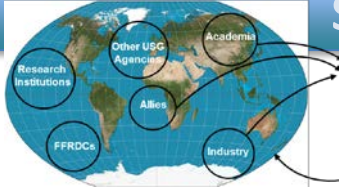


SMA Reach-back



Question (R3 QL4): *What are the critical elements of a continued Coalition presence, following the effective military defeat of Da’esh [in Iraq] that Iran may view as beneficial?*

Contributors: *Dr. Omar Al-Shahery (RAND); Ambassador Robert S. Ford (Middle East Institute); Sarhang Hamasaeeed (US Institute of Peace); Dr. Renad Mansour (Chatham House, UK); Dr. Diane Maye (Embry Riddle University); Alireza Nader (RAND); Christine van den Toorn (American University of Iraq, Sulaimani); Dr. Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute); Dr. Spencer Meredith (National Defense University); Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute); Dr. Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University, UK); Dr. Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies).*

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Dr. Omar Al-Shahery of Carnegie Mellon University offers a critical caveat in considering the question posed for this Quick Look. While Iran may see certain “advantages” of the presence of Coalition forces, Iran’s perspective is both relative to the nature of the context and thus transitory as “such benefits might not necessarily outweigh the disadvantages from the Iranian point of view.” If our starting point is that Iran is not happy to have US/ Coalition military forces in the region, then what we are looking for are those Coalition activities that might be seen as minimally acceptable, or “less unacceptable”.

The expert contributors were somewhat divided on whether they believed there were any Coalition elements or activities that they thought Iran might find beneficial. Some believe that there are Coalition activities, primarily related to defeating ISIS, that Iran would find beneficial. Others however do not believe that there is any US military presence in Iraq that would be seen by Iran as sufficiently beneficial to counter the threat that that presence represents. Dr. Anoush Ehteshami, an Iran expert from Durham University, UK, argues that both sides are correct; the difference is whether we are looking at what the majority of experts agree is Iran’s preference, or at Iran’s (present) reality. In other words, it is the ideal versus the real.

However, simply recognizing the ideal versus the real is not sufficient to address the question posed. When the question is essentially what determines the limits of Iran’s tolerance for Coalition activities in Iraq. Context matters. This is because Iran’s perception of political and security threat perception is not based solely on the actions of the West/US, but is the result of (at least) three additional contextual factors: 1) the immediacy of the threat from ISIS or Sunni extremism; 2) the intensity of regional conflict, particularly with Saudi Arabia, Iran’s closest major rival; and, 3) as discussed in SMA Reachback LR2 three-way domestic political maneuvering between Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Rouhani government. This should not be discounted as a key factor in Iran’s tolerance for Coalition presence in the region. The Context can push the

fulcrum point such that Coalition activities tolerable under one set of circumstances are not acceptable under others.

Iran's Concerns in Iraq

The contributors to SMA Reachback LR2¹ identified the following enduring strategic interests that should be expected to feature in almost any Iranian calculus in the near to mid-term. Relevant to this question these are: 1) expanding Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, and the region to defeat threats from a pro-US Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Israel and the US; and 2) eliminating the existential threat to Iran and the region's Shi'a from Sunni extremism.

The Ideal

In general, the experts suggest that from its perspective, Iran's ideal situation in Iraq would include the following: ISIS is defeated and Sunni extremism is otherwise under control. Iraq is stable and unified with political and security establishments within which Iran has significant, yet understated influence. The ISF are strong enough to maintain internal calm in Iraq, but too weak to pose a military threat to Iran. The strongest Shi'a militia elements are developing into a single Revolutionary Guard Corps type force that is stronger than the ISF. Finally, the major security threats from Israel and Saudi Arabia are minimal and there is no US military presence in Iraq and it is very limited in the rest of the region. This is the scenario that sets the Iranian reference point. All else is a deviation from this.

In Reality

Iran needs the Coalition for one thing: security. This is security sufficient to defeat ISIS and to stabilize Iraq without posing a threat to Iranian influence. Of course, ISIS, and Sunni extremism more generally has not yet been defeated in Iraq. Iraq is not secure and the Coalition forces have a different perspective on the requirements for a viable Iraqi state (e.g., an inclusive government, a single, unified and non-sectarian security force). The Saudis are irritated, the US remains present in the region, and who knows what Israel is apt to do. According to Iran scholar Dr. Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University, UK), Iranian leaders recognize that they lack the capacity now to defeat ISIS and bring sufficient stability to Iraq to allow for reconstruction. As a result, Iran appears willing to suffer Coalition presence in order to gain ISIS defeat and neutralize Sunni extremism in Iraq – arguably Iran's most immediate threat. As Dr. Daniel Serwer observes, "for Iran, the Coalition is a good thing so long as it keeps its focus on repressing Da'esh and preventing its resurgence." Once ISIS is repressed and resurgence checked, the immediate threat recedes (i.e., the context changes) and Iran's tolerance for Coalition presence and policies in Iraq will likely shift as other interests (e.g., regional influence) become more prominent. The critical question is where the fulcrum point rests, in other words, where is the tipping point at which Coalition presence in Iraq becomes intolerable enough to stimulate Iranian action.

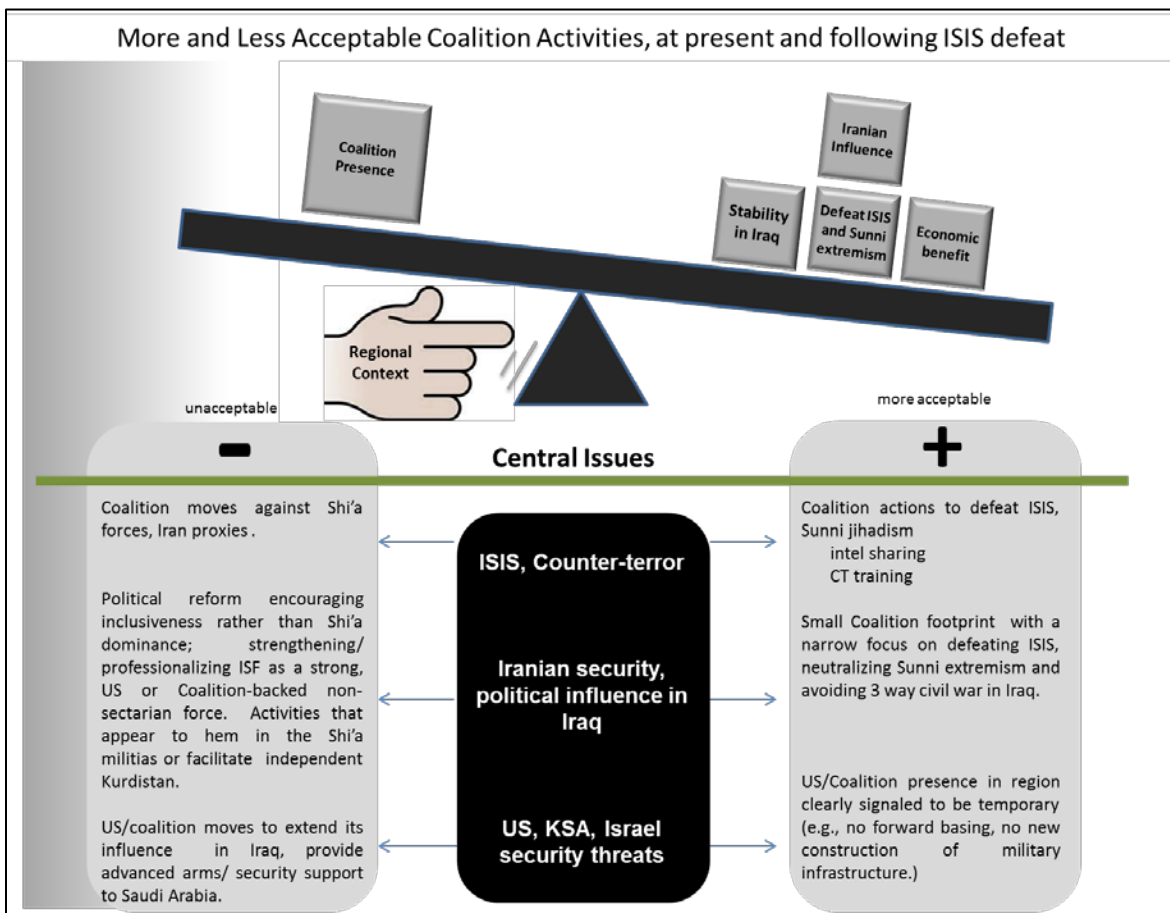
In a nutshell, Iran is most likely to find Coalition elements acceptable if they allow Iran to simultaneously 1) eliminate what it sees as an existential security threat from ISIS and Sunni extremism, and 2) expand its influence in Iraq and the region which is the pillar of its national security approach. Any Coalition element that fails on one of these is unlikely to be

¹ The LR2 question was: *What will be Iran's strategic calculus regarding Iraq and the region post-ISIS? How will JCPOA impact the calculus? What opportunities exist for the US/Coalition to shape the environment favorable to our interests?* The report is available from the SMA office.

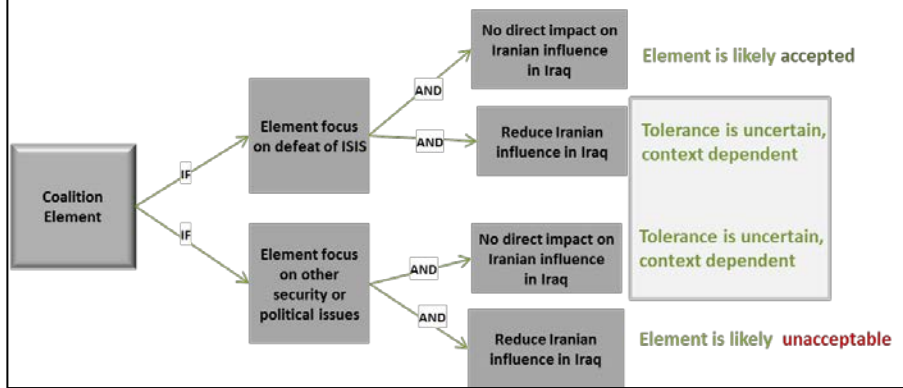
tolerated. Put another way, Coalition elements that defeat ISIS but derail Iran's influence in Iraq will not likely be seen as beneficial. Likewise, as multiple experts point out, Iran is aware that it cannot stabilize Iraq on its own regardless of how much influence it has there.

Summary

The two graphics below summarize the points made by the expert contributors to this Quick Look. The first lists three central Iranian concerns and Coalition activities that likely to be more acceptable to Iran versus those likely to be seen as unacceptable, and which under certain circumstances, might motivate Iran to act out against Coalition forces. The second image presents a process chart analysts and planners might use for a quick assessment of whether any given Coalition element might be seen as more or less acceptable to Iran, or whether context will be a particular factor in Iran's tolerance.



Grading Coalition Elements on Likely Acceptability to Iran



SME Input

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Ambassador Robert S. Ford, former US Ambassador to Iraq, Middle East Institute

“Iran will not view any Coalition military presence as desirable. Iran does not support a genuinely unified, independent and sturdy Iraq, and thus it won’t welcome long-term Coalition training of ISF. The Iranian effort to embed the Shia militias inside the ISF demonstrates this intent. Why would it want an independent competitor to the influence of those militias inside the ISF?”

Diffused Regional Hegemony

Spencer B. Meredith III, Ph.D., National Defense University

Iran has obvious historic interests and identities tied to Iraq as partner and influencer in the region. Any political structure that includes Coalition members shaping the character, goals, direction, and methods of Iraq, would obviously require commensurate, if not superior influence opportunities from Iran – *from Tehran’s perspective*. To do so would require several Coalition compromises, with other core concepts on which the Coalition should not yield regardless of Iranian pressures. Navigating that balance can incentivize Iranian participation, while setting boundaries on how far the Coalition is willing to go and by what means it gets there.

Paradigmatically for Coalition approaches lies Iran’s quest for regional hegemony, butting up against Turkish and Saudi pursuits, acknowledging that none has the capacity to remove the others from the balance of power. Instead, the Coalition can recognize a competitive triumvirate for the region, while seeing Egypt’s imminent and natural reemergence as another historic pole. This involves quid pro quo spheres of influence dealing, while also recognizing, on the part of the Coalition in particular, that said interactions will likely continue to provide opportunities for proxy conflicts. The goal becomes mitigating the chances of violence erupting outside of the local confines of each party’s sphere – for example, disaggregating Yemeni and Syrian conflicts from Coalition and Iranian, Saudi, and Turkish messaging (as a trial run for realigning the conflicts of the region.)

Equally important will be maintaining the development of responsive government in Iraq, recognizing the counter efforts by Iran on this particular point. Accordingly, operating from the perspective of an adaptive, changing balance of power and influence in the region can give more opportunities to keep the violence below the threshold of action for state to state conflict, and to counter external influence operations seeking to destabilize political reconciliation in Iraq.

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Omar Al-Shahery, Carnegie Mellon University

There are several political and operational advantages to Iran from the continuous presence of US forces in Iraq. However, it is important to note here that such benefits might not

necessarily outweigh the disadvantages from the Iranian point of view; keeping that admonition in mind, here are a few:

1. Continuation of protection of a political process and a government that is a close ally, if not the closest, to the Iranian regime.
2. Enforcing the perception that the US is fighting Iran's and the Shia's opponents, potentially further alienating traditional Arab allies, the main Iranian competitor in the region.

There are other benefits that are conditional on Iran's ability and the ability of its allies in Iraq to feed intelligence to the US troops in a way that could result in military action against the opponents of Iran's allied regimes, in this case the regimes in Iraq, and in Syria.

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Alex Vatanka, Middle East Institute

"... a big question, but I would have thought a continued US military presence in Iraq is the least alarming for the Iranians. It nicely compliments the capacities of an Iran-allied state (as long as Iran/US guns are not turned toward each other anytime soon.)"

Excerpts of NSI Team Telephone Conversation with Dr. Anoush Ehteshami, 12/12/2016²

Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI): Let's begin. Here is the first question: What are the critical elements of a continued Coalition presence following the effective military defeat of Daesh that Iran may see as beneficial? So, basically what can we do that Iran's not going to hate? We got a response from Ambassador Robert Ford, and he said this: "Iran will not view any Coalition presence as desirable. It does not support a generally unified, independent, and sturdy Iraq and thus won't welcome long-term Coalition training of Iraqi forces." But then we got this input from Alex Vatanka (a colleague of the Ambassador's) from the Middle East Institute, and he said: "Continued US military presence is the least alarming for the Iranians. It nicely complements the capacities of a new, Iran-allied state." So, I want to turn it over to you.

Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University, UK): I think actually, Allison, they're both right in some ways. It is true that Iran does not want to have the Coalition, let's say. It's led by the US really; they're the largest element in it, continuing to orchestrate the security of Iraq. At one level, Robert in a sense is right regarding that, but the

"Iran is in no position to guarantee anybody's security in Iraq, frankly. You saw recently that during Ashura, hundreds of Iranian pilgrims were killed in Karbala. If it can't guarantee the security of its own citizens travelling to Iraq while it has a military presence in the holy site, what chance does the Iraqi government have of Iranian reliance or guarantees for their security?"

² Full transcript available on request to the SMA office.

other side of the coin is equally correct and that is that Iran is in no position to guarantee anybody's security in Iraq, frankly. You saw recently that during Ashura, hundreds of Iranian pilgrims were killed in Karbala. If it can't guarantee the security of its own citizens travelling to Iraq while it has a military presence in the holy site, what chance does the Iraqi government have of Iranian reliance or guarantees for their security? That's one. The other part of it that's also important is Iran is now really aware of the negative blowback in the rest of the region for its presence in Iraq, in Syria, and in Lebanon with Hezbollah. The last thing I think they want right now is, with Daesh thrown out of Iraq, for Iran to be the new bogey occupying Iraq. That provides the Saudis and the rest of the Sunni Coalition a real grand card to mobilize the Sunnis in Iraq against Iran, to get Turkey on their side finally, and again, Iran does not want to play that bogey man post-Daesh in Iraq. The only way it can avoid that is to have the Coalition continue to underwrite national security over Iraq. Thirdly, the Kurds are also not too pleased with the Coalition staying on the one hand and also would be a bit nervous about Iran replacing the Coalition because they don't want to take any orders from Tehran. As you saw, even in the fighting for Mosul's liberation, they are loathe to be working closely with the Shia militias because they do not want to be associated with one group. Also, they're very sensitive about getting too close to the Iranian flame that will burn the whole Kurdish agenda, which of course has a strong presence in Iran itself. So, they would much rather have the Coalition's presence than post-Daesh destruction, [they] withdraw and hand Iraq over -- as the Sunnis see it -- on a golden platter to Tehran.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, basically, you're suggesting that there's a pragmatic element here to Iranian foreign policy, the way that it sees itself in the region. So, turning to domestic politics then, is that something that the Grand Ayatollah is manipulating? Is it coming from the Revolutionary Guards (RGC)? Who's pushing this within Iran?

Anoush Ehteshami: Both Iraq and Syria are not squarely in the hands of the National Security Council [of Iran], and while the executive has some say over it, it is largely the Leader [Khamenei], and therefore, the RGC who are facilitating policy in both Iraq and Syria, and because these are now not foreign policy; these are security policies in both Iraq and in Syria. So, whatever kind of contours that you see are ones which are being drawn by the Leader's office in consultation with the RGC and the National Security Council. That is the collective of all of the leadership, political and military and security and intelligence, anyway. But nevertheless, it's that security coalition which draws strategy for both Iraq and Syria. For the RGC, they simply are in no position to be involved against Daesh in Iraq, partly because they don't want to rile Daesh any more than they have to. The last thing that they want is to be seen as a frontline against Daesh in any shape or form because that would just crystalize this Sunni-Shia dimension to the level that Iran would then have to be seen as a defender of the Shia agenda because the Sunnis certainly will not rally around Tehran in any kind of anti-Daesh coalition. So, the RGC is fully aware that they can't really, for practical and ideological and pragmatic reasons, manage a post-Daesh Iraq by themselves, and they're not going to go away. The Shia militias, which have been mobilized, are going to stay mobilized, partly because they're an important element, a pillar of Iran's own influence in Iraq now. Iran ... is not that keen on the Iraqi government either and is much more committed to working with the Shia militias to maintain grass root presence and influence, dare I say control, of the vast areas of Iraq which are now Shia dominated. So, it wants to work below that radar level rather than at the grand state level, and so, maintaining a lower profile is always the RGC's preference in these situations. This also suits the Leader because it can always give him plausible deniability as well.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay, so, I have a question on this issue. I'd like to flip the question that we got from CENTCOM around and ask you what are the critical elements of a continued Coalition presence that Iran would see as most threatening? What shouldn't be done?

Anoush Ehteshami: In many ways, to extend the Coalition's presence in what Iran regards to be its spheres of influence in and around the holy sites, the triangle of Najaf, Karbala and Hillah and also in the south round the Basra area where, unfortunately, Iraq desperately needs a Coalition to stabilize the energy sitting down there that is going to fly in the face of Iranian influence in that part of Iraq. The southern regions are now dominated by Iranian businesses and security offices and so on. So, the Coalition would seem to have two roles that Iran would not find sufficiently threatening. One is the security of the central government, the green zone, that they can't do nor do they want to be seen doing; and secondly, to pacify the Sunni triangle, that they don't want to be doing. The rest of it [Iran] would like to be allowed to get on with it, make sure that the ... sides are protected. They would love the Coalition to stabilize Iraq all the way to the borders, if possible, of Syria but not force or push an agenda that would disarm the militias, for example. They would see that as a direct challenge to their authority in Iraq. So, it's a combination, if you'd like, of political issues and security issues. **So long as it's the Iraqi government that makes the requests of the Coalition, I think Iranians would be finding it very difficult to challenge it, in public at least;** it may do it in private with the Iraqis, but not in public. Beyond that, I can't see the Iraqi government also stepping too much out of line against Iran's interests because they recognize that Iran is going to make a lot of trouble for them in Iraq if they felt miffed by whatever Iraq does with the Coalition. ...

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Do you think... will the Iranian government listen to the Iraqi central government if they say, "Hey, move those guys into this or that area in Syria?"

Anoush Ehteshami: I think Iran will listen because for that, they will then get that corridor that they want, the corridor into Syria, which is vital for them. That has been facilitated, as you know, by the Iraqi government, that they keep that access going, which is important for them, and that Hezbollah kind of not be seen when it is in Iraq as well. That would be, I think, be something that Iran would like to see happen. So, you know, Hezbollah helping the Shias professionalize, if you'd like, if that's not a contradiction in terms, while mobilizing some of the others to finish off Daesh and the so-called opposition to the rest of Syria, that would suit the government, I think.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: This is the Iraqi government?

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah. ...

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay. So, we have an interesting question ... focus[ing] on the second part of that question which is: how do Sunni and Shia communities perceive the Coalition position on battling extremists. I think what they're getting at here is whether there is a narrative or a policy which can be pushed to enhance US/Coalition influence in the region?

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah, no I get it. I think you're right. I think the second half is real interesting, actually. Yeah, and it is the 'how do' bit which I found interesting as well, Allison. I agree with you. You know, when you look at things like public opinion surveys and young, student-level correspondence -- blogs, and tweets what have you -- it's interesting that there is considerable support for the Coalition's effort to contain extremism, to combat Daesh. I think it's now very clear that that exists. What is also clear, ironically, is that the Syrian effort is woefully inadequate and therefore opportunistic. I don't think the Sunni community

understands the constraints the US/Coalition has had to work [with] in Syria, and I don't think they even care to understand it because of our own propaganda about freedom, about human rights, about how bad Assad is and so on. They said all of that is posturing against what the Coalition has really done, right, and then they say well, they're only after their own interests, you know defending their own patch and sending in their own allies and are not really interested in the big picture of combatting, defeating, fighting extremism, and this narrative, it's the same narrative, Allison. It's both... "look at what the Coalition is doing, great", and "look what they're not doing. They're only doing it because it is in their own interest. If extremism serves their interest, they will even tolerate or even support extremism." So, it is really, really convoluted, and given that, these guys continue to thrive on conspiracy theories. They would not really believe anything that comes from the West and from a post-2016 US. They're going to have even less confidence in what comes out of the US. ... That's going to come into play, I'm afraid. Yeah, so that's going to affect their mentality of -- here I'm focusing on the Sunni communities in particular -- the Coalition's position on all of the Syrian problems, like Aleppo, like Raqqa, like Mosul and the rest of it. You know, in some ways, some of them actually see target bombing, drone bombing as cynical rather than as lowering collateral damage.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: How so?

Anoush Ehteshami: You see, that's cynical because they view it... as [the US] don't want to get their hands dirty. They don't want to be here fighting monsters. This is a cheap way of fighting their wars and then leaving when they're done. Ironically, Allison, they see this as lack of commitment rather than as an effort to save innocent lives.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: You know, there's truth in that.

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah, so, even the method of warfare, if you'd like, is now being questioned, you know. Amongst the Shia communities, it's ironically actually more straightforward. The politicized Shia want nothing to do with the Coalition because, to the vast majority of them, the Coalition is a creator of Daesh. It's the supporter of the Sunni majority and therefore cannot be trusted. They can have tactical maneuvers with them over a common enemy like Daesh, but beyond that, they actually have very little confidence in the Coalition doing anything which would be in their communal or, in the case of Iraq, for example, national interest. So, their bond is very different than the Sunni bond.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: If you remove the US from Coalition, are there any members of the Coalition that seem to be more acceptable, or is nobody going to believe that the Coalition isn't going to be directed by the US whether the US claims to be there or not?

"... [the people in the region] don't see even the thinnest paper between the French, the Dutch, the British, the German, the American, the Canadian, the Polish, whatever participants of a western alliance here."

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah, nobody buys it, and you know, our own Prime Minister May can be blue in the face saying that Britain is back east of Mosul, but you know, it's going to take a lot of convincing, and in any case, they don't see even the thinnest paper between the French, the Dutch, the British, the German, the American, the Canadian, the Polish, whatever participants of a western alliance here. In that, I think it's partly our own fault for not having been able to co-opt Turkey as a frontline NATO member, fully in our strategy. I think, frankly, in [the US] position ... I would focus on Turkey and where it's going, primarily as a Sunni actor in this

region. Forget its European-ness, forget its NATO membership, forget all of that, and look at it as a regional player here. I worry about how the Turkish government is beginning to reposition itself.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Hopefully people in NATO are as well. So, apropos to that, where do you think, in your view, the Turkish government is headed? What's driving them?

Anoush Ehteshami: In my view, I think they're becoming oriental. I think they are deoxidizing, if you'd like, and again, this is partly Europe's fault who has dragged membership along the grass like a carrot for possibly half a century, Allison, and they're rightly asking, "Well, you know, when are we going to eat the bloody carrot?" Given the relationship between NATO and Russia, it must be remembered Turkey sits right at the pinnacle of that relationship where it is. I think they have begun, perhaps unwisely, to review all of their strategic priorities in the region. Some of the lessons they're learning are, you know, how much can we rely on NATO to come to our defense, and really, how can NATO defend our interests in Syria when it is the Russians that are sitting there? Do we really need NATO in our dealings with Iran and the GCC countries? Not really. Thirdly, given that NATO cannot come to our defense, doesn't our future then lie eastward a bit, and so long as our western borders are secure as they are for the foreseeable future? I would argue, if they don't see a Cypress war flaring up or Israelis taking more Turkish ships in the eastern Mediterranean, then they can, if you'd like, afford to look at the Caspians, the Caucuses, to look at China's bridge and road initiative. The Turks clearly fit at the final segue of that into Europe. So, you know, in theory, they expect to gain from it, and say, "Well, alright. We'll passed on the European agenda, and we'll develop our Asian or oriental agenda." The problem with that is, of course, they'd been trading all of the stability of Europe for all of the instability of Asia and the orient, and I don't see them being equipped to deal with any of it, frankly. If they can't [deal with the instability], they'll become more erratic, they'll become more libertarian as they have done. In fact, you can plot on a graph the orientalization and the organization of the Turkish government as it moved away from Europe ... as it hooked up with the Middle East and Asia. So, I suspect that we'll see a bit more of that if this trend continues.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Do you think that the Turkish government believes that it has the bandwidth to pursue with its own interest in, or even take a leadership role in the orient whilst it's been a second class citizen in Europe?

Anoush Ehteshami: No, I don't think for a moment that they think they've got the resources. I mean, they can't even secure their own border with Syria or even Iraq for that matter as we speak. So, they're aware of their limitations, but what they are interested in is to explore non-western options, not non-western alternatives, I'm not using the word "alternative" here, but non-western options in which they find other ways of economic development beyond European Union membership, for example. You know, they're interested in much closer links with all the Persian Gulf states, and if they can only take this Kurdish thorn out of the side of Iraq, even with Iraq, but for now, that one remains a problem. Into the Caucuses, into Central Asia, as you know, they have talked about and looked at the "Look East" strategy and have flirted with China, the Chinese have shown interest in that from their side, and so, just moving some of their eggs from the Western basket and putting it in other baskets is in a way diminishing Turkish commitment to the West. That's all that I'm saying.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Well, and in some ways, it diminishes their risk if you think in terms of diversifying your own portfolio I guess.

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah, I agree. Yeah.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, there's one last question, and I know that we've gone over time. So, this one is huge, and it's: what major economic, political, strategic, and military activities do Saudi Arabia and Iran conduct in Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to gain influence? ... I wanted to ask you particularly about Iran and Iran's motivation and what the ultimate goals are.

Anoush Ehteshami: Okay, let's take all of them in turn; I'm happy to do it. Actually, let me do the Saudi one quickly and then move on to Iran. With the Saudi one, I think Bahrain is... in many ways, it's Hawaii. You know?

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay?

Anoush Ehteshami: So, alright. For me, that tells you everything you everything you need to know. It is... in many ways, Saudi Arabia is Midway. With Lebanon, the Saudis have fairly strong cultural links with the Sunni communities there and with the Sunni elite, which is extremely wealthy, more educated and very Saudi centric as well. So, the Saudis are key to making sure that that elite is not deprived of a political voice in Lebanon. But, the way they're going about it is to punish the Sunnis for being too weak in the face of the Shias, and they realize that that was a mistake, a bit late now because, of course, the presidency is now lost to them. They are trying to rebuild that Sunni constituency in Lebanon.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: How does it do that?

Anoush Ehteshami: It's a hot potato for both Iran and Saudi Arabia. So, I don't think they will be getting too heavily involved in Lebanon but rather try and engage with the Sunni elite as best they can. Syria is a huge geopolitical issue for Saudi Arabia because it is the only Sunni country dominated by a heretical minority, and it's the only Sunni majority country that Iran has massive influence in. These are, for me, enough reasons for the Saudis to be so focused on Syria, but recovery of the Sunnis in Syria... for them, it's a zero sum game. I think I'm correct in this calculation, because it will then deprive Iran of influence in Syria. I think both Iran and Saudi Arabia get this, and that is why Syria is this bloody theater for both of them. Saudi Arabia cannot afford to see Yemen lost to anybody that's disloyal to Saudi Arabia. Again, they're screwed up by this war that they unleashed. If they've learned any lessons from 2009's skirmishes with Houthis, that is that all of their gleaming weaponry are not sufficient to deal with an insurgency. I don't think they've learned the lessons from 2009, and that is why we are in the mess that we are, but I think the further they've gone into Yemen, the bigger the hole that they've dug for themselves. You know, somebody was saying from the UN that there is nothing that is left to bomb in Yemen. I think that he was right. I think that the Saudis have taken out whatever target was on their wish list, and this is not a war of attrition, and it's likely going to continue until the Saudis accept a compromise with the Houthis or, rather, until they persuade the government in exile to accept the national Coalition. For me, the Iranians have signed up to this actually, but nobody is taking any notice of them. I think the Iranians will be happy to see a government of national unity in which the Houthis can have a say, and Iran is going to walk away from that. You know, I don't think they'd be able to use the Houthis to destabilize Saudi Arabia's borders. But this is why Saudis are paranoid about this, and why Iranians and the RGC in particular have this dream of weakening Saudi Arabia's underbelly and what have you. In practice, I'm not sure if that has actually been effective or if it's sustainable in the long run. So, I think the Iranians will cut a deal over Yemen if they could find this formula. As you know, John Kerry is looking for this formula as we speak, and if the Coalition can land this, then good on them. That's one less dark spot for us to have to worry about. For Iran, alternatively, Bahrain is a perfect pinprick to annoy the Saudis with, but Iran has no control of Bahrain's Shias. That [narrative] is

something that the Bahrainis and the Saudis put out. Sure, there are links, sure Khomeini is a martyr for many Bahrainis, sure his photographs are everywhere, but you know, I think there is more of a religious cultural undertone to it than a political.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: And people are able to make that distinction?

Anoush Ehteshami: I think the Bahrainis don't. I know the Saudis do because it serves their agenda of Iranian interference in Bahrain. I think Iran has influence, don't get me wrong. I don't think it is actually pulling the strings in Bahrain, and the Bahraini Shia have been slowly deliberately distancing themselves from Tehran because they don't want to be seen as Bahrain's stooges. You know, these are well-established religious and ethnic communities, Allison, in Bahrain. They don't want to be brushed with this sectarianism, they're really don't, but I think it serves both Saudi interests to show this Shia coalition and Iran's interest to show its great influence in Bahrain to carry on this charade that we have in Bahrain. I myself don't see an end to this so long as al-Khalifa makes considerable change domestically So, this one is something that we have to play with, but of course, you know, Bahrain is important for the US for all sorts of reasons, including military, of course. So, what happens in this Saudi-Bahraini-Iranian relationship, I think, has a very direct impact on the US and will have a growing impact on us even given what Theresa May just said in Manama a couple of days ago. So, I think our presence there is in some ways debilitating because we have little options but to see the law of the land from the perspective of allies rather than objectively speaking. Given that, I think it limits what we can do. For Iran, Lebanon is vital, vital not just because of Hezbollah, but Hezbollah is the most important pawn that it has in the Arab world, but also because it continues to be the bit that Iran can play around with Israel, and it knows it. It knows that Israel's borders are susceptible, and it will not want to lose its foothold in Lebanon, and the most telling part of this was when Ahmadinejad in one of his goodbye trips actually went to the border where he looked into Israeli territory and saw it as something which is accessible to Iran and Iran's allies. This has brought us to them, and it's important strategically for them as well. You know, to talk of a forward mobilization strategy, Hezbollah and Lebanon are it for Iran. Iraq is a very convenient backyard now. I don't think going forward, maybe in 10 or 15 years, anybody's going to check Iran's influence in Iraq. It's up to the Iranians to decide how much they want to be in Iraq, to be honest. At the same time, Iraq now competes with Iran in the market, completely. But to them, that's a small price to pay because Iraqis are actually doing a lot more trade with Iran than at any time in the past. So, economically, it's important to them. Politically, it's important to them. In terms of military, Iranians have said many times that they would never allow Iraq to become a launch pad for aggression against them, and that means that they have to stay in Iraq to ensure that that doesn't happen, and they will do that. So, Iraq is... for want of better word, it's Iran's backyard now, and that really riles the Saudis.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Yes, because it's their backyard too.

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah, Iraq is so important geopolitically, and they feel that they've lost it. They've lost it through no fault of their own, and this really bugs them; this really bugs them. As I have said, with regards to Yemen, I think Yemen is much more of a tactical thing for Iran than strategic, and if it can cut a deal that would secure a Houthi voice and therefore an indirect Iranian voice in Yemen, it would be happy with it and let it be. I don't think this idea of encircling Saudi Arabia that has been posited runs, to be honest, because I don't think Iranians actually have much control of the theater in Yemen unlike Iraq, unlike Syria, unlike Lebanon.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Wow. So, I thought this was an enormous question, and you answered it in five minutes, so thank you so much for that. That's really helpful.

Anoush Ehteshami: My pleasure, Allison.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: One last question, and that's really about Iran's ultimate goal. So, I've heard, obviously, people say that Iran's grand strategy is to be seen as regional leader or defender of the the Muslim world. Do you have a sense of Iran's enduring strategic goal?

Anoush Ehteshami: I love you for this question, Allison, because I can plug my new book now. I have a new book that will be out January/February time called *Iran, Stuck in Transition*. I haven't wrapped up publishing yet, and it's available as an eBook, paperback also, and it's looking at everything, domestic, political economy, interrelations, security, and future prospects what have you, and my central argument in the international relations chapter of the book is that for all our perceptions of Iran marching towards this, if you'd like, the dawn of their hegemony for each of the areas that it has a presence, influence, and voice in, it's actually, at a strategic level, questionable and weak. Take Syria, for example. Iran was in support of the Assads from 1980 onwards, Allison. Right? The Iranian military has been in Syria since the 1990s because that's going to serve as a conduit for contact with Hezbollah and presence in Lebanon, and yet, when uprisings happen, half of Syria falls away, and it's only the Russians that can rescue Assad's crown, not Iran. Yet, over 1,000 Iranians have lost their lives fighting in Syria, and if you believe figures, upward of 10 billion dollars a year have been sunk into the Syrian war, money that Iran can ill afford. Where is hegemony in that? Let's assume that this pro-Assad coalition manages to recover all of Syria for Assad. How long did it take Vietnam to recover from their American withdrawal after the withdrawal of 1975, Allison? This is the Syria that Iran is going to inherit. Where is the strength in that? Let's take Iraq as another example. For all of Iran's influence, presence, cultural affinity, empathy, and so on, when the chips are down, where does Iraq go, the United States? So, you know, where is Iran's hegemony in Iraq when the Kurds tell it, "Don't tell us what to do, thank you very much. We'll mobilize your Kurds against you"? When the Iraqi government comes to Washington asking for support to train its troops and not the Iranian RGC, where is hegemony in that? Where is hegemony in Yemen when all you have are ethnic groups, which are really fighting their own domestic battles, Allison? You know, the Houthis are not fighting to liberate Yemen against Saudi Arabia. Their goals are far more parochial than we give Iran credit for in that regard. Where is hegemony in Yemen? Where is hegemony in Bahrain when the leaders of the Al-Wefaq party phone to Iran publicly and say, "Do not speak in our name"? Where is this Shia present when the majority of the population in Azerbaijan who are Shia have absolutely no empathy with the Iranian system of government there? Where is Iran's voice in Afghanistan when it's the Coalition and the Pakistani government and now with the Russians, thank you very much, trying to cut a deal to stabilize Afghanistan? Where is this giant neighbor influencing the geo-politics in Afghanistan? You know, I don't see it. The only place where they have a role is in Lebanon, and that is thanks to Hezbollah, but the more that Hezbollah is indigenized, the less influence Iran has...

"...Let's assume that this pro-Assad coalition manages to recover all of Syria for Assad. How long did it take Vietnam to recover from their American withdrawal after the withdrawal of 1975, Allison? This is the Syria that Iran is going to inherit. Where is the strength in that?"

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Alireza Nader, RAND

Ultimately, Iran does not want a U.S. presence in Iraq, but first ISIS has to be defeated and a modicum of stability introduced in Iraq. Nevertheless, Iran does not want any sort of American competition in its immediate neighborhood.

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Sarhang Hamasaheed, USIP

Iran would likely see intelligence and other support to Iraqi forces that fight Da'esh in its interest, but not presence of forces in Shia areas or other Coalition engagement that it would perceive as hostile to Iran and/or empowering the Sunnis at the cost of the Shia. They would likely also favorably view Coalition engagements that manage the Sunnis in ways that they would not incubate another terrorist organization or uprising against the Shia-led government. Any Coalition support that would lead to strengthening/arming of the PMF could also be viewed positively. Support to the Kurdish Peshmerga and Sunni Tribal/Popular Mobilization Forces that the US would use to leverage to prevent Kurdish Independence, and Sunni aspirations for forming a region could also be seen favorably by Iran. Coalition engagement that would prevent Turkey from intervening in Iraq militarily would also be a plus.

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Renad Mansour, Chatham House, UK

Iran will not want the Coalition to stay too long - as the less international actors there are, the better for Tehran. However, it knows that the Iraqi state is still unable at the moment to rebuild, stabilize, and control post-ISIS areas, and as such, will view U.S. support as beneficial.

Comments on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Diane Maye, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

After years of enduring the chaotic politicking of Saddam Hussein, many Iranian policymakers welcomed a more tractable Iraqi government, with political and economic outcomes benefiting Shi'ia groups that had been marginalized under the Ba'athists. Notably, policymakers and elites from Iran saw an opportunity to penetrate Iraqi decision-making. Iran quickly filled the void left by the U.S. military and policy makers, and Iranian officials quickly seized upon the opportunity to work with the longstanding Shi'ia militias by providing leadership and financial support. Iran also pushed a soft power strategy: non-oil industry trade as well as economic support to Shi'ia religious organizations and loyal politicians.

If U.S. forces quickly disengage from Iraq after the liberation of Mosul and the defeat of Daesh, Iranian policymakers are highly likely to capitalize on the opportunity to provide aid, assistance, and economic support. Yet, Iranian interference will aggravate Iraq's Sunni

population, who generally perceive Iranian actions as nefarious and misleading. To maintain stability after Daesh is defeated, U.S. policy makers and coalition forces should reject Iran's involvement in Iraqi affairs, promote strong, yet dispersed, self-governance, provide streamlined avenues for foreign direct investment, and actively work to secure Iraq's borders.

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

The Coalition needs to remain as a visible and active presence, so long as doing so does not create a serious backlash. There should be no "mission accomplished" moment. The Coalition needs to make it clear to all the forces involved in the Mosul campaign that maintaining the peace among them in the aftermath of victory is as important as the unity required during the offensive.

For Iran, the Coalition is a good thing so long as it keeps its focus on repressing Daesh and preventing its resurgence. But if the U.S. were to begin to engage with Iraqi Kurdistan and with Baghdad in a process that the Iranians think might lead to independence (a move under consideration in Washington), Tehran would move aggressively to do what it could to block the process and perhaps even initiate hostilities between Baghdad (or the Shia militias) and Kurdistan.

Baghdad will welcome the Coalition if it adds value by providing counter-terrorism training to the Army's forces and by continuing to try to forge a sense of common purpose among the different forces involved in the Mosul campaign.

Some believe that the U.S. in particular should play a mediating role in promoting Sunni/Shia reconciliation, either officially or through unofficial "Track 2" channels. This would require a special envoy or high-ranking embassy official to be charged with helping the Sunnis form a political platform and getting Tehran to allow the Iraqi government to engage in a U.S.-sponsored process. It would also require freezing the Kurdistan independence issue.

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Christine van den Toorn, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

Continuing to combat ISIL or ISIL in its new form I think would be viewed as beneficial – so for example intelligence gathering and targeted attacks in what will most likely be a new insurgency.

Comments on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Bilal Wahab, Washington Institute

In principle, Iran will not welcome foreign, especially American, military presence in Iraq. Exceptions would be if the Coalition presence were also instrumental in preserving the Shia-led government in Baghdad. Iran will also be amenable to a force that will pacify the Sunni provinces.

Iraqi Kurdistan would be the only region in Iraq where an American military base will be welcome by both the leadership and the public. If Iraq's current Prime Minister, Mr. Abadi, were to agree to U.S. military presence, for example, he would face political backlash incited by his predecessor, Mr. Maliki, who has been growing increasingly anti-American and pro-Iran. If the United States were to consider maintaining a Coalition military presence in Kurdistan, parties close to Iran in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) would be willing to turn their back to Iran in return for such a move that would be seen as security commitment. Shia parties in Iraq may not afford such a stance. A Coalition presence in the KRG, however, will not be a decision that the KRG can unilaterally make without some coordination with Baghdad. Hence, Iran will have a say regardless, unless the Coalition presence is of the magnitude and significance that encourages Iraqi factions to choose between it and Iran.

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.

Omar Al-Shahery

Experienced Consultant, Chief of Party, analyst and international leader, with a 20-year record of success, including more than 15 years of supervisory and leadership experience with multinational and national-level organizations including Aktis Strategy, RAND Corporation, Iraqi Ministry of Defense, and Coalition Provisional Authority, in providing liaison with a broad range of clients and stakeholders up to the Presidential and Prime Minister level in the Middle East, United States, and Africa on policy-level and nation-building level decisions relating to democratization, educational, and defense programs, military systems, future force structure and doctrine, and national military strategy.

Held the position of Chief of Party in North Africa during his tenure in Aktis Strategy. Former Analyst at the RAND Corporation. Prior to joining RAND, he served as the Deputy Director General of the Iraqi Defense Intelligence and Military Security. Graduated with an MC/MPA from Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Currently a PhD candidate in Engineering and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University.



Ambassador Robert S Ford

Robert S Ford is currently a Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington where he writes about developments in the Levant and North Africa. Mr. Ford in 2014 retired from the U.S. Foreign Service after serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Syria from 2011 to 2014. In this role Mr. Ford was the State Department lead on Syria, proposing and implementing policy and developing common strategies with European and Middle Eastern allies to try to resolve the Syria conflict. Prior to this, Mr. Ford was the Deputy U.S. Ambassador to Iraq from 2008 to 2010, and

also served from 2006 until 2008 as the U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, where he boosted bilateral education and rule of law cooperation. Ford served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bahrain from 2001 until 2004, and Political Counselor to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad from 2004 until 2006 during the tumultuous establishment of the new, permanent Iraqi government. In 2014 he received the Secretary's Service Award, the U.S. State Department's highest honor. He also received in April 2012 from the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston the annual Profile in Courage Award for his stout defense of human rights in Syria. He has appeared on CNN, PBS, Fox, MSNBC, NPR, the BBC and Arabic news networks as well as in the *New York Times* and *Foreign Policy*.

Education: B.A. in international studies, Johns Hopkins University; M.A. in Middle East studies and economics, Johns Hopkins SAIS; Advanced Arabic studies, American University of Cairo



Sarhang Hamasaeed

Sarhang Hamasaeed is a senior program officer for the Middle-East and North Africa Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). He joined USIP in February 2011 and works on program management, organizational development, and monitoring and evaluation. His areas of focus include political and policy analysis, conflict analysis, dialogue processes, reconciliation and post-conflict stabilization, and ethnic and religious minorities. He writes, gives media interviews to international media, and is featured on events and

briefings on Iraq, Syria, and the Middle East. He provided analysis to NPR, Voice of America, Al-Jazeera America, Fox News Al-Hurra TV, Radio Sawa, Kurdistan TV, Kurdsat TV, Rudaw, Al-Iraqiya TV, NRT TV, Skynews Arabia, the Washington Times, PBS, and CCTV. He is a member on the Task Force on the Future of Iraq, and was member of the Rebuilding Societies Working Group under the Middle East Strategy Taskforce, both initiatives by the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. He regularly gives a lecture at the Foreign Service Institute on ISIL and Challenges to Governance in Iraq.

Hamasaeed has more than 15 years of strategy, management, and monitoring and evaluation experience in governmental, nongovernmental, private sector, and media organizations. As a deputy director general at the Council of Ministers of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (2008-2009), Hamasaeed managed strategic government modernization initiatives through information technology with the goal of helping improve governance and service delivery. As a program manager for the Research Triangle Institute International (2003-2004), he managed civic engagement and local democratic governance programs in Iraq. Hamasaeed has worked as a planning and relations manager at Kurdistan Save the Children (1997-2002). Hamasaeed has also worked for the Los Angeles Times and other international media organizations. He holds a Master's degree in International Development Policy from Duke University (2007) and is a Fulbright alumnus.



Dr. Renad Mansour

Since 2008, Renad has held research and teaching positions focusing on issues of comparative politics and international relations in the Middle East. His research at Chatham House explores the situation of Iraq in transition and the dilemmas posed by state-building. Prior to joining Chatham House, Renad was an El-Erian fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Centre, where he examined Iraq, Iran and Kurdish affairs. Renad is also a research fellow at the Cambridge Security Initiative based at Cambridge University and from

2013, he held positions as lecturer of International Studies and supervisor at the faculty of politics, also at Cambridge University. Renad has been a senior research fellow at the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies in Beirut since 2011 and was adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government Civil Society Ministry between 2008 and 2010. He received his PhD from Pembroke College, Cambridge.



Dr. Diane L. Maye

Dr. Diane Maye is an Assistant Professor of Homeland Security and Global Conflict Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida and an affiliated faculty member at George Mason University's Center for Narrative and Conflict Resolution. She also served as a Visiting Professor of Political Science at John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. Diane earned a Ph.D. in Political Science from George Mason University; her dissertation focuses on Iraqi political alignments and alliances after the fall of the Ba'ath party. Diane has taught undergraduate level courses in International Relations, Comparative Politics, Homeland Security, American Foreign Policy, Terrorism and Counterterrorism Analysis, Beginner Arabic, and Political Islam. Her major research interests include: security issues in the Middle East and U.S. defense policy. Diane has published several scholarly works and has appeared in online and scholarly mediums including: *The Digest of Middle East Studies*, *The Journal of Terrorism Research*, *The National Interest*, *Radio Algeria*, *The Bridge*, *Business Insider*, *Small Wars Journal*, *Military One*, *In Homeland Security*, and the *New York Daily News*.

Prior to her work in academia, Diane served as an officer in the United States Air Force and worked in the defense industry. Upon leaving the Air Force, Diane worked for an Italian-U.S. defense company managing projects in foreign military sales, proposal development, and the execution of large international communications and physical security projects for military customers. During the Iraq war, she worked for Multi-National Force-Iraq in Baghdad, managing over 400 bilingual, bicultural advisors to the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Department of Defense. She has done freelance business consulting for European, South American, and Middle Eastern clients interested in security and defense procurement, and is currently the official representative of MD Helicopters in Iraq. Diane is a member of the Military Writers Guild, an associate editor for *The Bridge*, and a member of the Terrorism Research Analysis Consortium. She is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy and the Naval Postgraduate School.

Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III

Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Joint Special Operations Master of Arts program for the College of International Security Affairs at the National Defense University. After completing his doctorate in Government and Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia in 2003, he served as a Fulbright Scholar in the Caucasus in 2007 working on conflict resolution, and has focused on related issues in Eastern Ukraine for several years. He has also served as a subject matter expert for several DOS public diplomacy programs in South and East Asia dealing with the role of religion and democracy in US foreign policy.

His areas of expertise include democratization and conflict resolution in Russian, Eastern European and Middle Eastern politics. Most recently, he has been working with USASOC on several projects related to comprehensive deterrence, narratives and resistance typologies, and non-violent UW in the Gray Zone. His publications include research on democratic development and international nuclear safety agreements (*Nuclear Energy and International Cooperation: Closing the World's Most Dangerous Reactors*), as well as articles in scholarly journals ranging from *Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, to *Central European Political Science Review*. He has also published in professional journals related to UW, SOF more broadly, and the future operating environment, with articles in *InterAgency Journal*, *Special Warfare*, *Foreign Policy Journal*, and the peer-reviewed *Special*

Operations Journal. He is currently participating in SOCOM SMAs on Intellectual Motivators of Insurgency and a Russian ICONS simulation.



Alireza Nader

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

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

Dr. Daniel Serwer

Professor Daniel Serwer (Ph.D., Princeton) directs the Conflict Management Program at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He is also a Senior Fellow at its Center for Transatlantic Relations and affiliated as a Scholar with the Middle East Institute. His current interests focus on the civilian instruments needed to protect U.S. national security as well as transition and state-building in the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans. His *Righting the Balance: How You Can Help Protect America* was published in November 2013 by Potomac Books.

Formerly Vice President for centers of peacebuilding innovation at the United States Institute of Peace, he led teams there working on rule of law, religion, economics, media, technology, security sector governance and gender. He was also vice president for peace and stability operations at USIP, where he led its peacebuilding work in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and the Balkans and served as Executive Director of the Hamilton/Baker Iraq Study Group. Serwer has worked on preventing interethnic and sectarian conflict in Iraq and has facilitated dialogue between Serbs and Albanians in the Balkans.

As a minister-counselor at the U.S. Department of State, Serwer directed the European office of intelligence and research and served as U.S. special envoy and coordinator for the Bosnian Federation, mediating between Croats and Muslims and negotiating the first agreement reached at the Dayton peace talks. From 1990 to 1993, he was deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Rome, leading a major diplomatic mission through the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War. Serwer holds a Ph.D. and M.A. from Princeton University, an M.S. from the University of Chicago, and a B.A. from Haverford College. He speaks Italian, French and Portuguese, as well as beginning Arabic. Serwer blogs at www.peacefare.net and tweets @DanielSerwer.

Christine van den Toorn

Christine van den Toorn is the Director of IRIS. She has over 10 years of academic and professional experience in the Middle East, 6 of which have been spent in the Kurdistan

Region of Iraq (KRI). She has conducted fieldwork all over the KRI, with a particular focus on disputed territories in Ninewa, Diyala and Salahddin, and has published articles and reports in leading publications like Iraq Oil Report, Inside Iraqi Politics, Daily Beast and Niqash as well as delivered talks on her research. Ms. van den Toorn has also conducted baseline reports and social impact assessments for international oil companies operating in the KRI and disputed territories, working with teams of student researchers from AUIS. She served in the United States Peace Corps in Morocco and holds an MA in Middle East History from the University of Virginia, and taught the subject at AUIS for 4 years. Ms. van den Toorn speaks Arabic, which she studied at Middlebury College, Georgetown University, the University of Damascus in Syria and the French Institute for Near East Studies in Damascus.



Alex Vatanka

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

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

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

Dr. Bilal Wahab

Bilal Wahab is a Soref fellow at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on governance in the Iraqi Kurdish region and in Iraq as a whole. He has taught at the American University of Iraq in Sulaimani, where he established the Center for Development and Natural Resources, a research program on oil and development. He earned his Ph.D. from George Mason University; his M.A. from American University, where he was among the first Iraqis awarded a Fulbright scholarship; and his B.A. from Salahaddin University in Erbil. Along with numerous scholarly articles, he has written extensively in the Arabic and Kurdish media.



Dr. Anoush Ehteshami

Professor Anoush Ehteshami is the Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Chair in International Relations and Director of the HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Programme in International Relations, Regional Politics and Security. He is Joint Director of the RCUK-funded centre of excellence, the Durham-Edinburgh-Manchester Universities' Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW), whose research focus since 2012 has been on the 'Arab World in Transition'. He was the University's Dean of Internationalisation, 2009-2011 and was the founding Head of the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University (2004-9). He has been a Fellow of the World Economic Forum, and was elected in 2011 as a member of the WEF's foremost body, the Global Agenda Councils. He was Vice-President and Chair of Council of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) 2000-2003. He has collaborative links with many international organizations, including the German-based Bertelsmann Foundation, the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, and the Gulf Research Centre, and has acted as Advisor and consultant to the International Crisis Group, and has been Governing Board Member of the International Dialogues Foundation in The Hague.

In addition to having published 21 books and monographs, he also has over 90 articles in learned journals and edited volumes to his name. His current research revolves around five over-arching themes:

- The Asian balance of power in the post-Cold War era
- The 'Asianization' of the Middle East and the wider international system
- Foreign and security policies of Middle East states since the end of the Cold War
- The impact of globalization on the Middle East
- Good governance, democratization efforts, in the Middle East

Editor of three major book series on the Middle East and the wider Muslim world, and is member of Editorial Board of five international journals. He is a regular contributor to global news networks – print, online, radio and television.