance. More unfortunately, when they believe the GoI will not make concessions, Sunni Tribes are indifferent between ISIL governance and the current Government controlling Iraq. That is, they have no current interest served by taking security risks associated with opposing ISIL. However, the outbreak of civil warfare in Iraq does incentivize GoI to make concessions. Iranian backing of substantial GoI reforms changes the GoI preference from minimum to substantive reforms without the necessity of civil warfare.

**Implications:** Now is the opportune time to engage all parties in publically visible dialogue regarding their views and requirements for post-ISIL governance and security. Engaging Sunni factions on security guarantees and requirements for political inclusion/power is most likely to be effective; Engaging Kurds on economic requirements and enhancing KRG

international and domestic political influence encourage cooperation with GoI. Finally, incentivize Iran to help limit stridency of Shi'a hardline in Iraq eases the way for the Abadi government to make substantive overtures and open governance reform talks.

### **Saudi Arabia-Iran Proxy funding continues; easily reignites conflict**

Use of proxy forces by Saudi Arabia and Iran is one of the quickest ways to reignite hostilities in the region, and even though direct confrontation between state forces is the worst outcome for both, the chances of miscalculation leading to unwanted escalation are very high. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran have high resolve to continue supporting regional proxies up to the point that proxy funding or interference prompts direct confrontation between state forces. This is driven by mutual threat perception and interest in regional influence. This leaves open the specter that any conflict resolution in the region could be reignited rapidly if the incentives and interests of the actors involved are not changed.

**Implications:** International efforts to recognize Iran as a partner, mitigate perceived threat from Saudi Arabia and Israel, and expand trade relations with Europe are potential levers for incentivizing Iran to limit support of proxies. Saudi Arabia may respond to warning of restrictions on US support if proxyism is not curtailed.

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## Compendium of Actor Interests

### Ahrar al Sham Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Jeff Weyers, iBrabo

| Ahrar al-Sham INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION  | INTEREST TYPE                        |                            |   |                               |                    |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--------------------|
|   |  | National security/ population safety | Int'l/ intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival/ prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| <b>Moderating Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Jabhat al Nusra)</b>        | <i>One of the largest and most effective Islamist groups in the region is Ahrar al-Sham (AaS). Due to early ties to AQ in their emergence they received little traction outside of region players. As time has progressed, AaS has come to demonstrate an interest in being considered a more moderate alternative to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. There are numerous examples of AaS contesting JFS expansion and actions in the region. Due to its size this has generally had the effect of forcing JFS to back down in several instances or pushing issues to sharia court for decisions. In July 2015, AS's head of foreign political relations encouraged dialog and re-examination of labelling of Syrian opposition groups. In October 2016 AS joined Turkey's Euphrates Shield initiative in northern Syria putting it at odds with JFS, and giving the group increased operational relevance.</i> | X                                    |                            | X   |                               | X                  |
| <b>Increasing relevance and operational capability in Syria</b> | <i>During 2015 Ahrar al-Sham (AaS) was involved in many of the strategic victories in Syria as a part of Jaysh al-Fatah (Army of Conquest). This led to large territorial gains in Idlib, Latakia and Aleppo. In July 2015, AS's head of foreign political relations encouraged dialog with the US and a re-examination of labels given to Syrian opposition groups. In October 2016 AS joined Turkey's Euphrates Shield initiative in northern Syria putting it at odds with JFS, and giving the group increased operational relevance. In the same month AS gathered a coalition of 50 opposition groups to eliminate Jund al-Aqsa (JaA) after repeated attacks by the group who was sympathetic to ISIS. This forced JaA to pledge to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham to prevent their annihilation and placed JFS and AaS at further odds with each other.</i>  | X                                    | X                          | X   |                               | X                  |

# Bahrain's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Justin Gengler

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| Bahrain<br>INTEREST   | DESCRIPTION  | INTEREST TYPE                                 |                                  |  |                                     |                       |
|---|--|---|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |  | National<br>security/<br>population<br>safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic<br>politics/<br>regime<br>security/<br>constituent<br>support | Economic<br>survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Ensure regime security</b>   | <i>As with the other Arab Gulf monarchies, the most basic aim of the Al Khalifa family [in the capacity of the] Bahraini government is the preservation of regime security – that is, to ensure continued Al Khalifa rule of the country.</i>  |   |                                  | X  |                                     |                       |
| <b>Preserve the support of Sunni citizens via sectarian appeals</b>     | <i>Political support for the government is extremely low among Bahrain's majority (±55%) Shia population, and thus the ruling family's domestic political survival depends upon the continued sectarian segmentation of the citizenry such that political coordination among Shia and Sunni citizens is untenable. The state has accomplished this by successfully demonizing the Shia-dominated opposition as an Iranian fifth column, positioning itself as the best of two unsatisfying options for ordinary Bahraini Sunnis. The latter have been in effect scared away from cooperation with the opposition, despite a long list of shared grievances, by the threat of a full-scale Shia takeover (in the manner of Iraq) in the event of an overthrow of the Al Khalifa. The continued ability to portray the opposition as backed by a meddling and belligerent Iran is thus a core interest of the state's that is undermined by efforts to diffuse sectarian tensions in the region. In other words, the Bahraini government has a direct domestic political interest in continued Sunni-Shi'a tensions in the Gulf and Levant. (See my article for the MEI, "Sectarian Backfire? Assessing Gulf Political Strategy Five Years after the Arab Uprisings."<br/><a href="http://www.mei.edu/content/map/sectarian-backfire-assessing-gulf-political-strategy-five-years-after-arab-uprisings">http://www.mei.edu/content/map/sectarian-backfire-assessing-gulf-political-strategy-five-years-after-arab-uprisings</a>)</i> |   |                                  | X  |                                     | X                     |
| <b>Prevent direct Iranian material support for domestic Shia groups</b> | <i>The state has long made claims of direct material and financial support by Iran for what it calls "terrorist" cells within the opposition. To date, however, it has been unable to produce compelling evidence directly tying Iran to domestic groups. Still, the opportunity for indirect funding and support for opposition groups is considerable, both domestically and from outside, and the state has recently taken several steps to attempt to cut off such support. This includes most notably the banning of the khums ("one-fifth") tax through which Shia followers traditionally support clerics. More generally, the state has sought to bring all local charities and funds under central administration in order to exercise greater oversight.</i>   | X   |                                  |  | X                                   |                       |
| <b>Maintain the diplomatic support</b>                                  | <i>Prior to the emergence of Da'ish in Iraq and Syria, Bahrain was sensitive to efforts by the U.S. Embassy in Bahrain (along with the State Department generally) to facilitate negotiations between the Shia opposition and government</i>   | X   | X                                |  |                                     |                       |

|  |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|
| <b>and physical military presence of key international allies (the U.S. and the Britain)</b> | <i>(i.e., Crown Prince) that would resolve some of the issues underlying the uprising. The emergence of Da'ish offered Bahrain (and patron Saudi Arabia) a temporary solution to this problem, as it could make its support in the anti-Da'ish coalition contingent upon U.S. withdrawal from domestic Bahraini politics, which has indeed occurred. However, the possibility of renewed U.S. pressure for political reconciliation and/or reform is not far from the minds of the ruling family.</i>                |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Prevent or slow the normalization of Western relations with Iran</b>                      | <i>Normalization of Western relations with Iran poses direct economic and political threats to the Bahraini state. The latter category is largely addressed above. Regarding the former economic challenge, Iran's reemergence as a major oil exporter threatens to further reduce what dwindling resource rents presently accrue to Bahrain. Bahrain is overwhelmingly reliant upon oil and gas revenues (a majority of which are provided indirectly from Saudi Arabia via the jointly-owned Abu Safaa field).</i> | X | X | X | X |

# France's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr.s Marc Hecker and Élie Tenenbaum  
 Security Studies Center  
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| France<br>INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION  | INTEREST TYPE                           |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
|---|--|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |  | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Limit instability throughout the Middle East</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Middle East's geographic proximity to France makes the region's stability an absolute priority for France's future security</li> <li>- France has been heavily present in the region for centuries and will undoubtedly remain involved in the foreseeable future</li> </ul>              | X                                       |                                  |   | X                                |                       |
| <b>Mobilize a large coalition to help stabilize the region</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- France does not have the power to change regional dynamics alone: France needs to build partnerships and act within a coalition</li> <li>- The United States' commitment to the region's security is critical and will remain a prerequisite for any substantial military endeavor</li> </ul> | X                                       | X                                |   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Contain international jihadism</b>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destroying Jihadist sanctuaries: especially in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen</li> <li>- Controlling the flow of returning Foreign Fighters: especially those returning to Europe; and France's southern neighbors (North Africa)</li> </ul>  | X                                       |                                  | X   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Limit the flow of refugees</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting a more efficient EU external border control</li> <li>- Avoiding the potential negative impact refugee flows may have on the country's economy, security and domestic politics</li> </ul>  | X                                       |                                  | X   | X                                | X                     |
| <b>Promote the establishment of a stable and non-hostile state in Syria</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ending the civil war without returning to the status quo ante (That Bashar al-Assad remain in power is not an option)</li> <li>- Limiting the influence of radical factions over the future government</li> </ul>   | X                                       |                                  |   | X                                |                       |
| <b>Promote a cohesive and representative government in Iraq</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restoring the Iraqi government's full control over its territory</li> <li>- Helping Baghdad regain some degree of legitimacy amongst both Sunnis and Shias</li> <li>- Preserving autonomy for the Kurdish Regional Government</li> </ul>  | X                                       |                                  |   | X                                |                       |
| <b>Avoid further destabilization in Lebanon</b>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helping any Lebanese representative government maintain control over its territory</li> <li>- Limiting Hezbollah's influence over the government</li> <li>- Honoring century-long ties with Lebanon in cultural and religious fields</li> </ul>   | X                                       | X                                |   |                                  | X                     |
| <b>Move Iran towards a greater opening and</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enforcing the JCPOA and preventing Tehran's to acquire an operational nuclear deterrence capability</li> <li>- Developing business opportunities for French companies in</li> </ul>   | X                                       | X                                |   | X                                |                       |

|  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>a more constructive foreign policy</b>  | <i>Iran</i><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limiting the influence of the regime's hardliners within the government</li> <li>- Preventing the escalation of tensions with Gulf monarchies</li> </ul>  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Strengthening strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting further business partnerships (arms sales, foreign investments) while being cautious of not giving Gulf Monarchies too much clout in France's key economic sectors</li> <li>- Limiting the exportation of radical Islam (Salafi Islam, Muslim brotherhood) towards Europe and especially France</li> <li>- Avoiding greater tensions between Gulf monarchies and Iran</li> <li>- Securing peaceful regimes' successions</li> </ul> | X | X |   | X | X |
| <b>Keep on promoting the Two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preserving a sustainable security environment for Israel</li> <li>- Promoting the establishment of a stable and non-hostile Palestinian state with limited influence coming from Hamas</li> <li>- Avoiding the emergence of new jihadist groups in the Gaza Strip</li> </ul>   |   | X | X |   | X |
| <b>Make sure Turkey remains a stable and reliable ally</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Countering Erdogan's regime's authoritarian evolution</li> <li>- Securing the EU-Turkish agreement regarding Syrian refugees</li> <li>- Making sure Turkey remains a reliable NATO member</li> </ul>   | X |   |   | X |   |



# Hezbollah's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| Hezbollah<br>INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                                 |                                  |  |                                     |                       |
|--|---|---|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  |   | National<br>security/<br>population<br>safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent<br>support | Economic<br>survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Defend against Sunni Islamist threat</b>  | <i>Hezbollah (the Party of God) emerged in the wake of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 intended to eradicate the threat from Palestinian fighters based in the south. Hezbollah's claimed objectives were to remove the US, France from Lebanese territory and defend Lebanon from and ultimately destroy the Israeli state. Its move into Syria in direct support of the Assad regime, a long-time ally, has led to questions about an expansion of Hezbollah's original nationalist-religious focus.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the group and the Shi'a population do face an existential threat from Sunni radical groups such as the Al Nusrah Front, Ahrar al-Sham and ISIL that have taken up operations in Syria, especially as they come closer to Lebanon.</i>   | X   |                                  |  |                                     |                       |
| <b>Preserve links to support, funds, weapons from Iran, Syria</b>                  | <i>Iran, Syria and Hezbollah form an "Axis of Resistance" to US influence and Israeli presence in the region. Assad's use of Syrian military forces in Lebanon has served as a "force multiplier" for Hezbollah since the end of the Lebanese civil war, even after Syria officially withdrew from Lebanon in 2005. Hezbollah along with Amal (another Shiite party) and Michel Aoun's (Christian) party have also remained a pro-Syrian bloc in Lebanese politics (Berti &amp; Schweitzer, 2013). Crucially, Syria, and in particular the areas around the Damascus airport, is a prime transit way for Iranian funds and weapons to reach Hezbollah directly without having to transit more visible, non-Hezbollah-controlled areas of Lebanon (Bahout, 2015).</i>  | X   |                                  |  |                                     |                       |
| <b>Maintain political position in Lebanon; Keep fighting away from Shi'a areas</b> | <i>Although Hezbollah began as a militant resistance group, it has taken an active role in Lebanese politics and has built significant power within the legislature (Masters, 2014). Hezbollah leaders have reconciled at least in part to working with the Lebanese state, and other political actors including secular and Christian parties (Hamid, 2014).</i><br><br><i>Christians and minority groups in Lebanon feel increasingly threatened by the rise of ISIL (Abou Zaid, 2014). Given the weaknesses of the Lebanese Armed Forces, many have looked to Hezbollah for protection. This benefits Hezbollah by enhancing its nationalist political legitimacy and broadening support beyond the Shia community. Putting itself forward as protectors of Christians and minority groups is a way to overcome the backlash from its support of Assad, and a way to reshape its image as a resistance</i> |   |                                  | X  |                                     |                       |

<sup>3</sup> According to the Council on Foreign Relations's Robert Danin, Hezbollah's move "has left many Shiites in Lebanon worried that Hezbollah has overreached and forsaken its commitment to Lebanon in favor of its larger alliance with Iran and Assad's Syria." Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounders, Hezbollah; <http://www.cfr.org/lebanon/hezbollah-k-hizbollah-hizbullah/p9155>.

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movement protecting Lebanese constituents rather than a group that is seeking its own agenda and protecting its own interests.

There are currently 21 parties represented in the 128-seat Lebanese parliament, with a suitably diverse set of political agendas and sectarian interests. One of the main reasons Lebanese vote for Hezbollah is that the party makes them feel safe. If Hezbollah can deliver on this, its support base is likely to expand (Deutsche Well, 2014). Hezbollah could emerge from the Syrian war able to play a dominant role in Lebanese politics. Conversely, it could emerge weakened, tarnished, and without a solid base even amongst Lebanon's large Shiite community (Masters, 2014).

**Retain political legitimacy/ identity as anti-Western, Israeli occupation resistance organization, and champion of Arab and Lebanese interests**

Hezbollah was founded on a policy of resistance to the U.S. and Israel, and defense of Shiite interests in Lebanon and the region. Its political legitimacy is tied to this identity as an organizer of resistance and champion of Lebanese and wider Arab interests. Although Hezbollah began as a militant resistance group, it has in more recent years taken an active role in institutionalized politics within Lebanon building significant power within the Lebanese legislature (Masters, 2014).

X

Hezbollah initially was cautious about getting involved in the Syrian War and put out conciliatory statements at the outset of the demonstrations against Assad arguing that Assad was cognizant of the need for reform and calling for Syrians to have patience while these were worked out (Berti and Schweitzer 2013). It attempted to frame its support for Assad as consistent with its "resistance" theme and message as it was standing up against the foreign (Western) interests in the region that were supportive of Israel and more moderate, Christian actors in Lebanon. Thus supporting the Syrian regime at least rhetorically became part of Hezbollah's policy of resistance to Israeli occupation and US influence in the area. Berti and Schweitzer (2013) quote Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah as saying that Syria is the core of resistance in the area and "if Syria falls then Palestine is lost and the resistance in Palestine is lost, Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem will be lost." However, some have argued that Hezbollah's involvement in Syria raises the question of whether Hezbollah has become more interested in protecting Shiite interests regionally, than remaining a Lebanese nationalist organization (Masters, 2014).

# Iran's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

See also input from Alex Vatanka (MEI) in the following section

| Iran<br>INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                               |   |                                  |                       |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Increase Iranian influence in region; Dominate/sustain Sunni-Shi'a balance of power; mitigate threat from Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S.</b> | <p><i>Iran has long sought to establish itself as a key cultural, political, and economic player in the Middle East by strategically engaging Shia populations in the region (Bazoobandi, 2014; Cook, Barkey, &amp; Natali, 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015). As the largest Shia majority country in the region, Iran has a strong interest in offsetting Saudi influence across the region and claiming a place as a regional power with global reach (Bazoobandi, 2014). In Yemen, its backing of the Houthi rebels, a Zaidi Shia group directly opposes Saudi interests and influence (R. Mohammed, 2015).</i></p>  | X                                       | X                             |   |                                  |                       |
|   | <p><i>In Iraq, Iran has sought to maintain strong political influence by investing in a Shia-dominated Iraqi government that supports Tehran's foreign policy objectives in the region (Bazoobandi, 2014; Martin, Cowan, &amp; Mcalaster, 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015). Providing military support to Iraq and aid to Shiite militias in the fight against ISIL (Almukhtar &amp; Yourish, 2015; Martin et al., 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015) both strengthen Iran's influence in Iraq and address the external threat of Sunni jihadism.</i></p>   |   |                               |   |                                  |                       |
|   | <p><i>In Syria, Iran has worked to safeguard the survival of the Assad regime which enhances its influence in Syria – a strategic location that is the lynchpin of Iran's influence over the Arab-Israeli conflict as it provides a transit way for Iran to ship arms and resources to Hezbollah (Bonsey, 2014). Iran's backing of Hezbollah also provides it considerable influence in Lebanon, which provides leverage against Israel (Khatib, 2014; Salem, 2014).</i></p>  |   |                               |   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Defend economic assets in Syria; gain foothold in post-conflict economy</b>  | <p><i>Syria remains a focus of Iranian economic activity and foreign investment, particularly in the face of remaining Western sanctions. Since civil conflict broke out in 2011, and Turkey and Qatar halted Syrian aid, the Islamic Republic has provided nearly \$5 billion in loans to prop up its economy and rebuild infrastructure (al-Saadi, 2015). Despite the fighting Iran's trade with Syria is growing and expected to reach \$1 billion in 2015 (Press TV, 2015). Iran's economic investments and previous banking and energy agreements may be undermined by an opposition or transitional government replacing the Assad regime (Rafizadeh, 2013). If Assad survives, Iran - the largest producer of cement and iron in the Middle East - will be in a good position to benefit from post-conflict reconstruction projects - a point reiterated by the top Iranian economic</i></p> |   |                               | X   | X                                |                       |

official in Damascus according to an 18 May 2015 news report (Press TV, 2015).

**Ensure Iranian internal security and sovereign control**

*Threats to the internal stability of Iran emanate from both inside and outside of the country and at present involve two critical concerns: protecting Iran's borders and assuring stability the southwest. In the past the regime has faced separatist movements from Azeris – the Arab population in the southwest oil production area of Khuzestan. Especially as sanctions are lifted, Iran is keen to avoid any concern among foreign investors. More immediately, Iran has worked to avoid ISIL or other Sunni extremist groups taking up residence on its borders. From the outset Iran has sought to keep the fighting in Iraq contained (at the same time that it extends its influence there) for example, by training and funding the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), and providing support to the Iraq Security Forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga (one of the groups along with Syria who supported Iran in its devastating war with Iraq during the 1980s).*

X

X

# Iraq's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| Iraq (Abadi Govt)<br>INTEREST   | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
|---|---|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Maintain unified Iraq; avoid Kurdish independence, manage sectarian conflict</b> | <p><i>For the Abadi government, maintaining a unified Iraq is a central goal. Gaining the trust of Iraq's Sunni population and stemming momentum for independence among the Kurds requires the Gol to seek an elusive balance among the internal interests: forestalling Kurdish separatism, retaining Shi'a leadership of the power positions in the central government -- thereby retaining support among its core Shi'a support base, and at the same time increasing the legitimacy of the central government with Sunnis, e.g., by expanding the inclusiveness of the government and security forces in a way that that diffuses sectarian and ethnic strife.</i></p> <p><i>The policies of Maliki's government that marginalized and in some cases targeted Sunni Iraqis are widely held to have driven much of the sectarian conflict within Iraq in recent years (Connable, 2014; Dodge, 2014; J. T. Mathews et al., 2014), and contributed to the speed with which ISIL was able to advance in Sunni areas (Connable, 2014; Muir, 2015). Sunni Iraqis have long felt disenfranchised from their government, but their opposition to Maliki's government was driven more by fear and distrust of Shia ties to Iran, than a desire to form an independent state. Nevertheless, political reconciliation with the Sunni tribes and former Ba'athists must alleviate Sunni concerns over Iranian influence – complicated by the specter of Gol's dependence on Shia militia (some of the groups responsible for wide-scale violence under the Maliki government). The Gol must stand up to these militias, which have retaken and now control significant towns and territory in Sunni areas. Failure increases the possibility that ISIL is replaced by open Sunni-Shia conflict that could fracture the state. On the other hand, while the government has made some efforts to include Sunni voices and presence in the security forces, it is hindered by fears that armed Sunni militia will turn those arms against the government (Wehrey &amp; Alrababa'h, 2014).</i></p> <p><i>The inability of the Iraqi army to prevent ISIL's take-over of Sunni-majority territories long claimed by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) also presented the KRG with the opportunity to move in and gain de facto control, bypassing the Gol (Stansfield, 2014b). If not negotiated carefully this divide could also fuel sectarian animosities and separatism, especially in the post-ISIL push to repatriate Iraqi IDPs and refugees.</i></p> |   |                                  | X   |                                  |                       |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Defeat Sunni extremists, regime opponents</b>                          | <p>Prime Minister Abadi has identified “Takfiri terrorism” as one of the most dangerous threats to Iraq. Given its loss of territory to the group, it is not surprising that, according to the Foreign Minister the government of Iraq considers ISIL “a mortal threat to its existence as a nation and a political system” (Zebari, 2014), and an international threat, not one restricted to Iraq and Syria. The Iraqi government considers confronting ISIL in both Iraq and Syria to be necessary for defeating the group. It is also a necessary pre-condition to national reconciliation that serves the cause of unity.</p>  | X | X |
| <b>Retain access to economic assets</b>                                   | <p>Iraqis across the country are saddled with three types of insecurity -- physical, financial and food --that impact the government’s ability to govern, provide social services and demonstrate its value and legitimacy as a national authority.</p> <p>Worsening economic conditions and threats to oil revenue further challenge the government’s legitimacy. Over the past decade Iraq has failed to diversify its economy and reduce its economic dependence on oil, leaving it vulnerable. At the end of 2013 and against the wishes of the Gol, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) began independent oil exports to Turkey through their own pipeline (Stansfield 2014b, p. 1333; see also: Stansfield, 2014a; Zangeneh, 2013). Some 84% of Gol revenue comes from oil (Al-Janabi &amp; Al-Khatteeb, 2014). The loss of these funds – whether by KRG independent action or global reduction in oil prices – has significant <u>political</u> ramifications for the Gol which uses oil revenue to finance government jobs that keep down unemployment and increase support for the Gol.</p> <p>At the same time as salary security is tenuous, years of warfare has decreased food security for many Iraqis: reductions in food production and imports have decreased supply and pushed up food prices throughout the country (Schwartzstein, 2015). Finally, the conflict with ISIL has raised the military and humanitarian expenses of the Iraqi government leaving even less room to offset rising consumer prices (Schwartzstein, 2015). If workers are laid off or not paid, cannot afford or find food and receive little help from the government the ability of Iraq’s to meet their basic needs will be further undermined, inevitably leading to dissatisfaction with the government.</p> | X | X |
| <b>Retain international support in fight, and rebuilding Iraqi forces</b> | <p>As the events of June 2014 demonstrated the Iraqi army is not currently capable of defeating ISIL without assistance. Even before ISIL’s successes the Gol recognized its army lacked the expertise and resources to effectively fight the insurgent and terrorist groups that were benefitting from the chaos in Syria. Italians, French, Germans and other coalition members as well as Iran are providing resources and assistance. At present, the US has taken on much of the logistics planning, reform and implementation upon which a mechanized security force is dependent.</p> <p>In 2016 alone the US Congress appropriated \$1.4 billion for to support Coalition forces and another \$700 million for the</p>  |   |   |

*Iraq Train and Equip Fund used to support a number of international actors involved in training and equipping the Iraqi security forces. The requests for 2017 are nearly identical.<sup>4</sup>*

**Retain good relations with Iran**

*Iran can either influence Shi'a in Iraq to support the government and stabilization there, or do serious damage to prospects for stability by increasing support for Shi'a militias operating in Iraq. Maintaining open communications and good relations, ideally without appearing to be controlled by Iran is crucial for the success of the fight against ISIL and for the post-ISIL reconstruction of Iraqi governance.*

*In the security realm, and despite Prime Minister Abadi's initial policy of relying on government forces against ISIL, the failures of the army and loss of Ramadi in Spring 2015 left the government with little choice but to employ Iranian-backed Shia militia under the guise of the Popular Mobilization Units.<sup>5</sup> Iranian military support – advisors, ammunition and funding – has proven essential support as the Iraqi security forces move to defeat ISIL. Iranian influence over the PMUs and other Shi'a forces including where they fight and against whom, is also critical especially if the Abadi government is to avoid rekindling the sectarian hostilities managed over by its successor. Good relations and open communications with Iran also will be valuable to the government post-ISIL to help influence Shi'a hardliners to acquiesce to some government reforms need to convince Sunni to participate in a revised and more inclusive political process.*

**Preserve Abadi government; build legitimacy with Sunni and Shi'a communities**

*Popular experience with his predecessor, sectarian conflict, food and financial insecurity and the failures of the Iraqi Security Forces to halt ISIL's advance have already undermined the popular legitimacy and political position of the Abadi government. Moving forward, the situation will likely become more tenuous for Abadi before it gets better as Abadi tries to walk a tightrope between two forces. First, he must appease his own core political support that includes hardline Shi'a (led by Maliki) who oppose any government decentralization or other moves that would empower Sunnis and Kurds in meaningful ways and/or incorporate them into the government of Iraq (Arango, 2015). Second, he will be pressured by much of the international community and Sunni leadership to make those meaningful concessions for political power sharing (or accommodation) that many Shi'a fear but that are an essential step in gaining trust and legitimacy with the Sunni and Kurdish communities.*

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller, CFO), February 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Addressing concerns about the use of militia Iraqi President Fuad Masum has noted that the GoI had few options: "...when your area is attacked, then you use anybody who is able to carry weapons. In Iraq, we don't have a reserve army to ask them to join. We don't have that. That's why we asked—they asked people. We need today to gather everybody who's able to carry weapons and to be against ISIS" (Masum, 2014).

# ISIL's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| ISIL INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION  | INTEREST TYPE                           |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
|--|--|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  |  | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Consolidate control and expansion of Caliphate</b>  | <p><i>For ISIL, the ability to control territory and create an actual Caliphate in the land where the end-times battle is to occur has served as an essential element of their legitimacy and cache (Wood, 2015). In fact, it is prophesized as <u>necessary</u> to bring about the end times and therefore must be maintained in some semblance for that ideological reason. ISIL leadership will undoubtedly frame a loss as a temporary setback foretold by the Quran, but it will definitely erode ISIL's its vitality. The fallout could weaken its central control, possibly causing fragmentation within ISIL into smaller jihadist organizations.</i></p> <p><i>Successful control of territory and populations also supports the financial sides of ISIL operations through extortion and tax collection. According to an analysis of ISIL statements in Dabiq, a Caliphate must provide the essential services of a state in their view, including: continued military success, just leadership that includes taking counsel of advisors and rewarding performance, and the provision of civil services to include basic food and water for all, medical care (although not necessarily to Western standards) to all, and even justice in commerce and against transgression (e.g. Sharia courts) (Kuznar 2015).</i></p> |   |                                  | X   |                                  | X                     |
| <b>Cleanse the faith; defeat opponents (Sunni infidels and Shi'a)</b>                                    | <p><i>ISIL seeks to foment a showdown between Sunni and Shia and rid Islam of apostates and hypocrites, which includes all Shia, Sunni who do not adhere to ISIL's version of Islam, as well as the "tyrants" who unjustly rule Sunni lands (e.g., Saudi, Jordan). There is also an unstated strategic advantage to this tactic of targeting Muslims – it forces Sunni to ally with ISIL or be labeled as unclean and infidel.</i></p> <p><i>Violence is not simply a means to an end for ISIL. Rather according to the Hadith they cite, all of ISIL's goals not only cannot be achieved without violence, they must be achieved with violence. Not only should their actions be violent, but they should be as violent as possible and as supportable through Islamic verse.</i></p>   | X                                       |                                  |   |                                  | X                     |
| <b>Maintain ability to operate, e.g., by attracting acolytes and foreign fighters, holding territory</b> | <p><i>Maintaining the ability to operate includes preserving tactical and logistical requirements. While not necessary an ideological necessity, demonstrating battlefield success nevertheless aids in attracting foreign and local fighters as well as external funding sources.</i></p>   | X                                       |                                  | X   |                                  |                       |



# Islamist and Jihadist Rebels' Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Hassan Hassan

Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy

| Islamist and jihadist rebels INTEREST | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                        |                            |   |                               |                    |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--------------------|
|                                       |   | National security/ population safety | Int'l/ intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival/ prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| <b>Political support</b>              | <p><i>With the exception of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the rebels recognize the Gulf state's importance as a buffer between the regime and its backers, and Western countries that may consider abandoning the opposition. Through diplomatic and commercial links, the Gulf states emerged as key guarantors of opposition security on an internal level. Ahrar Al Sham's dependence on Qatar has made it amiable to political compromises when necessary, although such compromises are mostly posturing rather than an expression of real ideological realignment. The Muslim Brotherhood is also extremely interested in maintaining close ties to the Gulf states, especially Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.</i></p> <p><i>Jabhat Fateh al-Sham is deeply suspicious of all the Gulf states, but it has also sought to avoid stoking their fears about its future plans. It has maintained links by proxy, mainly through Ahrar al-Sham, with Qatar, and is cautious about the close ties between Ahrar al-Sham and Doha. In principle, however, JFS is open to the idea of political engagement similar to the Taliban's political engagement through its offices in Qatar and Beijing. It, for example, agreed in principle to participate in a political bureau during discussions for unity with jihadist and Islamist groups, primarily Ahrar al-Sham, but it insisted that the office would be "in compliance with sharia precepts". This is according to a serving high-ranking official of JFS.</i></p> |                                      | X                          | X   | x                             | x                  |
| <b>Financial support</b>              | <p><i>— The majority of rebel forces, including Islamist and jihadists, view funds coming from the Gulf, mostly from private donors or indirectly to battles against the regime through nationalist forces, to be essential. For Islamists, support from Qatar and Kuwait maintains their ability to dominate and have the upper hand on the ground, even if they dislike occasional pressure from donors.</i></p> <p><i>JFS sees reliance on government or semi-government funds to be a time bomb, as this increases the prospect of infiltration and espionage. Its strategy, increasingly explicitly expressed over the past few months, is to make their allies on the ground suspicious of foreign funding. JFS members often blame Ahrar al-Sham's reluctance to merge with it on foreign support.</i></p> <p><i>The push in the Gulf for Ahrar al-Sham to push Jabhat al-Nusra, before it became JFS, to delink itself from Al Qaeda was partly to allow regional countries to provide support to JFS or to shield their proxies from being associated with Al Qaeda</i></p>  | x                                    | x                          | X   | x                             |                    |

# Israel's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Brig. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Brom  
Fellow, Center for American Progress

| Israel<br>INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                               |   |                                  |                       |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Prevent Iran from acquiring military nuclear capability</b>        | <i>The JCPOA concluded in 2015 between Iran and the great powers prevents Iran from acquiring military nuclear capabilities for 10-15 years. Israel's interest is to expand this period as much as possible and prevent Iranian violation, as well as being alert of the possibility of other Middle East states following Iran's nuclear path and preempt it. A nuclear Iran will pose an existential threat to Israel and will achieve its ambition to become a hegemonic regional power that will be capable to harness other regional states to its war against Israel.</i> | X                                       |                               | X   | X                                |                       |
| <b>Prevent Iran from using proxies against Israel</b>                 | <i>The Islamic regime of Iran calls for the destruction of the state of Israel as an essential part of its identity and ideology. It adopted the use of Arab non-state proxies such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad as a useful tool.</i>   | X                                       |                               | X   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Prevent and defend against Hezbollah attacks</b>                   | <i>Hezbollah is a non-state actor that acquired military capabilities that equal a small powerful state. It has the capability to cover the whole territory of Israel with rockets and missiles, and operates precision guided missiles and UAVs. Since its inception it perceives itself enemy of Israel and is a proxy of Iran and part of the axis of resistance that fights Israel and the Western influence in the Middle East.</i>  | X                                       |                               | X   | X                                |                       |
| <b>Prevent and defend against Hamas attacks</b>                       | <i>Hamas is an Islamic Palestinian terror organization that controls the Gaza Strip and holds the ideology that Israel should be destroyed. It is part of the axis of resistance and serves sometimes as a proxy of Iran. It acquired the capability to cover large parts of Israel with rockets fire and develops the capability to execute terror and guerilla operations in Israeli territory.</i>   | X                                       |                               | X   | X                                |                       |
| <b>Break Iran's led axis</b>  | <i>Without the axis of resistance that Iran is leading it will be much more limited in its ability to harm Israeli interest. The weaker points in this axis are Syria and Hamas.</i>  |   |                               |   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Prevent Palestinian terror attacks in the West Bank and Israel</b> | <i>Palestinian terror groups and individuals lone wolves) operating from the West Bank and host countries try to execute terror operations against Israel. Some of them do that because they want to end Israeli occupation of the West Bank, others because they have adopted the ideological goal of destroying Israel.</i>   | X                                       |                               | X   | X                                |                       |
| <b>Prevent Jihadist Salafist attacks against Israel</b>               | <i>All the Jihadist-Salafist armed groups share the goal of destruction of Israel though it is not always their priority. It is Israel's interest to prevent their attacks and prevent them</i>   | X                                       |                               | X   | X                                |                       |

from approaching Israel's borders.

|  |   |   |   |   |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Expand peaceful relationships with Arab states</b>                        | <i>Israel and the Sunni Arab state have shared interests because of common enemies, Iran, the axis of resistance and the Salafist-Jihadist groups. Its Israel's interest to form coalitions and alliances with these states, and eventually conclude peace with the Arab world.</i> | X |   |   |  | X |   |
| <b>Keep strategic alliance with the US</b>                                   | <i>The strategic alliance with the US is one of the main pillars of Israel's security. It provides Israel's for the means to defend itself, as well as security guarantees and it is giving it a diplomatic shield in the international arena.</i>                                  | X | X | X |  | X | X |
| <b>Keep relations and cooperation with the European powers</b>               | <i>Europe is a major trade partner for Israel and a source for scientific and technological cooperation. Israel also perceives itself part of the West and the Judeo- Christian civilization.</i>   |   | X | X |  | X | X |
| <b>Prevent Russia from taking step harmful to Israel in the Middle East</b>  | <i>Post-Soviet Russia is not ideologically hostile to Israel but its ambitions in the Middle East and its competition with the US cause it to take steps that harm Israeli interests.</i>   | X |   |   |  |   |   |
| <b>Expanding relationships with the rising Asian powers: China and India</b> | <i>China and India are playing a significant growing role one the world stage, and are becoming significant economic partners. India particularly is a major market for the Israeli defense industries</i>  | X |   |   |  | X |   |

# Jabhat Fatah al Sham’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Jeff Weyers iBrabo

| Jabhat Fateh al Sham  | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                        |                            |   |                               |                    |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--------------------|
|   |   | National security/ population safety | Int’l/ intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival/ prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| <b>INTEREST</b>   |   |                                      |                            |   |                               |                    |
| <b>Maintenance of Territorial gains in Central Syria</b>                | <i>Since the emergence of Jabhat al Nusra now rebranded as Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS) one of the core principles was an integrated approach to expansion (based on direction from Al-Qaeda). In this regard JFS has attempted to gain the support of communities while slowly (after several missteps) implementing their version of Salafi Islam. To this extent JFS has become key to some of the major gains that have been accomplished by opposition groups in Idlib, northern Latakia, Aleppo and Hama. It should be noted that the success of this integration, including the coalition known as Jaysh al Fateh, may have been one of the key reasons for Russian intervention in the region. In the fall of 2015 it was widely observed that Syrian Army losses were mounting quickly. That JFS has continued to maintain ground despite Russian airstrikes only deepens their perceived value as an opposition amplifier in the region.</i>  | X                                    | x                          | X   |                               |                    |
| <b>Strengthening the Expansion of Salafi Jihadist movement in Syria</b> | <i>The efforts of the “moderate” opposition in tempering Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS) have acted as checks and balances to JFS’ application of strict sharia law. There are several instances of opposition groups and communities clashing with JFS as a push back against their attempts for dominance. This has forced JFS to continually test the waters before proceeding or backing down where they appeared to be losing support. This is in fact part of a larger strategy started by AQ to embed itself in communities. It has also however resulted in JFS taking in more extremist elements as they came into conflict with moderate groups. Perhaps the most concerning example being the acceptance of Jund al-Aqsa (an ISIS sympathetic group) into JFS in early October 2016. Based on these most recent actions JFS is likely to continue to be at odds with larger groups like Ahrar al Sham and Jaysh al-Islam, both of whom are both attempting to present as the “moderate” Islamist alternative.</i> |                                      | X                          | X   |                               | x                  |
| <b>Rebranding</b>   | <i>In August 2016 Jabhat al Nusra cut its “official ties” with Al-Qaeda most likely with the goal of avoiding increasing pressure and targeting by Russia and the US. According to the group it intended to remove “external direction” from AQ and continue its focus on opposing the Syrian government. It is also thought that by breaking away it will put JFS in a position to absorb other groups that previously didn’t want to come under the AQ umbrella. While it has changed in name JFS is likely to have retained many of its long-term goals including the creation of an Islamic Emirate within Syria.</i>   |                                      | X                          |   |                               | X                  |

# Jordan's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| Jordan<br>INTEREST   | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
|--|---|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Domestic and regime stability; decrease popular dissatisfaction</b> | <p><i>For the past couple of years there has been concern for the survival of the monarchy as the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist movement gain support in the country. While the regime has taken steps to contain the Brotherhood, Jordanians appear still to have little confidence in the King particularly due to the dire economic situation, perceived corruption and consequent sluggishness or failure of political reforms. Events that the regime seeks to avoid as they could threaten domestic stability include: mass demonstrations that the monarchy will need to use force to contain, success of ISIL and other extremists in neighboring countries who would encourage local support and/or exploit discontent in Jordan to gain a larger presence there and undermine the King.</i></p> <p><i>Palestinians – long at odds with the Hashemite Kingdom -- are a main support base for jihadi groups centered around Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa. Dissatisfaction among this group remains the most significant potential threat to the regime (Satloff &amp; Schenker, 2013). However, dissatisfaction has also increased among the regime's traditional East Bank tribal core supporters. Importantly, this is the group the makes up the majority of the Jordanian armed and security forces – precisely the group that would be called on to put down mass demonstrations and calls for outing the Monarchy.</i></p> <p><i>Conflict in the region has exacerbated Jordan's challenges with internal stability. Estimates are that the half million plus <u>registered</u> Syrian refugees in Jordan (a country of 7.5 million) is a small percentage of the total who live in cities and towns around the country; the vast majority live in border areas. As a result, the massive influx of refugees has had a detrimental effect on public service provision straining the education and health systems, increasing unemployment rates and sorely taxing the patience and resilience of the population (Jordan Times, 2015b). Iraqis fleeing the conflict there have been deemed "guests" by the regime to avoid the responsibilities that come with a refugee designation and thus do not receive the aid that Syrians do.</i></p> |   |                                  | X   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Retain defense relations with US, West, Israel</b>                  | <p><i>Jordan and Israel have developed a mutually beneficial security relationship since signing a peace treaty in 1994. Jordan provides a security buffer for Israel and a defense and intelligence sharing relationship has developed between the two states (Schenker, 2014). This relationship</i></p>  | X                                       |                                  | X   |                                  |                       |

has also extended to the US with foreign military financing increasing from \$9 million in 1993 to \$300 million in 2014 (Schenker, 2014).

At present the regime's key security threat is violent extremism – especially of the variety that abhors the idea of the Hashemite King. Many Jordanians have already joined ISIL and Jabhat Fatah al Shem (estimates range into the thousands making Jordan one of the largest per capita contributors of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq) and rooting out the threat of homegrown Salafi-jihadists attacking Jordanian targets has been a persistent security concern.

**Economic stability and growth**

The Syrian and Iraqi conflicts have exacerbated Jordan's challenges with economic stability as well. While the influx of refugees has had a detrimental economic effect by increasing government spending to provide public services for the new populations as well as Jordanian nationals, the conflict has also interrupted regional trade, destroyed trade routes and of course reduced international investment and tourism to the Kingdom (Jordan Times, 2015b; World Bank, Jordan <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan>).

X

X

Prior to the conflict, Jordan had been instituting structural reforms in education and health and notably adding social security and changing the tax structure in an effort to stabilize the economy and attract foreign investment (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview>). Nevertheless, GDP growth has been flat since the mid-1990s and fell in 2015 (according to the World Bank, real GDP growth dropped to 2.4% in 2015 from 3.1% in 2014) primarily as a result of regional conflict. Unemployment, especially among young people, remains high (between 13-20%). Despite the 1994 peace treaty many Jordanians continue to oppose cooperation with Israel (Laub 2015), King Abdullah has also faced criticism over his close relationship with the U.S. and stance as a pro-western Arab leader (Schenker, 2014). In October 2016 hundreds protested the huge natural gas deal with the US and Israeli partners (drilling in the Mediterranean off of Gaza) concluded in September as a "shameful" collusion with "the enemy" (PressTV, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/10/07/488062/Jordan-protest-rally-gas-deal-Israel>).

# [Kurds] Iranian Kurds' Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| Iranian Kurds<br>INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
|--|---|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Defend way of life; Kurdish identity and Achieve local or full autonomy</b> | <p><i>There are some 700,000 ethnic Kurds in Iran (about 9% of the population). There are two primary Kurdish groups within Iran, the democratic-socialist PDKI (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan) and the PJAK (Party of Free Life for Kurdistan an off-shoot of the PKK). Although the groups use different tactics they appear to be in alignment on their stated end goal: the establishment of Kurdistan within current Iranian borders. As stated by the PDKI they seek "to attain Kurdish national rights within a federal and democratic Iran"<sup>6</sup> for Kurds and other "nationalities" in Iran (e.g., Azeri, Baloch and Arab).<sup>7</sup></i></p> <p><i>The Kurds in Iran have long been a target of the government. The Shah was not sympathetic to Kurdish autonomy and, soon after the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini called for a jihad against Kurdish separatism (and ethnic minorities in general). Since the 1980s, the Islamic Republic has attempted to repress Kurdish cultural identity (dress, language, etc.) as well as political rights and economic opportunity.</i></p> |   |                                  |   | X                                | X                     |

<sup>6</sup> <http://pdki.org/english>

<sup>7</sup> <http://pdki.org/english/pdkis-reshmerga-forces-operation-against-two-iranian-military-bases/>

**Defend against violent repression by the Iranian regime**

*In the early 2000s Kurdish writers, teachers and activists were imprisoned and sentenced to death. Many have been executed, and as recently as 2013 Amnesty International was calling for the release of those still in jail.*

X

*Since the rise of ISIL, the Iranian government's apparent attitude toward the Kurds has changed. At least in the battle against ISIL the government and Kurdish interests have aligned. In fact, the Kurdish cause including that of Iranian Kurds (most of whom are Sunni) has more recently become a theme in Iran's official narrative about relations in the region (and aligns with their objective of standing for all the region's Muslims – not just Shi'a). Namely that without Iran the Kurds and Iraqis would not have been saved from ISIL.<sup>8</sup>*

*Today, there are reportedly "hundreds of Iranian Kurds"<sup>9</sup> fighting with Kurdish forces in Syria and Iraq. Presumably if the Iranian regime did not want them there it could block their participation. Once they moved into Syria, the risk has heightened for wearing out Iran's unofficial patience with the fighters. It is unclear whether there are provisions for Iranian Kurds fighting ISIL to steer clear of Revolutionary Guards operating in Syria.*

*Still, the Iranian government's relationship with PIJAK and its own Kurdish population remains fraught. In May 2015 Iranian police attacked demonstrators in the Kurdish region of Mahabad who were protesting the death of Farinaz Khosrawani, a 25 year old Kurdish woman who reportedly jumped to her death to avoid sexual advances from an Iranian army officer. This incited further protests among Kurdish populations in Iran as well as Syria, Iraq and Germany (RUDAW, 2015; Schwartz, 2015; Zaman, 2015). In 2014 six Kurdish men were executed for alleged involvement in Kurdish separatist and Salafist violence and Rezan Javid, co-chair of the political wing of the PIJAK estimates that another 30 are currently on death row. In an interview with Al Monitor Javid characterized the situation of the Kurds in Iran: "Every day the regime is killing our people for nothing other than seeking their rights, and the world remains silent... There is an established pattern of the regime seizing on any thaw with the West as an opportunity to crack down even harder on its opponents" (Zaman, 2015).*

*As recently as September 2016, the group reports that its Peshmerga carried out operations against Iranian military bases near Bokeran in Iranian Kurdistan reportedly in retaliation for "terrorist attacks and ambushes" by Iran's Revolutionary Guards against Kurdish smugglers in the area.<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> Dalay, Galip. Where do Iranian Kurds Fit into Iran's Kurdish Policy? ME Eye, 17 August 2015. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/what-place-do-iranian-kurds-have-iran-s-purported-new-regional-kurdish-policy-212236589>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/a/iranian-kurds-join-the-fight-against-isis/3529076.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://pdki.org/english/pdkis-peshmerga-forces-operation-against-two-iranian-military-bases/>



# [Kurds] Iraqi Kurds' (KRG) Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

\*it is clearly a reduction to consider the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as a unified front. The KRG is deeply divided as is the Peshmerga roughly along the lines of the two major political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – each of which seeks to avoid domination of Kurdistan by the other. Nevertheless, there are high-level strategic issues that the sides agree on, if not on the tactics (or allies) that will get them there. Thus for the purposes of this assessment we represent the KRG as a single entity, with the understanding that there is a lot more to the story.

| Iraqi Kurds (KRG) INTEREST   | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                        |                            |   |                               |                    |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--------------------|
|  |   | National security/ population safety | Int'l/ intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival/ prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| <b>Eliminate threats to and retain control of Kurdish areas</b>            | <i>In August 2014, ISIL turned its attention to Iraq's northern territory engaging Peshmerga forces controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and advancing on their capital, Irbil. As of September 2014, the primary interest of the Iraqi Kurds became to "clean the area of ISIL" (Faud Hussein, as cited in Gutman, 2014). ISIL's activity in Iraq has had both direct and indirect consequences for Kurds living in the Kurdistan region. In addition to losing control of territory to ISIL, Iranian military activity has also caused damage in civilian areas of Kurdistan. (Department of Foreign Relations, 2015c). Finally, KRG territory is threatened by Turkish military activities in pursuit of Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) fighters who have operating bases in KRG territory, and who remain a source of aggravation for the KRG given their ability to provoke Turkish military activity in the KRG.</i> |                                      | X                          |   |                               |                    |
| <b>Defend way of life; protect Kurdish rights; retain/enhance autonomy</b> | <i><u>Culture</u>: Defending their cultural identity, language, ethnicity and way of life is old hat for Iraqi Kurds in the modern world – from the Ottomans Turks, the British, Ba'athists and Islamic extremists. Even during the civil warfare between the PUK and PDK in the 1990s Kurdish identity remained distinct from the Arabs, Persians and Turkoman who surrounded them.<sup>11</sup></i><br><br><i><u>Autonomy</u>: In one regard the political demands and</i>  |                                      | X                          |   |                               | X                  |

<sup>11</sup> Goudsouzian, Tanya. A growing identity crisis for Iraqi Kurds. Al Jazeera, October 4, 2015 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/growing-identity-crisis-iraqi-kurds-isil-151003073100805.html>

concerns of Kurdish Iraqis are similar to those of its Sunni population. They seek an inclusive national government that is responsive to their needs and demands, and avoids the sectarian preferences that undermined the legitimacy and performance of Maliki's government<sup>12</sup> (Cooper & Gordon, 2014). This is both an issue of identity and security. In a March 2015 interview with Al Monitor, Barzani stated "Setting aside the fact that if you asked any Kurd about independence they would say they wanted it, independence has not been and is not presently on our agenda." However, since 2014 until the present fight in Mosul, Barzani has reiterated that it is impossible to return to the centralized political situation that existed before the capture of Mosul (Barzani, 2014).

The question is whether the GoI and KRG can come to a political accord that is acceptable to Baghdad and affords the Kurds the political influence and recognition they feel they deserve for their years of holding up the fight against ISIL. The wild card is whether Kurdish groups would take up arms rather than continue to negotiate resolution if they believed that was the only way to keep territorial and economic gains made over the past years of fighting.

**Define relations with Iraq government; including agreement on oil revenue**

Although the degree of political authority that is to be devolved from Baghdad to Irbil is supremely important, there are additional non-political autonomy issues that will need to be defined. These include first and foremost a permanent and stable agreement on Kurdish sales and revenues from oil in the Kirkuk region. Independence to increasing oil exports would provide additional revenue to the KRG, which they badly need, and would provide them greater autonomy from the national government. Independent trade agreements could also help the KRG create relationships with regional states, particularly to Iran and Turkey, independent of the GoI (Sheppard, 2014; Zebari, 2014).

X

X

**Stabilize Kurdistan economy; reduce government debt**

KRG PM Barzani called the financial challenges facing Kurdistan its "biggest threat." In 2015 the KRG faced an internal debt of \$17 billion and has borrowed \$1 billion money from Turkey to enable it to operate (Aland Mahwy, 2015; Daily Sabah, 2015). Currently, the KRG is purportedly working economic reform programs with the World Bank and other international institutions and has taken steps to alleviate financial shortfalls.<sup>13</sup> It has also passed laws and regulations designed to promote foreign investment, however between 2006-2015 investments from the GoI still accounted for 77.83% of total investment capital in the region, with foreign investment accounting for 13.1% and joint ventures 9.07% (Bradley, 2013; Kurdistan Board of Investment, 2015a, 2015b). Although its resources make

<sup>12</sup> According to the KRG Department of Foreign Relations, "The Kurdistan Region seeks to develop the best possible relations with the Iraqi federal government. The KRG believes that any outstanding issues, or any new disagreements that may emerge, should be resolved within the framework of the Iraqi Constitution...will continue to participate in the national affairs of Iraq so long as our rights and freedoms are protected by the constitutional order" (Department of Foreign Relations, 2015a).

<sup>13</sup> Kurdistan Regional Government, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?s=040000&l=12&a=55058>.

*Kurdistan an attractive investment economically, the security situation and the legal complexities arising from its relationship to Baghdad are impediments to gaining international debt financing or capital investment (Roy, 2014).*

# [Kurds] Syrian Kurd's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION  | INTEREST TYPE                           |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
|---|--|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |  | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Syrian Kurds</b>   |  |   |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Defend integrity of Rojava Cantons against military threats from ISIL, Turks</b>                 | <p><i>In July 2012 Assad withdrew the majority of his security forces from Kurdish regions of northern Syria and “and yielded effective control over the other towns and countryside to the militias of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) (Caves, 2012). The PYD is allied with the PKK (Turkish Kurdish Workers’ Party) and takes much of its philosophy for governing Rojava from the model developed by Abdullah Ocalan - leader of the PKK (Knapp, 2015). Prior to that move however, Syrian Kurds had suffered decades of ethnic discrimination and political and economic rights violations by the Assad regimes.</i></p> <p><i><u>Threat from Violent Extremists:</u> Even despite the Assad regime’s past violence against them, in a 2015 interview PYD Chairman Saleh Muslim asserted Rojava’s “main goal is the defeat of Da’esh ...We would not feel safe in our home so long as there is one Daesh left alive.” However, they were equally threatened by Al Qaeda, Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly Al Nusrah), “They all have the same mentality.”<sup>14</sup> Specifically, the Rojava Kurds see the ISIL and Salafist groups as infringing on their rights and territory, and are willing to fight it (Mansour, 2015).</i></p> <p><i>Turkey: Turkey remains opposed to establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region on its Syrian borders (Todays Zaman, 2015). After declaration of Rojavan autonomy, Turkey closed the border with the Kurdish region in an effort to undermine the newly formed government. In August 2016 Turkish forces invaded northern Syria and established a buffer zone between that area and Turkey. While the move satisfies multiple Turkish interests, it particularly reduces the threat of ISIL or PKK activities in Turkey and prohibits establishment of a unified Kurdish territory in northern Syria.</i></p> | X                                       |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Defend way of life and Kurdish identity including by establishing int'l diplomatic relations</b> | <p><i>Prior to the Civil War the regime persecuted the Kurdish population for years with activities ranging from “disappearing” to arrest and torture of Kurdish activists and were denied Syrian citizenship.</i></p> <p><i>The Rojavan leadership sees establishing diplomatic relations as important both for political and economic</i></p>  |   | X                                |   |                                  | X                     |

<sup>14</sup> “Syria civil war: Kurdish leader says collapse of Assad regime 'would be a disaster' despite its treatment of his people,” Independent, 24 September 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-civil-war-kurdish-leader-says-collapse-of-assad-regime-would-be-a-disaster-despite-its-10515922.html>

development and also as a protection against Turkey and others who see Rojava as a threat. (D. Murphy, 2015).

**Govern  
autonomous  
Rojava as  
collectivist,  
“democratic  
confederation”**

*On January 9, 2014 the Rojava Cantons declared their autonomy from Syria and announced their own constitution and government structures (D. Murphy, 2015; “The Constitution of the Rojava Cantons,” 2014; The Rojava Report, 2014).*

X

*The Rojava Cantons face a significant challenge in consolidating their political system and building institutions while fighting to repel ISIL’s advance. The political leadership of the Rojava Cantons does not necessarily seek independence; the Constitution of the Rojava Cantons “recognizes Syria’s territorial integrity and aspires to maintain domestic and international peace”, and Article 12 states: “The Autonomous Regions form an integral part of Syria. It is a model for a future decentralized system of federal governance in Syria.” (“The Constitution of the Rojava Cantons” 2014). Saleh Muslim, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), has said that they have no plan to break away from Syria, underlining that Kurds in Syria are part of the nation (Today’s Zaman, 2015b).*

*Kurdish participation in the Syrian opposition has been limited based on the recognition that the opposition is inherently nationalist, and thus opposes autonomy for Syrian Kurds. The unwillingness of the SNC to discuss federalism or autonomy for Kurds was a major factor in the decision of most of the Kurdish parties to leave the SNC in late 2011 (Caves, 2012).*

## Qatar's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

\* See also *Strategic Objectives: Saudi Arabia and Qatar*, by Dr. Tom Lynch (INSS-NDU) below

| Qatar<br>INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                                 |                                  |  |                                     |                       |
|--|---|---|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  |   | National<br>security/<br>population<br>safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent<br>support | Economic<br>survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <p><b>Expand Qatar's regional influence/prestige especially relative to that of Saudi Arabia</b></p> | <p><i>In 1995 Qatar's Emir was overthrown by his son, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (the current Emir's father), who undertook a series of changes to increase Qatar's regional profile and influence. He established the Al Jazeera news network (Kampeas, 2014), doggedly pursued the rights to host the 2022 men's Soccer World Cup, settled border disputes with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (despite being particularly ill-suited to host a world soccer tournament in the summer/fall months), and pursued opportunities to mediate regional disputes<sup>15</sup>. Concern over Qatar's international reputation and prestige is demonstrated by the government's response to widespread criticism of its treatment of foreign workers, which led to the hiring of PR firm and the establishment of a government Communications Office. Much like Iran, the key to Qatar's foreign activities appears to be its interest in expanding its regional influence and prestige. Presenting Qatar as a valued and successful global mediator appears to have become a focus of Qatari foreign policy. Hamad abdicated to his son Tamim bin Hamad in 2013. Sheik Tamim has continued his father's international orientation.</i></p> <p><i>Historically, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have had an antagonistic relationship, driven by political and territorial rivalry, and Qatar's desire to minimize Saudi influence over its actions (Haykel, 2013).<sup>16</sup> These relations as well as those with Bahrain and the UAE had been rocky over the past couple of years primarily as result of its funding for</i></p> |   | X                                |  |                                     |                       |

<sup>15</sup> As a practical matter Qatar - government and citizens - have used the Emirate's enormous oil wealth to cultivate clients to further its political Islamist interests and maintain ties to groups in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. It also maintains a self-proclaimed "good neighbor" policy with Iran while it supports the idea of the Gulf Union. Together, these moves set Qatar up to play an intermediary role in the Gulf in a way that the Saudi's cannot or will not (Dickenson 2014; AL Monitor 2015).

<sup>16</sup> For Qatar, like Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism is a fundamental basis of the state's makeup; however, concern over Saudi influence led the Qataris to structure the relationship between religion and the state very differently (Baskan & Wright, 2011). To incorporate Wahhabism within the educational or bureaucratic structures of Qatar would have created a reliance on Saudi scholars and jurists to design and staff Qatar's institutions, and subsequent deference (Roberts, 2014). Instead, Qatar looked to Muslim Brotherhood scholars to develop its systems, granting the Emir greater control.

extremist groups -- particularly the Muslim Brotherhood and allied groups across the region (e.g., Hamas), and Qatar's previous support of the Houthi rebels in Yemen<sup>17</sup> – a group that Saudi Arabia sees as a terrorist organization operating at its borders. Saudi Arabia funded Salafist factions of the Syrian opposition in part to counter Qatari and Turkish support of opposition groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria (Haykel, 2013). Although both Saudi Arabia and Qatar seek Assad's defeat, they do not agree on which faction they wish to see rise to prominence in the aftermath.

**Mitigate internal threats to the regime**

To achieve regime security Qatar has chosen a "hyperactive style" of diplomacy and foreign policy. It has acted as a mediator and financial supporter wherever it can, in order to make itself valuable to all sides, so no matter which side prevails in the region, it will have some goodwill to protect it. (Dickinson, 2014; Haykel, 2013; Kampeas, 2014). Qatar has used its enormous oil wealth to further its interests and maintain ties to Islamist groups in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other MENA states. It has used these same ties to mediate for the U.S. for the release of American hostages (Dickinson, 2014; Goldman & DeYoung, 2014; Londono, 2014; Riechmann, 2014).

X

X

Qatar's Foreign Minister, has claimed that the Gulf states are "immune to revolution" of the type espoused by ISIL (AL Monitor 2015). Qatar did not experience the domestic unrest that many other Arab states did in the 2010-11 period. On the other hand, a recent Chatham House report on the future of the Gulf points out that significant internal political change will accompany the end of the oil production and revenue that currently support these states. Qatar is in a less dire situation than others (e.g., KSA) as its natural gas reserves are expected to carry it into the next century (Snoj 2015). Emir Tamim bin Hamad has prioritized development of Qatar's advanced healthcare and education system and infrastructure around Doha in anticipation of the 2022 World Cup. There has been speculation that the focus on social service spending was also a strategy to contain the domestic influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, who typically establishes sports clubs, operate food banks and provide other community services as a means of gaining popular support (Roberts 2014).

Support for the Muslim Brotherhood and the presence in Qatar of Muslim brothers poses a potential risk to the Qatari regime. In Saudi Arabia, the influence the Brother's gained culminated in radicalization of young people against the regime and support for al Qaeda in the 1990s. Qatar has managed to avoid similar radicalization of its younger

<sup>17</sup> Qatar was rebuked by KSA in 2013-14 for among other things, its support of the Houthi. That odd circumstance of a Wahabbi state supporting a Shi'a religious movement against KSA interests indicates the depths of antagonism to which Saudi Arabia and Qatar had fallen. See, "Al Alaqaat Al Saudiyah Al Qatariyah Mutazmah Jidan Wa Al Harb Al Alamiyah Tshtaal Bayn Al Biladayn Qa Amir Al Kuwayt Ytwasat Lil-Thdah Qa Ttwyq Al Tawatr [Qatari-Saudi Relations in Crisis as a Media War Flares up between the Two Countries; the Emir of Kuwait Mediates to Calm Tensions]," *Al Rai Al Yaum* (November 22, 2013)

population, partly due to the more secular nature of Qatari politics (Baskan & Wright, 2011). They have also encouraged the Muslim Brotherhood to focus their attention on the outside world, giving them media and internet outlets, and funding their activities in other states (Haykel, 2013; Roberts, 2014). Additionally, there may be the hope that support for the Brotherhood will ensure that they do not criticize the Qatari regime's policies, or become politically active in the country (Azem, 2012).

**Maintain good US/West relations**

Qatar has both economic and security-related reasons for seeking to maintain good relations with the US. Economically, the US is Qatar's largest foreign investor and its single largest importer. Qatar's interest in expanded regional influence is buoyed by its maintaining sufficiently favorable relations with the US. It allows US basing - on which the US depends and has tapped its regional networks to work behind the scenes for US purposes. Although Qatar's relationship with Islamist groups is publically questioned by the US, these ties have made Qatar a useful intermediary.<sup>18</sup>

X

X

**Manage Qatari economic reform**

While GDP growth is expected to remain around 3-4% in the near term, the Government of Qatar recognizes that its dependence on a single economic sector, namely hydrocarbons, is a significant vulnerability and is looking into ways to diversify. In addition, Sheik Tamim has taken an aggressive approach to instituting economic reforms in Qatar to avoid the decline in standards of living - and subsequent civil discontent - that analysts project for the region as world oil prices continue to remain low. In particular, Tamim's goal is greater efficiency in government spending and development of a national "culture of planning, work and achievement", rather than the current mindset which he characterizes as a "culture of consumption" that is no longer tenable. In 2016 the Emirate is projected to endure a \$12 billion deficit -- its first in over a decade.<sup>19</sup> Deficits are expected for 2017 but according to the Qatar National Bank should balance out by 2018. The government is also instituting what will probably be a 5% value-added tax - Qatar's first consumption tax in a bold move to increase government revenue.<sup>20</sup>

X

X

<sup>18</sup> For example, the release of Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan, was achieved through the use of Qatari intermediaries and depended on Qatar's willingness to allow the five Taliban detainees exchanged by the U.S. to reside in Qatar (Dickinson, 2014; Goldman & DeYoung, 2014; Londono, 2014). Qatar's intelligence service was also instrumental in securing the release of American journalist Peter Theo Curtis in July 2014, captured in Syria by Al Nusrah almost two years earlier (Goldman & DeYoung, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> "Qatar must tackle 'culture of consumption', says emir", Gulf News, 1 November 2016.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/qatar-must-tackle-culture-of-consumption-says-emir-1.1922485>

<sup>20</sup> Parvez Jabri. "Qatar budget back to 'near balance' by 2018." Business Recorder, 21 November 2016

<http://www.brecorder.com/business-a-finance/banking-a-finance/318973-qatar-budget-back-to-near-balance-by-2018.html>.



## Russia's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team with input from Timothy Thomas (Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth) and Eugene Rumer (Carnegie Endowment)

| Russia<br>INTEREST   | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
|--|---|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Enhance international/regional influence at detriment to US</b> | <p>Since coming to power in 2000, President Putin has been committed to restoring Russia's global status as a world power. As Russia's closest ally in the region Syria is "key to Putin's calculus" as he seeks to position Russia as a counterweight to Western influence in the Middle East (Borshchevskaya, 2013).</p> <p>Putin's extension of military support to the Assad regime directly challenged the US-led Coalition to defeat ISIL and Assad by building an alternative coalition against ISIL. In July 2015, Russian and Iranian ministers held a series of meetings, arriving at a "common position" on Syria and in September, the Iraqi military announced it had reached an intelligence sharing agreement with Russia, Iran and Syria in the fight against ISIL.</p> <p>Like Assad, Putin has argued that it was the West's wrong-headed backing of the Syrian rebels not Assad's actions that escalated the violence (Putin, 2013) and led to the crisis in Syria (S. Dagher, 2015; Roth, 2015). From the Russian perspective, if the moderate Syrian opposition continues to erode, the US will have no choice but to moderate its own position on removing Assad. In this case, Russia will be well positioned to use its influence with Assad to gain diplomatic concessions from the West over Ukraine sanctions.</p> | X                                       | X                                | X   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Access to Mediterranean; retain port, airfield intel post</b>   | <p>The Assad regime has been Russia's closest ally in the Middle East for more than 40 years.<sup>21</sup> In 2013 President Putin made expansion of Russian naval power one of the "chief priorities" of his third term. This was followed a week later by announcement of the biggest Russian naval exercise in the Mediterranean which was seen by some as early indication that Russia did not intend to step away from Assad (Borshchevskaya, 2013). In September 2015 Russia began building a forward air base at Latakia, the port city where Russia maintains a small naval base. Safeguarding the Assad regime preserves Russian naval access to its only port in the Mediterranean where US and NATO forces have important bases and operations</p>   | X                                       |                                  |   |                                  |                       |

<sup>21</sup> According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia accounted for 78% of Syria's weapons purchases between 2007 and 2012. Between 2009 and 2013 Russian companies invested more than \$20 billion in Syria

(Humud, Woehrel, Mix, & Blanchard, 2015).

**Stymie spread of extremism into central Asian states; weaken/ defeat Chechen and other extremist fighters**

*Broader geopolitical interests aside, the Russian leadership has a strong interest in counterterrorism operations and fears that the fall of the Assad regime will bring radical Islamists to power in Syria, destabilize the region and potentially affect the stability of Russia's southern regions. In short, the Russian position is that supporting Assad is essential if ISIL and other terror groups in the region are to be defeated (Tharoor, 2015).*

X X X

*It took the Russia government nearly a decade to quiet its internal conflict with Chechen rebels and Russia remains wary of any ideological or ethno-religious movements that could emerge inside the country. From Putin's perspective not only do extremist ideology and battle-hardened jihadis from the North Caucasus pose a threat to population safety in Russia, they also threaten the domestic popularity of the regime and its international prestige.*

**Demonstrate Russia still has the power to act as a global player**

*Related to Russia's interest in extending its global influence, is its interest in demonstrating its "rebuilt" strength and capabilities. There are a number of objectives associated with this. First, testing Russia's new weapons and command and control capabilities (of the new National Defense Control Center in Moscow) affords the military a real-life training opportunity. Second, it sends a clear deterrence message to the US about Russia's resolve to recover its place in the world and shows off the military's "professional competency" that as Timothy Thomas notes, "was lacking in Georgia."*

X X

**Avoid popular ire at economic downturn; sons dying abroad**

*While stirring up nationalist sentiment – particularly aimed at the damage American aggression does to Russian interests – helps bump up Russian opinion of Putin, the balance of his support rests on the perception that the regime has recharged Russia's economy and international stature.<sup>22</sup>*

X X

*Russian shows of new military weapons and the effectiveness of the Russian military also play well at home in Russia. Timothy Thomas notes that "with the situation in Ukraine at a stalemate, and the economic effects of continuing low oil prices and economic sanctions felt across Russia, direct intervention in Syria offered Putin the opportunity to both distract domestic attention and ... from an increasingly unpopular conflict against brother Slavs in Ukraine; and reassure the population that the Kremlin is directing its attention toward the emerging threat to the south of the nation."*

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Sherlock, "Putin's Public Opinion Challenge," *The National Interest*, 21 August 2014. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/putins-public-opinion-challenge-11113>.

# Saudi Arabia's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| Saudi Arabia<br>INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION  | INTEREST TYPE                                 |                                  |  |                                     |                       |
|---|--|---|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |  | National<br>security/<br>population<br>safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent<br>support | Economic<br>survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Dominate/ sustain Sunni-Shi'a balance of power; mitigate threat from Iran and proxies</b>  | <p><i>For decades, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran have been engaged in a strategic rivalry for power and influence in MENA. Even before the Iranian revolution in 1979 when both were US allies the two clashed over Iranian military modernization, oil policy, openness to the West and secularism. With the Revolution, the Iranian Ayatollahs upped the ante by calling for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy as un-Islamic. During the Iran-Iraq War beginning in 1980s KSA supported Iraq with funding, diplomatic pressure on Gulf states to do the same and increasing oil production to bring down Iranian earnings. Although there was a thaw in relations around the First Gulf War, with the accession of King Salman to the throne in January 2015, the KSA has taken a more visible role in attempts to influence regional affairs (e.g., intervening in what it perceived as an Iranian-led coup attempt in Bahrain; the civil conflicts in Yemen and Syria) rather than relying on the US to intervene in regional disputes as it had done in the past (Takeyh, 2015).</i></p> <p><i>The KSA has been fairly consistent in condemning the Assad regime -- Iran's long-time ally in Syria, arguing that if Assad had not brutalized the Sunni majority population in Syria, ISIL would not have been able to construct the jihadi narrative that has resonated with militants worldwide (Nazer, 2015). The removal of Assad is also consistent with the KSA's overarching interest in containing the regional influence of Iran.</i></p> <p><i>In short, the KSA continues to see Iran as a very close and existential threat to its national security and to the regime.</i></p> | X   |                                  |  |                                     |                       |
| <b>Quell non KSA Sunni extremism, secularism, Muslim Brother influence at home and abroad</b> | <p><i>Since the heyday of Nasser's secular pan-Arabist challenge to the conservative monarchies in the region, the KSA has pursued a policy of tamping down on secularist, populist or revolutionary sentiments at home, and funding conservative proxies abroad. The KSA tried to stem Arab Spring fervor at home by offering massive hand-outs to government employees including the military (the state is the largest employer) and poor Saudis.</i></p> <p><i>As in Qatar, Wahhabism is a foundation of the Saudi state (Baskan &amp; Wright, 2011). The Muslim Brotherhood's Sunni Islamist doctrine challenges not only the Wahhabist basis of the Saudi regime, but also the principle of dynastic rule (El Gamal, 2014). Despite this, there has been a Muslim Brotherhood presence in KSA since the 1950s, after they were exiled by repressive regimes in Syria and Egypt.</i></p>  | X   | X                                | X  |                                     |                       |

*The Saudi regime has not forgiven the Brotherhood for supporting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in 1990, hold it responsible for radicalizing Saudi youth, and perceive its presence in KSA as a possible threat to the regime (Roberts, 2014). In response to the ascendancy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (after the 2011 uprising), the Saudis supported the Egyptian military coup to oust the Morsi government in 2013 (Al-Arian, 2015; Howeidy, 2015). In May 2014, they formally designated the group a terrorist organization, along with al Nusra and ISIL (El Gamal, 2014). However, since the death of King Abdullah, the Saudi's attitude to the Brotherhood appears to be changing, and exiled Muslim Brotherhood leaders are looking toward the Kingdom as a possible mediator with the Al-Sisi government. The Egyptian Muslim brotherhood, Hamas and Yemen's Islah Party (Muslim Brotherhood's branch in Yemen), have also come out in support of Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen (Al-Arian, 2015). In March 2015 KSA began airstrikes against Houthi forces in Yemen, a move supported by the Islah Party, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas*

*As with many of Saudi Arabia's recent regional actions, its apparent change in approach to the Muslim Brotherhood is more likely the result of geopolitical concerns than a change of heart. The Saudis perceive the fall of the Yemeni government as a significant security threat as it would provide a safe haven for anti-Saudi extremists and allow them to build strength and launch attacks across the border (Reardon, 2015). In a similar vein,*

*KSA concern over closer relations between the new Egyptian government and Iran (Al-Arian, 2015; Howeidy, 2015) reflects its ongoing drive to contain Iran's regional influence. Similarly, the release of eight Hamas members charged with political campaigning within the Kingdom could be interpreted as an initial overture to better relations with an influential group that is backed by Iran. There is also the concern that stifling more moderate and mainstream political Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, may be aiding more extreme groups, such as ISIL gain support (Al-Arian, 2015).*

*In April 2014 a royal decree was issued that stated any citizen found guilty of fighting in a foreign conflict would be sentenced to between three and twenty years in jail. This was followed by the formal designation of as Nusra, ISIL, the Houthi movement, and Hezbollah as terrorist groups (El Gamal, 2014). The decree underscores the regime's continued concern about radicalization of its population and opposing the royal family (El Gamal, 2014).*

*At this point the extent of the threat to the regime posed by ISIL is in question. However, as the birthplace of Islam and the location of the Two Holy Mosques, Saudi Arabia would be the ultimate prize for ISIL, and the group has made it clear that this is their ultimate goal. Saudi Arabia is a Sunni*

majority, has a strong government, and ISIL's domestic approval rating has been quite low (about 5%). Nevertheless, KSA has taken multiple actions to counter the ISIL threat to the regime. Part of the campaign involves security operations which have resulted in the arrests of thousands of ISIL sympathizers and a few thousand ISIL sympathizers entered in a rehabilitation program. Media institutions have tried to discredit ISIL messaging on religious grounds.

**Expand oil and other product export/ revenue**

*It has been clear to the KSA and global economists for some time that the Gulf states eventually would have to wean themselves from their extreme dependence on oil revenue. It may not have been as clear how quickly that day would come for Saudi Arabia. According to IMF data, Saudi Arabia needs an oil price of \$US 106 to avoid a budget deficit, and although it has reserves to cope with the current lower prices, using these to avoid government cutbacks in spending fails to resolve structural weakness in the economy. While the KSA has invested heavily in education and infrastructure to increase economic diversification, some 81 -83% of government revenue is derived from oil (Alturki & Khan, 2014; Nereim, 2015).*

*The KSA's budget deficit was \$US 100 billion in 2015. The prolonged collapse of global process, coupled with the KSA's traditional practice of providing high government subsidies for corporations and individuals (e.g., for water, energy) and an increasingly costly war in Yemen, has forced Saudi leaders to make some stark cuts. In 2016 KSA has sliced public spending, workers' pay and benefits, halted construction projects and added revenue-producing taxes and fees.<sup>23</sup> Many of these have serious implications for domestic support for the regime which has long been able to "buy" political legitimacy by underwriting the lifestyles of its citizens. Foreign workers have protested for months of back pay, the sharp increase in water bills caused a storm of protest and prices are rising across the board.*

X

X

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Kulish, "Saudi Arabia, Where Even Milk Depends on Oil, Struggles to Remake Its Economy," NY Times, October 13, 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/14/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-oil-prices-economy.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/14/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-oil-prices-economy.html?_r=0)

# Shi'a Hardline & Militia Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| Shi'a Hardline & Militia INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                               |   |                                  |                       |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Protect Shia Shrines and population</b>                                     | <i>The initial catalyst for Shia militias in Iraq to begin fighting actively against ISIL was the destruction of Shia shrines in Syria. The Badr Militia, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS), and Peace Brigades all claim their fighters went to Syria to defend Shia shrines, moving back to Iraq only when ISIL expanded into the country (Murphy, 2014; Siegel, 2014; TRAC, 2015). ISIL has followed the practices of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, attacking the Shia, secularists, non-violent Islamist parties, and Sunni-tribesmen that do not subordinate themselves to al Qaeda in Iraq (Braniff and Pereira, 2014). The expansion of ISIL into Iraq, especially its move toward Baghdad expanded the stated aims of the Shia militia groups to include the protection of the majority Shia population in and around Baghdad.</i>  | X                                       |                               | X   |                                  | X                     |
| <b>Contain and defeat threat from Sunni extremists, ISIL in Syria and Iraq</b> | <i>The Shia militias, as they are composed now, exist for the purpose of confronting ISIL. ISIL's military operations have focused on attacking regional groups who do not submit to their ideological interpretations of Islamic law (Braniff and Pereira, 2014). After apostate Sunnis, Shias are considered by ISIL to be their next most important target (Kuznar and Moon, 2014). ISIL's success in gaining control of territory presents a direct threat to the Shia population in Iraq. Furthermore, ISIL has created a significant disruption to the dynamics of the ongoing sectarian conflict between Iraqi Sunni and Shia militia groups. It is both a threat and an opportunity for Shia groups in their ongoing struggle for influence in Iraq.</i><br><br><i>Some Shia militia groups, including the Badr Militia, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), have expressed support for, or actively provided fighters for the Assad regime (K. Murphy, 2014). All groups consider the continued presence of ISIL in Syria to be a threat to Shia interests.</i> | X                                       | X                             |   |                                  |                       |

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Maintain influence in Gol; Shi'a dominance of Iraq governance home and abroad</b>                     | <p><i>Concerns over actions by Shi'a militia fighters against Sunni populations are strengthened by the political influence of these groups within the Gol.<sup>24</sup> Until July 2016 Mohammed Ghabban, member of the Badr Organization served as Interior Minister. Shi'a paramilitary group Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq has also build considerable political influence over recent years. Still, the threat to Shia populations from ISIL is real, and to this point, the Shia militias have had greater success in protecting those populations than the Iraqi army. This power to protect could be translated into longer-term political support and legitimacy if they continue to be a successful opposition force to ISIL in central Iraq.</i></p> <p><i>Shi'a hardline former PM Nouri al Maliki who led a highly sectarian government and was forced out in 2014 looks to be positioning himself to regain political power and oust PM Abadi once Mosul is liberated from ISIL forces.<sup>25</sup> His still strong bloc in parliament has been removing the key Sunni and Kurdish cabinet members of the Abadi government by levying corruption charges, leaving little doubt that they are aiming to push the more conciliatory (and inclusive) Abadi aside. Reuters cites a Maliki advisor Sami al-Askari as saying that Maliki's "aim is not necessarily to become PM but to have the PM chosen supported by him... If Abadi joins Maliki for the elections, Maliki will not choose him to be PM again; if Abadi runs without Maliki, he has no chance to win enough seats."<sup>26</sup></i></p> | X | X |
| <b>Retain external material support (e.g., from Iran) while diminishing US influence in Iraq/ region</b> | <p><i>There is significant evidence that the success of Iraq's Shia militias is dependent on Iranian support, both in terms of resources and expertise (Barnard, 2015; Bazoobandi, 2014; Campbell, 2014; Chulov, 2014; Nader, 2015; Spyer &amp; Al-Tamimi, 2014). It has been reported that, since June 2014, Iran has sent more than 1000 military advisors to Iraq, as well as elite units to fight and train Iraqi militias, and has provided more than \$US 1 billion in aid (Ryan &amp; Morris, 2014). This is a mutually beneficial relationship however, as it is in Iran's interest to use these militia to increase its regional influence (Basiri, 2014; Khedery, 2015).</i></p> <p><i>Some of the nationalist Shia militia groups currently fighting ISIL evolved from the Mahdi Army. The Mahdi Army was</i></p>  | X | X |

<sup>24</sup> There is evidence that Shia militia active in Sunni areas have used their fight against ISIL as a cover for continued actions against Iraq's Sunni population. There have been reports of militia groups refusing to let Sunni residents in mixed Sunni/Shia areas to return to their homes after ISIL forces have been pushed back, and others of the killing of Sunnis (Dearden, 2014; Fahim, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Human Rights Watch Iraq, 2015; Lake, 2015; Muir, 2015; G. Porter, 2015; T. Porter, 2015; Rasheed, Parker, & Kalin, 2015; Smyth, 2015). Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have provided evidence that supports the view that the fight against ISIS is being used by Shia militias as a cover for continued violence against Sunni population that verges on ethnic cleansing (Amnesty International, 2014; Hassan, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2015, 2015; Human Rights Watch Iraq, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Ahmad Rasheed and Maher Chmaytelli, "Ex=PM making comeback as Iraq's most powerful man," Reuters, 11 October 2016, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/ex-pm-maliki-making-comeback-iraqs-most-powerful-145525589.html?ref=gs>

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Rasheed and Maher Chmaytelli, "Ex=PM making comeback as Iraq's most powerful man," Reuters, 11 October 2016, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/ex-pm-maliki-making-comeback-iraqs-most-powerful-145525589.html?ref=gs>

*created under Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in 2003 during Iraq's sectarian conflict and disbanded in 2012. All of these groups were formed with the goal of ending U.S. presence and influence in Iraq. Although the U.S.-led coalition is currently coordinating with Shia militia groups, providing air cover for ground operations against ISIL forces, some groups remain committed to their opposition to any US presence in Iraq. Karim al-Nouri, Badr Militia spokesman and military commander has stated: "We don't need them [the US], either on the ground or in the air. We can defeat the Islamic State on our own. We don't have a problem [with continued US airstrikes], but they should not strike while we are on the ground. We don't want history to record that we conducted an offensive with American cover" (Sly, 2015). Badr leader Hadi al-Amiri, addressing militant fighters stated: "Our mission is to liberate Iraq with Iraqis, and not with foreigners" (Sly, 2015). Even if these militias are willing to tolerate U.S. assistance in fighting ISIL, there is little confidence that this will result in any fundamental change in their attitude toward American involvement in Iraq.*



# Sunni Tribal Leader’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

\*it is clearly a reduction to consider Sunni Tribe in central Iraq as a single group with the same preferences. However, given common experience with the Shi’a-led and US-backed central governments, it is reasonable to presume that while there are highly-localized interests that differ, the high-level strategic interests described below can sufficiently represent the positions of the Sunni tribes. Thus for the purposes of this assessment we represent the Tribes as a single entity, with the understanding that a deeper dive that is beyond the scope of this project would be required in order to genuinely distinguish tribal groups from one another.

| Sunni Tribal Leaders<br>INTEREST                        | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                                  |   |                                  |                       |
|---|---|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int’l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Maintain way of life; livelihood; land; autonomy</b> | <p><i>Sunni Iraqis have long felt disenfranchised from their government, but their opposition to Malaki’s government was driven more by fear and distrust of Shia ties to Iran, than a desire to form an independent state. Adding to their immediate fear of ISIL, Sunni Tribal elites in both Iraq and Syria view with concern the increasing power Shi’a and Kurds have gained as a result of ISIL’s rise. It is seen as a new manifestation of previous governments’ attempts to marginalize their Sunni populations, and interpret it as another attempt to take Sunni lands, power, and resources away (Murray, 2014).<sup>27</sup></i></p> <p><i>Because Arab Sunni Tribes’ interests are hyper-localized, it is difficult to ascribe a best outcome for all the tribes. However, one consistent narrative is that the tribes want a much greater degree of autonomy from the central government. This ranges from a federated nation with weak central government to a fully autonomous region with very weak ties to the center. This self-determination or autonomy is important to assure the safety, stability, and welfare of Sunni tribe members from the Shia-led Iraqi government. Regional expert Victoria Fontan argued that “[i]f Baghdad promises autonomy to Sunni regions in exchange for their support against IS, that will be a game changer” (Middle East Eye, 2015).</i></p> |   |                                  |   |                                  |                       |

<sup>27</sup> Many tribal leaders depend on need some kind of patronage in order to maintain power, provide leadership, and ensure a basic level of wellbeing. The tribes not aligned with ISIL seek this patronage from the Abadi government or from the USG (Malas & Adnan, 2015). Sunni states—particularly Saudi Arabia and Jordan—have tried to exert influence over the tribes and keep them away from ISIL by providing funds, logistical support, and military training (Wehrey & Alrababa’h, 2014). This is a double-edged sword for both the tribes and the actors seeking influence. On one hand, tribal leaders are likely to play the actors against one another to reap the greatest benefits while trying to remain as independent as possible. On the other hand, no single actor clearly stands to help the tribes achieve their strategic interests over the long term—making it difficult for tribes to feel secure in any potential partnership.

**Survival; personal/  
family safety**

*ISIL has made its position with regard to other Muslims very clear: either you submit to ISIL's version of Islam, or you are an apostate. Of all Muslims, non-aligned Sunnis are those whom are considered their main enemy (Braniff & Pereira, 2014; Salama, 2015). ISIL's extremely violent tactics clearly showed tribes the consequences of opposing the group, but without a strong alternative to ISIL to protect them from violence, some tribes may have little choice but to pledge allegiance to ISIL (Malas & Adnan, 2015). So while tribal leaders have publically declared allegiance to ISIL, the duress under which many such declarations were given, makes their reliability questionable (Shaikh, 2014). One expert stated that tribes will not support ISIL in absence of coercion because "they want to trade, they want to drink, they want to smoke, they want to party. And living under Sharia law is probably not the best way they see their life." This sentiment highlights that many Sunnis do not see themselves—their culture, values, and way of life—reflected by ISIL (Murray, 2014; Yahya, 2014). Any effort by tribes to put up strong resistance to ISIL and participate with the government of Iraq and the Shia militia has resulted in that tribe targeting by ISIL (Salama, 2015), further incentive not to resist.*

**Equity, honor, fair  
treatment; defend  
against ill-  
treatment by  
government in  
Iraq/ Syria**

*Iraqi national policies under former PM Maliki's government marginalized and targeted Sunni Iraqis. Not only were his policies and actions widely held to have driven much of the sectarian conflict within Iraq in recent years (Connable, 2014; Dodge, 2014), but also to have contributed to the speed with which ISIL was able to advance in Sunni areas (Connable, 2014; Khatib, 2014; Muir, 2015). "The reason so many tribes joined Daesh in the first place is because they saw them as revolutionaries fighting against the government that abandoned them," said Sheikh Amin Ali Hussein of the al-Khazraji, a government-allied tribe in Samarra (Salama, 2015). In the words of one tribal leader, Zaydan al-Jubouri: "We chose ISIL for only one reason. ISIL only kills you. The Iraqi government kills you and rapes your women" (Wehrey & Alrababa'h, 2014).*

# [Syria] Assad Regime's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Hassan Hassan

| INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION  | INTEREST TYPE                              |                                  |  |                                     |                       |
|---|--|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |  | National security/<br>population<br>safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup<br>prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent<br>support | Economic<br>survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Bashir al Assad</b><br><br><b>Stopping the Gulf states from pursuit of regime change</b> | <p><i>The key Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, remain committed to supporting the Syrian opposition, even though a regime collapse is not their current goal, with the possible exception of Qatar. The regime believes that if the Gulf states stop supporting the rebels, it will be easier to crush the rebellion.</i></p> <p><i>— These states' priorities have changed over the past five years. Saudi Arabia, for example, is currently fearful of a rebel win, given that Islamist and jihadist groups dominate. The UAE has taken the backseat in support for the opposition, mostly focused on the Southern Front closely cooperating with Jordan and other countries. For the regime, these changes vindicate its policy in fighting the rebellion against its rule, and the Gulf role, along with Turkey's, will continue to be the focus of Damascus.</i></p>   | X  |                                  | X  |                                     |                       |
| <b>Resisting the acceptance of Gulf-friendly Islamists</b>                                  | <p><i>The regime views its struggle with Islamist movements as a zero-sum game. Any compromise given to Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, will undermine the regime's edifice in its entirety. Despite suggestion the regime can accept opposition integration in a future power-share deal, it views Islamism in existential terms, something that the regime's popular base also agree on, broadly. This is due to historical hostilities with the Muslim Brotherhood but also because the regime and its supporters see any compromise as a slippery slope that will ultimately lead to the revival of the challenge it is facing now. The regime's top echelon, including Bashar al-Assad, sees the Gulf states as a source of this push to strengthen Islamism in Syria.</i></p> <p><i>— Even in the event of warming relations, the regime sees interest in maintaining an ideological distance with the Gulf states, whether in terms of their worldview vis-a-vis American role in the region or in terms of Islamic movements.</i></p> | x  |                                  | X  |                                     | x                     |

# Turkey's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| Turkey<br>INTEREST  | DESCRIPTION   | INTEREST TYPE                           |                               |   |                                  |                       |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
|   |   | National security/<br>population safety | Int'l/<br>intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/<br>regime security/<br>constituent support | Economic survival/<br>prosperity | Identity/<br>ideology |
| <b>Maintain Erdogan, AKP control/ influence in government</b> | <p><i>Political opposition to President Erdogan strengthened in light of several factors related to the war in Syria. However Erdogan's popularity has risen significantly since the summer 2016 coup attempt. Erdogan is closer to the numbers needed to win a referendum on his long-held ambition: replacing Turkey's parliamentary system with a presidential system that would as a consequence legally and substantially expand his powers.</i></p> <p><i>Changing demographics due to refugee influx into 5 provinces bordering Syria are shifting the balance of power between ethnic groups and increasing the potential for tension and conflict. It also has economic impact on use of services and dropping of wage rates as refugees who are willing to work at lower wages take especially unskilled labor from locals. In the past, voters have not supported the presidential system. Erdogan by changing that in part by linking the referendum to Turkish nationalism and threat perception. "Erdoğan has managed to introduce the idea that he is the only guy who can keep the country together, that Erdoğan's survival is essentially the survival of the state of Turkey."<sup>28</sup> He also has made a number of sensational speeches since the coup appealing to nationalist, neo-Ottoman sentiment and reinforcing his tough stance against the PKK.</i></p> |   |                               | X   |                                  |                       |
| <b>Stem Kurdish separatism; deny PKK safe havens</b>          | <p><i>Kurdish battlefield successes against ISIL in Syria and Iraq are viewed with trepidation by Turkey. In particular it remains concerned about arming of Kurdish forces in Iraq (Peshmerga) for fear that those weapons would fall into the hands of its arch enemy, the PKK – a designated terrorist organization -- which has also joined the fight against ISIL.</i></p> <p><i>Success by Iraqi Kurds, who have been able to significantly expand their territory (Bender, 2014), however is not necessarily viewed as a loss given Turkey's close economic ties with the Kurdish Regional Government of Northern Iraq. Since the 1990s, and particularly since 2003, Iraqi Kurds have been relentless in trying to convince the Turkish government that they have no real connection to the Turkish Kurds or the PKK. The KRG quite explicitly conveys that it is not and will not play the nationalist, ethnic card to rile up Turkey's Kurdish population. A 2014 deal between the Kurdistan Regional government and Turkish state</i></p>  | X                                       |                               |   |                                  |                       |

<sup>28</sup> Zia Weiss. "Erdoğan pursues his plan for even greater power," Politico, 28 October 2016. <http://unexploredworlds.com/cgiproxy/nph-proxy.pl/010110A/http/www.politico.eu/article/recep-tayyip-erdogan-pursues-his-plan-for-even-greater-power-turkish-president-akp/>

energy companies over stakes in the region's oil and gas fields deepened the relationship between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds (Dombey, 2013).

**Limit Iran's regional influence**

According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Turkish and Saudi foreign policy perspectives mutually support each other and create synergy" (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Both countries are concerned over Iran's increasing influence in the region and their alliance effectively forms a Sunni bloc. Like Saudi Arabia, Turkey competes with Iran for influence in Iraq and Syria, and like both KSA and Iran, attempts to use the region's ethnic and sectarian fissures to its advantage. Tensions have flared of late about the presence of Turkish troops in Iraq – which is seen as led by an Iran-leaning, Shi'a government that has lost governing legitimacy over years of excluding and targeting Sunni, and alienating the Kurds.<sup>29</sup> Turkey does not want Iranian presence on its borders and from which it might direct proxy forces to attack. An analysis in *The National Interest*, argues that Turkey fears for the safety of the (Sunni) Turkoman population in northern Iraq at the hands of Iran and Shi'a militia operating in these areas.<sup>30</sup>

X X

**Promote Turkey's position as regional leader; exemplar of moderate Islamist government**

Turkey has a neo-Ottoman ambition to restore Turkish prestige and leadership in the region. However, its economy is dependent on foreign funds, particularly from the US, making it vulnerable to external shocks that reduce foreign investment. Moreover much of this dependence is in the guise of foreign loans/ short-term investment that could be swiftly pulled (Dombey 2014). Together these conditions generate a desire to be seen internationally as a "stable and democratic state, ruled by a moderate Islamist government that offers a model of a progressive political system for other Muslim countries" (Manfreda, 2014); Turkish government would like to be seen as the "big brother of the emerging Arab democracies" (Hinnebusch, 2015, p. 16).

X

X

**Enhance Turkey's energy security and trade**

Turkey has worked to position itself as energy hub between Europe and Central Asia/ME suppliers (Dombey 2014).

X

X

Turkey's energy needs have risen along with its rapid economic growth. It is reliant on imported crude oil (Iran 26%, Iraq 27%, KSA 10%) and natural gas (Russia 57%, Iran 29%) from countries whose foreign policies are often at odds with those of NATO and the EU. Its supply lines – particularly those running through Iraq have demonstrated vulnerabilities. Still, Turkey's involvement at the center of the region's energy trade – as a "strategic bridge" between the Caucasus and European markets -- is critical to the country's continued stellar growth.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad. "Are Turkey and Iraq Headed for War in Mosul?" *The National Interest*, 20 October 2016. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/are-turkey-iraq-headed-war-mosul-18130>

<sup>30</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad. "Are Turkey and Iraq Headed for War in Mosul?" *The National Interest*, 20 October 2016. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/are-turkey-iraq-headed-war-mosul-18130>

<sup>31</sup> "Turkey's key strategic energy role in its region is expected to continue," *Daily Sabah*, 3 August 2016. <http://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2016/08/03/turkeys-key-strategic-energy-role-in-its-region-is-expected-to-continue>

## Strategic Objectives: Saudi Arabia and Qatar

Dr. Tom Lynch

National Defense University, INSS-CSR

Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the two richest Gulf Arab States, have divergent regional objectives but a common cause in Syria to see off the Bashar Assad regime and to destroy ISIL. Qatar and Saudi Arabia have divergent foreign policy agendas with Iran. Since at least 1979, Riyadh has viewed itself to be in a fundamental struggle with Tehran over leadership of the global Muslim faithful and about which will hold the dominant geopolitical position in the Middle East. The Saudis maintained their right to Muslim world ascendance as custodians of Islam's two holy mosques, and rebuffed demands by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini and fellow Shia clerics that Iran be afforded a prominent leadership role with the faithful. Saudi enmity toward the Ayatollah-led Iran collapsed almost all forms of social, economic and political interaction between the two countries. Although similarly alarmed by the religious assertiveness and regional military threat posed by Iran after the 1979 revolution, Qatar has taken a less confrontational approach toward Tehran. A seafaring state, less than 60 miles from Iran at its closest point, and with a long history of maritime trade and barter along the Iranian coast, Qatar supported Saudi leadership of the global Muslim faithful but maintained significant economic and diplomatic ties with Iran after the fall of the Shah.

From the early 1980s until 2003, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the other Gulf Arab States relied upon Saddam Hussein's Iraq to constrain and pressure Iran, limiting Iranian reach and influence in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia was a strong backer of Saddam Hussein's war against Iran. Qatar also supported Iraq financially in its 1980-88 war against Tehran. Over the course of more than two decades, Iraq's containment of Iran held firm but for one consequential exception: strong Iranian influence in the Levant via its proxy Shi'a militia-turned-political party, Lebanese Hezbollah. Iran's conduit for its relations with Lebanese Hezbollah (and Hamas) ran through Syria and was enabled by Iran's support for Syria's Allawite (a minority form of Shi'ism) government in Damascus.

For most of the past two decades, Riyadh and Doha agreed with the need to arrest and roll back Iranian influence in Syria and the Levant, but differed in approach. In an effort to empower Lebanese Sunni Muslim communities and prevent greater Iranian regional influence, Riyadh and Doha undertook independent financial and diplomatic efforts in Lebanon during the 1990s and through the 2000s. Saudi Arabia grew frustrated with Syrian complicity in Iran's military and political activities in Lebanon. This frustration boiled over after the 2005 assassination of Saudi-born businessman and former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in Beirut, Lebanon. Hariri died from a powerful car bomb attack on his motorcade—an attack that a UN Special Tribunal later found was facilitated by Syrian agents working in concert with Lebanese Hezbollah. Syrian-Saudi relations were not severed, but grew increasingly frosty during the late 2000s. Qatar took a different approach with Syria. Qatar pursued warm relations with Damascus. Qatar's regional politics aimed to maintain ties across the political spectrum and to keep Syria in the mainstream of Arab politics. Qatar invested in Syria specifically because Doha wanted Syria to be a part of the Arab world, not a part of Iran.

But after Bashar al Assad began vigorous attacks against the Syrian Sunni opposition in reaction to the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, Qatar was the first Gulf Arab State to call for Assad's ouster in late 2011. Sharing the outrage against Assad, Saudi Arabia called for his demise shortly thereafter. Both declared that Assad must go. Both supported anti-Assad Sunni Salafi militant groups and Salafi jihadist groups operating in Syria, including the group that became ISIL. Both reversed course on ISIL in 2014 after the declaration of the Caliphate by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Both joined the U.S.-led anti-ISIL Coalition in late 2014 and remain members during 2016. Qatar has flown airstrikes in Syria against the Islamic State as part of the U.S.-led anti-ISIL Coalition where Saudi Arabia is also a partner.

Both states have undergone major changes in royal family leadership since the 2011 Arab Spring and the beginning of the civil war in Syria. These leadership shifts have narrowed some of the differences in foreign policy approach and substance between the two states, albeit not all of them. The new leaders have improved their cooperation in the U.S.-led Coalition to destroy ISIS. The new leaders also have grown closer and more committed to supporting the fight to assure that Bashar al Assad is ousted from power in Syria. Both joined other GCC states in March 2016 by naming Lebanese Hezbollah a terrorist organization. However, the Saudis still prefer support for Islamist and Salafi militant groups fighting Assad in Syria while Qatar has grown closer to Turkey-supported rebel factions and groups associated with Jabhat al-Nusra, the longtime al Qaeda affiliate in Syria.

In Qatar, Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani peacefully relinquished power to his son, 33 year old Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani in the summer of 2013. Many outside observers viewed this transition as a Qatari acknowledgement that under Sheikh Hamad, Qatar had over-reached in regional foreign policy aims, strongly backing the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt after the overthrow of President Mubarak. Qatar's Brotherhood support clashed with Saudi Arabia's preference for stable autocratic rule in Egypt. Doha's support for the Syrian chapter of the Brotherhood in the nascent civil war there threatened Syrian Salafist groups favored in Riyadh, fragmenting the Syrian opposition and enabling the rise of jihadist group competitors like ISIL during 2012 and 2013. The 2013 transition to Sheik Tamim signaled that new leadership in Doha would be more cooperative with Saudi Arabia in pursuit of common regional interests. In November 2014, Emir Tamim promised not to allow leading Muslim Brotherhood figures to operate in Qatar, calming a diplomatic row with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain.

In January 2015, Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz died and power transferred to his 79 year old brother, Prince Salman. The Saudi transfer of power witnessed the Kingdom take an even more assertive and determined posture against Iran. King Salman also reaffirmed the late 2011 Saudi declaration that Bashar al-Assad must be removed from power in Syria. Saudi Arabia still supports anti-Assad groups in Syria, including the Islamist Jaysh al-Islam. It changed policy, however, over fears of "blowback" from returning fighters. King Salman has re-affirmed Riyadh's mid-2014 proscription of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaida's longtime Syrian affiliate. It also banned Saudi nationals from fighting abroad. Crackdowns on financing and charity collections have been effective, the control of firebrand preachers less so. Western diplomats increasingly complain of an "outdated stereotype" of Saudi tolerance for terrorism.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ian Black, "Saudi Arabia and ISIS: Riyadh Keen to Show It is Tackling Terror Threat," *The Guardian (UK)*, January 21, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/21/saudi-arabia-isis-riyadh-terror-threat>.

Over a half decade of turmoil and major leadership change, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have grown closer, but remain different in many foreign policy aims and objectives. Despite their remaining differences, both states now are firmly committed to see ISIL destroyed, Syrian President Assad depart, and Persian Shia influence in Syria and the Levant rolled-back from Syria for good. They should be expected to doggedly adhere to these aims until realized; persisting in the face of temporary setbacks or frustrations and sparing no expense to realize them.

## Strategic Objectives: Russia

Eugene Rumer  
Carnegie Endowment

The Middle East is the key global hotspot and Russia has to be involved with a seat at the table when the fate of the region is decided. It has to be counted as a full member of the global politburo. Standing up to the United States and constraining its ability to operate freely is enhancing the stature of Putin's Russia on the global stage as an equal of the United States.

Great power status is important for the Putin regime's domestic standing at a time when the domestic economy is suffering. Russia's rebirth as a great power on Putin's watch is a major legitimizing theme for the regime in Russian domestic politics.

## Strategic Objectives: Russia

Timothy Thomas  
Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth

On 30 September 2015 Russian air operations began in Syria. Earlier, a military equipment buildup had taken place, lasting over several weeks, at an airfield near Latakia and at the naval base at Tartus, the latter designed to serve Russia's air, naval, and ground (naval infantry) components.

Why did Russia take these preparatory steps and then intervene in this particular conflict at a time when Kremlin leaders were heavily focused on Eastern Ukraine and potential problems in the Baltic? The rationale appeared simple: first, and foremost, to support the Bashar Al-Assad regime, which had lost control of, according to some Russian accounts, up to 70 percent of Syrian territory to the Islamic State (IS) in September 2015.<sup>33</sup> Second, Russia noted with alarm that its southern belly was again exposed to the return of extremists who had fought on the side of IS against the Syrian government and were now bringing back to Russia both their ideology and lessons learned from fighting there. After quieting the near decade long struggle inside Russia in Chechnya, which is very near the region of conflict, Russia's leaders did not want a new threat recreated there or spread to

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<sup>33</sup> Yuriy Gavrillov, "Syria: Russian Thunder. The Commander of the Russian Federation's Troop Grouping in Syria Has Given His First Interview to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 24 March 2016.



other parts of the country. Both points appeared to have spearheaded the Kremlin's decision-making and influenced its resolve to intervene.

Upon further examination after several months of fighting, however, other reasons beyond this initial rationale began to appear. They can be summarized as geopolitical, national, and military:

*Geopolitical:* restore Russian influence in the Middle East as its main arbiter; provide support to its best friend in the region, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad; keep the United States from exerting too much influence over the region; place the US in a conundrum—does it overextend its influence in Syria at the expense of Afghanistan, Iraq, and a tired force?; deflect attention away from Russian activities in Crimea, Ukraine, and elsewhere on its periphery; conduct integrated operations with Iranian, Hezbollah, and Syrian forces; and exert pressure on the European Union.

*National:* use cooperation with the US in Syria as leverage to perhaps curtail sanctions and as a result energize Russia's failing domestic economy; divert attention from an increasingly unpopular conflict against brother Slavs in Ukraine; and reassure the population that the Kremlin is directing its attention toward the emerging threat to the south of the nation.

*Military:* test new weaponry and transport capabilities; demonstrate professional competency to the international community that was lacking in Georgia; learn to work with other nations/groups (Iran/Hezbollah, etc.) and establish new alliances; learn to identify the forms and methods that insurgents/terrorists use in combat; demonstrate the command and control capabilities of the new National Defense Control Center in Moscow and its ability to integrate combat assets; destroy the financial (oil facilities, etc.) means supporting IS's operations; and demonstrate new military deterrence means (with new weapons) as the military continues to implement reforms and reequip the force after years of neglect.

The emphasis in Syria is on military operations and not nonmilitary issues, which is of note since General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov stated in 2013 that nonmilitary activities were used over military ones by a 4:1 ratio in today's context. Instead, the testing of new weaponry and the heavy use of the military's Aerospace Force (space, air force, and air defense assets) was emphasized. The primary use of aerospace operations also confirmed Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu's assertion that they represent the center of gravity of modern conflicts. There appeared to be little cyber or propaganda input other than efforts to persuade Russia's domestic population of the validity of the military's deployment. There was some attention provided later in the campaign to humanitarian operations, but overall the 4:1 ratio seems to have been reversed.

The focus on testing new equipment was prioritized not only under Syria's battlefield conditions but also in exercises. Of interest was that nonstandard (atypical) decisions were emphasized, as there were no scripted solutions. Gerasimov added that as military art develops, defensive operations must be active, since the boundary between defense and the offense is becoming increasingly blurred. Commanders must be able to foresee how to incorporate preventive offensive operations in certain sectors.<sup>34</sup> Finally, with regard to

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<sup>34</sup> See for example, Aleksandr Tikhomnov, "In the Southwest Sector," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 16 September 2016; and Oleg Falichev, "The Long Arm of the Bastion: Why the Strategic Command Staff

missiles and mobility, it was noted that S-400, Kalibr, and Bastion systems were fired, and the Strelets reconnaissance and target attack system was exercised along with air, rail, river, and sea operations.<sup>35</sup>

[The forthcoming] article will only discuss the military aspect of the Russian intervention. It will analyze the thinking of the General Staff's Main Operations Directorate about actions on the ground and in the air; the equipment that Russia has used in the region from both Russian and Western sources; the forms and methods of fighting used by the Islamic State as detailed in Russian articles; and the thinking behind the partial pullout of forces in March 2016.

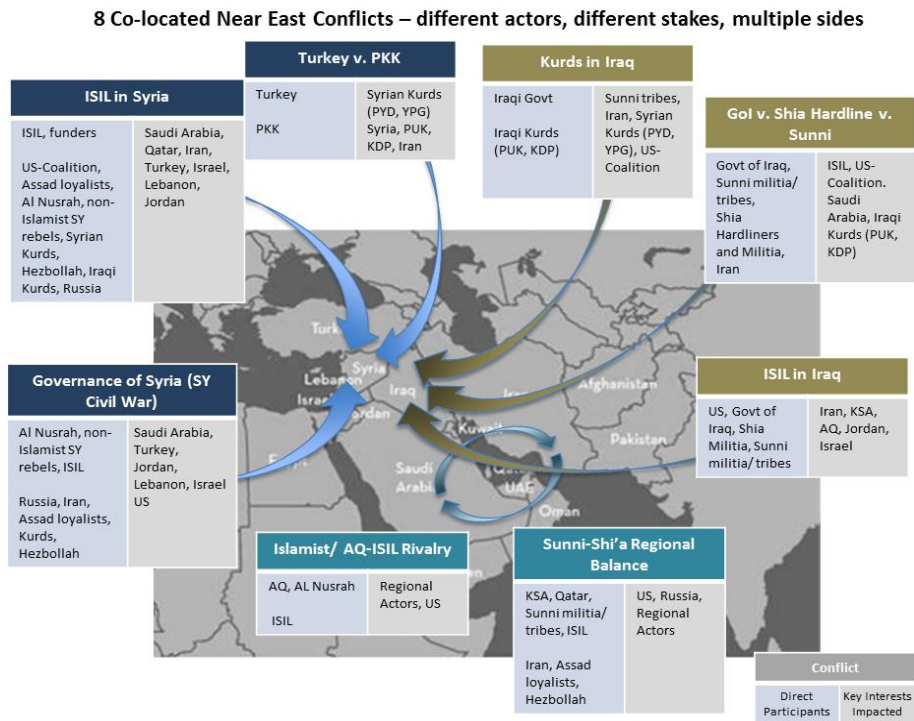
## Comments on Strategic Objectives of Regional Actors

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

NSI

To say that the situation in the Near East is complex and multi-faceted is an understatement of epic proportion. What we tend to think of as one or two conflicts in Syria and Iraq is in reality a complex web of at least eight discrete violent conflicts happening simultaneously in pretty much the same space. In addition to the efforts to defeat ISIL in Syria and Iraq – each

of which has a different roster of participants and different possible outcomes -- there is 1) the Civil War in Syria between the Assad regime backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, against a fragmented opposition including the Free Syrian Army groups backed by the US as well as Islamist groups; 2) Turkey versus the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) – a State Department designated foreign terrorist group



Exercise Kavkaz-2016 Elicited Heightened Activity of Foreign Intelligence Services,” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer Online*, 21-27 September 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

which has long pursued Kurdish self-rule by armed rebellion; 3) Iraqi Kurds versus the central government over self-rule and who controls the valuable oil fields in Kirkuk; 4) Sectarian fighting in Iraq between the Sunni minority and the Shi'a hardline and militias. Iraq's Shi'a Prime Minister al- Abadi is caught between his Shi'a support base and pressure from the intentional community to form a more inclusive government; 5) Competition for regional power between Shi'a Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia that has been played out via proxies in Iraq, Syria and Yemen; and 6) the violent rivalry between Al Qaeda and ISIL over ideological leadership of Islamic violent extremism.

Each of these conflict impacts US national security interests either directly or indirectly. If we fail to correctly understand the context within which counter-ISIL efforts occur we run a real risk of strategic surprise because we have not considered the full impact of our actions. There are a number of scenarios in which the defeat of ISIL, for example accomplished by further alienating the Sunni minority from domestic politics in Iraq, or by tipping the balance in the Iran-Saudi power balance would actually do more damage to US national security and our counter-terror efforts than not having done so.

### **The defeat of ISIL will not end the fighting in Syria**

There is no doubt that the US military, unfettered by domestic reticence and the need to show progress in two-year election cycles, could eliminate ISIL as a terror organization. Even the complete elimination of ISIL from Syria would not likely eliminate the security threat of terrorists establishing themselves and training in unstable or ungoverned areas. This is because defeating ISIL would have done very little to address the popular grievances and elite power plays that originally incited the civil conflict in Syria. There is nothing in the defeat of ISIL that would necessarily change Assad's, Putin's or Iran's interests in preserving the regime, or that would change the opposition groups' (and regional actors who might fund them) interest in taking it down. In short, even with the defeat of ISIL there is every indication that civil conflict would continue between regime supporters and the opposition. The conclusion that goes unstated both because it impacts the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and contradicts the President's previous statements is that there is a strong case to be made that keeping the Assad regime in power is more beneficial for US security than its demise.

What if both ISIL and Assad are defeated in Syria (the preferred end state per US policy)? Unfortunately, there is reason to believe that we would likely see continued instability and conflict in Syria and thus threat that originally brought the US and Coalition into Syria and Iraq, namely the ability of terror groups to establish safe havens and operating bases in ungoverned and unstable spaces, would not have been resolved. There is a real risk that we would be back where we started.

### **The defeat of ISIL will not end fighting in Iraq**

We can also expect violent conflict to continue in Iraq. Defeat of ISIL in Iraq would not necessarily address the Sunni Arab sense of embattlement and lost dignity that ISIL initially exploited so well in Iraq and the West for that matter. If Iraqi Sunnis feel that the defeat of ISIL was once again a Western attack on the Sunni in favor of the Shi'a, the actions taken by the Government of Iraq, Shi'a militia and international community to defeat ISIL could actually spur domestic conflict and undermine international efforts to build governing institutions and capacity in Iraq. Also, Shi'a militia (and Iran) would likely have played a significant role in the defeat of ISIL in Iraq and should be expected to resist leaving the territories in which they have been operating causing continued sectarian tensions and impeding reconstruction of Iraq's devastated infrastructure. Constructing a viable polity –

whether a unified state or autonomous areas – requires both time and some degree of cooperation among groups even if this is just tacit recognition of their differences. With the elimination of ISIL as a common enemy the serious political issues and long-standing rivalries surrounding the make-up of Iraq will be brought to the fore.

### **The defeat of ISIL could exacerbate regional Sunni-Shi'a regional balance**

Saudi Arabia has long perceived significant political, economic and security threats from Iran. The defeat of ISIL in Syria and Iraq could also have a negative impact on longer-term US security interests if Iranian and Saudi efforts to enhance their own regional influence and security are allowed to escalate. The instability and conflict in Syria and Iraq that we should expect to follow an ISIL defeat will hold these areas open to continued Saudi funded Sunni versus Iranian funded Shi'a proxy warfare adding yet another layer to the instability in Syria and Iraq that facilitated the growth of ISIL and like groups.

### **The defeat of ISIL strengthens the Al Qaeda brand**

One of the most under-discussed consequences of defeat of ISIL in Syria and Iraq is the boon this could represent for Al Qaeda. With proper handling of the narrative space (admittedly not an Al Qaeda core competency) the defeat of ISIL and its brutal approach could easily be framed as a failure and give a huge win to Al Qaeda's current campaign to rebrand itself as still relevant. As the major jihadi group left standing Al Qaeda would be in a good position to regain stature and legitimacy in its community. ISIL's defeat also would give Al Qaeda leadership and other groups the opportunity to adopt some of its successful innovations without granting tacit approval to ISIL. Barring a radical change in ideology neither of these outcomes would enhance US security.

Whether ISIL is defeated or not, the path to overcoming violent extremism in the region is a generations long one.

## **Comments on Strategic Objectives of Regional Actors**

Dr. Benedetta Berti

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Non-Resident Fellow, Modern War Institute at West Point

“... part of the limitations of ongoing (and likely future) efforts to tackle ISIS has precisely to do with the different objectives and strategic visions of the global and international players involved in 'the anti-ISIS coalition.' This is in addition to the different regional priorities of such actors, which determines also the urgency with which they are involved in the 'war against the Islamic State.

'For example, a country like Jordan's calculation is relatively simple with respect to ISIS: the country is interested in preventing additional infiltration of ISIS into Jordan, securing its border and, in the long, term it sees both regional stability and the defeat of ISIS as key strategic interests. Saudi Arabia's position, however, is substantially more complex: the country is balancing a set of (potentially competing) interests, including: fending off growing Iranian influence in the region--especially in Iraq, Yemen and Syria; supporting the

opposition forces and preventing Assad from consolidating power in 'useful Syria'; preventing internal dissent from growing; keeping the domestic influence of ISIS at bay and seeing the weakening of the Islamic State project. It is highly relevant that some of these objectives may clash (i.e., preventing Iran from strengthening its footprint in Iraq and fighting ISIS) at least in the short term; and the order of priorities--for the KSA--is likely to put fighting ISIS as a secondary objective, at least for the time being.

## Comments on Strategic Objectives of Regional Actors

Dr. Hilal Khashan  
Professor of Political Studies  
American University of Beirut

The main theater for the fight against ISIL is in Syria and Iraq. The strategic objectives and motivations of indigenous state and non-state partners in the counter-ISIL fight are simple and readily observable. Of course, their strategic objectives differ from the regional and international actors whose meddling renders the situation more or less nebulous. I do not see how one can extricate the indigenous partners from the regional and international actors.

In Syria, the regime aimed at deflecting the course of the uprising from one demanding freedom and dignity into one against radical Sunni movements. The trick worked superbly. The regime succeeded in militarizing the initially peaceful uprising; it focused its geographical presence in the vital parts of the country, better known as "beneficial Syria," as opposed to the parts of the country where the fight against ISIL takes place, i.e. "harmful Syria." Most of the ongoing fight against ISIL in "harmful Syria" involves pro-Turkish FSA rebels and U.S.-supported PYD. The regime in Damascus has secured its grip on the Syrian heartland and abandoned the peripheries. Despite diplomatic haggling between the U.S. and Russia on the ceasefire in Aleppo, both countries accept the need to keep the regime in place, which in essence legitimizes the regime's counter-revolution.

In Iraq the situation is clearer—despite the presence of several regional actors meddling in the country's affairs—because Iran is the preponderant regional power there. In fact, Iran's privileged status in Iraq runs parallel to American interests without ever clashing with them. There is unmistakable evidence to suggest that Iraqi Shiite motivation to fight against ISIL aims at spreading their physical control on the ground to Sunni areas in the name of fighting ISIL. This is already happening in Anbar, Diala, Salahuddin provinces and eventually in Nineveh. Whereas Iraqi Shiite animosity to the country's Sunnis runs deep in history, one must not dissociate their indigenous motivation to fight ISIL from Iran's ambitions to become a paramount regional power.

## Comments on Strategic Objectives of Regional Actors

Alex Vanatka  
Middle East Institute

The official Iranian line is that ISIS is an “existential threat” to Iran. I think there is plenty of hype here and the Iranian regime likes to show its fight against ISIS as a way of legitimizing itself at home and in the international community, but by and large I do not believe Iran has a desire to see ISIS become a permanent feature of the regional landscape (as was the case with the Taliban in the 1990s). There are people who believe Iran benefits from the rise of ISIS in the region, and while that might be true for Tehran’s short term aims, I do not believe that Iran as multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state can afford to have ISIS stay in the picture as a pseudo state for too long. It simply raises to many threat scenarios that this regime in Tehran is unable to tackle and they will want to move against it before it becomes a bigger test with more domestic implications for Tehran and no longer just a foreign policy issue.

## Author 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.



### **Dr. Tom Lynch**



Dr. Thomas F. Lynch III is a Distinguished Research Fellow for South Asia, the Near East and countering radical Islam in the Center for Strategic Research (CSR) at the Institute of National Strategic Studies (INSS) at the National Defense University (NDU) in Washington, D.C. He researches, writes, lectures and organizes workshops and conferences for Department of Defense customers on the topics of Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and the Subcontinent, the Gulf Arab States, and the past & future trajectory of radical Islam. Dr. Lynch joined NDU in July 2010 after a 28 year career in the active duty U.S. Army, serving in a variety of command and staff positions as an armor/cavalry officer and as a senior level politico-military analyst. Dr. Lynch was a Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff & Deputy Director of the Chairman's Advisory & Initiatives Group; Commander of the U.S. Army War Theater Support Group in Doha, Qatar; Director of the Advisory Group for the Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM); and Military Special Assistant to the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan. He spent 42 of 44 months from 2004-07 on assignment in the Middle East and South Asia supporting OPERATIONS ENDURING & IRAQI FREEDOM.

Dr. Lynch has published widely on the politics and security of South Asia, the Near East and radical Islam including articles in *Orbis*, *The American Interest*, and *Joint Forces Quarterly*; book chapters in publications by NDU Press, Oxford University Press and Johns Hopkins University Press; and feature monographs with the New America Foundation, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, and NDU Press. He is also regular multi-media analyst and commentator on national & international programs with FOX News television, Al Jazeera International television (Qatar), Alhurra television, Express-24/7 television (Pakistan), Chinese Central television (CCTV)-English, Voice of America radio & television, and FOX News radio.

Dr. Lynch is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and an adjunct professor in the Security Studies Program in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. He is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the International Studies Association and the Arms Control Association. A former CFR-International Affairs Fellow, Dr. Lynch also has been a fellow at the Brookings Institution, the Atlantic Council of the United States and the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. Dr. Lynch holds a B.S. from the United States Military Academy; and a Master's in Public Administration (MPA) along with a M.A., and Ph.D. in International Relations from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs at Princeton 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

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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.*"

#### **Dr. Hilal Khashan**

Hilal Khashan is a Professor of Political Science at the American University of Beirut (AUB). He received his PhD from the Florida State University in 1980, and BA from the University of Florida in 1977. His first academic appointment was at King Saud University between 1981-84. He has been teaching at AUB since 1985. He is the author of five books and 65 articles. His articles appeared in publications such as *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Orbis*, *Third World Quarterly*, *International Affairs*, *The British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* and *The Brown Journal of International Affairs*. He is currently completing a book on political leadership in Hizbullah. He is on the editorial board of *Shia Affairs Journal*. He reviewed manuscripts for *Security Dialogue*, *The Arab World geographer*, *The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research*, *Social Behavior and Personality*, *International Migration Journal*, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, and *International Studies perspectives*. He reviewed grant proposals for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Research Council of Norway, and reviewed promotion files for faculty at the University of Jordan and Yarmuk University. He also provided advice to the Immigration and Refugee Boards in Canada and Australia. He gives frequent interviews to international news outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Reuters*, *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, *Al-Jazeera*, and *Al-Hurra*.

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Justin Gengler is Research Program Manager at the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University, where he heads the SESRI Policy Unit. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science in 2011 from the University of Michigan. Gengler's research focuses on mass attitudes, political behavior, and group conflict in the Arab Gulf states. He is the author most recently of *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State* (Indiana University Press, 2015), and publishes regularly in both scholarly and policy fora on topics related to sectarian politics, Arab Gulf public opinion, and survey methodology in the Middle East context.



**Brig. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Brom**

Shlomo Brom is a visiting fellow with the National Security and International Policy team at the Center for American Progress. He is also a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv. He retired from the Israel Defense Forces, where he held the position of director of strategic planning in the general staff, in 1998. He was also the deputy national security advisor, 2000–2001. He participated in peace negotiations with Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians and in Middle East Arms Control and Regional Security talks during the 1990s. He published numerous papers on Middle Eastern national security and foreign policy issues.

**Dr. Benedetta Berti**

Originally from Italy, Benedetta Berti is currently a fellow at the Institute for National security studies (INSS), a Ted senior fellow, a Robert A. Fox senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), a non-resident fellow at the Modern War Institute at West Point, and a contributor to SADA (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.) In addition, Benedetta works as a human security and foreign policy consultant for political risk consulting firms, NGOs, international organizations as well as governments.

In the past decade, Benedetta has worked in NGOs and research institutes in Latin America, the Middle East, and the US, focusing on human rights, internal conflict, and political violence. Her areas of expertise include human security, internal conflict, integration of armed groups, post-conflict stabilization and peace-building, as well as violence prevention and reduction and crisis management and prevention. Her work has appeared, among others, on Al-Arabiya, the daily beast, the Christian Science Monitor, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, the National Interest, and Open Democracy as well as in academic journals including Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, the Middle East Journal, Orbis, Democratization, Civil Wars and Mediterranean politics. Recently, Dr. Berti authored *Armed Political Organizations: From Conflict to Integration* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013) and edited with Kristina Mikulova and Nicu Popescu of *Democratization in EU Foreign Policy: New Member States as Drivers of Democracy Promotion* (Routledge, 2015).

Benedetta is a frequent news commentator on international security, foreign policy, Middle Eastern politics and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Her comments and interviews have been featured in a number of prominent news outlets, including the New York Times, Time Magazine, the Wall Street Journal, the Christian Science Monitor, Bloomberg, Reuters and Al-Jazeera. She is also a frequent guest lecturer and public speaker. Her work and research have been awarded numerous awards, grants and fellowships, including the world politics and statecraft fellowship, the Horowitz Foundation grant, the Lady Davis Fellowship, the Bradley Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, the Morris Abrams award in international relations, the Rosenthal Fellowship and the International Center for Non-violent Conflict curriculum fellowship.

She is a young Atlanticist fellow, a Körber foundation's Munich young leader, a German Marshall fund of the United States young strategist, as well as a member of the Asian Forum on global governance and the UN alliance of civilizations "global experts." In 2015 the Italian government awarded her the order of the star of Italy (order of knighthood) and in 2016 she was appointed as a member of the "commission on the study of radicalization" established by the government of Italy. Benedetta holds a BA in oriental studies from the University of Bologna, an MA and PhD in international relations from the Fletcher School

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### **Timothy L. Thomas**

Timothy L. Thomas is an analyst at the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He retired from the U.S. Army as a Lieutenant Colonel in the summer of 1993. Mr. Thomas received a B.S. from West Point and an M.A. from the University of Southern California. He was a U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer who specialized in Soviet/Russian studies. His military assignments included serving as the Director of Soviet Studies at the United States Army Russian Institute (USARI) in Garmisch, Germany; as an inspector of Soviet tactical operations under CSCE; and as a Brigade S-2 and company commander in the 82nd Abn Division. Mr. Thomas has done extensive research and publishing in the areas of peacekeeping, information war, psychological operations, low intensity conflict, and political-military affairs. He served as the assistant editor of the journal *European Security* and as an adjunct professor at the U.S. Army's Eurasian Institute; is an adjunct lecturer at the USAF Special Operations School; and was a member of two Russian organizations, the Academy of International Information, and the Academy of Natural Sciences. Books published by Mr. Thomas regarding Russian military operations are (all are US Government publications and not available in bookstores): *Recasting the Red Star*, 2011, in digital form on our website; *Russian Military Strategy: Impacting 21<sup>st</sup> Century Reform and Geopolitics*, 2015, forthcoming.

### **Dr. Mark Hecker**

Marc Hecker is Director of Publications at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) and editor-in-chief of *Politique Etrangère*. He holds a PhD in political science from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and teaches a course on terrorism at Sciences Po. He published several books including *Intifada Française?* (Ellipses, 2012) and *War 2.0: Irregular Warfare in the Information Age* (Praeger, 2009 with Thomas Rid; translated in Chinese in 2011). His articles appeared in major journals (*Policy Review*, *Internationale Politik*, *Commentaire*, *Etudes*, etc.).

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Élie Tenenbaum is a Research Fellow at IFRI's Security Studies Center and coordinator of the Defense Research Unit (LRD). His research focuses on guerrilla and irregular warfare as well as on military interventions and expeditionary forces. He holds a PhD in History from Sciences Po and has been a visiting fellow at Columbia University (2013-2014). He has taught international security at Sciences Po and international contemporary history at the Université de Lorraine. He is the author of several articles in peer-reviewed journals (*Studies in Intelligence*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, etc.)



### **Jeff Weyers**

Jeff Weyers is a decorated police veteran from Ontario, Canada with an academic background in investigative psychology and intelligence studies. He currently lectures in the areas of Terrorism and Open Source Intelligence with Wilfrid Laurier University. He is a regular contributing author to the Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC). Jeff is also a Senior Intelligence Research Analyst with iBRABO, an intelligence research group based in Canada and the UK. With iBRABO Jeff was one of the lead analysts involved in producing daily SOCMINT/OSINT reports on Syria in support of the Access to Justice and

Community Security (AJACS) program in 2015. As a result Jeff has developed an intimate understanding of many of the groups and conflict dynamics still ongoing in the region. He is currently in the final year of his PhD studies with the Tactical Decision Making Research Unit at the University of Liverpool where he is examining extremist social media, monitoring and prevention. He is a recognized expert in terrorist's use of social media and open source intelligence gathering and has assisted governments and intelligence agencies around the world in this regard.



### **Eugene Rumer**

Eugene Rumer is a senior associate and the director of Carnegie's Russia and Eurasia Program. Rumer's research focuses on political, economic, and security trends in Russia and former Soviet states, as well as on U.S. policy toward that region. Prior to joining Carnegie, Rumer was the national intelligence officer for Russia and Eurasia at the U.S. National Intelligence Council from 2010 to 2014. Earlier, he held research appointments at the National Defense University, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and the RAND Corporation. He has also served on the National Security Council staff and at the State Department, taught at Georgetown University and the George Washington University, and published widely.

### **Hassan Hassan**

Hassan Hassan is a resident fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy focusing on Syria and Iraq. He is the author, with Michael Weiss, of *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, a New York Times bestseller, and was previously an associate fellow at Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Program in London and a research associate at the Delma Institute in Abu Dhabi. He is a columnist for the National in Abu Dhabi, where he previously worked as deputy opinion editor. Working in journalism and research since 2008, he focuses on Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf States, and he studies Sunni and Shia movements in the region. His writing has appeared in the Guardian, Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, and the New York Times, among others. He has also written for the European Council on Foreign Relations on the Gulf States. Mr. Hassan received an M.A. in international relations from the University of Nottingham.

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