

SMA CENTCOM Reach-back Reports



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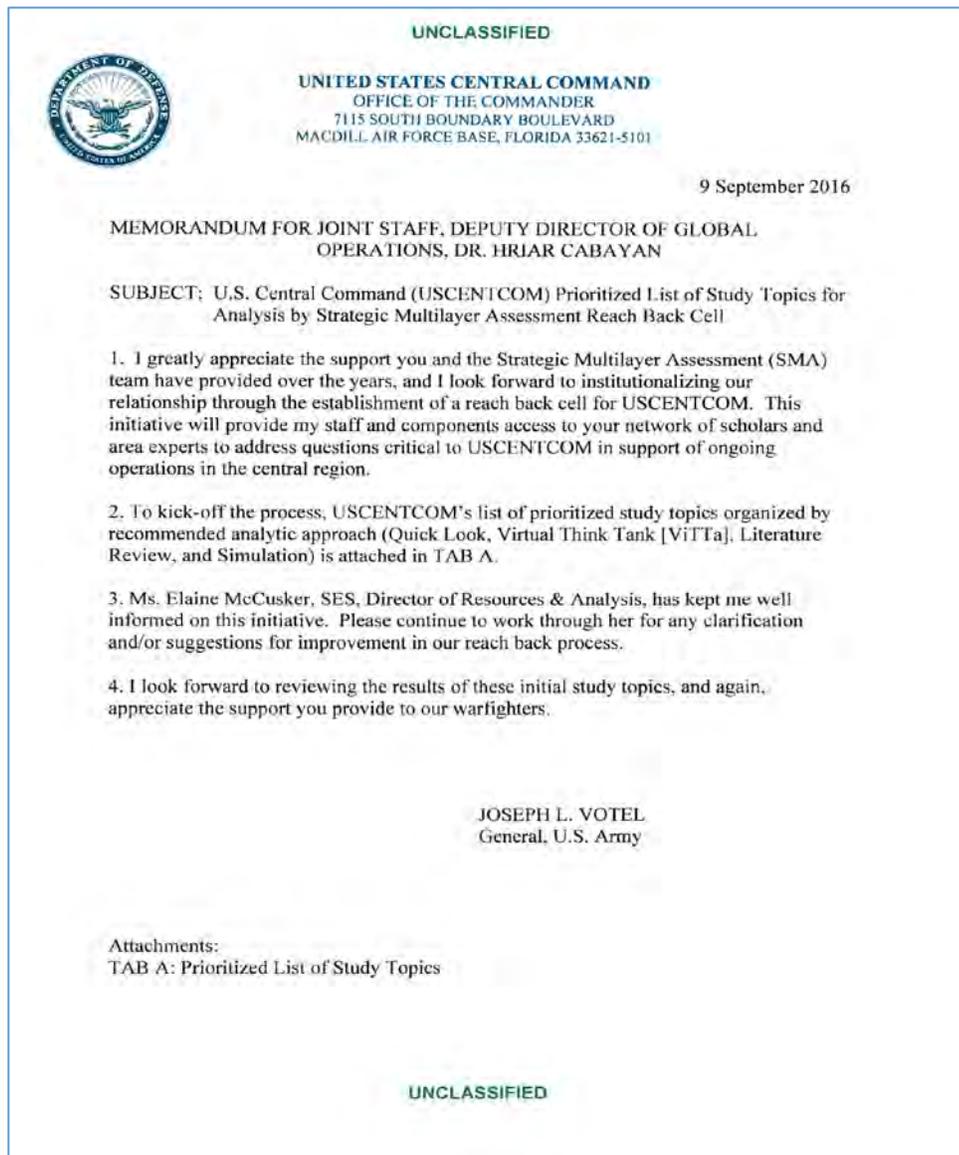
9: Coalition Views

This is Part 3 of a 9 part series of SMA Reach back responses to questions posed by USCENTCOM. Each report contains responses to multiple questions grouped by theme.

27 January 2017

At the request of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), the Joint Staff, Deputy Director for Global Operations (DDGO), jointly with other elements in the JS, Services, and U.S. Government (USG) Agencies, has established a SMA virtual reach-back cell. This initiative, based on the SMA global network of scholars and area experts, is providing USCENTCOM with population based and regional expertise in support of ongoing operations in the Iraq/Syria region.

The Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are NOT within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff (JS/J-3/DDGO) and executed by ASD(R&E)/EC&P/RRTO.



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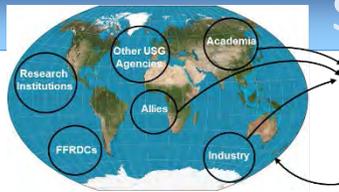
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SMA Reach-back

Question *What are the factors that could potentially cause behavior changes in Pakistan and how can the US and coalition countries influence those factors?*

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The experts who contributed to this Quick Look agree on an essential point: Pakistan's beliefs regarding the threat posed by India are so well-entrenched that they not only serve as the foundation for Pakistan's foreign policy and security behavior, but represent a substantial barrier to changing it behavior. Christine Fair a Pakistan scholar from Georgetown University is specific as to the target of any influence efforts – difficult as they may be: “the object of influence is not “Pakistan;” rather the Pakistan army” and so security behavior change if possible requires change in the Army's cost-benefit calculus.

The essential components of Pakistan's security beliefs are first that India is an existential threat to the state; and second that Pakistan is at a tremendous military and economic disadvantage to its stronger neighbor. Tom Lynch of the National Defense University adds a third: Pakistan's national self-identity as an “oppositional state, created to counter India.”¹ The nature of behavior change is relative and can occur in (at least) two directions: one aligning with the observer's interests (for the sake of brevity referred to here as “positive change”), and one in conflict with those interests (“negative change”). Encouraging positive change in Pakistani security behavior

¹ These generate what Christine Fair (Georgetown) sees as three enduring security goals: resisting Indian regional hegemony, developing “strategic depth” sufficient to deny India another base from which to threaten Pakistan; and gaining Indian-administered Kashmir.

was seen by each of the experts as an extremely difficult challenge, and one that would likely require dramatic change in Pakistan's current internal and external security conditions. The experts also generally agreed that negative change in Pakistani behavior is easily generated with no need for dramatic changes in circumstance.

Negative Change: Easy to Do

According to long-time Pakistan scholar and Atlantic Council Distinguished Fellow Shuja Nawaz, Pakistan's current state is to "to view its regional interests and strategies at a variance from the views of the US and its coalition partners." Moreover, Pakistan's willingness to cooperate with US/Western regional objectives can deteriorate rapidly if the Pakistani security establishment believes those states have dismissed as invalid, or take actions that exacerbate their concerns. Specifically, actions that reinforce the perceived threat from India (e.g., Indian military build-up, interest in Afghanistan) or Pakistan's inferior position relative to India (e.g., US strengthening military and economic ties with India; Indian economic growth) stimulate negative change. Importantly, because the starting point is already "negative" relative to US interests, these changes can take the form of incremental deterioration in relations, rather than obvious and dramatic shifts in behavior. Examples may include increased emphasis on components of Pakistan's existing nuclear weapons program, amplified use of proxy forces already in Afghanistan, or improved economic relations with Russia.

Levers Encouraging Positive Change: A difficult Challenge

While the experts agreed that Pakistan's deep-rooted, security-related anxieties inhibit changes in behavior toward greater alignment with coalition objectives, they clearly diverge on what, if anything might be done to encourage positive change. Two schools of thought emerged: what we might (cheekily) refer to as a *been there* perspective; and a longer-term, *cumulative influence* view.

"Been there" School of Thought

Tom Lynch (NDU) argues that the security perceptions of Pakistan's critical military-intelligence leaders have been robustly resistant to both pol-mil and economic incentives for change² as well as to more punitive measures (e.g., sanctions, embargos, international isolation) taken to influence Pakistan's security choices over the course of six decades. Neither approach fundamentally altered security perceptions. Worse yet, punitive efforts not only failed to elicit

² Lynch cites the promoting Pakistan as an ally in the War on Terror, delivery of preferential military equipment and operational arrangements, and global debt relief among other efforts.

positive change in Pakistan's security framework but ended up reducing US influence by motivating Pakistan to strengthen relations with China, North Korea and Iran. As a consequence of past failure of both carrot and stick approaches, both Lynch and Christine Fair (Georgetown) argue that motivating change in Pakistani security behavior requires "a coercive campaign" to up the costs to Pakistan of its proxy militant strategy (e.g., in Afghanistan by striking proxy group leaders; targeted cross-border operations)³. Moreover, Lynch feels that positive behavior change ultimately requires a new leadership. Raising the costs would set "the conditions for the rise of a fundamentally new national leadership in Pakistan" and be the first step in inducing positive behavior change. Lynch believes these costs can be raised while at the same time US engagement continues with Pakistan – in a transactional way with Pakistan's military-intelligence leadership and in a more open way through civilian engagement and connective projects with the people of Pakistan. However, Christine Fair points to US domestic challenges that mitigate against the success of even these efforts given what she argues is a lack of political will "in key parts of the US government which continue to nurse the fantasy that Pakistan may be more cooperative with the right mix of allurements."

Cumulative Influence School of Thought

Other contributors however believe are not ready to abandon the possibility of incentivizing positive change in Pakistan's foreign policy and security behavior. They argue that there are still actions that the US and coalition countries could take to reduce Pakistani security concerns and encourage positive change. Admittedly, the suggested measures are not as direct as those suggested by a *been there, done that* approach and assume a significantly broader time horizon:

- **Do not by-pass civilian authority.** Equalize the balance of US exchanges with Pakistani military and civilian leaders rather than depending largely on military-to-military contact. Governing authority and legitimacy remain divided in Pakistan, and while dealing directly with the military may be expedient, analysis shows that by-passing civilian leadership and continuing to treat the military as a political actor inhibits development of civilian governing legitimacy, strengthens the relative political weight of the military, and will in the longer term foster internal instability in Pakistan and stymie development of the civil security, political and economic institutions necessary for building a stronger, less threatened state.⁴ In this case the short-term quiet that the military can enforce, is off-set by increased instability down the road.
- **Reduce the threat.** A direct means of reducing the threat perceptions that drive Pakistani actions unfavorable to coalition interests is to actually alter the threat environment. One option suggested for doing this is to use US and ally influence in India to encourage that

³ See additional options as outlined in the material submitted by Dr.'s Fair and Lynch below.

⁴ See Astorino-Courtois, Allison, Belinda Bragg, Danette Brickman, George Popp, Alex Stephenson and Richard Williams. *PAKStaM: Drivers and Buffers of Instability in Pakistan*, Strategic Multi-Layer Analysis for USSOCCENT, 2013. Full report available from Allison Astorino-Courtois at aastorino@NSIteam.com, or the SMA office.

country to redirect some of the forces aimed at Pakistan. A second option is to develop a long-term Pakistan strategy (“not see it as a spin-off or subset of our Afghanistan or India strategies”) was seen as a way to signal the importance to the US of an enduring the US-Pakistan relationship.

- **Remember that allies got game.** Invite allies to use their own influence in Pakistan rather than taking the lead on pushing for change in Pakistan’s behavior. According to Shuja Nawaz, “...the Pakistanis listen on some issues more to the British and the Germans and Turks. The NATO office in Islamabad populated by the Turks has been one of the best-kept secrets in Pakistan!”

Enlist Pakistan’s diplomatic assistance. Finally, Raffaello Pantucci of the Royal United Services Institute (UK) suggests enlisting Pakistan to serve as an important conduit in the dispute that could most rapidly ignite region-wide warfare: that between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistan has sectarian-based ties with Saudi Arabia as well as significant commercial ties with Iran. Although as MAJ Shane Aguero points out increased Saudi-Iranian hostilities could put Pakistan in an awkward position, Pantucci believes that the US and allies could leverage these relations to open an additional line of communications between the rivals. Importantly, doing so would also important signal US recognition of Pakistan’s critical role in the region, which would enhance “Pakistani sense of prestige which may in turn produce benefits on broader US and allied concerns in the country.”

Contributors: *Shuja Nawaz (Atlantic Council South Asia Center), Hassan Abbas (National Defense University), Thomas Lynch (Institute of National Strategic Studies - National Defense University), MAJ Shane Aguero (US Army), Shalini Venturelli (American University), Raffaello Pantucci (Royal United Services Institute - UK), Christine Fair (Georgetown University)*

Editor: *Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

Factors that could Cause Behavior Changes in Pakistan

Shuja Nawaz

Distinguished Fellow, South Asia Center, Atlantic Council

Pakistan remains a society and polity in flux, with a dysfunctional government and sharp divisions between a weak and disorganized civilian administration and a powerful, disciplined, and well organized military, led primarily by the Pakistan army and its chief. In the short run, tensions will arise in the transition from the current army chief General Raheel Sharif to his successor, especially given reports of tensions between the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the military on the support for Jihadi groups operating against both Afghanistan and India. This uneasy relationship will likely persist into the spring and summer of 2017 once a new chief is appointed at the end of November and then takes his time to assert his position within the army in the first place and then relative to the civil administration.

“Pakistan continues to view its regional interests and strategies at a variance from the views of the United States and its coalition partners...”

between a weak and disorganized civilian administration and a powerful, disciplined, and well organized military, led primarily by the Pakistan army and its chief. In the short run, tensions will arise in the transition from the current army chief General Raheel Sharif to his successor, especially given reports of tensions between the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the military on the support for Jihadi groups operating against both Afghanistan and India. This uneasy relationship will likely persist

In the longer run, the impending elections of 2018 will occupy the minds of the political parties, and increasing pressure from India and Afghanistan on Pakistan will continue to heighten the paranoia of the Pakistani authorities about Indian designs to isolate Pakistan and encircle it. There are also persistent fears that the United States is decidedly tilting towards India as a potential economic and military partner in the region. Recall that Pakistani historian Ayesha Jalal once used the term “Paranoidistan” to describe this country.⁵ Both civil and military leadership circles often operate on the basis of unverified information about Indian designs and US intentions. Pakistan fears that a growing Indian economy and military presence in the region will be used to coerce a smaller Pakistan into submission. The National Intelligence Council’s 2030 Scenario pointed to an ascendant Indian economy: “India will most likely continue to consolidate its power advantage

“The United States has failed to develop a steady relationship with Pakistan despite its potential leverage of direct economic and military assistance ...”

⁵ Shuja Nawaz “Feeding Pakistan’s Paranoia”, *The New York Times*, May 9, 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/04/12/when-pakistan-says-no-to-the-cia/feeding-pakistans-paranoia> and Ayesha Jalal “Global Profiling of Pakistan: Problems and Prospect”, <http://www.induspk.org/107-the-nation/231-the-nation-article-2>

relative to Pakistan. India's economy is already nearly eight times as large as Pakistan's; by 2030 that ratio could easily be more than 16-to-1," according to the NIC report.⁶ Despite its efforts to rely on support from China, Pakistan fears a diminution of its status in the region and will continue to use proxies against neighbors in the first instance while continuing to develop short-range nuclear weapons and nuclear delivery mechanisms to stave off any military or insurgent operations against it from India or its allies.

The United States has failed to develop a steady relationship with Pakistan despite its potential leverage of direct economic and military assistance, including a large quantum of training for the best and brightest military officers from Pakistan, and assistance from US-dominated International Financial Institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank. Pakistan continues to view its regional interests and strategies at a variance from the views of the United States and its coalition partners, while ostensibly working with the coalition forces in return for coalition support funding (or its successor arrangement).

The critical factors that will affect Pakistan's view of India and the United States in the next few years are:

- The below par state of the economy in Pakistan. Increased pressures from the return of migrant workers from the Middle East, and demographic pressures internally, leading to a sharp increase in the youth bulge and a rapid urbanization will add to Pakistan's difficulties at achieving stability at home.
- Lack of institution building and formal decision making systems in managing the economy. For example, the government was unprepared for the roughly \$7-4 billion "savings" windfall per annum that resulted from the drop in the price of imported energy in 2015 and beyond and frittered it away on inconsequential projects and pork barrel politics. A senior minister, who is a member of the prime minister's inner circle, told me the savings had "gone down the hole."
- Both Pakistan and the United States will have to do more with less in the next decade or so.
- A persistent dynastic and corrupt political system under which the major political parties are led by autocrats or run as family businesses. Opposing them, increasingly through extra-legal and subterranean operations are a growing number of extremist militant groups that use Islam as a rallying cry against the State and neighbors, including India and Afghanistan.

⁶ "India to become superpower by 2030: US Intelligence", News18.com
<http://www.news18.com/news/india/india-to-become-economic-superpower-by-2030-us-intelligence-526055.html>

- A powerful military establishment that has created and continues to foster a “culture of entitlement” for its senior ranks and actively protects its turf even against the constitutionally superior civilian government.
- The Pakistan military remains organizationally stuck in a post-World War II mind set, with bloated administrative systems, relying on outmoded budgetary and management systems. It could achieve much-needed economies in its operations autonomously and with greater oversight and inquiry from the elected representatives in parliament. There is very little active oversight and accountability of military finances and management systems by the civilian rulers of Pakistan.
- The Pakistani military, particularly the army and air force, have been transformed in recent years into a force that is focused on fighting militancy and insurgency. Younger officers routinely are sent from the military academy to the border region. They are all battle inoculated and tend to view unfavorably the corruption of their civilian masters as well as the wealth acquired by senior military officers through acquisition of real estate through the proliferation of the defence housing schemes that provide windfall profits with relatively small investments.
- The multiple ethnic and sectarian wars within Pakistan will persist for some time to come and drain the ability of the state and the military to de-militarize and de-radicalize Pakistani society. Political parties are beholden to jihadi groups with whom they have electoral alliances. Others use militant wings of their parties to amass wealth through kidnappings, extortion, and coercion.
- Persistent suspicions, particularly in the senior leadership of the army, that the United States aims to defang Pakistan’s nuclear capacity and will countenance or even support Indian moves against Pakistan as a regional surrogate for the United States in that regard.
- Lack of a center of gravity in decision making inside Pakistan, with the civil and the military more often than not at loggerheads, and the United States largely depending on its mil-to-mil contacts to affect decisions inside Pakistan.

What can the United States do?

The United States can work on multiple fronts to build Pakistani confidence in this relationship, while shifting the onus on to the Pakistanis to craft mechanisms for implementing, benchmarking, and reviewing projects and cooperative operations in both the civil and military sectors. Creating Pakistani ownership of these operations is critical to instilling confidence and fostering trust. This approach also makes it easier for the United States to turn off the aid spigot if Pakistan fails to meet its own self-imposed targets without the US being seen as arbitrary or antagonistic.

Pakistan needs to understand and verify that the United States does not wish to take away its nuclear capabilities but wishes to help safeguard its assets. Moreover, The United States must work to help Pakistan understand that it will not assist any foreign attempt to undermine Pakistan’s sovereignty and independence. Finally, the United States must make it clear that it will bolster Pakistan’s defence but not support offensive capabilities.

A number of approaches could be explored by the United States:

- Use US influence directly and through the IFIs to transform Pakistan’s management of the economy, especially its longer-term strategies to deal with growing demographic pressures and changing economic situations in the Middle East. A more efficient system of employing economic aid, monitoring and reviewing its use at the provincial level, and setting of attainable targets by the Pakistanis themselves would engender great confidence among donors and potential donors. This will require transforming the Economic Affairs Division into a more professional and active body inside the Government of Pakistan. Pakistan tends to over promise and under deliver on economic aid. It needs to become more realistic in its planning and the US could help it draft achievable plans and projects. The US could follow the Chinese model of insisting on a strong US presence at the federal and provincial level to monitor progress of implementation. But this needs to be done in a quieter and low-key manner so the US is not seen as hegemonic.
- Help Pakistan achieve a bigger bang for its military dollars. This could be done by providing Pakistan advice and assistance in adopting a practicable taxonomy for defence planning and management, revamping the budget system so it is driven by results rather than wish lists of the military. Helping Pakistan understand the need for longer-term defence planning and budgeting along the lines of the quadrennial review in the United States may be a start. The US could provide expertise in the theoretical construct of such reviews and budgetary mechanisms without requiring Pakistan to share details of its expenditures with the United States. Use of NATO partners, especially the British in this process would make it less US-dominated and more palatable to the Pakistani military. If we can help the Pakistan military remove the fat inside its own system, it might help them understand that our intentions are good and they can do much more with what they have rather than constantly demanding more resources from their government and the United States.
- The United States could help improve Pakistan’s defences while exercising greater influence over its offensive capabilities in the neighborhood. Pakistan has a relatively immobile land army. Provision of three helicopter fleets (50 helos each) with troop-lifting capacity for the long eastern border and another fleet of 50 helos for use in monitoring the western border and attacking insurgents in the difficult terrain of the western marches would enhance Pakistan’s defences. Prohibitions on the movement of the western fleet to the eastern border could be imposed if the supply of helicopters were under a lease agreement rather than outright purchase.
- Reducing Pakistan’s huge fear of India’s growing military might is a more difficult task. If Indian could be persuaded to shift one of its three strike corps facing Pakistan to the Chinese border, the signaling effect on Pakistan would be enormous. So long as a third of the Indian military budget continues to be spent on troops arrayed toward Pakistan, it is hard to convince the Pakistanis that India does not wish to coerce Pakistan into submission.⁷

“We should eschew the short-term fix and over-reliance on the military channel to solve problems as they arise. This undermines the civilians in Pakistan.”

⁷ Bharat Karnad “Rethinking Indian Policies towards Pakistan” Security Wise, a blog by Bharat Karnad. May 2, 2012. <https://bharatkarnad.com/2012/05/02/rethinking-indian-policies-towards-pakistan-2/>, and

- The White House and Department of State need to work with the Pakistani government and the US Congress with the Pakistani parliament to help make government more open, inclusive, and pluralistic in running the country. In other words, make Pakistan truly the federation that its constitution has defined. A greater review and public scrutiny by parliament of economic and military matters would assist the growing media inside Pakistan play a more useful role in informing the public about key issues and answers. Engaging with and educating civil society and media in this direction would act as a multiplier for the US efforts to assist Pakistan.
- The United States needs to have a clearer and longer-term Pakistan Strategy and not see it as a spin-off or subset of our Afghanistan or India strategies. Once the Pakistanis understand this to be the case, they will feel more respected and comfortable in taking us at our word. While it may be tempting to follow a “feel good” policy of isolating or containing Pakistan, those approaches confuse our friends within the country and weaken their position while achieving little by way of influence in what still remains a critically important country in a tough neighborhood. History has taught us that crises will continue to erupt in the arc of instability that extends from Turkey to Indonesia. Who knows when we may need to have Pakistan on our side again?
- We should eschew the short-term fix and over-reliance on the military channel to solve problems as they arise. This undermines the civilians in Pakistan. Bypassing the Minister of Defence and even the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for example, in favor of the Chief of Army Staff only makes the latter stronger than his titular bosses.
- Ask the Pakistanis to help identify for us ways we can work with them to improve nuclear safety and prevention of leakage of nuclear materials and weapons into the hands of unsavory groups and work with them to further strengthen safeguards. This approach is better than offering unsolicited advice.
- Use the Chinese approach of closed-door pressure tactics rather than public harangues to convey demands for change of behavior or explanation for missed targets or broken promises. We have provided more aid without strings and more grant aid to Pakistan than China, yet the Chinese are perceived in the Pakistan government and the public as being a better friend of Pakistan than the United States. One reason is that they lower the boom quietly and privately, while we resort to public criticism that provokes perverse behavior from our counterparts inside Pakistan.
- The United States need not always be the lead agency for change in Pakistan. Use of key NATO allies, especially the British, the Germans, and the Turks could help us achieve our goals. This bank-shot approach might sometimes be preferred, since the Pakistanis listen on some issues more to the British and the Germans and Turks. The NATO office in Islamabad populated by the Turks has been one of the best-kept secrets in Pakistan! A growing number of senior military officers in today’s Pakistan army have been trained in Germany and Britain. The Australians also could help Pakistan think through the institutional changes needed to assess the structure to support the work of the newly minted National Security Committee. (I provided the new National Security advisor with a journal article that listed the steps the Australians took to reframe their national assessment networks.)

Bharat Karnad “Rethinking Pakistan,” *Asian Age*, March 31, 2011.
<http://archive.asianage.com/columnists/rethinking-pakistan-898>.

Many of these ideas have been offered before in different fora, including the published works by me for the Atlantic Council over 2008-2014 and in my book *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its army, and the wars within* (Oxford 2008) that I am now updating. Some of the budgetary ideas were also shared with General James Mattis in his project on the future of CENTCOM shortly before he left his post as commander CENTCOM.

Determinants of the Foreign Policy Behaviors of Pakistan

Thomas F. Lynch III

NDU, Institute of National Strategic Studies (INSS), Center for Strategic Research (CSR)

Pakistan's foreign policy and security behaviors are the function of three major factors. In late 2016, these factors remain firmly embedded in the narrative framework agreed to [be] safeguarded by Pakistan's security and defense leadership – principally its military and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Agency, which answers to the military. Absent foundational changes in these three factors, there will be no change in Pakistani behavior. The U.S. and its Coalition partners in Afghanistan cannot directly change these factors. However, they can deny Pakistan and its proxies dominant influence in Afghanistan while at the same time reducing the risks of escalating proxy war in Afghanistan between Pakistan and India.

“Reconsidering a Pakistani security framework firmly rooted in the need for proxy jihad would require a radical reformulation of the intellectual basis for Pakistan itself. This will require fundamentally new national leadership – leadership of a character not now present in Pakistan.”

Three major factors drive Pakistan foreign policy and security behaviors. First, Pakistan's security leadership views India as an enduring and existential threat. This belief is dogmatic, and resistant to countervailing evidence. It impels Pakistan to an anti-status quo foreign policy and a security approach that “blames India first” and seeks to agitate and provoke India into intemperate responses. Second, Pakistan security elites believe themselves to be at an enormous asymmetric military disadvantage with India, one that they must offset with a robust nuclear weapons arsenal and with use of militant proxy forces. They empower and encourage militant proxy groups imbued with the spirit of jihad, leveraging these proxy groups to keep India off balance with targeted insurgency operations in nearby locations like the disputed area of Jammu-Kashmir and the country of Afghanistan. They also inspire and resource these jihadist groups to acts of terror inside India and in locations where Indian interests appear to be advancing, especially Afghanistan. A

strategy of “jihad beneath a nuclear umbrella” – or no peace, no war - allows Pakistan persistently to challenge the status quo while staying short of another dangerous, direct military clash with India. Third, Pakistan’s militant strategy is necessitated by its state-building logic – which is cherished and perpetuated by Pakistan’s military and intelligence elites, but shared across the civilian political spectrum. By definition, Pakistan is an oppositional state, created to counter India. As long as it remains so defined, it will cling to a proxy militant strategy in pursuit of its core national purpose.⁸

U.S. and other western governments have attempted a full range of policy options in failed efforts to alter Pakistan’s security framework. Pakistan has been welcomed as a U.S. ally in the Global War on Terror and afforded preferential military equipment, training and operational arrangements in an effort to alter its security choices. The Pakistani framework did not change. Pakistan has been given preferential international loans, global debt relief and an enormous amount of direct economic aid, including a U.S. government \$1.5 billion per year for 5 years deal known as the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill in an effort to encourage a change to Pakistan’s security narrative. Pakistan’s framework has not changed. The U.S. and its western partners have also sanctioned, embargoed and isolated Pakistan from the international community in reaction to its covert nuclear arms programs. When sanctioned, Pakistan turned to the support and comfort of states like China, North Korea and Iran – states that do not challenge Pakistan’s security framework at all. Its framework did not change; and, its leverage of jihadist proxies expanded and its nuclear weapons arsenal grew. Reconsidering a Pakistani security framework firmly rooted in the need for proxy jihad would require a radical reformulation of the intellectual basis for Pakistan itself. This will require fundamentally new national leadership – leadership of a character not now present in Pakistan.

Given these three dominant security factors and their complex interaction, Pakistan must be expected to pursue proxy-led jihad (with the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqanis, Gulbiddin Hekmatyar’s group and others) in Afghanistan against what it views to be U.S. and Coalition

⁸ The themes in this paragraph are advanced in various forms and fashions in the following scholarly works: Thomas F. Lynch III, “War and Pakistan: Ongoing Conflict, Imminent Risks and the “One Big Thing,” in Thomas Mahnkhen, ed. *Learning From History* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2017- *Forthcoming*); Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army and the Wars Within* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008); Aparna Pande, *Explaining Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: Escaping India* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), Stephen P. Cohen, *Shooting for a Century* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2013); T.V. Paul, *The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); S. Paul Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy: Islamist Militancy, National Security and the Pakistan State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Tayyibah* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2011).

abetted Indian interests in there. U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan can frustrate Pakistan proxy aims to wrest control of Afghanistan from its leadership in Kabul. Our forces can continue to strike at proxy militant leadership in Afghanistan and in targeted cross-border operations. Each of these activities, over time, will raise the cost to Pakistan's proxy militant strategy in Afghanistan; and, may eventually assist in the rise of new leadership voices in Pakistan questioning the strategy's worth.

Simultaneously, U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan can work to build the stamina and resilience of Afghan national forces against proxy militant operations. It also can demonstrate that Afghan leadership will be durable and persistent without the requirement for direct Indian security assistance. This too can slowly erode the Pakistani security narrative of nefarious Indian influence in Afghanistan. Finally, the U.S. and its Coalition partners can maintain frank – and even blunt – open dialogue with Pakistan military and civilian leaders about the unfortunate and inevitably unsuccessful pursuit of its aims through a proxy war strategy in Afghanistan or across wider South Asia. Coupled with limited but important U.S. and western-states civilian engagement and connective projects with the people of Pakistan, a persistent and capable U.S. and Coalition partnership in Afghanistan can set the conditions for the rise of a fundamentally new national leadership in Pakistan. Only then can the factors that undergird Pakistan's six-decade-old proxy militant strategy be redressed.⁹

Comments on Behavior Change in Pakistan

Raffaello Pantucci

Director of International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)

It is very difficult to influence Pakistani behaviour, but considering the massive influx of Chinese investment of late and the degree to which Islamabad has expressed a view that CPEC offers all the answers to Pakistan's problems, it is clear that Chinese investment is a point of influence on the country. Were Beijing to abruptly change tack, this could change Pakistani behaviour. Having said this, it is highly unlikely that China would change position abruptly, but it is clear that Chinese

⁹ These paragraph themes are developed more fully in Thomas F. Lynch III, *The 80 Percent Solution: The Strategic Defeat of bin Laden's al-Qaeda and Implications for South Asian Security*, National Security Studies Program Policy Paper, *New America Foundation*, February 2012; Thomas F. Lynch III, "After ISIS: Fully Reappraising U.S. Policy in Afghanistan," *The Washington Quarterly*, 38:2, 119-144 (July 2015); and, Thomas F. Lynch III, "South Asia and Evolving Major U.S. Security Interests," in Richard D. Hooker, Jr. ed., *Strategic Assessment 2017* (Washington, D.C.: NDU Press, January 2017-Forthcoming).

influence does have leverage over Pakistan. The US and allies are already engaging with Beijing in Afghanistan (and to some degree in Pakistan), focusing these efforts to an even greater degree could start to help shift more entrenched Pakistani views (though this requires Beijing's continued

"Hugging Beijing closer within this particular context may be a way longer term to influence Pakistani behaviour."

support and willingness to see its problems as coincidental to US and allies ones, something that may become complicated by the broader US-China relationship). Hugging Beijing closer within this particular context may be a way longer term to influence Pakistani behaviour.

Use Pakistani connections in the Middle East (on both sides of the Sunni-Shia divide) to give the country a greater sense of importance as well as provide a different conduit into difficult relationships. Iran and Saudi Arabia have complicated and deep relationships with Pakistan, and maintain regular engagements. Playing up this role for Islamabad and suggesting Islamabad offers a useful conduit to better understand and engage with both sides in the Saudi-Iran clash will not only offer a new way to engage with this complicated clash (between Iran and Saudi), but also offer a way of enhancing Pakistani sense of prestige which may in turn produce benefits on broader US and allied concerns within the country.

Comments on Behavior Changes in Pakistan

Hassan Abbas

National Defense University

Pakistani military and intelligence staunchly believes in the conspiracy theory that the US plan to target Pakistan's nuclear arsenal at some stage. Despite strong US-Pakistan cooperation in the realm of nuclear security measures, the concern lingers on. It is less intense than before (based on my interactions with leading Pakistani military and intelligence officers). Any event/statement/action that will in any way strengthen their view will change Pakistan's behavior for the worse. Secondly, Pakistan is increasingly leaning towards China in regards to regional politics for quite a while but its power centers are more aligned with the US primarily due to the military aid component. Pakistanis love US made military hardware and they often express that Chinese equipment is no match to that of the US. Any negative slide in the US-Pakistan military to military relationship can make Pakistan more insecure. Pakistani perception about increased Indian role in Afghanistan is yet another critical issue but in that case Pakistan has played all its cards (by continuing to equip and arm Afghan Taliban/Haqqani group). The rise of Northern Alliance players in Kabul in 2002 for Pakistan was the red line and they never reviewed their Pro-Afghan Taliban stance since then.

Potential Internal and External Factors of Pakistani Behavioral Change

MAJ Shane Aguero

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There are several factors that have the possibility of causing behavioral change within Pakistan. I have broken them down into four internal (military coup, economic collapse, new national leadership, and a massively effective terrorist attack) and four external factors (increased Saudi/Iranian hostilities, Indian aggression, Russian rapprochement and Chinese benefaction). In the short term, none of these are likely, although the probability of an external factor occurring increases over time. Several of these have limited lead time before occurring (military coup, massively effective terrorist attack, Indian aggression), and four of them have little chance of the US navigating a path towards increased influence (massively effective terrorist attack, Indian aggression, Russian rapprochement and Chinese benefaction).

“If PM Sharif were to be replaced by a PPP candidate, relations with the US would cool significantly, as the party has often opted to increase relations with China, Russia and Iran ... by a PTI candidate ...relations with the US would most likely become hostile ...”

Internal factors

Internal factors that have the potential to cause behavior change within Pakistan include military coup, economic collapse, new national leadership, and a massively effective terrorist attack. A military coup is a low probability, high impact event due to the low threat to the military posed by PM Nawaz Sharif, and the politically low key Chief of Army Staff Raheel Sharif. If this were to occur, it would most likely be orchestrated by the ISI and have the tacit approval of COAS Sharif since he would be the one to be placed into national leadership. If this were to occur there would be little warning, and would most likely cause little long term instability in the country, since the military is still seen as being the most effective and least corrupt organization in the country. The most negative effect for the United States would be the short-term interruption of US support and aid similar due to the situation in Egypt in 2013. Due to the long term interaction of the US and Pakistani militaries, there would be little difficulty in resuming working relationships between the two countries on issues of mutual benefit.

Economic collapse of Pakistan without a concomitant regional disaster, military conflict with India or China (regarding the Gilgit-Baltistan, Jammu and Kashmir) or a widespread economic downturn is highly unlikely, and the economic devastation would be foreseen well ahead of time by regional

economic actors. If this were to occur, the US is well positioned to assist in providing humanitarian and economic relief on a large scale. Depending on the length of time aid is required, and how such aid is delivered (preferably through the Pakistani military with acknowledged US involvement, but minimal US visibility) an event such as this with a large US relief package could assist in strengthening relations with both the government and the populace over the long term.

A political regime change (as opposed to a military coup) is a moderate probability, especially with the renewed allegations of corruption brought on by the release of the Panama Papers. Although there is a call for PM Sharif to resign by his opponents, there is little support for this in the populace since the other two political parties are also widely seen as being corrupt. If PM Sharif were to leave office, but replaced by someone in his party (PML-N), there would be little change with regard to the US relations with Pakistan.

If PM Sharif were to be replaced by a PPP candidate, relations with the US would cool significantly, as the party has often opted to increase relations with China, Russia and Iran instead of the West. This would be difficult to counteract post-election unless the US made a concerted effort to support the PPP aligned PM whenever appropriate, although due to many of the policies the PPP supports, this would be difficult. Economic assistance would be the only easily accepted tool, and that would be only grudgingly accepted and fail to provide long term influence.

If PM Sharif were to be replaced by a PTI candidate, most likely Imran Khan, relations with the US would most likely become hostile as many of the PTI policies would bring it in conflict with US policies. If that occurs, the US would be best served by approaching the new PM as a blank slate as they have no national leadership experience. By placing all aspects of US-Pakistan relations on the table, it would allow the US to build a new relationship with Pakistan minus many of the previous missteps and some of the mistrust. The most effective influence the US could achieve with a blank state approach to a PTI PM would be continued relations with the Pakistani military, increased economic trade and a willing partner in the CT fight throughout Central Asia. The US should be wary of PTI aggression over Kashmir and/or a military coup in the event of a PTI victory.

A massively effective terrorist attack has a distinct possibility of causing a behavior change within Pakistan. This terrorist attack would not be effective due to the number of casualties, but rather the target of the attack. If Pakistani terrorists were able to cause a significant number of foreign casualties similar to the Islamabad Marriott Hotel bombing in 2008, it would cause a significant domestic uproar as more foreign investments leave and tourism declines even further, weakening the economy. Alternately, an effective terrorist attack against a foreign target may possibly goad the victimized state to attempt a retributive military action, in an attack similar to the 2008 Mumbai attacks. However, another distinct possibility is that an effective terrorist attack occurs against a nuclear facility, which would cause the country to go into immediate lockdown and possibly cause India or other concerned states to attempt intervention. This response would lead to armed conflict between Pakistan, the terrorist groups and the foreign intervention forces. The

long term US response to an incident such as this could be to push for nuclear disarmament, increased global CT efforts, and increased regional cooperation, all of which are unlikely.

External factors

The external factors that have the potential to cause behavior change within Pakistan are an increase in Saudi/Iranian hostilities, Indian aggression, Russian rapprochement and Chinese benefaction. An increase in Saudi/Iranian hostilities would place Pakistan in a difficult position, as Pakistan is a very close ally with Saudi Arabia, and a very close economic partner with Iran and is seen in positive light by a majority of Pakistanis. If the Saudi/Iranian hostilities were to increase to the point where Pakistan was forced to choose between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it would most likely choose Saudi Arabia, although the level of that support would be highly variable and be weighed against the long term issue of being sandwiched between a hostile Iran, the existential threat of India, an unstable Afghanistan, a vast “occupied area” in Jammu, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, and a relatively unfriendly China beyond that. In the case where Pakistan must become a belligerent in the Saudi/Iranian conflict, the US should expect Pakistani support for Saudi Arabia. Pakistan would be far more willing to support Saudi Arabia as part of a broad international effort as opposed to working bi-laterally against Iranian interests.

Indian aggression against Pakistan, either as a response, or as pre-emptive Cold Start offensive, would be devastating for Pakistan. The Pakistani response would most likely include massive terrorist actions across India, nuclear weapons and a very long low level insurgent conflict regardless of the military outcome. The US can best use its’ influence to prevent this conflict from occurring, but if that fails, the potential for interminable conflict throughout the region leaves no positive options for US policy other than diplomatic channels and humanitarian assistance during the conflict and economic aid post-conflict.

Russian rapprochement with Pakistan is a new phenomenon due to the relatively close ties of Pakistan with the West and the support of the anti-Russian mujahedeen in the 1980’s. The freedom that having positive relations with Russia provides Pakistan cannot be overstated, however. Having Russia as a patron to counteract India, China and the US allows Pakistan to more fully engage in regional issues from an independent position as opposed to having to follow a more stringent foreign policy dictated by having only one patron. The convergence of Pakistan and Russia on issues closely parallels that of Pakistan and China, although without the territorial issues that China and Pakistan have. This has led to an increase in military equipment purchases from Russia and joint exercises, increasing Pakistani military capability further. This is seen as a direct counter to increased India-US ties and warmer India-China relations. The US influence in the Pakistani military will wane over the long term if this trend continues.

Chinese benefaction would cause a significant Pakistani behavior change as China is already Pakistan's leading trading partner. If China determined that it was in China's best interest to support Pakistan's territorial claims, the regional stability would shift overnight as Pakistan would have finally achieved a lasting victory over India, which could embolden Pakistan or goad India into overt military action. China is careful to maintain the balance of power in Central Asia, but if China (and Russia) decide to punish India for their closer ties to the West, Pakistan would be a very valuable ally or cat's paw.

The US would be hard pressed to respond in an effective manner to a Chinese benefaction and/or Russian rapprochement in a timely manner, although there would be sufficient lead time before any significant actions were able to be made. The most effective US strategy would be to attempt to limit Russian and Chinese influence in Pakistan on issues the US requires Pakistani support for, such as nuclear security, CT and CN. The good news is that these are issues where the US finds itself in agreement with all the concerned parties including China, Russia and Iran.

In conclusion, behavior changes in Pakistan could either be internal (military coup, economic collapse, new national leadership, and a massively effective terrorist attack) or external (increase in Saudi/Iranian hostilities, Indian aggression, Russian rapprochement and Chinese benefaction), and with limited US capacity to influence prior to the event. Of these four (military coup, economic collapse, new national leadership, increase in Saudi/Iranian hostilities) offer the US the opportunity for increased influence in Pakistan, and the other four (massively effective terrorist attack, Indian aggression, Russian rapprochement and Chinese benefaction) have a generally negative effect on US influence.

Pakistan's Asymmetric Advantage in Strategic Information & Influence Control is Progressing to New Thresholds

Dr. Shalini Venturelli

American University

In parallel investigations I am currently conducting on four conflict and instability zones covering the regions of MENA, South & Southwest Asia, Russia-Eastern Europe and the China-East Asia, I identified a set of underlying patterns in key drivers of low-to-high intensity conflict inflation that involve differential capability of strategic actors to potentiate multiple signaling pathways in order to modify, influence and control the perceptions and behaviors of adversaries, media organizations and population groups.

- The research demonstrates that the Pakistani state is a far more capable strategic actor in critical areas of asymmetric information warfare and in disinformation and influence control than is its much larger regional adversary, India.

- The Pakistan military is the epicenter of this capability which, directly and through its client networks of jihadi militias, civilian sanctuaries and indigenous media channels continues to excel in shaping the domestic perception environment within the country. Crucially, however PAKMIL is increasingly proficient in projecting asymmetric control of the perceptual and behavioral response environment across the border in India, including among India's diverse population groups and Indian civilian and military decision-makers. The mere threat of escalation by PAKMIL and its client networks has thus far restrained Indian decision-makers fearful of Indian public opinion opposed to their military's involvement in spiraling and costly wars. Indian Decision-makers are also anxious to avoid provoking too far an adversary they believe to be manipulated by a powerful but irrational circle of military and ideological leaders who seem eager to obtain a disproportionate reaction from the Indian military. Among top ranks in the Indian Army and Ministry of Defence, a deep belief in the willingness of their PAKMIL counterparts to take hostilities to the nuclear brink is widely and deeply held. Moreover, scant media and public support in India for pushing Pakistan's military leaders beyond current levels of low-intensity border skirmishes, continues to rein-in the scope of tactical and strategic options available to the Indian military. In contrast, the Pakistani public perception—other than among a professional minority—is daily controlled and channeled by the military's direct and indirect, multi-tiered information campaigns to keep India at a strategic information disadvantage in vulnerable territories like Kashmir with majority Muslim composition, and among unstable Muslim-Hindu population groups in urban zones prone to sectarian unrest. The net result is that strategic information signaling by PAKMIL and its clients effectively shapes and dominates the perceptions of leaders, population groups, and media channels across both sides of the border. Despite possessing a far larger sector of media and military power, India's civilian-military organizations and leaders are unable to compete with their rival's capability in the influence domain.
- Even as India's military forces conduct operations in response to cross-border Jihadist network infiltration in Kashmir, intervene in that Himalayan state for security and population control, and plan and conduct strikes against terrorist camps in Pakistan-held territory, they are obliged to plead public support through painstaking discourses of rationalization and lengthy explanation. Although venturing into new practices of open public announcements of operations, India's defense organizations are doing so without any assurances of the kind of enduring and stable support from their own media or populations comparable to that enjoyed by their rival military organizations within Pakistan.
- Nor do Indian defense forces have any experience, capability or even intention to influence Pakistan's domestic opinion environment. They have in essence ceded the region's strategic and asymmetric information domain to PAKMIL.
- Thus while the Indian armed forces are in process of shifting to a new military doctrine with new sets of assumptions regarding the use of pre-emptive operations to prevent and deter terrorist attacks launched from Pakistani territory, nevertheless the influential narrative on the latest outbreak of hostilities over Kashmir will be crafted for the entire region of actors by PAKMIL's information operations. This includes narratives of absolutist threats to 'destroy' India which is vital to securing public legitimacy, unity and cohesion for PAKMIL from across multiple indigenous sectors, as well as signaling the US and regional neighbors of its determination to escalate if India does not back down and continue to grant implicit freedom of maneuver to PAKMIL's proxy jihadist militias.

- Most singular of all capabilities in the information domain, is PAKMIL's current success in narrating border violations and hostilities by its historical enemy India suggesting the imperative of a greater war. These are powerful narratives intended to influence perceptions of reality in the Indian media and general public and thus serve as an effective deterrent and limitation on India's armed forces.
- Indian leaders and security organizations have not yet learned the art and science of asymmetric information warfare, and Pakistan's dominance of this critical capability will continue to shape the evolution of the region's security and (in)stability.

How can US influence these factors?

The US currently is unable to match the asymmetric strategic information capabilities demonstrated by a number of strategic actors ranging from terror networks to peer competitor states such as Russia, Iran and China. This does not mean, however, that it does not have a role to play in helping to stabilize an increasingly volatile information and perceptual environment of conflict in South Asia. So long as PAKMIL control this space of operations, conditions will continue to escalate. The US can use its experience of information and influence operations over the past decade fighting the Taliban and stabilizing Afghanistan to support the Indian military's development of capabilities for stabilizing this domain. Without this capability, the spiral of escalating tension and graduated hostility will generate an autonomous dynamic past the indeterminate tipping point from which neither side can voluntarily withdraw.

- Our extensive research in the field in the region shows how the complex signaling system of asymmetric information dominance works, its control mechanisms, and vulnerabilities. This knowledge should be applied to rapidly advance US capabilities, to deploy them for upgrading the information capabilities of our partners in India, leading to stabilization of the cross-border information environment in both countries
- Investing in this strategy will pay multiple order dividends in the long run, not only in South Asia and MENA but also in other regions subjected to instability by continuing asymmetric information domination by peer competitors such as Russia.

Comments on Behavior Changes in Pakistan

Dr. C. Christine Fair

Georgetown University

In this memo, I first address the policy problem confronting the United States and its partners. Second, I identify the Pakistan army as the center of gravity. Third, I address specific actions the United States and its partners can undertake to influence the army's cost-benefit calculus of its preferred courses of action.

The Problem

I argue here and elsewhere that the object of influence is not "Pakistan;" rather the Pakistan army.¹⁰ The Pakistan army controls all levers of power that influence Pakistan's foreign and security policies as well as key domestic policies that inform the same. The civilians have very little role in setting these policies.

The Pakistan Army has several enduring strategic goals:

1. Resist Indian hegemony in South Asia and beyond
2. Cultivate "strategic depth" in Afghanistan both to vitiate any Afghan ill-will towards Pakistan and to deny India any space from which it can destabilize Pakistan from Afghan territory
3. Secure that portion of Kashmir currently administered by India

To secure these goals, Pakistan has two tools:

1. A menagerie of Islamist (as well as non-Islamist) militant groups acting as proxies
2. An ever-expanding nuclear arsenal which includes battlefield nuclear weapons

Pakistan relies upon proxies because they are inexpensive, able to subvert even the best defenses in India and Afghanistan, offer plausible deniability of state involvement, and generally limit the involvement of Pakistani security forces in direct engagement. (Pakistan's military and intelligence personnel of course train, equip, and otherwise enable the operations of these groups and collaborate in planning high-profile attacks. In some cases, retired personnel fulfill these roles and may even join a militant group.)

¹⁰ C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Pakistan's nuclear arsenal confers three principle advantages:

1. It raises the cost of Indian punishment in response to Pakistan-backed terror
2. It ensures international involvement following a Pakistan-sponsored terror attack or incursion by Pakistani forces (e.g. Kargil War of 1999) to pressure India to not escalate
3. In conjunction with the veritable zoo of militant groups, Pakistan's nuclear arsenal coerces the international community to engage Pakistan by exploiting the twin fears of Pakistan's collapse should aid be withdrawn and of terrorists acquiring nuclear materials, weapons or know-how.

Pakistan has successfully used terrorism under its nuclear umbrella with impunity because it works to achieve Pakistan's agenda of highlighting the "conflict" between Pakistan and India and inevitably provokes calls for dialogue to resolve "outstanding differences." At the same time, Pakistan has incurred few costs that it believes to be disproportionate to the benefits it derives from this course of action. Even the sustained blowback of erstwhile proxies since 2004 has not persuaded Pakistan to cease using "jihadis" as tools of foreign policy.

"The only way to motivate change is by developing a coercive campaign that diminishes the advantages of Pakistan's use of militants under its nuclear umbrella while also increasing the costs of doing so."

Motivating Change: The Army is The Center of Gravity

Pakistan's army is fighting a battle it cannot win conventionally and it is unwilling to revise the three core goals enumerated above. The only way to motivate change is by developing a coercive campaign that diminishes the advantages of Pakistan's use of militants under its nuclear umbrella while also increasing the costs of doing so.

The United States has been reticent to undertake a serious revision of policy because of the belief that US assistance and presence in the country can position Washington to stave off state collapse and/or prevent further nuclear proliferation. Unfortunately, Pakistan has used American assistance to further develop the very assets—nuclear weapons and terrorists—that disquiet Americans the most. Americans have generally been unable to appreciate the resilience of the Pakistani state and the low likelihood of any such failure. The United States will not likely be able to undertake any meaningful coercive policy if it continues to believe that its resources and those of its allies and multilateral organizations are staving off an otherwise likely collapse of the state. The below recommendations assume that state collapse is very unlikely even though this fear is commonly articulated by US officials. This assumption is premised upon the author's detailed studies of this country since 1993.

If the United States seeks to change Pakistani behavior, it must change the cost-benefit calculus of the Pakistan army. To the extent possible, policies should aim to influence the army's equities rather than the entire country.

It should be acknowledged that any significant deviation from the status quo is unlikely given the prevailing lack of political will in key parts of the US government which continues to nurse the fantasy that Pakistan may be more cooperative with the right mix of allurements.

Courses of Action

Washington first must cease incentivizing Pakistan to continue producing "good jihadi assets" while fighting "terrorists of the Pakistani state." Pakistan is engaging in simple asset banking. As long as Pakistan has terrorists to kill, the United States will pay exorbitant amounts to Pakistan to do so. The army knows that the United States would be less concerned about Pakistan were it not for these groups. Instead of continuing to incentivize the security establishment to groom more terrorists, the United States should incentive them to abandon Islamist terrorists as tools of foreign policy. How does Washington do this?

As a preliminary matter, it should cease providing CSF funds.¹¹ Pakistan should not be paid to do what sovereign states are supposed to do. Washington should also cease supplying Pakistan with strategic weapon systems.

Instead, the United States should be willing to provide a narrow set of platforms which have proven utility in counterterrorism and counter-insurgency operations. None of these platforms should have significant value in fighting India. The United States should also offer Pakistan military training in these areas, as well other areas that fit squarely within the rubric of domestic security (i.e. natural disaster relief). The United States should remain willing to provide police training and counterinsurgency training to Pakistan's security forces and other forms of assistance to Pakistan's shambolic justice system should Pakistan permit the United States to so and should the United States be able to provide meaningful assistance to these organizations.

A key part of this change of incentive, Washington should state clearly that it will declare Pakistan to be a state sponsor of terror if specific actions are not immediately undertaken. Such a declaration will impose sweeping and devastating sanctions against Pakistan's army in particular because it will curtail security assistance. To pre-empt such an outcome, the United States should provide a time-line of concrete steps that Pakistan must take against the various militant groups it now supports. The first such step is ceasing active support for these groups, constricting their space for operations and recruitment; ultimately, Washington should demand the elimination of the remnants.

¹¹ The latest legislation no longer uses this term. I use it here because this term has widest recognizably.

Even if Pakistan were willing to do so, this will be long-term project akin to any disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program. Pakistan has trained tens of thousands of militants, if not more. However, there should be no economic support to Pakistan for these efforts as long as it continues to actively raise, nurture, support and deploy so-called jihadis for state goals.

Simultaneously, the Washington should expand effort to target specific individuals who provide material support to terrorist groups and individuals. This means international prosecution, designations under UNSC Resolution 1267, Department of Treasury designation and seizure of accounts, and visa denials. In some cases, it should also include JSCOC targeting or other means to eliminate high-value personnel. Washington should work with its allies to ensure that its partners follow suit as well as those countries that traditionally protect Pakistan (i.e. China). Should China not cooperate, it will literally be China's problem. The United States should be less concerned about "lost access and influence" in Pakistan than about coercing Pakistan to abandon the most dangerous policies that it currently pursues with American subsidies.

The United States can, in some measure, curb Pakistan's appetite for terrorist misadventures by depriving it of the principle benefit it derives: international attention to its pet cause, Kashmir. Recent administration statements that reiterate support for India and Pakistan to achieve "peaceful resolution of outstanding issues, including Kashmir" reward Pakistan for its malfeasance while treating India as an equal party to the crime. India is, in fact, a victim of Pakistani terrorism. This language gratuitously rewards Pakistan for its use of terrorism in Kashmir.

It is also historically ill-informed and dangerously misguided. Despite Pakistan's vocal assertions that it has legitimate claims to Kashmir, the facts bely Pakistan's narrative. First, the Indian Independence Act of 1947 did not allocate Kashmir to Pakistan; rather allowed the princely state to select the dominion of its choice. Second, Pakistan started the first war of Kashmir by dispatching militants who enjoyed various levels of state support in an effort to seize Kashmir by force, despite having signed a standstill agreement which bound it to not undertake a military invasion. As a consequence of Pakistan's invasion, the Maharaja of Kashmir Hari Singh signed an instrument of accession to India in exchange for military assistance. Thus, all of Kashmir, including that portion currently administered by Pakistan and that portion "ceded" to China in 1963, are lawful parts of India. When the United States acknowledges Kashmir as a disputed area, it either demonstrates an enormous historical ignorance of the issues or evidences an effort to placate Pakistan at the costs of facts, law and history. Worse yet, it rewards Pakistan for its continued use of terrorism in Kashmir and elsewhere in India.

Consistent with historical facts, the United States should refuse to interject any mention of Kashmir in its various statements with and about Pakistan. Equally, it should abjure making any statements encouraging India to engage with Pakistan on the subject. Pakistan craves such language because it legitimizes Pakistan's contention that it is seeking peace from India, which obstructs its efforts. While it would be preferable if the United States adopted strong language placing the onus on the conflict firmly upon Pakistan, a middle ground may simply be omitting such language altogether. The Pakistanis are very sensitive to such omissions and will understand the intent that such an omission conveys. Such signaling would also advance U.S. interests in discouraging Pakistani terrorism in some measure by depriving Pakistan of this much sought-after benefit.

When Pakistan-based terrorist organizations attack India, the United States should abandon its usual practice of encouraging India publicly to observe restraint and offering the usual bromidic calls for the both sides to continue dialogue. Such language imposes a false equivalence on India, the victim, and Pakistan, the victimizer. Most importantly, such language rewards Pakistan for using terrorism, and one of the reasons why Pakistan does so is to continue focusing international attention upon the area and incentivizing the international community to continue identifying Kashmir as “the most dangerous place on earth.” Instead, the United States should consider encouraging Pakistan publicly to take action against the militant groups in question and to cooperate with Indian and international law enforcement agencies to bring the terrorists to justice. This is a far cry from what the United States should do to punish Pakistan for continuing to use Islamist terrorism as a tool of foreign policy, but it may be something that the current or next administration would consider.

Finally, the United States inter-agency should have a serious conversation about its official position on the Kashmir “dispute.” I would encourage the inter-agency to officially adopt support for converting the Line of Control into the international boundary. After all, such a conversion requires India to forego its claims on Pakistan-administered Kashmir while allowing Pakistan to retain that which it currently controls without legal sanction.

Author Biographies



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Major Shane Aguero is a counter-terrorism strategic intelligence officer with the DIA. He has previously been the Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) Joint Intelligence Support Element (JISE) officer in charge, and prior to that he was the US Army Central (US ARCENT) intelligence fusion desk chief for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Major Aguero also has over five years of deployed combat experience in both Afghanistan and Iraq working at all levels from infantry

squad to Combined Joint Task Force, with experience conducting joint, special and combined operations.

Major Aguero has a Master of Strategic Intelligence from the National Intelligence University, an MBA from Webster University and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from St. Edwards University.



Raffaello Pantucci

Raffaello Pantucci's research focuses on counter-terrorism as well as China's relations with its Western neighbours. Prior to coming to RUSI, Raffaello lived for over three years in Shanghai, where he was a visiting scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS). Before that he worked in London at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington. He has also held positions at the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) and is an associate fellow at the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College, London. He is the author of *We Love Death As You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Terrorists* (London: Hurst, April 2015/US: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), described by The Financial Times as 'the most articulate and carefully researched account of Britain's 'suburban terrorists' to date.' He is currently completing a writing project looking at Chinese interests in Central Asia. His journal articles have appeared in *Survival*, *The National Interest*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, and *RUSI Journal* amongst others, and his journalistic writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Sunday Times*, *CNN*, *Guardian*, *Foreign Policy*, *South China Morning Post*, and more.



Hassan Abbas

Hassan Abbas is Professor of International Security Studies and Chair of the Department of Regional and Analytical Studies at National Defense University's College of International Security Affairs (CISA). He is also currently a Senior Advisor at Asia Society. He remained a Senior Advisor at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (2009-2011), after having been a Research Fellow at the Center from 2005-2009. He was the Distinguished Quaid-i-Azam Chair Professor at Columbia University before joining CISA and has previously held fellowships at Harvard Law School and Asia Society in New York.

He regularly appears as an analyst on media including CNN, ABC, BBC, C-Span, Al Jazeera and GEO TV (Pakistan). His opinion pieces and research articles have been published in various leading international newspapers and academic publications. His latest book titled *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier* (Yale University Press, 2014) was profiled on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in August 2014. Abbas' earlier well acclaimed book

Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror (M E Sharpe, 2004) remains on bestseller lists in Pakistan and India. He also runs WATANDOST, a blog on Pakistan and its neighbors' related affairs. His other publications include an Asia Society report titled *Stabilizing Pakistan Through Police Reform* (2012) and *Pakistan 2020: A Vision for Building a Better Future* (Asia Society, 2011).



Shuja Nawaz

Shuja Nawaz, a native of Pakistan, is currently a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center. Most recently, he was the Center's first director. He is a political and strategic analyst. Mr. Nawaz writes for leading newspapers and websites and speaks on current topics before civic groups, at think tanks, and on radio and television worldwide. He has worked with RAND, the United States Institute of Peace, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and other leading think tanks on projects dealing with Pakistan and the Middle East. He has also advised or briefed senior government and military officials and parliamentarians in the United States, Europe, and Pakistan.

Mr. Nawaz was educated at Gordon College, Rawalpindi, where he obtained a BA in Economics and English Literature and the Graduate School of Journalism of Columbia University in New York. He was a newscaster and news and current affairs producer for Pakistan Television from 1967 to 1972 and covered the western front of the 1971 war between Pakistan and India. He has worked for the *New York Times*, the World Health Organization, and has headed three separate divisions at the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He was also a director at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna from 1999 to 2001, while on leave from the IMF. Mr. Nawaz was the managing editor and then Editor of *Finance & Development*, the multilingual quarterly of the IMF and the World Bank. He served on the editorial advisory board of the World Bank Research Observer.

He is the author of *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within* (Oxford University Press 2008). He is also the principal author of *FATA: A Most Dangerous Place* (CSIS, Washington DC January 2009), *Pakistan in the Danger Zone: A Tenuous US-Pakistan Relationship* (Atlantic Council 2010), *Learning by Doing: The Pakistan Army's Experience with Counterinsurgency* (Atlantic Council 2011), and *India-Pakistan: The Opportunity Cost of Conflict* (Atlantic Council 2014).



Dr. Shalini Venturelli

Dr. Shalini Venturelli is Associate Professor of International Communication and International Relations, in the School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC. She conducts international sociocultural field research and multidisciplinary complex qualitative analysis on the information environment of conflict, culture and international security, analysis & forecasting of strategic threat systems and outcomes. She investigates strategic competitors, regional stability systems, high-complexity asymmetric conflict environments, ideology & influence projection, strategic communication, sociocultural drivers of violent networks, analysis of global social media networks, evolutionary analysis of extremist networks, and assessments of governance, security and stabilization in volatile world regions.

Current research projects include:

- Design and application of evolutionary model of information dynamics to identify and predict unstable human ecosystems in trans-regional environments.
- Identify critical drivers of human ecosystem volatility across diverse security and information and orders with the aim advancing capabilities in detection, deterrence and information engagement.
- Control systems mechanisms of asymmetric information and influence capabilities of geopolitical power actors Russia, China, Iran and their non-state proxies across transregional land and maritime domains in Euro-Asia, East Asia and MENA.
- Evolutionary capabilities and strategic impacts of violent terrorist networks, including ISIL, within and across regions.
- For her front-line research efforts in support of U.S. forces in Southwest Asia and the Middle East with field investigation and analysis of the strategic information environment and sociocultural drivers of conflict, Prof. Venturelli was awarded the U.S. Army Commander's Medal for Civilian Service, and the Secretary of Defense Medal for the Global War on Terrorism.

Dr. Venturelli has multidisciplinary expertise, and is multilingual. She is the author of many studies and publications on information and communication environments and information networks, the global communication and knowledge revolution, and culture, media and international security. Professor Venturelli received a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado at Boulder in International Communication & International Relations, an M.A. from the University of Chicago in Interdisciplinary Social Science, and a B.S. from Illinois State University in Economics.



Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

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Dr. Tom Lynch

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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 Masters 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.



Christine Fair

C. Christine Fair obtained her PhD from the University of Chicago, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations in 2004 and an MA from the Harris School of Public Policy in 1997. Prior to joining the Security Studies Program (SSP) within Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, she served as a senior political scientist with the RAND Corporation, a political officer to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan in Kabul, and as a senior research associate in USIP's Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention. Her research focuses upon political and military affairs in South Asia. She has authored, co-authored and co-edited several books including *Cops as Counterinsurgents: Policing Insurgencies* edited with Sumit Ganguly (forthcoming 2013, OUP) *Cuisines of the Axis of Evil and Other Irritating States* (Lyons Press, 2008); *Treading Softly on Sacred Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations on Sacred Space* edited with Sumit Ganguly (OUP, 2008); *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan* (USIP, 2008), *Fortifying Pakistan: The Role of U.S. Internal Security Assistance* (USIP, 2006); among others and has written numerous peer-reviewed articles covering a range of security issues in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Sri Lanka. Her forthcoming book (OUP, 2013) is on the strategic culture of the Pakistan army. She is a member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies, the Council on Foreign Relations, Women in International Security, and the American Institute of Pakistan Studies. She serves on the editorial board of *Current History*, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, *Asia Policy*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and *India Review*. She is also a senior fellow with the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. Her publications are available at www.christinefair.net

SMA Reach-back



Question: *What are the most likely post-ISIL Iraq scenarios with regards to Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical Environment, and Time (PMESII-PT)? Where are the main PMESII-PT friction points, which are most acute, and how are they best exploited to accomplish a stable end state favorable to U.S. and coalition interests?*

Executive Summary

“The biggest danger is to assume we know the answer.” Alexis Everington, Madison Springfield Inc.

“The unpredictable nature of the country’s social sentiment, lessons from history, the culture, regional influencers, the corrupt political elite with their sectarian-based agendas, and lack of statesmanship and political and strategic prowess are among the factors that suggest that even the most seasoned expert on Iraq might be misled in his or her attempt to predict the next phase.” Hala Abdulla, Marine Corps University

Seventeen experts contributed their thoughts about the future of Iraq and Syria in a post-ISIL environment. Summarizing their insights, warnings, and predictions in under five pages runs the risk of over simplifying and incredibly complex challenge, which is why this summary is heavily cited to encourage the reader to seek further details in the texts provided.

This summary is divided into three parts: 1) a table that describes the PMESII-PT elements essential to understand the current and future trajectory of Iraq and Syria, 2) a brief description of various friction points, the resolution of which may influence the future of the region, and 3) suggested elements that may encourage the transition to stability.

The table below lists the major PMESII-PT element critical to understanding the current and future trajectory of Iraq and Syria. Where possible, outcomes of ignoring or addressing these elements is listed in the “Potential Outcome” column. The analysis is heavily weighted toward the government of Iraq, which several experts believe to be the most critical element in re-establishing regional stability.

PMESII-PT	Iraq	Syria	Potential Outcome
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure of political reintegration (Van den Toorn, Trofino, Sayigh) • Power blocs with no party able to get majority in Iraq (Trofino) • Deep corruption (Sayigh; Liebl) • Failure to provide essential services (Sayigh) • Lack of unified Sunni voice (Maye; Abdulla) • Kurdish expectations of autonomy and/or independence (Meredith) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disenfranchisement of Sunnis (Van den Toorn, Trofino) 	<p>Sunnis in Iraq and Syria will wonder why they should buy into a new government if there is no belief that real representation will happen (Sayigh)</p> <p>Lack of unified Sunni voice will almost surely result in continued political marginalization and the failure of the Iraqi government in a post-Daesh environment (Sayigh)</p> <p>Iraqi government likely to be under Iranian influence for a long time (Maye). There is too much momentum in this direction to apply the brakes now.</p> <p>After contributing greatly to the defeat of ISIL, Iraqi Kurds will not accept anything less than autonomy and perhaps independence (Meredith).</p>
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tacit approval of Shia militias (Trofino) • PMF atrocities (Meredith) • Non-government sanctioned forces (Iranian militias, Kurdish forces) liberating Sunni populations. • Iraqi Special Forces (ISOF) a well-regard, integrated unit that could provide a model for all Iraqi forces (Abdulla) 		<p>PMF atrocities, especially in Mosul, could lead to another major Sunni uprising (Meredith)</p> <p>Shia and Kurdish groups will not easily turn over Sunni territory where they have spilled their blood to liberate from ISIL (Abouaoun; Abdulla)</p>

Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of employment opportunities for youth (Trofino) • Cost of rebuilding an economic burden (Trofino) • Continued economic depression (Meredith) • Reliance on oil (Abdulla) 	<p>Baghdad is already seeing mob violence attributed to young men with no economic opportunities (Meredith)</p> <p>The reconstruction of Iraq will be severely hampered by low oil prices (al-Marashi)</p>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social, ethnic discord (Trofino) • Weak sense of nationality (Trofino) • Shia-Shia competition (Sayigh) 	<p>Shia-Shia competition for influence over the Iraqi state could lead to bloodshed (Sayigh)</p> <p>Tensions between ethnic groups, particularly following the battle for Mosul, could instigate waves of bloodshed and revenge for perceived and actual wrongs committed (Abdulla)</p>
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media inflaming divided community in Iraq (Trofino) • Twitter Awakening (Abdulla) 	
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iraq's infrastructure is very poor 	
Physical Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarce, shared water resources with Syria and Turkey (Palmer Moloney, Meredith; Abdulla) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarce, shared water resources with Iraq and Turkey (Palmer Moloney, Meredith)
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The longer it takes to institute meaningful government reform, the greater the chance for the re-emergence of extremism (Abdulla; Astorino-Courtois) 	

Friction Points (Including Most Acute)

If the number of grievances listed in the table above are not addressed after the fall of ISIL, the fear is that the region will descend once again into a number of conflicts, including continued extremism (Van den Toorn). This section lists friction points identified by the contributors as fulcrums in the future of Iraq and Syria that could tip the scales toward stability or violence.

The Battle for Mosul

“A victory over ISIL will not be the end of Iraq’s problems, rather the beginning of an internal political battle over territory,” according to CSU professor Ibrahim al-Marashi.

The way the battle for Mosul is conducted, as well as its outcome, may be the greatest determinant of the future of the Middle East (Dagher; Abdulla). If it is done wrong, it could lay the groundwork for the re-emergence of ISIL or a successor group. If it is done right, it could provide a model for integration, governance, and recovery for the region (Dagher). In a comparative study of Mosul vs. Fallujah, Zana Gulmohamad listed three major contributors to successful operations: effective coordination of Iraqi forces, coalition airpower, and intelligence from Sunni tribes and townspeople—even in the face of unauthorized incursions by Shi’a militias.

But there are many dangers along this path. First, one of the greatest fears of the Sunni population is that Shia militias will once again be allowed to dominate Sunni populations under the guise of liberation (Dagher). Second, the new governance structure in Mosul must address political grievances of diverse population groups in Mosul. The government must draw its leadership from a new political elite that is of and from Mosul. The existing sources of political power in Ninewah represent the nexus between Islamist extremists and the organized businesses that thrived during ISIL’s occupation of Mosul and should not be allowed to dominate the regional government. Likewise, the new government should pay close attention to minority groups, to pose a model for integration and representation in the country and the region (Dagher, al-Marashi).

Finally, the battle for Mosul poses risks to the cohesion of the Coalition itself. There are any number of occurrences, described in a report by Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI, that could cause partial or severe fracture before, during, or after the battle. The longer cohesion is required, the likelihood of a spoiler event increases. Zana Gulmohamad notes that unless conflicting agenda among regional powers can be resolved, any victory in securing the city could be fleeting.

Transformation of ISIL from Proto-state to Insurgent Group

The battle for Mosul may effectively push ISIL out of Iraq and into Syria (Abouaoun). This will likely be the turning point of ISIL from a proto-state to an insurgency group (al Marashi; Abouaoun) with the intent to encourage violence on near and far enemies, especially through the encouragement of lone wolf terrorism. This pressure could also result in jihadists leaving ISIL for other groups or inspire some to create new ones (Abouaoun). The bottom line is that ISIL will decline, but the ideology will not.

Even after ISIL's defeat, individuals, groups and networks of fighters and terrorists will be motivated to continue violent jihad, whether against local regimes, the West, Shiites, or apostate Sunnis. In a post-Caliphate ISIL, threats will take two main forms, according to David Gompert, a national security expert at the US Naval Academy and RAND: 1) Remnants of fanatical forces in the region, including in Iraq, Syria, and Libya and 2) radicalized individuals in or returning to the West. This former group could lead to increase terrorism in the West.

Federalization of Iraq

There were two major schools of thought regarding the idea that the federalization of Iraq is one way to address popular grievances, governance issues, and mistrust of the central government. Several experts suggested that a federalization model based on Kurdish semi-autonomy might provide a stable way ahead (Maye, McCauley). The arguments in favor of this stance include self-determination, freedom from domination by other ethnic groups, and potential for buy in from Iraqi Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds (McCauley). The primary US role in this effort would be to bring the parties to the table to negotiate and enforce an agreement (McCauley)

However, another cohort of experts argued that constitutional autonomy will not work in Iraq—particular in traditionally Sunni-held areas (Dagher; Abdulla). The people of Iraq all want unity except for the Kurds (Abdulla). Furthermore, Sunni territories in western Iraq are not economically viable (Abdulla). As people tire of sectarian conflict, one way forward may be to support a secular, technocratic party (Maye). However, the success of this kind of party would undermine all existing political actors and is likely to be undermined unless it receives strong international support.

Power Sharing in Syria

The issue is not how Assad should share power in a post-ISIL world, but the fact that he cannot share power without unraveling the entire government (Sayigh). Assad's goal in Syria is not total victory (because that only allows him to become the king of ashes); his goal is to regain access to capital and

markets and get sanctions lifted (Sayigh) (Sayigh). Assad cannot do this with diplomacy, so he is using the conflict to coerce the US, EU, GCC, and Turkey to make economic concessions. Russia and China will endorse this demand as will Lebanon and Jordan in order to ease pressure on their domestic concerns.

Settlement of Intra-group Tensions

The greatest threat to long-term stability in Iraq is not tensions between Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds, but intra-Sunni, intra-Shia, and intra-Kurdish tensions (Abdulla; Liebl). Sunnis lack any kind of unified political voice and efforts to consolidate power may lead to tribal conflict. While the Kurdish government faces significant rivalry between its two main political parties, the KDP and the PUK, for power (Abdulla). However, the real determinant of stability in Iraq hinges on the settlement of Shia-Shia tensions in the country (Sayigh; Abdulla). Although Iraqi Shia present a united façade, there are serious divisions among its main blocs, leaders, and elites (Abdulla). Shia-Shia competition for influence over the Iraqi state could lead to bloodshed (Sayigh).

Environment

Long-standing tensions are often inflamed by disagreement over scarce water resources (Palmer Moloney). This is particularly true in the Tigris-Euphrates Watershed, which is shared by Turkey, Syria, and Iraq and largely controlled by Turkey (Palmer Moloney, Meredith).

Achieving a Stable End State Favorable to US and Coalition Interests

This section briefly lays out suggested actions and conditions to promote a stable end state in Iraq and Syria favorable to US interests in the days after Daesh.

New Regional Framework

The most important action the USG and the Coalition can take to promote stability in the region is to bring all actors to the table to agree on a new regional framework (van den Toorn, Trofino, Abouaoun; Meredith). Iran, Saudi, and neighboring Sunnis states must be encouraged to form a new regional framework. Real stability in the region cannot be accomplished without bringing these actors in general agreement (van den Toorn).

Economic Revitalization of Iraq & Syria

Funds for the reconstruction of Iraq and Syria are essential not only to prevent humanitarian crisis, but to shore up the economic stability of the region. How reconstruction funds are handled could either serve

as a foundation for a new transparent and accountable economy system or entrench the population's perception of government corruption and negligence (van den Toorn).

Focus on Capacity, Autonomy, and Legitimacy

No matter what kind of states emerge from the post-ISIL environment—be they unified states of Iraq and Syria or federalized zone within each country—they all require three things: capacity, autonomy, and legitimacy. The Coalition can take action to support these three elements in a number of ways outlined in Spencer Meredith's contribution including the encouragement of nationalism and ensuring the reduction of violence.

Be Ready to Take Advantage of Cognitive Openings

Even if groups fight efforts to establish good governance or to lay down arms, there is often a few windows of opportunity to encourage these groups to join the fold (Meredith). These cognitive openings do occur. The USG has to be ready to take advantage of them. The Coalition should be looking for indicators of cognitive opening by conflicting parties through 1) moderated speech, 2) evidence of factional divisions within a group, and 3) failure to claim ownership for violence.

Increased Faith in Iraqi Special Forces

The fight against ISIL has proved that Iraq has at least one reliable force: the US-trained Iraqi Special Forces (ISOF) and Counter Terrorism Forces (ICTF), which includes Iraqis from all ethnic and religious backgrounds (Abdulla). The danger is that a prolonged infantry war for a unit designed for short, special operations might soon experience significant fatigue. But this unit provides a model and hope for what Iraqi forces could look like in an integrated Iraq.

US-bilateral Soft Power Engagement

The USG has soft power tools at its disposal to conduct symbolically meaningful engagement with the populations in Iraq and Syria. These tools "carry major weight in the MENA," according to van den Toorn. The USG could promote education exchanges, business opportunities, and cultural exchanges.

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Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

Hassan Abbas

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What are the most likely post-ISIL Iraq scenarios with regards to Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical Environment, and Time (PMESII-PT)? Where are the main PMESII-PT friction points, which are most acute, and how are they best exploited to accomplish a stable end state favorable to U.S. and coalition interests?

ANSWER: a) Tribalism; b) Patronage networks based on sectarian identities; and c) poor educational standards are likely to continue to impact governance challenges in the long run. The post ISIL Iraq will likely be impacted by organized crime and tribal warfare.

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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Abstract: There is no detailed planning evident for a post ISIL Mosul or Iraq in general. The most pragmatic outlook is that revenge and retaliation will be part of Iraqi social fabric for decades and the sectarian bloodshed will continue promoted in part by international and regional actors such as Turkey and Iran.

“Revenge and retaliation will be part of Iraqi social fabric for decades and the sectarian bloodshed will continue promoted in part by international and regional actors such as Turkey and Iran.”

- Division and mistrust among Iraq’s political players is not only among the main three factions; in fact, the more serious problem lies between the intra-Shi’a, intra-Sunni, and intra-Kurdish divisions.
- Each Iraqi faction wants to guarantee the boots of their own forces will be the first to march into Mosul as the victors.
- It is in Iraq’s political players’ best interests to keep the status quo, with Iraq as a loose semi-state, poorly glued together based on interests, with lots of moving and shaking parts.

- The fight against ISIL has proved that Iraq has at least one reliable force which is the semi-independent, quasi-ministerial, U.S trained, Iraqi Special Forces ISOF and Counter Terrorism Forces ICTF (the “Golden Division”).
- The Kurds will not shed blood and then turn over areas to the Iraqi central government.
- The urgent involvement in the battle of Mosul extends beyond the borders of Iraq, as regional players, namely Iran and Turkey, are determined to have a role in Mosul in one way or another.

Iraq after ISIL

The face of “Iraq after ISIL,” remains in the realm of the speculations for all parties involved. The question of what’s next still hovers over Iraq and will most likely remain for years to come. The unpredictable nature of the country’s social sentiment, lessons from history, the culture, regional influencers, the corrupt political elite with their sectarian-based agendas, and lack of statesmanship and political and strategic prowess are among the factors that suggest that even the most seasoned expert on Iraq might be misled in his or her attempt to predict the next phase. This is true, particularly if treating this topic with absoluteness as the only approach taken here. A safe assumption might be that it is in Iraq’s political players’ best interests to keep the status quo, with Iraq as a loose semi-state, poorly glued together based on interests, with lots of moving and shaking parts. All this uncertainty gives Iraq’s political elite an advantage for what they deem as power via political pressure, sectarian, tribal and ethnic mobilization, and geographic advances and gains by fighting a common enemy, which is ISIL. Does this mean, keeping a footprint for ISIL inside Iraq as a pressure tactic is possible for these players? The answer is that everything is possible in Iraq as long as the same political faces remain in power. Will the Kurds go solo, after the defeat of ISIL, as they’ve been threatening to do for the last decade? They could have done it long ago, before the ISIL’s crisis. What about the Shi’a in the south, who are calling for the “Federal Sumer Region,” where they hope to have some control over Iraq’s main resources, namely oil. Although the concept is appealing to most Shi’a, the fear of a mini-mullah region, with an official allegiance to Iran, concerns most Shi’a, especially those who oppose an Iran-like authority. Some western experts have suggested that creating a Sunni state, dependent on regional allies, and oil-rich GCC states is the only way to defeat ISIL, and satisfy the frustrated Iraqi Sunnis.¹² These calls, proposals, and threats all remain in the realm of political pressure poorly played by Iraqi politicians with no serious intentions in taking it into action and reality.

¹² John R. Bolton (2015, Nov. 24). *John Bolton: To Defeat ISIS, Create a Sunny State*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/25/opinion/john-bolton-to-defeat-isis-create-a-sunni-state.html?_r=0

What we are witnessing today is that all this political wrangling that has been going on for the last thirteen years is approaching its boiling point because of the battle of Mosul. The question becomes particularly

“What we are witnessing today is that all this political wrangling that has been going on for the last thirteen years is approaching its boiling point because of the battle of Mosul.”

urgent as the countdown to the ‘Battle of Mosul’ is ticking and the zero hour is approaching, while ISIL still maintains Iraq’s second largest city as its Iraq-stronghold. For Iraqis, be they Sunnis, Shi’a, other minority groups, or to lesser extent Kurds, the immediate and most anticipated goal is defeating ISIL, regardless of how and who takes the credit for it. This is mainly because they are the ones bearing the brunt of this crisis. Sunnis have been internally displaced (IDP) and living in camps or in Shi’a-dominated provinces where they have lost everything. Shi’a are accused of having dominance, though they are not really experiencing any privileges

in their daily lives. At the same time, Shi’a are the sole target for terrorists’ car bombs and suicide attacks. While Kurds live in relatively better conditions, the IDPs situation has added more pressure and exhausted the region’s limited resources. Meanwhile the political elite, thrive as each faction aims and works on gearing any victory against ISIL to their own advantage. Each faction wants to guarantee the boots of their own forces will be the first to march into Mosul as the victors. There is no doubt that the progress made by the Iraqi forces, with the assistance of the coalition, in defeating ISIL and retaking Ramadi, Fallujah, Heet, Qayyarah, and most recently Sharqat, have restored the confidence and faith in the capabilities of the Iraqi forces following its shameful defeat and withdrawal in June of 2014. These victories, with relatively minimal losses (contrary to what had been anticipated, particularly in Fallujah, Qayyarah, and Sharqat), set the tone for the battle of Mosul, encouraging all political players to put all bets on Mosul as their bargaining chip. All rivals, Sunni, Shi’a and Kurds aim to be credited for leading the Mosul operation for political gains. This urgent involvement in the battle of Mosul extends beyond the borders of Iraq, as regional players, namely Iran and Turkey, are determined to have a role in Mosul in one way or another.

Although a Sunni-dominated province, Ninawa remains a province with a very diverse and distinct social fabric, with Sunni, Shi’a, Kurd, Christian, Yazidi, Shabak, Turkoman, and Alevi populations. Hence, there have been calls to divide Ninawa province into several regions or provincial districts following its liberation, to protect the indigenous minorities that have been purged by ISIL. These calls shadow the already tense debate among players in Iraq’s political arena about Mosul, the battle and the identity of the province following ISIL. Kurds are pressuring to include any geographical region fought and reclaimed by the Peshmerga to their own Kurdistan region, which will later become their long-awaited independent Kurdish state. This includes Kirkuk, and those parts of Mosul which Kurds inhabit. This is a notion stressed by Barazani’s own words, where he stated “the region’s new borders will be drawn in blood.”¹³ Simply, the Kurds will not shed blood and then turn over areas to the Iraqi central government. All this wrangling

¹³ Ghassan Charbel (2015, Feb. 15). *Barzani: The region’s new borders will be drawn in blood*. Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2015/02/barzani-iraq-peshmerga-kurds-islamic-state-interview.html>

between the Kurds and Baghdad has prompted the Iraqi parliament to vote, last September, to maintain and confirm the administrative borders of Ninawa province to its status before 2003.

However, an Iraq divided into two or three entities is definitely the most talked about topic among Iraq's own political factions, by Iraqis themselves and by major regional and world players alike. The split itself, although introduced by VP Joe Biden years ago, mirrors the demographic distribution of Iraq's ethnic, religious, and sectarian fabric. However, mixed areas such as Baghdad, Kirkuk, and to some extent Mosul will remain problematic and a major flash point among the competing players. Therefore, for Iraq's political elite, the current status of Iraq is the best way to maintain their own agendas. With the absence of 'the other' who is portrayed as an enemy, political rivals will have to convince their constituency of their own legitimacy to win their votes and speak on their behalf, an effort that might derail them and distract them from making the best out of this lifetime political opportunity for their own interest and their parties. The overall sentiment of the people is to maintain the unity of Iraq. This is mirrored in the daily protests of the masses, both Sunni and Shi'a, who realize their only survival remains in their unity. However, this sentiment is not expressed by the Kurds. Realistically, a landlocked independent Kurdish state and an independent Sunni state, would be hard to maintain economically with few to no resources, and both respective political elites realize this fact.

Since last year, there have been calls and daily protests in Baghdad and all southern provinces for reform, with demands by protestors to rid the government of corrupt faces and replace them instead with technocrat and secular individuals. PM Haidar Abadi, in an attempt to appease the angry masses, called on the Parliament to make some changes and replace several cabinet members. However, Iraqis realize that these are only surface level reforms, with no intentions or serious policies to curb and fight corruption.

PMESII-PT format

Political

Most likely Iraq will remain the same with an elected central government, however, more autonomy might be given to the main competing factions following the defeat of ISIL. A divided Iraq of three independent states is not off the table; however, this should not be predicted as an outcome for the near future. It is no secret that the division and mistrust among Iraq's political players is not only among the main three factions; in fact, the more serious problem lies between the intra-Shi'a, intra-Sunni, and intra-Kurdish divisions. Although Iraq's Shi'a maintain an outer unity, there are some serious divisions among its main blocs and leading religious and political elites. However, the Pope-like figure Shi'a Grand Ayatollah Sistani remains a unifying factor among the Shi'a rivals. Meanwhile, the problem among the Sunni is that

there are no prominently known or even reliable faces to represent the Sunnis either politically or tribally. There are several apparent Sunni bases, claiming to be the voice of the populations with some residing in Jordan and others in the Kurdistan region. Added to the equation are the Sunni politicians in the government, and the pro-government Sunni tribal leaders who are fighting ISIL. The fact that there are several faces and entities that represent Sunnis and most of them are rivals is extremely problematic. Sunnis do not trust or believe their own representatives in the government, and believe that these politicians have not supported them in the face of the Shi'a and Kurd domination. Therefore, some have resorted to groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIL. Some joined ISIL, others did not object or resist ISIL, and those who did ended up in an IDP camp in a Shi'a dominated province. For the Kurds, the main rivalry remains between the two main political parties, KDP and PUK, in Erbil and Sulaymaniya respectively, under Barazani's authoritarian rule.

Military

The Iraqi forces in one way or another are tied to the political structure, mainly because of the U.S. designed ethnic/religious/gender apportionment government where each faction is promised a quota. However, the fight against ISIL has proved that Iraq has at least one reliable force. It is the semi-independent, quasi-ministerial, U.S trained, Iraqi Special Forces ISOF and Iraqi Counter Terrorism Forces ICTF (the "Golden Division") which includes Iraqis from all ethnic and religious backgrounds.¹⁴ Maintaining a sole Iraqi identity with no religious or ethnic affiliation, the unit has spearheaded almost all of the battles against ISIL and won with minimal casualties. It proved its effectiveness at the time when the Iraqi army and other divisions lost credibility among the Iraqi people following the general collapse in the face of ISIL in 2014. With that being said, most military experts acknowledge and stress that a force that was designed for short-timed special operations and missions is now leading a prolonged infantry war might soon be burned out and exhausted.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the Kurds have their Peshmerga, with mainly self-interested goals and also tied to the political structure in the Kurdish region. The Shi'a militia, known as the Hashd or the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), are fighting on a more ideological basis and operating in survival-mode against an apocalyptic enemy, meaning ISIL. Formed following the rise of ISIL in 2014, the PMF consists of several groups, some of whom are associated with either political or religious entities, and others directly linked to Iran. They've been accused of human rights violations; however, they've been assigned more of a supporting role to the regular Iraqi forces in the last several battles (from the battle of Falluja until now). Sunni tribal fighters are also present; some of whom fall under the PMF, and others who are associated with either pro-government tribes or political figures such as Atheel Al-Nujaifi, former governor of Mosul. Other ethnic minorities such as the Yazidis and Chaldeans in Mosul have been fighting ISIL, some classified under PMF, others with the Kurdish forces or as independent units. In an Iraq post-

¹⁴ David Witty (2016). *The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service*. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/David-Witty-Paper_Final_Web.pdf

¹⁵ Loveday Morris (2016, Jul. 26). *The Force Leading the Iraqi Army's Fight Against ISIS went from 'dirty division' to golden boys*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/the-force-leading-the-iraqi-militarys-fight-against-isis-went-from-dirty-division-to-golden-boys/2016/07/25/8e6b0164-389e-11e6-af02-1df55f0c77ff_story.html

ISIL, it is likely each area will remain under the control of their respective federal forces/police, tribal fighters, or militia.

Economic

Maintaining the status quo in Iraq translates into maintaining the country's dependency on oil. Although the Kurdish region has been putting some serious efforts into positioning itself as a major tourism destination, which could potentially generate serious revenues, the rise of ISIL and its proximity to the Kurdistan region, combined with the wave of IDPs, has hindered that vision at least for the near future. The Shi'a areas (mid and southern Iraq) enjoy a very robust religious tourism economy, which brings in extra revenues; however, the wave of IDPs from the western provinces to these Shi'a religious provinces, has put an extra burden on these areas. Another possible and potential revenue generator is the Mesopotamian marshes and other historical sites in the south. This year, the southern marshlands and Zaqura-Ur (Ziggurat of Ur) have been named UNESCO World Heritage Sites, a resolution that could potentially transform these areas into tourist destinations. Meanwhile, the Sunni areas are not only lacking any economic opportunities, the entire provinces have been devastated by the military operations by and against ISIL.

Social

With the collapse of government institutions in 2003, and the birth of a weak sectarian government noted for its absence of the rule of law, the country has been falling back on what used to be the known system in that region, that being the tribal system. Currently there are three recognized legal frameworks that people can adhere to: civil law, tribal law, and religious (Shi'a or Sunni) law. At present in Iraq, as just stated, the most prevalent is tribal Law. It has been noted, widely discussed, and criticized in the local media, that those with no tribal allegiance can 'rent' a tribal sheikh to solve a dispute. With the liberation of what was ISIL-controlled territory, and the return of the residents of these provinces, it is safe to assume that more and more tribal councils will be held and that intra-Sunni revenge will be committed. As an example of this, a 30-minute documentary produced by VICE news named "Fighting the Islamic State with Iraq's Golden Division: The Road to Fallujah,"¹⁶ suggests the rate of revenge and blood feud crimes will rise in these areas. In the documentary, while the ISOF/ICTF Major Salam al-Obaidi questions the locals, brothers and cousins start accusing each other as being ISIL affiliates. This is but one example in a small village in al-Anbar that gives us an idea of what awaits Iraqis, and the Iraqi government forces, in Mosul. Another example of the anticipated revenge wave that could take place is the Yazidis' retribution when

¹⁶ Ayman Oghanna and Warser Jaff (2016, Jun. 13). *Fighting the Islamic State with Iraq's Golden Division: The Road to Falluja*. Retrieved from <https://news.vice.com/video/fighting-the-islamic-state-with-iraqs-golden-division-the-road-to-fallujah>

their town of Sinjar was retaken from ISIL in late 2015.¹⁷ Yezidi fighters went on a looting spree, burning houses of those they deemed as ISIL supporters and/or sympathizers of the Sunni Arabs.

Information

The Internet and particularly social media platforms are the basis for information exchange between Iraqis and with the outside world. For that reason, ISIL relies on social media for disseminating its propaganda. Moreover, the daily protests are all being organized and coordinated through social media and particularly Facebook. Iraqis are not particularly reliant on Twitter; however, in the last two months there has been a serious local campaign, led by 30 Iraqi influential Facebook bloggers to take on Twitter in support of the Iraqi Army and to counter ISIL's propaganda on Twitter where it lives and breathes, and disseminates its information. The number of Iraqis signing up and using Twitter was extremely significant, as 26K organic Twitter (Iraqi) users signed up and released 200K tweets with the Arabic hashtag 'Fallujah is being liberated' in just the first 48 hours of the Iraqi twitter campaign, which was launched simultaneously in support of the military operations to liberate Fallujah. The campaign was dubbed by local media and social media experts "Iraqi Twitter Awakening," and "Iraq's Assault to Twitter." Twitter daily hashtags have become the Iraqi way in fighting ISIL online and sending daily messages in support of the Iraqi Army and their military operations to defeat DAESH.

Infrastructure

As mentioned earlier, the Sunni regions are the most affected and most frequently destroyed by the military operations by or against ISIL. There is an opportunity for the Iraqi government to regain the trust of the Sunni population by launching a serious campaign to rebuild these provinces, towns and villages. All Iraqis yearn for a normal life, the right to live in dignity and to provide a roof over their family's head. Most people from the Sunni areas are returning to nothing, as their homes have been leveled either by ISIL and their IEDs or by the Iraqi military attacks targeting ISIL fighters. The opportunity here for the government in launching a well-publicized campaign of "Rebuilding" and "Reconstruction" should begin simultaneously with the start of the Mosul operations. This will not only regain the trust of the Sunni populations returning to their liberated areas and homes, it will also send a message of comfort to civilians in Mosul. The message is that reconstruction awaits them and that they will be compensated for their losses, once ISIL is defeated.

¹⁷ Alice Fordham (2015, Nov. 16). *An Iraqi Town is Retaken from ISIS, and looting and retribution begins*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/11/16/456246515/after-taking-back-iraqi-town-yazidis-vow-revenge-on-isis-supporters>

Physical Environment

With the resolution in naming of Iraq's southern Mesopotamian marshlands as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, with the purpose of protecting and preserving the site, there is a chance that Turkey will be pressured into maintaining a consistent flow of water into the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which are the main feeders of the marshes. This resolution was fought for by the Iraqi government and supported by U.S., European and Iraqi experts, being specifically intended to put pressure on Turkey to regulate the water flow into Iraq's main rivers.

Time

As Iraq is approaching the battle of Mosul, and based on the battles won by Iraqi forces in the last few months, some experts are predicting a relatively short battle. However, this is dependent on ISIL fighters, and the possibility they may choose to flee to Syria and not resist or fight. If ISIL fighters choose to stay and fight, then this could be a prolonged battle, due to the nature of the city and its civilian population. Moreover, if ISIL chooses resist, there is a possibility the PMF will be called to assist, a golden opportunity for both, ISIL to resist and fight to the bitter end, and Iran for its Shi'a militia to play a part in the battle of Mosul in any way possible. Following the defeat of ISIL, there will remain an unsatisfied faction of the Sunni population that is susceptible to recruitment and exploitation by Islamic extremists and terrorist groups. The lack of a unified political or religious entity to lead Iraqi Sunnis will remain an issue that faces that group and hinders them from assimilating into post-ISIL Iraq, the way it did following 2003 and the ousting of the Ba'ath regime.

Major friction points

These have always been and will remain about resources (oil and water), services, infrastructure, and employment. However, there are many grassroots campaigns to bring back and highlight the bonding aspect between Iraqis. Most of these social movements are initiated by Iraqis themselves with their own smartphones, and circulated and shared on the common platform of social media (Facebook and Twitter). These campaigns focus on the coexistence of Iraqis of all backgrounds, highlighting the fact that most IDPs are hosted by Shi'a dominated provinces, where they are welcomed and living side by side with other Shi'a Iraqis. With the existence of live streaming features, Iraqi soldiers have been capturing spontaneous and live positive reactions of people who were held by ISIL, who welcomed the Iraqi troops as heroes. These videos have been storming the internet, and have received positive reactions from Iraqis, turning the ISOF and ICTF soldiers into real heroes with merely one identity which is Iraqi. These include stories of Sunni heroines, such as the tribal daughter Ummaya al-Jbara, who died fighting ISIL, and Umm Qusay, a Sunni woman from Tikrit who saved the lives of 25 Shi'a soldiers from the Camp Speicher massacre when ISIL took over her town.

In conclusion, the U.S. government should promote a stable end state by urging Iraq's political elites to reconcile and integrate groups who participated in the fight against ISIL into the government's institutions. The main triggering point that led most Sunni tribal fighters of the Awakening Councils of al-Anbar aka (Sons of Iraq) from 2006, to go back into joining AQI which later became ISIL, was the failed promises to integrate them into government institutions and offer them employment. Another opportunity for the U.S. to promote a stable state is by lending support to local secular initiatives on the ground, or encourage the Iraqi government to acknowledge these calls and protests to make serious and much needed reform.

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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The military operations in Iraq will probably push out most of ISIL fighters from the non-liberated parts of Nineweh province to Syria. This will make Raqqa the main territory of significant size the organization holds. This is going to have not only economic implications (access to resources) but also will also be a turning point in the life of an organization that positioned itself outside the typical cast of guerilla/insurgency type organizations and more into a valid alternative for the failing states in the Arab region.

“The same pool of masterminds, jihadists, and other fighters will move, individually or collectively, either to existing terrorist organizations or to establishing new ones.”

However, this decline will remain confined to the current “brand” or “structure”. As it happened in the past, the same pool of masterminds, jihadists and other fighters will move, individually or collectively, either to existing terrorist organizations or to establishing new ones. One possibility is for some of them to change ISIL's mode of operation from a “state” to an “insurgency” type while keeping the same name. In all cases, the “comparative advantage”

that ISIL built for itself (a state rather than an insurgency organization) will suffer a lot from the decline of ISIL; not the ideology though.

The region has been living on the pace of wide range of Islamist ideologies for decades and the decline of the currently branded ISIL will not affect much the Jihadist variation of such ideologies. As long as a Jihadist preachers are receiving some support from religious, political and military elites in the region, they will

continue to trigger the launch of similar movements in different forms. What determined the fluctuation in the popular support to such movements is the extent to which the population in a given country feels that an Islamist movement can be a remedy to a situation of exclusion they have been subject to.

The best way to determine the weaknesses and hence exploit them is to determine the variables that can lead a local constituency from adhering to the Islamist thesis or not. In the case of Iraq, there was a set of factors that led scores of Iraqi Sunnis consider, in 2013/2014 that ISIL will rescue them from their exclusion. None of the below mentioned factors is valid alone to explain why scores of Sunnis have explicitly or tacitly supported jihadists or at least did not mind seeing them take the control of some areas. It is always a combination that drives such a change in political behavior.

To say that the Sunnis, in 2013, were poorer than the Shias in Iraq is a misrepresentation. Although what is considered to be today the Sunni region has less resources than the Shia controlled region, the status of the infrastructure, unemployment, level of education, access to health care...etc. were mostly at comparable values with insignificant differences. The major difference was in political representation and the growing feeling of a majority of Sunnis that the country was run by a “Shia controlled mafia” and that the weight (of a largely diverse) Sunni political forces in political decision was close to zero. It was also exacerbated by the perception that Iran is expanding in the region with the aim of controlling a viable territory that goes from Iran to the Mediterranean through Iraq and Syria with the aim of consolidating Shias’ influence over the populations and resources of these countries. Whether ISIL will be defeated in Iraq and/or Syria or not, this perception among Sunnis will not change soon, given the developments in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq. This perception will lead Sunnis who are not necessarily married to Jihadism to at least provide a “justification” of why Sunni militarized communities are a necessity imposed by an “intrusive Iran”.

Without a grassroots support of these Sunni Constituencies to post ISIL organizations, their operational capacity will be significantly hindered.

So one of the priority approaches should be to reverse this perception among Sunnis by pushing for the adoption of an appropriate governance model in Iraq¹⁸ that address the concerns of non-Shias about their role in a future Iraq. This requires a heavy investment by the US and its international partners in result oriented political processes and initiatives in Iraq, something that the US has shied away from since 2011. The future of the relationship between Sunni constituencies and post ISIL jihadists will be determined, to a large extent, by their feeling that an inclusive and credible political process is in place to address their grievances. This would ideally be expanded to become a regional dialogue between Iran and the GCC, under the guidance and support of the International Community, to address the points of contention

¹⁸ And elsewhere but this question is about Iraq

between both parties. Such a dialogue will contribute significantly to the diffusion of tension amongst Sunnis and hence encourage them to look for more constructive political approaches including in Iraq.

Another element to take into account is that post ISIL Jihadist groups will return to the insurgency mode of operations that entails indiscriminate attacks against civilians causing large numbers of casualties. As in the pre-ISIL years, the targets of these attacks can well be Sunni communities. This will also contribute to the disconnect between the Sunnis and these Jihadist groups. Obviously there is very little to be done at this level, except some work with media outlets to convey proper messaging about the indiscriminate attacks undertaken by these groups against Sunnis.

A key element in the viability of the post ISIL groups will be their access to resources. Efforts are already underway to cut off such access to resources. Some of the US key allies in the region, most prominently Turkey, have an indispensable role to play in this aspect. Looking at ISIL's deployment today, one can easily see how bad it would have been for ISIL should the Turks decide to apply more rigor in the control of the borders and the flow of people via Turkey.

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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What are the most likely post-ISIL Iraq scenarios with regards to Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical Environment, and Time (PMESII-PT)? Where are the main PMESII-PT friction points, which are most acute, and how are they best exploited to accomplish a stable end state favorable to U.S. and coalition interests?

The Future of a post-ISIL Iraq

In the case of the expulsion of ISIL from territory within Iraq's borders, significant problems would persist, including the collapse of the neighboring state of Syria, and the lingering presence of ISIL, in Iraq and neighboring Syria, and its transformation into a state-sponsor of regional and international terrorism.

"A victory over ISIL will not be the end of Iraq's problems, rather the beginning of an internal political battle over territory."

While the defeat of ISIL would be a significant national victory, the Iraqi government has yet to articulate a strategy to manage the end game after the battle for Mosul. A victory over ISIL will not be the end of Iraq's problems, rather the beginning of an internal political battle over territory.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi will face continuing demands for reform and restructuring of the political system, which he attempted to confront so far with only marginal success. These reforms are part and parcel a larger question. Even if ISIL will be expelled, how will the Iraqi state reform and govern its territory? While the Iraqi state has survived the reemergence of ISIL, the contours of Iraqi politics, identity, and culture have been transformed since 2014. Abadi faces the daunting challenges of a post-ISIL period in terms of the governance of Iraq, and dealing with post-conflict security issues; first, the reintegration of territory and populations under IS control, second, agreeing to Iraq's internal borders with the Kurds, third, the fluctuating price of oil and the economy, and finally presiding over a fragmented, sectarian state to deal with the aforementioned issues.

I have ordered the friction points in terms of priorities for post-conflict stabilization in Iraq. They do not follow discrete categories of "Political," "Military," "Economic," etc.

As I have highlighted below, they are interconnected. The first two are the most acute, while the last two have been longer term dynamics that have been analyzed in depth over the last couple of years.

1. SOCIO-POLITICAL FRICTION POINTS IN FORMER ISIL-HELD TERRITORY

The first paramount issue the Iraqi state faces is displacement of large swathes of the population, and how to reincorporate previously held-ISIL territories and those who lived under ISIL rule. Political battles will ensue over who is going to secure and govern these areas, who will get to live there in the resettlement process, and how to reintegrate the IDPs. This problem will also hinge on the pace of reconstruction of the ISIL-held areas.

The political ramifications of this issue is how the central government will manage this process. For a good number of Arab Sunnis, the fear will emerge that after an ISIL victory, a Shi'a-dominated government will rule as a conqueror of this territory, largely supported by the Shi'a militias. Nowhere will this issue be more prevalent than the city of Mosul. There is no political consensus over will control the city after ISIL is expelled. In theory the central government would, however it was the central government's governance of this city that led to the conditions to allowed ISIL to find fertile ground in Mosul in the first place. ISIL's seizure of Mosul was a symptom of the failure of the Iraqi state. The question remains as to how will Arab Sunnis in this city, and Anbar and Salah al-Din provinces reconcile with the central government.

2. POLITICAL-ECONOMIC FRICTIONS BETWEEN BAGHDAD AND THE KRG

The notions of the territorial sovereignty of the central government will come to the fore not only over Mosul, but Kirkuk as well, which does not bode well with already tense relations between the central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In this regard, the battle for territorial sovereignty will not only involve this city and its oil reserves, but other contested areas, such as Tuz Khurmato, one half controlled by the Kurds, the other by Shi'a militias ostensibly protecting the town's Shi'a Turkmen. The battle over territory will also involve the complex issues of resource nationalism. Resolving the issue over Kirkuk and the allocation of oil will determine whether Iraq survives in the most optimistic scenario as a loose Shia-Kurdish alliance.

3. ECONOMIC FRICTION POINTS

The state will still depend on the fluctuating price of oil, and the reconstruction of Iraq has already be handicapped by years of low prices.

4. POLITICAL FRICTION POINTS: ENDEMIC SECTARIANISM

Increasing sectarianism has have only been exacerbated by the ISIL-conflict, which will result in continued fragmentation of political blocks amongst the various sects and ethnic groups.

In terms of 1 & 2, and "how are they best exploited to accomplish a stable end state favorable to U.S. and coalition interests," the only leverage the U.S. and the coalition has at this juncture is to pressure the Iraqi parliament to begin the process of reaching a consensus on these disputed territories, before the actual battle for Mosul, at a time when the Iraqi state is most dependent on American and Coalition military assets to achieve this task. When put under pressure, the Iraqi state can achieve compromise in a relatively short period of time. The best case in point in the crisis of the summer of 2014. After the elections of April 2014, Iraq had failed to form a government for months. It was only when ISIL seized Mosul, that the U.S. could pressure the Iraqi state. American military engagement was made conditional on replacing incumbent Prime Minister Maliki with a more conciliatory candidate, Haider Al-Abadi and forming a government afterwards. Maliki was replaced and the Iraqi government was formed within the span of a few weeks under such pressure.

Similar leverage can compel the Iraqi parliament to come up with a draft on Iraq’s governance after the expulsion of Mosul. The issues of Mosul and Kirkuk, or smaller towns such as Tuz Khurmato will involve intense political rivalries, but at least this process needs to be dealt with before the commencement of the battle for Mosul.

The Prospects for Coalition Cohesion in the Battle for Mosul

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One of the biggest risks to the cohesion of the coalition against ISIL is time. Analysts and practitioners warn that we should expect that the coalition of actors involved in the battle for Mosul will have to hold for a significant amount of time before Mosul is wrested from ISIL (see Dagher and Kaltenhaler, SMA QL3). Given the tenuousness of the ties that hold it together currently – and the variety of competing interests

“The longer cohesion is required, the likelihood that a spoiler event--perpetrated by actors either inside or outside the coalition on issues either directly or indirectly related to Mosul—will increase.”

and agendas of coalition members, as outlined below, there is any number of occurrences that could cause partial or severe fracture before, during or after the battle. The longer cohesion is required the likelihood that a spoiler event -- perpetrated by actors either inside or outside the coalition on issues either directly or indirectly related to Mosul – will increase.

Under which conditions might Sunni forces (e.g., Popular Mobilization Force, Mosul Tribal Police) break from the coalition?

The coming battle in Mosul has been characterized as the biggest and perhaps final Sunni referendum on the sincerity of the Abadi government’s intention to be inclusive of Sunni voices. This is, many believe, one of the critical steps in drawing Iraq’s sects and ethnicities into a unified state. Understandably, the Sunni population in Mosul may not be particularly friendly toward Shi’a dominated Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)¹⁹ – many of the same forces used to repress anti-government protests beginning in early 2013. In the already antagonistic environment during fighting in Mosul the risk of mistreatment – real or perceived – by Iraqi Security Forces, Peshmerga or Shi’a militias unable to distinguish civilians from ISIL fighters fleeing the city is very high.

¹⁹ Dagher and Kaltenhaler response to SMA QL3.

At present, ISF are being trained for counter-insurgency operations in Mosul and elsewhere following ISIL defeat.²⁰ As the US military can attest, operations to degrade insurgent strength while protecting a population during counter-insurgency operations requires security forces to walk a very fine line. In the current setting missteps and mistakes will immediately gain sectarian overtones. Tactics used by ISF, the police, Peshmerga fighters or others that are perceived locally to be strong-armed or with a sectarian bias are likely to reaffirm local perceptions that the Iraqi Government has not altered its discriminatory stance regarding Sunni populations and will not seriously consider some form of autonomous control in Sunni areas. In addition, it reinforces an already prevalent view that the West/US is at war with Sunnis.

Sunni Forces: Two conditions could easily push Sunni forces to break with the coalition: 1) local leaders see no evidence that the post-ISIL situation in Mosul will be other than a return to the discrimination and harassment that they suffered at the hands of the Iraqi government (particularly the eight Maliki years) prior to the ISIL crisis; and, most immediately, 2) Shi'a Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) take an active role in the fighting in or too near Mosul. True, there is general awareness of the need to keep these forces separated from the Sunni population in Mosul, and there are media reports that coalition leaders will allow Shi'a militias to participate in the coming battles from rural areas south of the base at Qayyara and west of the city²¹ presumably with the mission of rounding up escaping (Sunni) ISIL fighters and families. Unfortunately, despite aid agencies' intentions²², depending on where fighting takes place Moswalis living in neighborhoods in the city's southwest may attempt to flee by the quickest route which would be to the south – precisely the areas that the Shi'a militia are purportedly intended to patrol. Again, mistreatment of Sunni at the hands of the Shi'a could convince the tribal forces to leave the coalition in order to protect their own if not to exact revenge.

Iran: There is significant evidence that the battlefield success of much of Iraq's Shia militias is dependent on Iranian resources and expertise (Barnard, 2015; Bazoobandi, 2014; Campbell, 2014; Nader, 2015).²³ Of course this relationship aids Iran to increase its regional influence (Khedery, 2015).²⁴ Given local Sunni sensitivity to the Shi'a militias and their presumed Iranian backing Iran could readily spur fracture of the coalition before or during the fight by sending pro-Iran militias to "help" in Mosul. Just their presence too close to Mosul may be enough to cause a Sunni break from the coalition. As noted above, inclusion of

²⁰ Associated Press. "Canadian General: Anti-IS Fight Will Grow Harder After Mosul," 10/5/2016, 2:05 P.M. E.D.T. <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/10/05/us/politics/ap-us-united-states-islamic-state.html>

²¹ Knights, Michael. "How Will the Battle for Mosul Unfold," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 4, 2016.

²² Newly constructed and emergency camps are mainly in the northern Kurdish areas and to the east of the city. At present international aid agencies have the balance of their assets in the Kurdish areas north and east of the city. Mosul Flash Appeal, UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (20 July 2016), [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Iraq/mosul_flash_appeal_final_web%20\(1\).pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Iraq/mosul_flash_appeal_final_web%20(1).pdf).

²³ Barnard, A. (2015, March 5). Iran Gains Influence in Iraq as Shiite Forces Fight ISIS. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/world/middleeast/iran-gains-influence-in-iraq-as-shiite-forces-fight-isis.html>; Bazoobandi, S. (2014). Iran's Regional Policy: Interests, Challenges, and Ambitions (Analysis No. 275). ISPI. Retrieved from http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/publicazioni/analysis_275__2014_0.pdf; Campbell, J. (2014, November 6). Iran Switching to Hard Ball in a Last Attempt to Control Iraq. Retrieved June 30, 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/iran-switching-hard-ball-last-attempt-control-iraq>; Nader, A. (2015). Iran's Role in Iraq (Perspective). Rand. Retrieved from http://www.mashreghnews.ir/files/fa/news/1394/3/16/1066030_363.pdf

²⁴ Khedery, A. (2015, February 19). Iran's Shiite Militias Are Running Amok in Iraq. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/19/irans-shiite-militias-are-running-amok-in-iraq/>

any forces seen as associated with Iran and/or perceived maltreatment of Sunni by them is one of the conditions likely to discourage Sunni forces from remaining in the coalition.

Turkey: In many ways, the tenor of the Turkish conflict with the PKK (and any other groups it believes are associated with it), could make or break post-ISIL efforts to forge a resolution and interim authority in Mosul. Turkey has two main security interests at stake in the coming battle: avoid massive and destabilizing refugee flow from Mosul; and, avoid strengthening or the uniting Kurdish groups.

On the issue of refugees, Turkey already has seized the opportunity to create a security buffer in northern Iraq. This area could also serve as territory to house IDPs from Mosul. While it is unlikely that Turkey would publically withdraw from the coalition or throw its weight clearly onto the side of anti-government forces in Iraq, President Erdogan strongly opposes any further arming of Kurdish groups willing to participate in the liberation of Mosul. The PUK is, in Turkey's view indirectly allied with the leftist PKK – the group at the top of its terrorist list – (via the PKK's alliance with the US-funded Syrian PYD.) This sensitivity could cause Turkey to balk if the PUK were armed and included as equal with the PDK during the fighting in Mosul, and particularly if it were given status as a major player the post-battle political resolution. Similarly, it is to be expected that the Erdogan government would drag its feet, or reject coalition requests outright if asked to take action that it believes would leave any Kurdish group but the PDK in control of Kurdish areas (e.g., withdrawing troops from northern Iraq following ISIL defeat in Mosul, withdrawing support of KDP aims against the Government of Iraq), even if these actions were intended to spur political resolution. In short, reconciliation among the Turkish groups is the worst outcome for Turkey.

KSA: There appears to be little in the nature of the fighting in Iraq that would push KSA to a public break with the coalition. However, perceived further encroachment or a regional “win” by Iran, e.g., in Syria, could prompt a further uptick in KSA-Iran tensions in Yemen. In the past, members of the US Congress and British Parliament have condemned KSA for human rights violations in the fighting²⁵. This type of sanction especially if there were not similar treatment of Iran would further corrode US-KSA relations and perhaps convince KSA to resume connections with Sunni extremist groups in Iraq and Syria as bastions against Iranian influence. Opening up funding for Sunni tribes/ extremist forces could exacerbate in the area could not only exacerbate the KSA-US relationship, it could also spur increased proxy conflict and perhaps widen any split between the Sunni groups in Iraq, putting the US in a tight spot with very few levers of influence over KSA.

Under which conditions might Sunni and Kurdish Peshmerga forces break from the coalition? In this instance the Kurdish groups have both left the coalition and are in direct conflict with the Sunni tribes in Ninewah while the Iraqi armed forces and Shi'a militia presumably retain their initial missions.

²⁵ Radwan, Tarek. “Yemen Heightens Tension in Saudi's International Relations,” 9/27/16
<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/yemen-heightens-tension-in-saudi-s-international-relations>

Sunni Forces: As stated, strong-arm tactics by Iraqi forces and/or Shi'a militia especially if coupled with apparent US acquiescence or failure to respond could be enough to convince the Sunni tribes that they are the only ones willing to come to their defense and that the coalition holds no promise of change for them following the Mosul fight. If they are pushed aside by the US or not included politically by the government in Baghdad they could decide to leave the coalition *en masse* or split over the issue.

Iraqi Peshmerga (PDK and PUK): Similar to the Sunni, Kurdish fighters may be prompted to break with the coalition if they believe they are not granted the political influence and recognition they deserve for their years of holding up the fight on behalf of the West first against Saddam, Al Qaeda and then ISIL. Specifically, the Kurdish groups could decide to leave the coalition if it became clear that they were going to have to fight to keep the balance of the territorial and economic gains made over the past years of fighting. The appearance that the Government of Iraq would (or would be allowed to) renege on the recently brokered oil-revenue sharing deal, and/or the presence of uninvited ISF forces in Kurdistan would be clear indication that the Government intended to deny Kurdish gains and return to pre-ISIL disputes over territorial control and oil revenues.

However, the Peshmerga – like other Kurdish groups – is not necessarily a unified force but is led by, among others, both PDK and PUK loyalists. The PUK and PDK fought a civil war in the 1990s and although seem to have buried the hatchet, remain rivals looking to avoid dominance of Kurdish politics by the other. As a result, the Peshmerga could itself split over internal questions of leadership and control with what may appear to be little provocation from outside forces. Specifically, the PUK could split from the rival PDK over the latter's deal making with Turkey and use of the fighting in Mosul to gain leverage over other Kurdish groups including the PUK.

Under which conditions might Sunni, Peshmerga and Shi'a militia forces all break from the coalition? In light of their pivotal role in many of the factors that could impel both Sunni and Peshmerga forces to break with the coalition, it is fair to say that greatest risk to the cohesion of the coalition from the Shi'a militia would be its active participation, rather than withdrawal. In the recent past, Shia militia active in Sunni areas have used the fight against ISIL as a cover for violence against the Sunni population that has verged on ethnic cleansing (Fahim, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Human Rights Watch Iraq, 2015).²⁶ Similar actions or those perceived locally as uncurtailed overstepping by Shi'a forces – whether GOI or Iran-backed -- have the capacity to very quickly fracture the coalition along sectarian and ethnic lines for reasons already stated. What is generally forgotten however is that Shi'a activities also have the capacity to worsen what UN officials expect to be one of the worst humanitarian crises in decades as refugees flee

²⁶ Fahim, K. (2015, February 7). Shiite Militia Drives Back Islamic State, but Divides Much of Iraq. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/world/shiite-militia-drives-back-islamic-state-but-divides-much-of-iraq.html>; Human Rights Watch. (2015, March 18). Iraq: Militia Attacks Destroy Villages, Displace Thousands. Retrieved June 30, 2015, from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/18/iraq-militia-attacks-destroy-villages-displace-thousands>; Human Rights Watch Iraq. (2015, March). After Liberation Came Destruction: Iraqi militias and the aftermath of Amerli. Retrieved June 30, 2015, from http://features.hrw.org/features/HRW_2015_reports/Iraq_Amerli/index.html

the fighting in Mosul. The fear of revenge killings among the Sunni population is considerable²⁷ and may cause refugees to avoid escape routes near Shi'a forces.

Shia Militia: Still, ISIL's military operations have focused on attacking regional groups who do not submit to their ideological interpretations of Islamic law. After "apostate" Sunnis, Shi'as are their next most important target.²⁸ As a result, ISIL success in Mosul or ability to strike Shi'a elsewhere presents a direct threat to the Shia population, and should it look like a possibility, it should be expected that Shi'a militia fighters both within the coalition as well as those not currently included could "join" operations in Mosul. This is even more likely if, for example ISIL was able to strike against Shi'a targets in southern Iraq during the Mosul battle.

It should not be discounted that some of the nationalist Shia militia groups currently engaged in the fight against ISIL evolved from groups such as Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army which arose 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, it is not at all clear that this has or will result in a fundamental shift in the hostile attitude toward Americans in Iraq. If it looks as if they will be denied reward or recognition of their contributions particularly after the Mosul battle, some Shi'a groups or individuals could easily reject coalition restrictions on their activities in and around Mosul and act on their own to avenge Sunni violence against Shi'a, or in the name of the sectarian rivalry. This is not necessarily a stretch: Sunni grievances have worsened in recent years, fueled by "endless interventions" by Iran and the staunch support given to Maliki and Assad (Moaddel, 2014) who are seen by many Moswalis as persecuting Sunnis in favor of "serving the Shia Iran master plan." in the region

Under which conditions might the coalition be completely shattered? Finally, as the accumulation of the previous conditions, a completely shattered coalition means that the battle for Mosul has prompted a full-out, multi-sided civil war.

Iraq: At the same time that the Abadi government is attempting to signal that it intends to be more inclusive of Sunni leaders and views, it is restricted first by fears that armed Sunni militia will turn those arms against the central government, and second by its need for support from Shi'a hardliners who do not want to empower Sunnis or meaningfully incorporate them into the governance of Iraq (Arango, 2015).²⁹ Further, Abadi's desire to preserve the unity of Iraq puts it at odds with calls for increased local autonomy from some factions of Kurdish and Sunni Tribal leaders. In the event of the chaos that would characterize violent civil conflict among Kurdish, Sunni and Shi'a forces -- likely with proxy support from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively -- the multi-ethnic, multi-sect members of the Iraqi Army and police will be hard pressed to know which battles to fight and more than breaking with the coalition outright, may for reasons of confusion and self-preservation simply fall and recede as effective fighting forces.

²⁷ Associated Press, "In battle for Iraq's Mosul, many forces with many motives," 28 Sept 2016.

²⁸ Braniff, W., & Pereira, R. (2014). A Tale of Two Caliphates. In Multi-Method Assessment of ISIL (pp. 156–160). Arlington, VA: Strategic Multilayer Assessment Program, Office of the Secretary of Defense.

²⁹ Arango, T. (2015, April 30). Proposal to arm Sunnis adds to Iraqi suspicions of the U.S. New York Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/01/world/middleeast/proposal-to-arm-sunnis-adds-to-iraqi-suspicions-of-the-us.html>

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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It has been very clear during the last few weeks that Nineveh(Mosul) will soon be freed from Da'ish(ISIS) control . Yet ,what is the best way to deal with situation on the ground after the defeat of IS which seems to be approaching quickly. As I stated many times before, the million dollar question is not how to defeat Da'ish, rather it is what comes afterward? There is no question that the so-called Islamic State will become part of history soon, yet what is crucial to ask is: Will its ideology of hate and extreme violence disappear or even stop its dissemination among people living in my region?

As an Iraqi expert in counter-terrorism and public opinion in Iraq since 2003, I don't have any doubt that the real battle will start after freeing Mosul from ISIL. The consequences will affect not only Mosul but it will extend, as it did before, to the entirety of Iraq and the region as well. The success in conducting reconstruction and reconciliation in Mosul after its liberation from ISIL will positively reflect on the future of Iraq and the entire region while failure will have potentially have disastrous consequences. As many Iraqis looks to Al Qaeda insurgents as (moderateterrorists) in comparison with ISIL terrorists, we may witness a new version of ISIL, which will exercise much worse terrorism than we yet witnessed if, we fail in dealing with Mosul's population's needs and concerns.

"We may witness a new version of ISIL, which will exercise much worse terrorism than we yet witnessed if we fail in dealing with Mosul's population's needs and concerns."

One thing is that is very instructive about how the forthcoming battle may play out, is to look back at how Mosul was conquered by ISIL in June of 2014. Iraq's second biggest city, with around two million residents, was taken by a group of around 400 ISIL fighters with the help of some Sunni tribesmen. The much, much larger Iraqi army

force simply fled as ISIS approached. The ISIL forces were welcomed by some residents within Mosul while most certainly did not resist ISIL. The key to understanding this is to view ISIL and the Iraqi army through the eyes of Mosul's Sunni population. For them, the Iraqi army, was a Shia-dominated force, operating with the help and guidance of hated Iran, that had a record of abusing and humiliating Iraqi Sunnis. Mosul's Sunnis were still angry about how demonstrating Sunnis had been treated during the Arab Spring demonstrations of 2011. Many Sunnis were shot, beaten, or disappeared by Iraqi Shia-dominated security forces. Thus, for Mosul's Sunnis, ISIL may have seemed like a group of fanatics who were brutal and even savage, but they were Sunnis who opposed the Iraqi Shia-dominated state. Thus,

Mosul residents acquiescing to ISIL taking over their city was more a vote of no confidence in the sectarian Shia-dominated Iraqi state than it was an embrace of the brutally intolerant Salafism of ISIL.

It will be a major blunder if, we fail twice in recognizing the clear signs of concern and dissatisfaction, which Mosul's public evidenced before Da'ish took over Mosul. Just a short time before that time, over 85% of the people said that the country was going in the wrong direction. 83% of households stated that they felt unsafe in their neighborhoods. Just 7 days after Da'ish took over Mosul, 81% of the city households stated that they felt safe. In Mosul, and before Da'ish took over it, all my polls showed very low trust in the national government, local government, parliament, the federal police, and the army. Actually it was always about half of the general trust rate of other Iraqis in the same institutions. Moreover, only 20% of people in Mosul thought that human rights were respected and over 60% of them believed that the government institutions interfered in their private lives.

Freeing Mosul and running it in the same way, which it was run before will definitely generate a great deal of anger and dissatisfaction. This will be a golden opportunity and the right environment for Da'ish and/or other terrorist organizations to take over again. This time the consequences will be even worse than what we experienced during the last two years.

To avoid this, we need to follow a people-oriented approach, which recognizes all previous and current concerns, needs and hopes of the people and avoid all past mistakes. Empowering Mosul's people and giving them more authority over their lives will definitely be the right strategy. Yet this strategy needs a different approach than what some local politicians are demanding. These politicians have been promoting federalism as the right solution for all Sunnis problems in Iraq. Unfortunately this is also what some US officials believe in. Due to the fact that Nineveh (Mosul) and the other Sunni Arab provinces lack significant energy resources and the leverage they provide, Kurdish-style constitutional autonomy is not a viable option. More importantly, as the Islamist movements and its businessmen supporters in Nineveh are the most organized and well-funded powers currently, then they will be the ones who control the suggested semi-autonomous government. This will, for sure, lead not just to friction with much of the populace but also to a lot of tension with the Iraqi federal government and expansion of Turkish influence in the region. A Sunni, Shia and Kurdish power struggle will potentially take place. Again, this is the right environment for Da'ish and its similar organizations to take over again. Since Ottoman Empire and then British occupation after WW1, Mosul has been in a unique. It is a province with a Arab Sunni majority, yet as with many Iraqi provinces, it has a good percentage of different religious and ethnic groups. We need not only to take care of Sunni, Shia and Kurdish concerns. For me, it is more important to give serious consideration to Christian, Yazaidi and Shabek concerns as it is not only the original pillars of Mosul social fabric that needs to be re-built, but more importantly as it will be the model of Iraqis willingness to live peacefully together.

The US official whom I met a week ago asked me how to solve this contradiction of empowering people on the ground on one hand and avoid the control of the wrong local politicians over Mosul again on other hand? The answer is quite simple. The strategy of empowering people is correct but we need, this time, to implement it via more trusted players. These can not be the same political elites who were imposed by foreign forces, whether these forces are the U.S., Turkey, Iran or any other regional or international player.

The new elite who should run Mosul must emerge from and really represent the people of Mosul if, we really want to avoid any reappearance of Da'ish or any other terrorist group.

To achieve this we need to give the people the required space and opportunity to reorganize themselves and push up the right elite to govern their areas. This cannot be reached unless we provide impartial and independent local authorities which, can establish the right and healthy environment for honest and trusted local election. Again, current politicians will never provide such conditions. The only feasible alternative is to make all stakeholders agree on an interim local government with no more than a 2 year mandate. All members of this government should publically announce that they will not stand for the next election as candidates or represent any political group's interests. They should really be technocrats.

The interim government's main tasks are:

1. Run the reconstruction process, with the allocated money, in a very transparent and professional way.
2. Provide a healthy and peaceful environment for all people to exercise their free will in organizing political parties and NGO's.
3. Work with the federal government and the international community to develop the local economy and the provision of public services. These services should be provided by the local authorities and there should not be any federal police or army in the city itself.
4. Run real integrated local election which result in a new local government within two years.

Finally, it is so important to prevent Turkey, Iran and the Kurdistan regional government or their agents from getting a freehand in the future of Mosul (Nineveh) if we really want to avoid further terrorism in the region.

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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The biggest danger is to assume that it is possible to answer this question. Every conflict and post-conflict scenario in recent history has delivered surprising results. A salient example is Libya where now countries are, for political reasons more than anything else, questioning their involvement in the 2011 revolution while the country appears to head inexorably towards further division exacerbated by an almost entirely useless and counterproductive UN effort. The best answer to this question is that there should be trained, flexible and responsive civil teams that are financed and empowered to help react to the changes as they take place. The UN is not the answer, nor is OTI. The former is nowhere near flexible enough and the latter has become overly politicized.

Post-ISIL Iraq's Grim Prospects

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Post-ISIL Iraq's prospects are, sadly, quite grim, with multiple factors—including atrocities carried out by the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs), the prospects of another major Sunni uprising, Kurdish tensions with the central government, economics, infrastructure, and environmental devastation—converging and amplifying one another. The key factors that will influence the fate of post-ISIL Iraq will be examined in turn.

Aftermath of the fall of Mosul. The question of how ISIL loses the ground it controls in Iraq is paramount, and has already generated great friction within the anti-ISIL “coalition” prior to the advance against Mosul. Turkey has frequently warned of the consequences of majority-Sunni Mosul falling to Shia militias. As will be discussed, Turkey is right about the atrocities that have been committed by PMFs when they retook Sunni-majority territory from ISIL.

“With no exaggeration, this [conflict between PMFs and Turkey] has the potential to set the stage for another major armed conflict on Iraqi soil.”

Further, Turkish troops with their eye on Mosul have refused to leave Iraqi soil despite Iraq’s request for them to get out. It is possible that after the fall of Mosul, conflict between the PMFs and Turkey could spiral out of control. Turkey has said that it won’t allow the religious demographics of Mosul to be changed, and the PMFs have said that they are willing to fight the Turks in the same way they fought ISIL. With no exaggeration, this has the potential to set the stage for another major armed conflict on Iraqi soil. A flare-up between Turkey and the PMFs could in turn accentuate tensions between Turkey and Iraq’s central government, as well as between Iraq’s central government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).

PMF atrocities. When the PMFs entered Fallujah after ISIL was pushed out, there were mass killings, detention of civilians, sectarian cleansing, torture, and abuse. There is a good reason that Sunni elites in Ninawa unanimously don’t want the PMFs to enter their territory. PMF atrocities have already created lasting grievances. Even more could be created following the fall of Mosul—not to mention major humanitarian and moral consequences.

Chances of another major Sunni uprising. Sunni disenfranchisement following the defeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq was an essential driver of ISIL’s rise.³⁰ At this point, all the ingredients for another major Sunni uprising are in place. At the forefront of current Sunni grievances is the atrocities the PMFs have carried out against Sunni civilians as they retook territory from ISIL. Other factors should also be carefully considered. Will there be significant Sunni representation in Iraq’s central government in post-ISIL Iraq? Iraqi Sunnis’ view that their government is controlled by Iran is growing, as the fight against ISIL has made Iran increasingly influential in the Iraqi political sphere.

³⁰ See discussion in Daveed Gartenstein-Ross & Sterling Jensen, “The Role of Iraqi Tribes after the Islamic State’s Ascendance,” *Military Review*, July/August 2015, available at <https://www.joomag.com/magazine/military-review-english-edition-july-august-2015/0631518001433865170?page=104>.

It is unlikely that Sunni elites will reconcile themselves to being part of a rump state that's under growing Iranian influence. One doesn't have to be a jihadist to find these prospects quite unappealing. Sunnis face the possibility of having their status as second class citizens in the post-Saddam order further entrenched.

Kurdish independence. The chances of the KRG becoming independent are steadily increasing. The KRG supports Turkey's military presence in northern Iraq at the same time that Iraq has requested that Turkish troops leave. The degree to which this represents the erosion of Iraqi sovereignty, and the ascendance of the KRG as an independent political entity, cannot be overstated. A domestic analogue would be the Mexican army entering Texas at the request of Gov. Greg Abbott, and the Obama administration requesting that Mexican troops withdraw from American soil. If Gov. Abbott in turn disagreed with the administration and asked Mexican troops to stay, that would be a powerful rebuke of the federal government by a state governor. In Iraq's case, regional officials in the KRG are negotiating with a foreign power, and asking foreign troops to remain in their region even when the central government has formally asked them to leave.

Though KRG now has *de facto* independence, gaining *de jure* independence would make a difference for them. KRG's lack of *de jure* independence inhibits its ability to enter into contracts for the sale of oil from its territory, and also makes it more difficult for KRG to receive military and other forms of foreign assistance. If KRG gained independence, the loss of revenue from its oil would further damage an already battered Iraqi economy.

The post-ISIL economy. The Iraqi economy, particularly with low oil prices, is in poor shape. The mob violence we have seen in Baghdad is the kind of thing that makes international investors and creditors nervous. Nobody wants to invest in something today that can be stormed and looted tomorrow. It does not appear that the government has put together any kind of substantive reconstruction process for Ramadi, Fallujah, or Tikrit. All of this, in turn, is a recipe for a lot of discontented military-age males.

Infrastructure. Iraq's infrastructure has been poorly maintained, as the government has been in survival mode, and battling an existential threat, since 2014. Everything has gone into its war budget. Poor infrastructure will hamper Iraq's economic recovery further.

In contrast, KRG's infrastructure has been relatively untouched by the fight against ISIL. This will be another driver of Kurdish independence: A lot of national-level spending will be poured into infrastructure, which will disproportionately benefit the non-KRG regions.

Environment. ISIL has been a blight on Iraq's natural environment, laying waste to crops, oil wells, and factories. Many IDPs will not return to their farmlands—although some groups that are helped by outside private aid donations, such as the Yazidis and Ninawa's Christians, will be in a better position to return to their farms because they are able to implement micro-reconstruction in their traditional areas. In Sunni areas, there is an opening for Islamist-leaning—and, sometimes, jihadist-leaning—NGOs to shoulder this burden.

In short, Iraq's post-ISIL future is likely to heap bad news on top of a situation that is already bleak.

After the Caliphate: Understanding and Countering Salafist Threats

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The loss of Mosul -- and for all intents and purposes Iraq --could be the beginning of the end of the territorial Islamic State. Yet we know, and ISIL's leadership has warned, that serious threats in the region and to the West will remain. Understanding what forms these threats will take is the first step toward shaping strategies to counter them.

We now know (if we did not already know) that ISIL depends fundamentally on radicalization and recruitment of *individuals* to kill and die in the cause of Salafist extremism. Larger Sunni communities and populations tend not to sympathize with but instead are brutalized and antagonized by ISIL. This suggests that foreign occupation and large-scale counterinsurgency, in the classical sense, will be unnecessary if not also unhelpful to counter post-Caliphate ISIL.

Still, individuals, groups and networks of fighters and terrorists will be motivated to continue violent jihad, whether against local regimes, the West, Shiites, or apostate Sunnis. Since ISIL's seizure of expansive populated real estate, recruits have had a dual motivation to commit violence: the siren call of Salafist extremism and the historic creation of the Caliphate. The Caliphate's demise may lessen the intensity and the breadth of Salafist-extremist motivation.

Post-Caliphate ISIL threats will take two main forms:

1. Remnants of fanatical forces in the region, including in Iraq, Syria, and Libya
2. Radicalized individuals in or returning to the West

The persistence of violent fanaticism in the region could continue to stoke individual radicalization and terrorism in the West. Thus, the destruction of ISIL remnants in the region could in time lessen, though not end, threats in the West. (This point is important in placing responsibility within the US Government for countering these two threats – see below).

The first of these threats is likely to take the form of comparatively small units with light combat equipment, modest economic resources, minimal popular backing, and only fleeting territorial sanctuary. With suicide terrorist methods and wanton executions, they will be extremely dangerous to civilians. But they could be overmatched by well equipped, trained and led indigenous forces, e.g., Iraqi Army or Peshmerga. They may also be targets for liberated Sunni populations (e.g., tribes). Remnants might fight to the death or melt into rural or urban terrain. Some might seek a more normal life, but we should not count on this. While ISIL remnants will be hard to eliminate entirely, loss of territory will increase their vulnerability.

As for the second form of threat, individuals in or returning to the West could be American or European citizens -- inconspicuous but potentially suspicious to those who know them through work, family or mosque. They will continue to identify with the Umma and embrace Salafism mainly via websites and social media. The motivation of these individuals could ebb with the end of the Caliphate, though it takes very few of them to create havoc, as we well know. They could engage in various types of suicide terrorism. While they may be networked, they are unlikely to have significant support, direction or sophistication.

By objective standards, neither of these post-Caliphate threats on their own present as severe a danger to U.S. interests as Caliphatic ISIL has presented. However, the potential for further Salafist extremist violence in the volatile Middle East and for lone-wolf terrorism in the United States and Europe cannot be ignored.

With the notable exception of Syria, threats from ISIL remnants in the region can be destroyed by indigenous forces – possibly police but certainly combat units -- supported by U.S. ISR and U.S. or allied air power and advisors. Remaining or new high-value post-Caliphate targets could be eliminated by air strikes or SOF. Responsibility for spelling out and executing this strategy is mainly CENTCOM's.

Countering the second threat -- radicalized post-Caliphate lone-wolf (or lone-group) terrorism in the United States -- requires a different strategy, of course. Lead responsibility is the FBI's, and the "battlefield" is mainly the Internet and other information domains. Enhancements are needed in intelligence collection, data management and analytics, and cyber operations. More robust capabilities

and operation are achievable with current and coming technology. However, protections of privacy and freedom of expression need to be debated, agreed, and assured.

A final note about policy. In Iraq, insistent encouragement of a non-sectarian federated democratic state is paramount for the post-Caliphate anti-ISIL strategy to work. In Syria, the strategy leaves open the difficult question of what to do about the Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian backers, though it is possible that the destruction of the Caliphate would remove an excuse for regime brutality against Sunni opponents.

Unseating the Caliphate: Contrasting the Challenges of Liberating Fallujah and Mosul

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We cannot reproduce the article from the CTC Monitor, but you can access it:

Gul, Z. (2016, October). *Unseating the Caliphate: Contrasting the Challenges of Liberating Fallujah and Mosul*. Combatting Terrorism Center Sentinel, retrieved from <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/unseating-the-caliphate-contrasting-the-challenges-of-liberating-fallujah-and-mosul>

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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Trying to view a post-IS Iraq means looking forwards to an Iraq which may possibly be split into two or more parts. The Westphalian world is over, and the borders of Iraq dating from the 1920s up to 2014 are up for debate, despite what the coalition desires. Of course, there are vested interests within Iraq who desire to retain the “borders of Iraq” as they have been, primarily interests located in Iraq and profiting from siphoning off of resources provided by the international community largely in the form of humanitarian aid/assistance. Additionally, the Iraqi government is acknowledged to be extremely corrupt but there is also a desire to root out most of that corruption by changing the government away from the U.S. designed ethnic/religious/gender apportionment and to a “free merit-based” government which will be a primarily Shia-dominated government.

Iraq is primarily a tribal culture living within a centralized governmental system, in which the centralized government doles out resources to tribal leaders who return a loyalty to “the State.” As long as the resources flow, loyalty is generally assured (that resource flow has been cut off to the Sunni tribes of Anbar and Ninawa provinces, thus the uncertainty of the status of IS in those provinces, and the manipulation of the Sunni tribes by external players such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE).

Additionally, Iraq is divided in many ways by various religions within its current borders. The obvious and major split is between Sunni and Shia. However, it is not that simple. There are Arab Sunni and Kurdish Sunni, neither of whom generally get along. As for the Shia, the Shia of Iraq are basically Akbari Shia and proud of their Arab past, while the Shia of Iran are mostly Usuli and not so fond of Arabs. It has been noted that many Iraqi Shia are thankful for the assistance of Iran in the fight against IS but once that fight is successfully won, they would like the Iranian Shia to go back to Iran. In addition to Islam, there are Christian minorities (Nestorian and Chaldean), Cult of Angel minorities (Yezidi, Alevi, Yarsani) and still a few Mandeans (Gnostic).

So, taking into account the current fight with IS and assuming that it will be a victory of the anti-IS forces, as well as all the intervening countries (Iran, U.S., Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the GCC, and lesser players such as France, Great Britain, Russia, etc.), let me use the PMESII-PT format:

Political - If Iraq remains unitary, likely an authoritarian-style government. If not, then it may split into three parts. The Shia-dominated government will likely be the closest to a western-style governance form although heavily influenced by the Marjaya. The Kurdish government would be authoritarian, as it is now, and heavily dependent upon Turkey for its survival. The Sunni portions may remain chaotic until and unless they can be formed under an authoritarian regime, potentially linked to Turkey or the GCC, or not.

Military - It depends upon the political structures. The Kurds are easy, their military would/will likely remain a corrupted Peshmerga in which ration strength is heavily over-reported and mobilization will only be taken in dire circumstances. The Sunni areas will be tribally dominated, if there is a unified military structure. The Shia areas will retain the structures of the Iraqi Army and Federal Police.

Economic - As with today, it is all about oil. As current economic dependence on oil is 90% and government revenues is dependent on oil at 95%, such will remain the same. Both the Kurdish and Shia regions will have access to tremendous oil reserves (although Kurdistan will remain dependent upon Turkey to get the oil out). The Sunni region will be in a much more desperate situation as there is little access to oil reserves. This will make the Sunnis susceptible to external manipulation as well as leading to working abroad.

Social - Iraq will remain largely tribal in orientation, although religious divides could subsume tribal divisions. The Shia region with its greater urbanization and access externally could enjoy a greater detribalization compared to the other regions.

Information - With the retention of a strong internet infrastructure backbone, cyber information flow will only increase. With this flow, there will be adequate interaction with the greater global community but it is possible that local filtering is possible.

Infrastructure - Infrastructure in the Sunni region will deteriorate while it should improve (in the absence of conflict) in the Shia and Kurd regions.

Physical Environment there will be a continued degradation of the physical environment as long as Iraq is subject to the reduce water flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers due to Turkish impoundment of water in the 22-dam system of the GAP. Existing environmental damage has significantly impaired Iraq. Example, Saddam's Anfal campaign included the injection of salt water into the sweet water aquifers beneath the Sinjar area, permanently destroying the aquifer. Saddam's destruction of the Mesopotamian Marsh caused the 120 mile long Shatt al-Arab waterway to suffer saltification and uncontrolled spread of pests, thus destroying approximately 14 million date palms out of 18 million (a huge economic loss to both Iraq and Iran). There are many other environmental problems in Iraq but the major issue is water and the lack of it.

Time - In a post-IS Iraq, the factors which led to the rise of the Islamic State as well as the influence of Al Qaeda and related entities will remain. Therefore, there will be Islamic insurgent organizations who will continue to struggle against any centralized Shia-based (or Kurdish-based or Sunni Shia-dependent political entities) government. As they believe they are fighting in the way of Allah, they have an infinite amount of time. If they are an apocalyptic or millenarian insurgent movement, they will likely bind

themselves to their own timeline (as the Islamic State has done today). A remaining major time-related issue will be coordinating between a western Gregorian-based calendar of 365 days versus an Islamic-based calendar of 354 days, but this is a fairly small issue.

The major friction point is the lack of water, which in conjunction with 9 years of drought has forced numerous small farmers from their land to urban areas ill-equipped to receive them. The continuing negative impact upon the national infrastructures (power, water catchment and movement, oil extraction, etc) all ultimately depend on the ability to convince Turkey to release more water as well as the stabilization and repair of Mosul Dam. Successful and equitable water management is the key to whatever successes Iraq might enjoy.

What Comes After ISIS? A Peace Proposal

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Clark McCauley publish a paper on this topic, which we cannot reprint there, but you may access it via the link below.

McCauley, C. (2016). What comes after ISIS? A Peace Proposal. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol 10, no. 4. Retrieved from <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/528>

Building the Framework: Exploring the Connections between the Questions

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify the areas of overlap between these related questions, and provide a framework to support the other ViTTa submissions. Accordingly, it aims to help build greater situational awareness of the complexities facing the region and US efforts there designed to shape outcomes desired by both external actors and the internal participants themselves. To do so, the arguments presented here rely on several core scholarly approaches, namely comparative politics and conflict resolution studies, as a kind of analytical “reconnaissance” of key scholarly approaches that can benefit practitioners and planners. Both academic disciplines focus on aspects of *structure and agency* – fundamental tools that shape our understanding of contexts, concepts, and categories of analysis.

Foundations of Change

To begin, we can apply these tools to the Gray Zone as both context for CENTCOM’s efforts, as well as a concept itself worthy of evaluation. Yet rather than rehearse the well-used definitions present in DOD and broader USG discussions, this paper focuses instead on the Gray Zone as *undefined borders of conflict*. These can certainly mean actions short of war, committed by both *state and non-state actors*. However, an additional framework that explores multiple 2

transnational attributes gives traction to identify Gray Zone issues, actions, and responses to them, and to show their interrelations to each other. Key to this is the idea that all parties engaged in the Gray Zone have elements of transnationalism, whether through NATO coordination, ISIS propaganda via social messaging, or economic integration across borders.

In addition, state and non-state participants have broad reach, finding themselves affected by and affecting geo- and regional politics, in part because of the reliance on *proxies, partners, and puppets*. Defining these groupings, 1) proxies operate on behalf of an otherwise distant party, 2) partners share responsibilities and openly support the common cause, while 3) puppets claim autonomy but have little to no capacity of independent action, to say nothing of the intentions for carrying out their own autonomous outcomes. In particular, groups hostile to the US are also often bound together in the Gray Zone by the presence of an anti-status quo *casus belli* due to the **presence of actual grievances**. These can range from common forms of economic privation and political marginalization, to all sorts of disenfranchisement due to ethnic, religious, sectarian, and interpersonal experiences. The presence of these grievances matters greatly when considering the causes of conflict and ways to resolve them. Yet since these have often been around for considerable time in most places defined within the Gray Zone, in

both a general sense of widespread suffering and in particular cases that matter to anti-status quo groups, an additional factor rests on the **perception of grievances**. This is often the tinder to the kindling of actual grievances.

Perceptions matter in that they serve to identify collective and individual problems, but equally they shape the boundaries for what is really “bad” and who is really “guilty”. This part of perceived grievances often addresses the sense of loss and powerlessness attributed to those who participate in anti-status quo behavior. This can apply equally to Kaiser Wilhelm II’s aggressive pursuit of “a place in the sun”, to Occupy Wall Street, to violent extremist organizations currently facing the US and its allies. However, perceived loss and powerlessness do not by themselves motivate aggressive action. That requires a second element of empowerment, namely that something can be done to right the wrongs. Underlying both is the persistent anger at those perceived to be responsible. The combination of anger and a sense that options exist to rectify injustice rests on beliefs of **efficacy** – the ability to impact one’s life positively through action. Efficacy applies generally, coming up across the spectrum of traditional discourse between great powers and local host nations, as much as in VEO recruitment narratives. As a result, efficacy becomes a powerful tool for analyzing perceived grievances, which need not correspond directly to actual problems as defined by the angered parties; they can have basis in reality to be sure, but the extent of the problems and their perpetrators can certainly drift from established fact based on perceptions.

Yet, as valuable as the presence and perception of grievance are in giving a basic understanding of the reasons for aggressive actions, something is missing even beyond the efficacy to do something about them. There remains the need for a spark to ignite the process. Building on root causes, these kinds of **proximate factors** can be seen clearly in those that set off the Arab Spring in Tunisia – lingering doubts about the legitimacy of the Ben Ali regime, the tragic public suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi, and ultimately the ease of information sharing to connect disparate people through social media. However, in important ways those factors still relied on the active non-violent participation of security forces supporting the protestors. This removal of capacity and explicit legitimacy from the government moved the process of revolution along apace.

Additionally, to add to our understanding of the context that faces US and partner efforts in the region, the Arab Spring also shows other factors relevant to the initial CENTCOM questions in this paper. It addresses comparisons between countries whereby actions in Tunisia found ready fuel in growing anger over rising bread prices in Egypt, for example. In the latter case, efficacy for revolution, based on a general sense that change could happen, needed additional *casus belli* to set off Tahrir Square, both externally to the protestors and internally to their motivations. Externally, the loss of legitimacy in the Mubarak regime came to a head when it became clear the president would not allow open elections as promised, and instead planned to appoint his son as successor. This in itself need not have caused the effusion of discontent, as the regime suffered legitimacy problems for some time. However, in the context of rising food costs (kindling), the tinder of political betrayal created a scenario awaiting the right spark.

Internally, that spark came in Egypt, as with so many other instances of personal and collective anti-status quo actions, with a **cognitive opening**. In this case, it came through the **replication effect** of successful change in Tunisia – specifically due to military support for the protestors. More broadly, the Tunisian revolution was itself akin in process (if not in grievance) to Serbia’s Bulldozer Revolution, which could be argued followed from the post-communist Color Revolutions, following the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe, building on the third wave of democratization in Latin America the decade prior, and so on. The broader point is that *cognitive openings build on previous phenomena, often found in catastrophe and epiphany* – some tragic event rocks the worldview and some opportunity presents itself for real change. In both cases, the spark enables mobilization by ready and able organizations, be they states or non-state actors. 5

It is also important for all of these events to note the role of state forces supporting protestors, either implicitly by not implementing violent actions decreed by regime leaders, or explicitly by manning the barricades together. Of note in many of these cases though, was the division between internal security forces/police and military units. Often the decision of the military carried greater weight, perhaps as symbols of national identity and preservation of the state against the government or even broader regime rules governing the country. This dynamic can play a pivotal role in the struggles in the Levant, not least because efforts to establish rule of law and external security remain so intangible in the current state of affairs, yet both offer the potential to build legitimacy for governance in both countries.

Foundations of Governance

These processes and factors are certainly not new to the Gray Zone, and this gives hope for solid analysis regarding Iraq and Syria. The undefined borders of conflict there can find resonance with historic cases as variations on a theme in 19th and 20th century domestic and international politics. Internal pressures on and by states towards their societies, as well as on and by external actors operating in foreign countries, reinforce the transnational geographic nature of the persistent Gray Zone. Examples of transnational actions and issues can be seen in Western divide and rule imperialism couched as “civilizing”, as well as post-colonial cross border conflicts by revolutionary governments striving to maintain legitimacy while committing actions that undermined it. Additionally, Cold War spheres of influence that included proxies, partners, and puppets often employed justifications for transnational priorities with instrumental speech of liberty, while using others for “higher” purposes that made strange political bedfellows with dictators. Today, we can see similarly apparent paradoxes with the convergence of transnational criminal organizations and VEO’s, to say nothing of the use of universal regime narratives claiming democracy as the rule of the day, while pursuing wholly undemocratic practices in many parts of the world.

Therefore, knowing the shared historical precedents of the contextual complexities facing US and partner nation efforts, particularly the constraints inhibiting positive lasting influence, helps to establish firm analytical grounding for addressing those challenges. Specifically, analysis benefits from reliance on two fundamental categories found in comparative politics, namely *structure and agency*. **Structure** can be defined broadly as the setting and system that constrains or enables agents to act. **Agency** would then be the individuals and groups that actually do stuff. An example from the recent past best describes both and their interaction with each other. Looking at Gorbachev’s role in helping to end the Cold War, one can

easily identify the structural element of hierarchical domestic power based on his position as the head of the Communist Party, and the international leverage granted that position that empowered Gorbachev to accomplish much internationally. Agency also played a role in that Gorbachev pursued policies from a clear ideological framework as a true believer in communism. Equally importantly was his norm-entrepreneurship – when the real world began not to look the way his belief system said it must, Gorbachev used his structural power to influence others to his “new thinking”. The same can be said for countless leaders in general, as well as for average citizens who join and participate in organizations bent on changing the status quo. The point is not to reinvent the analytical wheel here, but to show that these core concepts give solid footing for addressing some of the most difficult questions raised in the CENTCOM project.

That analytical role for structure and agency operates through the framework of the **state-society relationship**, where the *state* is that enduring entity that protects borders from internal and external threats. It does so according to Weber’s maxim that states control the monopoly on the use of legitimate coercive force, recognizing that that monopoly is rarely absolute for long, and that contestations to legitimacy invariably rise by internal challenges and external rivals. Despite these necessary caveats, the definition still provides enough grounding to draw vital distinctions between states and *regimes*, which define the rules of the games – both codified formal rules and informal day-to-day governance procedures. These two entities differ from *governments* made up of elites who rule and make policies according to the parameters of the state and regime. However, at times these three are odds with each other, or have some variation of conflict, as can be seen in quasi-state entities like ISIS, and by extension the Assad regime today. These entities can function with a degree of internal sovereignty but without external recognition by the international community, and in the above cases, a much-deserved lack of recognition in their current forms.

On the other side in this relationship, the societal element often relies on an in-group/out-group dynamic defining how individuals and groups see themselves and others, as well as how they believe others see them. These identities follow processes of socialization among “believers”, whereby ideas and interest first get *articulated*, and individuals learn what matters to themselves and others. Next, these concepts can *aggregate* as groups form around commonalities, finally leading to the *articulation* of identities and interests to those in power. Social movement theory expands this greatly and offers valid insights in the mechanisms for social mobilization, while it too rests within the context of states and their relationships to societies as a whole. However, by no means do these processes occur along deterministic paths, as many ideas and interests fall by the wayside or get squashed at various stages by social or state rivals. Instead, the basic process helps to reveal common steps by which groups, including states, can come to develop self and other identities. This can in turn allow for analysis into the processes of mobilization, something that has great significance for both sides of the radicalization-deradicalization spectrum pertaining to questions posed at the outset of this paper.

That spectrum also shares three factors that help to define structure and agency in a given context, whether states or non-state organizations: capacity, autonomy, and legitimacy. **Capacity** refers to the ability to collect resources and use specific allocation mechanisms for distributing them effectively, according to whichever schema dominates the policy decision making process. These can be paternalistic,

prestige-based, retributive, democratic, religious, or rely on a host of other *norms of appropriateness* defined by and defining the state-society relationship. In turn, **autonomy** deals with decision making and enforcing power without the presence of countermending outsiders. This often gets labeled as sovereignty in interstate diplomacy, as well as between separatist movements and governments loathe to relinquish control over state territory. The recent Colombian government negotiations with the FARC highlight the centrality of autonomy discussions with anti-status quo non-state actors. This may hold promise for comparisons to Iraq and Syria if conditions follow similar paths, and agents with the requisite structural power can pursue them; two very large conditions, but ones worth watching for and seeking to support if they do arrive. Finally, **legitimacy** can be difficult to operationalize in a research sense – “how can we know that a group or government has it beforehand” is a much more difficult question than knowing when those actors have lost it. Accordingly, legitimacy can range from no overt opposition (tacit) to purposeful support (explicit). This captures a set of actions to indicate the presence of an otherwise difficult to ascertain belief.

In an attempt to show that these variables can provide real world measures of the state-society dynamic, the following two tables provide an example template for Iraq that includes structure and agency for both state and society. It can offer some steps to establishing the context for discussion of what victory would look like in Syria and Iraq, how to position the US and partners for engaging ISIS until the group loses traction in the “war of words” by losing on the battlefield, and ultimately what can be done to help establish stable governance that at the very least is not hostile to the US and its efforts in Syria.

Employing this template allows for engagement with two additional core concepts, specifically *cultural empathy* and *conflict resolution* paradigms. These two related approaches can greatly aid planning and implementation of policies, in terms of defining “good” outcomes beforehand and working appropriately to enable them. Both also recognize the limitations inherent to the latter, in particular, in places suffering from catastrophic, persistent violence like Iraq and Syria.

Foundations of “Victory”

Cultural empathy steps through the door of cultural knowledge to reach out figuratively and literally to the “other”. By that, it allows for practitioners to use several critical topics used often in the fight against ISIS – narratives, norms, and to a lesser degree in the public fora but equally importantly, nationality. Narratives remain central to a range of DOD functions, as well as more broadly by implication, political interactions between states and within them over resources, influence, and strategic victory. Narratives play that role because they accomplish several primary tasks. First, they help to explain why people do what they do, and the meaning of events that occur outside of direct human action. Second, they also serve as keepers of collective memory passed through generations, helping individuals and communities to know their place relative to outsiders, whether hostile, indifferent, or confederates working towards common goals. Finally, narratives are themselves acts of purposive language, providing tools for groups to achieve their goals by combining collaborative stories. Those stories build on each other through central themes that often include some form of trouble and a way out of it. Therefore, as more than simply rote memory of what happened, or even why it occurred and still matters, narratives also include elements of empathy to connect the story tellers and hearers with story characters, thus giving a sense of shared

humanity across time and space. Those characters can motivate present day listeners towards greater pursuits of justice, reward and fulfillment, and as a result, offer states and non-state groups a broad spectrum of powerful analogies and archetypes for action.

Yet narratives are not in themselves rigid, immutable things. Elements of internal cohesion and adaptability show tensions that can exist between *master narratives* that persist through continued traction within a community based on their meaning and usage to explain things, and *personal versions* of the story that circle the core tenets. Having room for individuation does not mean an ideational free-for-all though. Stories or meanings that move too far from the center, or peripheral ideas that seek to overcome the core beliefs are likely to draw attention, if not outright hostility. Examples from counter fatwas regarding ISIS, or the broader current meaning of the European Union highlight the contested nature of those deviations, or more aptly, their perception as deviations by those who hold to a more “traditional” meaning of the core. In significant ways then, for Europe, the most meaningful changes in the EU can be seen in its movement from economic unity to political coordination and finally social integration of values, rather than the more easily noted geographic enlargement into Eastern Europe. These comparisons have direct application to Iraq and Syria as both polities struggle to define the narratives that establish and build the capacity, autonomy and legitimacy discussed earlier.

To make those comparisons, it is necessary to ask why some narratives become the message for violent action, while others do not, as well as the mechanisms by which those processes take place. Determining that requires a focus on aspects of *integration, coherence and fidelity*. Each of these reveals connections between core beliefs and language, while tying in experiences before people join resistance movements, as well as what members do within them. Accordingly, dialogue between rank-and-file participants, and between them and the leadership reveals points of contact either to build up or diminish the legitimacy of resistance narratives.

In particular, identifying a disconnect between what messages actually say relative to common, long-standing meanings will require a depth of knowledge that is available in different academic disciplines. Tapping into that knowledge base allows for strategic messaging to attempt plugging holes in a supported information campaign, or conversely, efforts to open new gaps or exploit existing ones in countering adversary movements. This partly focuses on the ideational space, while trustworthiness deals with the actions of leaders as moral archetypes of those narratives. As such, engaging in a typical “smear campaign” to discredit opponents has its rewards, but opposition groups retain ways to justify what could otherwise be considered deviations of character in response. Recognizing that action-reaction dynamic remains a key feature of effecting positive change in the long-term fight against ISIS and the prospects for stabilization of Syria and Iraq.

So how then can practitioners take this into practical data collection and messaging? Analysis into multiple layers of meaning gives a framework for evaluating a spectrum of issues and how people handle them cognitively, but at the same time, it also recognizes the limitations posed by *incomplete, inaccurate, and instrumental* information – people may not know, may remember or understand incorrectly, or may seek to skew the presentation of information in favor of things other than full truth claims. Accordingly, research needs realistic boundaries for what it can do in this central area of narrative analysis. Of

particular note is the way individual cognition coalesces into larger group dynamics since group think can override personal decision making. Examples include things like *bandwagoning* – siding with the dominant view to ensure personal rewards; *peer pressure* – overriding emotional attachments and cost/benefit calculations to “fit in”; and *threat perceptions* – engaging in fight and flight mechanisms.

Tied to these considerations are norms of appropriateness, specifically the practical use of beliefs within society that reinforce personal and group senses of place and purpose, as well as admonitions and reprimands for deviating away from the norms. In particular, we want to know what those norms are for Iraq and Syria, but first, can we even homogenize those two countries into single normative units of analysis? Deeper analysis into subgroups based on *objective* norms (those that exist regardless of who the “other” is or what they do), as well as *subjective* ones focusing on intergroup dynamics, can identify the friction points within the states as they currently exist, and areas of overlap in the potential future. Even more so, these norms have undergone stress from the near constant violence plaguing both countries, but at the same time, belief systems have also adapted, whether by highlighting virtues of fighting or fleeing to protect what matters most. Those valued things span a range from life, family, ethnic identity, and to ideational notions of nationality, all of which are relatable points of empathetic connection for practitioners engaging with vulnerable populations in the region.

Specifically, nationalism offers more than just a reference point for conversations in-country between locals. It also pertains to aspirations of self-government through a sovereign state, and thus gives much more in terms of the broader concept of cultural empathy for outsider interveners. Both Iraq and Syria are deeply broken in fundamental ways. Economic disruptions, demographic dislocations, political alienation, and the ensuing violence over these and deeper ethnic and religious identity conflicts reveal a

“One way to bind the brokenness is nationalism, an identity marker that can cross cultural and economic cleavages through a political framework.”

broad landscape of complex, overlapping problems. In many ways, they are similar to the Gray Zone itself with undefined borders of conflict. As such, one way to the brokenness is nationalism, an identity marker that can cross cultural and economic cleavages through a political framework. Citizenship allows for opportunities to give allegiance to broader entities, while not inherently threatening and diminishing more local identities. In return, states provide rights and “goodies.

However, even a cursory glance at the struggles facing Afghanistan calls into the question the rose-colored glasses one could assume of building nationalism. This relates back to the troika of analytical categories – *capacity, autonomy and legitimacy* – for even in places with two out of three, the absence of one may undo, or at the very least undermine nation building; Turkmenbashi remained an elusive goal despite the profusion of golden statues. What value then can nationalism bring to the discussion at hand? In one critical aspect, it provides a way forward, but as with all other aspects of this analytical foundation argument, considerations of feasibility matter as much as the efforts and paradigm undergirding nationalism.

Accordingly, **conflict resolution** strategies offer practical guidelines for setting the steps for long-term efforts that have potential to lead to successful outcomes in the region. In many ways, the tools for conflict resolution already exist across a host of USG and partner nation capacities. These include historic examples of multilateral peacekeeping, prevention efforts through negotiated settlements at all levels of governance from the local to international venues, all the way to reconciliation mechanisms found in truth commissions and microfinance. What binds these actions together is their *modularity*, their flexibility of application across issues and geographic spaces. In significant ways, conflict resolution shares similarities to the Gray Zone as a concept and in practice, making transnational actions feasible in both areas.

Specifically, reductions in violence, establishment of peace zones, and ultimately the development and embedding of non-violent resolution mechanisms in the structures and agents of the state-society relationship remain the gold standard for lasting peace. To do so obviously requires addressing the underlying causes, which the aforementioned analytical tools can provide, to say nothing of actually ending the violence itself, clearly no easy task. The relevant actions often lie across a spectrum of contexts and goals ranging from negative peace (the absence of overt violence) to positive peace (reconciliation so fighting no longer becomes a desired option). Conflict mapping of the origins and processes of dispute lays a similar analytical foundation as structure and agency do for the state-society relationship, offering both snapshots at any given moment, as well as trend analysis for deeper analysis into causality. When combined with research into grievances, cognitive openings can emerge into view, and not just after the fact. This is partly due to a reliance on *organizational lifecycles*, a related field in business, sociology, and other related scholarly disciplines.

Recognizing that organizations progress through stages of development in similar ways to individual decisions to join and participate in those organizations, it is possible to identify markers of capacity, autonomy and legitimacy for both states and non-state groups. In particular for anti-status quo VEOs, one can examine initial incubation when narratives and norms advance into new areas of application and draw new adherents to the belief system. Strategic violence can result from those processes, in part due to rivalries within the emerging organization for power over more than just resources, to include the core identity markers of the narrative. It can also result from actions by external enemies or a lack of acceptance, or even notice, by the targeted population perceived by the organization as vulnerable and capable of mobilization by the group; violence in either case lashes out as a demand for attention and recognition. This stage also often includes expansion of logistics while seeking to avoid the threshold of decisive action by the targeted adversary. The third stage of political violence develops out of the group's efforts to usurp legitimacy from the dominant power base, often through the provision of state privileges and public goods. ISIS's current efforts in those areas have in part relied on replication effects based on successful transitions by the Iranian revolution, Hezbollah, and Fatah, despite their apparent sectarian and geographic differences.

Many revolutionary movements remain at this stage, whether through the continuation of counterrevolutionary narratives and actions as in Cuba and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, or because of de facto stalemates between themselves and their opponents. Neither of these outcomes holds much appeal for US interests in Iraq and Syria, begging the question of what can be done to prevent, if possible, enduring quagmires of political instability. Above all, conflict resolution strategies mandate **pragmatism**

overlaid on solid analytical frameworks to see what is feasible. Not all conflicts are ripe for resolution, sometimes requiring *decisive victory*, despite the incumbent costs to human rights that often result. Another option with promise can be seen in Colombia with the *hurting stalemate* that incentivized conciliatory trust-building efforts that have produced a potential peace after decades of war. Obviously the same remains difficult in the case of the United States in Iraq and Syria, not least because of broader constraints facing interagency and international efforts within a deeply polarized American political process. However, certain observable reference points and steps can guide a pragmatic approach, even if it must be over the long-term.

First, organizations, including states and non-state actors in conflict, as well as individuals within them, will face cognitive openings. While difficult to predict, indicators of something moving that way can include 1) moderated speech acts – even if only inklings of conciliation, 2) factional divisions – even if these may be instrumental speech designed for effect on external adversaries rather than a realistic picture of internal dynamics, and 3) failures to claim ownership of violence – even if the same actions had previously received the group’s sanction and support. These are a few of the possible indicators of openings, but they offer potential for engagement, which raises the second issue of front vs. back channel negotiations. How, when, where, and by whom those negotiations take place have numerous historical and contemporary examples of success and failure, such that obvious pros and cons exist for both. However, outlining beforehand the second and third order effects for each remains a necessary planning step. Thus, when used together with the foundations of change and governance listed above, these approaches help to build a framework for engaging the relevant questions posed by this CENTCOM SMA, one that can support systemic evaluation in lieu of ad hoc analyses so often tied to the exigencies of urgent crises.

Conclusion

This brief review of scholarly contributions has sought to engage the connections between the questions rather than delve into specific names, dates, and places for action, as other elements of this ViTTa will likely have contributed. Those certainly carry great weight in addressing the questions raised, as does knowing the players, their histories, and relationships to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. These can all assist in identifying motivations and hopefully, opportunities for US and partner efforts. In that light, this paper offers reference points that are more than pre-mission checklists, while still providing tangible guidelines for establishing strategic analysis into core concepts that have application at the operational and tactical levels as well. However, the concepts presented here are neither exhaustive, nor the sole paradigm through which to see opportunities and constraints in Iraq and Syria. They merely give decision makers another vantage point for working to continue the progress made in Iraq, and to develop standards of capacity, autonomy, and legitimacy for a post-ISIS Syria. In that sense, this paper does not propose specific guidance on the thornier issues of whether Assad should stay, or to what degree the current Iraqi government can build greater governance as it reclaims deeply broken areas of its country. Instead, the framework shows sturdy stepping stones on which the US can stand as it wades deeper into the torrents facing the region.

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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Please see image on next page.

PMESII-PT friction points in post-ISIL Iraq; Future of Syria

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GEOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT

Watershed Considerations

When one riparian holds the most geographic and military power, equitable agreements are difficult to reach.

Unilateral development of water resources leads to increasing tension over water.

Tigris-Euphrates Watershed...

is shared among Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. These three riparian states have co-existed with varying degrees of "hydropolitical tension" since the 1960s.

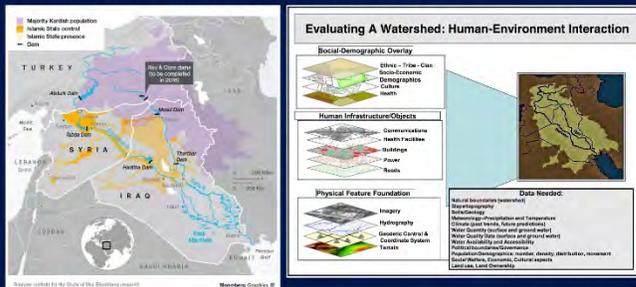
In 1975, unilateral water developments nearly led to war along the Euphrates River.

In the '90s, Syrian support for Kurdish separatists and Turkey's military support for Israel exacerbated on-going water dispute.

By 2001 Syria and Turkey agree on protocol of cooperation for Turkey's GAP and Syria's GOLD projects.

2003 post-Hussein Iraqi leadership stated intention to reach agreement with Turkey and Syria regarding Tigris-Euphrates water allocation.

The two rivers have their sources in eastern Turkey. Both rivers drain southeast through northern Syria and Iraq to the head of the Persian Gulf. The upper courses are confined to the valleys and gorges of Anatolia. Their middle courses cross the uplands of northern Syria and Iraq, emptying onto the plain of central Iraq. Finally, their lower courses meander across the alluvial plain, which both rivers have created jointly. Near Basra, the rivers join to form the Shatt al-Arab, which empties into the Persian Gulf.



An understanding of the inextricable links between the systems of water, food, energy and climate is critical to make informed decisions regarding trade-offs between these systems, rather than suffer unintended consequences. **Water** security is the keystone of the water-energy-food-climate change nexus. **Food** production requires water and energy; water extraction and distribution require **energy**; and energy production requires water. Agriculture is the single largest consumer of water worldwide, and rapidly growing urban populations require safe, clean drinking water and adequate sanitation, as well as more food. Expected impacts of **climate change** on water resources increase the urgency of finding new ways to balance urban and rural needs in a sustainable way that ensures the continued health of freshwater ecosystems.

Issues to watch...

Water-Food-Energy Nexus



Environmentally Displaced People

Demographic Shifts - rural to urban migration

<http://bit.ly/Zdy7oBA>

<http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/basins/euphrates-tigris/index.stm>

Palmer-Moloney Dissertation Source: <http://bit.ly/Zd8pT00>

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

Diane Maye

Embry Riddle Aeronautical University

Below is an email exchange following Dr. Maye's 14 October SMA Speaker Series talk about "Iraqi Politics: Political Power, Alignment, and Alliances in Post-Ba'athist Iraq" that is relevant to this question. To listen to an audio of this event, please contact Sarah Canna at scanna@nsiteam.com.

I hope this answers your questions - please let me know if you need any clarification:

Questions. Ref. a 'conclusion' or 'so what?' to Dr. Maye's research / BIG QUESTION - So what's the 'way-ahead' look like WRT upcoming elections and continuing development of Iraq? At least the possibilities based upon the trends she's seen w/I Iraqi political development?

Iraq's Sunnis have a big problem - lack of institutional longevity in their political parties as well as a lack of legitimacy. So, I predict that unless a strong Sunni political player emerges, the same situation of Sunni marginalization will emerge.

- Does it look like KRG/Kurdistan will remain a 'federated state' within the Iraqi National project?

Yes, I think so - now the push for Kurdish nationhood is strong; but it very difficult to fully break from Iraq. I think the Kurdish model would bode well for most of Iraq's provinces; a confederal state with each province in charge of their own security, and security at the local level.

- Can the previous success of the Iraqi National Movement to form an effective coalition of Shi'a and Sunni parties/candidates be replicated in future?

Yes - there will be secular party - a technocratic group; it is emerging now - these are the intellectual elite, businessmen. Their problem is that they tend to be undermined by the impoverished classes, the religious establishment, the Shi'ia street.

- Will this or the next Iraqi Administration grow closer to Iran, the US, or chart it's own 'third way'?

As it stands now -the Iraqi Administration is likely to be under the influence of Iran - the outcome of Mosul will have big play here- this is where the U.S. can undermine Iran and push the technocrats.

- Will the Iraqi religious authority(ies?) in Najaf/Karbala (the Hawza?) more actively 'advise' the Shi'a majority government to steer clear of the 'Iranian model'?

They are unlikely to steer clear of this in my opinion, the movement away towards an Iraq model is just not strong enough yet. Right now Iran has so much soft power, it will be hard to change the momentum.

What's the 'next generation' after al-Sistani general leanings WRT policies al-Sistani has taken?

Well, there is going to be huge vying for power - either there will be a declaration before Sistani dies, or there will be real chaos. There are already people trying to fill this gap. I predict chaos.

Question. Ref. slide 17 / Generalizations (Kurds)

- bullet two - while the Pesh have become legitimate, what's the impact to internal KRG politics AND external relations and development w/Iraqi Government of the multiple different 'factions' of Pesh (arguably as many as 5 different Peshmerga forces and NOT a single, unified, security force) to come to some internal and external 'agreement/accommodation' on a way-ahead?

Well - The folks in Suliyamaniah - from what I can tell they are certainly trying to align with the Baghdad gov'n't, yet they are certainly seeking increased autonomy. Barzani's faction, the KDP - they are very interested in what happens to Mosul (this is the real point of contention). There are many in Mosul that see the Kurds as running away - letting Daesh take over, doing nothing to help them. So, there is some resentment that the Kurds could take over once Mosul is taken back from Daesh. The Turks want

influence in Mosul as well. This is going to be a big problem - already there are disagreements about having Turkish forces on the ground there.

- Is there any chance of another 'civil war' between KDP(West) and PUK(East) over way-ahead for the KRG and Kurdish autonomy/independence?

No, I don't think so.

- While it appears to me that NEITHER KDP nor PUK want to 'support' integration of Eastern Syrian Kurds into a 'greater Kurdistan', they have supported them materially to fight ISIS/Assad - WRT Kobani the Turks reluctantly 'allowed' this - is support of Syrian and Turkish Kurds a point of contention between KDP and PUK leadership and policies?

They are trying to establish this one big Kurdish nation - so this would certainly help in terms of geography. I can see some pushing for this and others opposing it.

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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1. The principal factor affecting the future of the Syrian conflict is that the Assad regime is not simply unwilling to engage in any degree of genuine power-sharing - it is unable to do so without the risk of unraveling. But the key issue here is not simply that it will therefore continue to fight for outright military and political victory. Rather, even total victory leaves the regime in command of a devastated economy

“The Assad regime is not simply unwilling to engage in any degree of genuine power sharing, it is unable to do so without the risk of unraveling.”

and under continuing sanctions without the resources to rebuild its power or consolidate its hold over the country. So its logical goal has to be to regain access to external capital and markets, and to get sanctions lifted. In theory, it has little hope of achieving this thru normal diplomacy and will face severe reluctance from the US, EU, and GCC countries and Turkey, and so it will extend the fighting inside Syria as a means of coercing external powers into accepting

its demands. This is not something that will start to happen in a year or two or only after a political deal is reached; the regime is probably thinking along these lines now. I suspect that Russia (and others such as China) will endorse regime demands, arguing that the "Friends of Syria" governments can't demand a transition or peace in Syria and then be unwilling to increase its chances of success by lifting sanctions and allowing trade in goods and capital flows to resume. Turkey will also have an interest in getting back into the Syrian market, as will Lebanon and Jordan, which have suffered the most economically and are desperate to repatriate refugees and revive their flagging economies and business sectors. The regime knows this and has been adopting new laws since late 2015 designed, at least in part, to attract investors and Syrian flight capital. Securing the regime financially and economically will, I believe, become the real purpose behind much of its military operations (i.e. as leverage and coercion of external governments) and the focus of behind-the-scenes discussions with the US and EU (et al), probably mediated by Russia, once the new US administration picks up the foreign policy reins from Spring 2017.

2. With regard to the implications of the Turkish intervention in Syria, I view this primarily as a maneuver by Erdogan to display an appearance of being in charge (of the army and foreign policy) in the wake of the attempted coup, but in reality what seems to be an offensive posture is a defensive one that seeks to mask the big challenges the Turkish president faces at home. These include: 1) his continuing confrontation with the PKK (which he resumed as an extension of his domestic political agenda), 2) his need to consolidate control over his own party as well as the general public and the civil service (it's true

that he has fired 80,000 civil servants and is going after opposition or independent media, academics, activists, which consolidates his personal grip, but Turkey is a diverse, complex, modern country and these measures will also inflict a high social, political, and economic cost too), and 3) his need to worry about the army (it's true he's defeated the coup, but the army will not regain its full cohesion and effectiveness for years, during which he's implicated it in a nasty domestic war with the country's Kurdish population, and he can't be absolutely sure that it is now wholly neutralized politically.)

So in my assessment, controlling a narrow strip of land inside Syria by Turkish units is more about show and PR, as are statements about being ready to work with the US to regain Raqqa. The Turkish army can't reach Raqqa without going either thru Syrian Kurdish areas (if going directly south from the border), which would be very problematic and disruptive for US military planning, or thru or adjacent to Assad regime forces (if hooking via Aleppo East and then south of the Tabqa dam to Raqqa). This is just not real, and the Turkish defence Minister Isik has publicly said Turkey will "support" but not be part of the Euphrates Force.

The takeaway is that no single ground force operating in Syria today can take Raqqa on its own, no matter how much air support it gets: not the Assad regime, the Kurds/SDF, nor any combination of the "moderate" opposition (or non-moderate opposition for that matter). But I don't see a coalition of any two of these forces working together, either.

3. With regard to post-ISIL scenarios, the real threat is the future of the Iraqi state and of Shia-Shia rivalries. There was a brief moment when the US and others faced up to the truth of why ISIL was able to revive and then sweep thru Mosul and central Iraq in summer 2014: the deep corruption of the Iraqi state (of which army and police corruption were a part), the failure to achieve genuine political reintegration of the Sunni Arabs or to resolve any other deep political divisions within the Sunni and Shia political camps and communities, and the failure of government ministries and agencies to deliver effective services and solutions to endemic problems (electricity, poverty and unemployment which remain deepest in Shia provinces, etc.). The US understood that these issues had to be addressed, but in the face of resistance from the Iraqi actors abandoned the attempt and focused solely on immediate military needs. While understandable, the result is that nobody has confronted, let alone resolved, the above three challenges since 2014. In fact they are not even being discussed. Talk of reform in Baghdad (cabinet and parliament) had no depth and little will, and has degenerated into a power struggle between Abadi, Sadr, and the other main Shia players (Maliki, PM chiefs).

All these problems will be center stage again as soon as the dust clears from the battle for Mosul. I'm not even talking about the huge challenge of post-conflict reconstruction of towns and homes and businesses destroyed in the actual fighting. I'm referring to the basic question of what Iraqi state will emerge, and to

the questions many Iraqis will pose about its purpose and nature and identity - and indeed why to have it at all. Potentially most worrying, however, will be the intensification of Shia-Shia rivalry in a post-ISIL context. This has been subsumed by the fight against ISIL, but is already apparent. With ISIL's defeat, however, the single most important issue for the powerful Shia political and military actors will be to decide who dominates their community and, given the central position of the Shia in the post-2003 government and Iraqi state, who controls Baghdad. That is likely to trigger a bloody contest in the capital and other cities and provinces.

I hope this helps. Please note that I share these views freely and do not consider them the exclusive property of the Joint Staff, CENTCOM, or any other agency and reserve the right to use or publish them elsewhere and in public.

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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Executive Summary

Iraq remains a country in transition. Multiple variables contribute to the country's weakening security apparatus, rendering the county vulnerable to external proxy influence, most notably from Iran. The collapse of global oil markets of 2014 coupled with the Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant's (ISIL) military offensive of June 2014 are only two examples. With much attention on these two primary facilitators, little discussion has taken place regarding the country's fragmented political system or second order effects emanating from the country's weak economic condition - both of which have compounding consequences on future stability operations.

It is within the country's *political and economic sectors* that fracture points are most pronounced. These fracture points enable Iran with opportunity to support the country's fragile state, exerting Iranian influence and capitalizing on Iraq's weakened condition. It is therefore in Iran's best interest to maintain an element of weakness within Iraq's central government in an effort to hedge against US influence in the region.

Iran's support to Iraq has been both covert and overt, as Iranian leadership not only seeks to influence Iraq's political policies but also control elements within the country. Overt actions include supporting social welfare programs where the Iraqi central government is deficient due to weak economic conditions. This Iranian support fosters elements of trust between Iran and Iraqi Shi'a *communities* enabling Iran with influence at a localized level. Covertly Iran exerts influence via numerous Shi'a militia organizations most notably, Muqtada al-Sadr's Promised Day Brigade – the successor to the Mahdi Army, Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl al Haqq (League of the Righteous) and Kata'ib Hezbollah (Battalions of Hezbollah).

SME Input

Political

Friction points within Iraq's political system are multi-faceted and encompass the country's political coalitions as well as sentiments of political disenfranchisement of Iraq's minority Sunni population. Iraq's government is a multi-party system comprised of executive, judicial, and legislative branches supported by various ethno-sectarian coalitions. The majority of power within the country resides with the government's three-hundred-twenty-eight member Council of Representatives (COR) who enact laws based on two-thirds COR (majority) vote. Council of Representatives members are elected by popular vote and represent the country's diverse ethno-sectarian population. This representation also includes the country's vast tribal communities.

As the majority of the country's population is Shi'a, Iraq's COR will remain Shi'a dominate for the near future. Friction arises within Iraq's political system from sentiments of disenfranchisement of Iraq's minority Sunni population. As a consequence, Iraq's political system is fragmented resulting in weakness throughout Iraq's central government *from within* which manifests in social discord at the localized level.

Often power-blocs are formed between coalitions as no one coalition holds the required two-thirds majority vote to enact laws on their own. As a result, power-blocs (alliances between coalitions) are formed as a means to gain the necessary support to enact laws. These power-blocs are a friction point as often alliances of COR members fluctuate based on sectarian, tribal, or ethnic agendas. This results in intra-coalition tensions among coalition members due to perceived notions of disloyalty. Often, political tensions in Iraq are publically displayed through media outlets further dividing Iraq's diverse communities.

Further supporting discord among the country's deeply divided population, unsettled grievances from former Shi'a Prime Minister Nori al-Malaki's sectarian political policies continue to fuel deep sentiments of disenfranchisement and political marginalization of Iraq's Sunni population. Sunni opposition groups will require reintegration into the civil-military-political process in an effort to address legitimate

grievances. This will provide a level of managed stability but *will require cooperation and concession* among the country's deeply fragmented, ethno-sectarian political leadership. If Sunni grievances are not legitimately addressed, greater divisions among Iraq's political leaders will create further social stratification which will increase tensions throughout the country.

Capitalizing on this political polarization, Iran has actively sought to exert its influence within Iraq's political system. Iran has long-standing associations with Iraq's current government officials, most noticeable through its support of Iraq's Shi'a coalitions via Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani. Often, Soleimani serves as political arbitrator between Iraqi Shi'a parties and heads Iran's activities inside the country (disbursing funds to political leaders and overseeing soft power initiatives).

On May 23, 2016, Soleimani was identified in a picture, reportedly taken in a meeting on then pending operations in Fallujah, according to the *Long War Journal, Threat Matrix*. Also appearing in the same picture were two US designated terrorists: (1) *Akram al Kaabi*, a Shi'a militia leader; and (2) *Abu Mahdi al Muhandis*, who leads Hezbollah Brigades, specifically, *Hata'ib Hezbollah*, and Shia PMU's, in Iraq. In addition Hadi al Amir the leader of another Iranian supported militia, the *Badr Organization*, was present in the picture. Soleimani and Amir have very close personal ties dating back to the Iran-Iraq War. Multiple sightings of Soleimani working with Iranian backed militias in Iraq have surfaced. Of note, Soleimani was implicated by the US Treasury Department in a Washington DC based bomb plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador at a café in Georgetown.

Covertly, Iran utilizes Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr as a conduit to implement destabilization. On April 30, 2016 al-Sadr loyalists stormed the Iraqi parliament inside Baghdad's green zone demanding the resignation of the prime minister, speaker of the COR and the Iraqi president. The protesters who staged a twenty-four hour sit-in further demanded increased responsiveness of government officials to fight corruption and address the needs of the population. Protesters demanded the government do more to alleviate economic burdens and address the lack of social services.

Using Iraq's deteriorating economic conditions as the basis to affect political change, Muqtada al-Sadr frequently holds large rallies in opposition against Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi's administration. Iran's use of Muqtada al-Sadr as a key proxy enables Iran with opportunity to support Iraq's impoverished communities while simultaneously creating political friction within the country. Thus, Iran is controlling the mechanisms of creating opportunities within the county utilizing Muqtada al-Sadr as a primary proxy.

Economic

Iraq's declining economic conditions stemming from collapsed global oil markets is felt most at the

community (local) level. The country is suffering from the ill effects germane to rentier economies where revenue is nearly wholly contingent on uncontrollable market variables such as price fluctuations, supply/demand issues and lack of economic diversification. The latter has extensive second order effects, as job markets remain limited. Consequently, the Iraqi government employs twenty-percent of the country's total population. It is significant to note nearly sixty-percent of Iraq's population is under the age of twenty-five. As youth mature, many seek opportunity to support their families. Without viable employment opportunities, youth become despondent, increasing the risk of susceptibility to nefarious activity, most notably cooptation into the ranks of ISIL as a means to offset needed income.

The Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant's military offensive has caused the central government to prioritize its limited financial resources on military expenditures at a time when the country's revenue stream has become stagnate. In order to offset this new financial challenge wide-scale cuts to social services and government lay-offs have ensued. This has increased poverty levels, which adds to local population's financial hardships as debt burdens are increasing throughout the country.

In addition to increased military expenditures, rebuilding costs associated with ISILs destruction has placed additional strains against Iraq's central government. With little revenue coming into the country's treasury, the need to borrow funds has increased. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) indicated Iraq's deficits were expected to triple in 2015, from 5.3% of GDP in 2014 to 18.4% of GDP in 2015. In May 2016, the IMF agreed to loan Iraq \$5.4 billion over a five-year period. The interest rate will vary between 1 to 1.3% depending on how much of the funds Iraq's central government borrows.

Unfortunately, loans always come with a set of conditions established by the lender. Such was the case in 2004 when the IMF loaned Iraq \$50 billion. At that time, IMF officials suggested Iraq privatize some sectors and raise oil prices *in exchange for lowering the country's payments*. Iraq failed to meet the IMF's demands. With Iraq's current economic instability, it is apparent the country's immediate need to offset its financial deficits far outweighs the risk of potential IMF influence over Iraq's future policies. Companies, who wish to conduct business inside Iraq, will need to be aware of the potential for changes in Iraq's fiscal policies due to the potential of the IMF to exert influence over Iraq's central government.

Social

Iraq is a multicultural society in which members identify with different traditions. These varied traditions shape, or influence, the activities, and behavior of everyday life for Iraqis in different ways. While multiculturalism enriches Iraqi society with diversity, it also presents significant obstacles to the formation

of a unified national identity. This lack of a unified national identity is an additional friction point as often in Iraq, ethnicities clash due to perceptions of social stratification, marginalization, and political disenfranchisement.

While there are friction points among Iraq's diverse populations, a common theme intrinsic across ethno-

“Primacy in Iraqi identity is given to the family, followed by associations with clans, which further link Iraqis with tribal membership derived from patrilineal lines of extended family.”

sectarian divisions is loyalty to family. In Iraqi identity is given to the family, followed by associations with clans, which further link Iraqis with tribal membership derived from patrilineal lines of extended family. Secondary, but also important, are ethno-sectarian affiliations such as identification to Sunni-Kurd, Shi'a Arab or Christian Yazidi, etc. While diversity exists, the common theme intrinsic throughout Iraqi society is that social behaviors are consistent with the implied values of family unity, loyalty, honor, and duty. Paradoxically, these values can be both a stabilizing and destabilizing factor. It is stabilizing as one's sense of loyalty to family

acts as a deterrent to aberrant behavior. It is destabilizing because affronts to one's family can only be avenged by individual action.

Ethnicity is an important source of Sunni Arab, Persian Shia, Kurdish, and Turkoman, identity. Shared similarities among these diverse ethnic groups provide feelings of familiarity related to commonly held characteristics of appearance, speech, values, and experiences. Each ethnic group is proud of its respective tribal, religious, and political history. The centrality of their patrilineal bloodlines connects them to a deep historical past as descendants of an ancient and powerful ethnic and sociocultural-religious narrative central to their identity, *in the absence of a unified national identity*.

Friction Points within the Iraq PMESII-PT Construct.

Multiple variables within Iraq's PMESII-PT construct are contributing to the destabilization of the country's security environment. Most prevalent are via the country's unstable political system and its weak economic outlook. *It is via these two variables*, which Iran seeks to capitalize on most in an effort to insert Iranian influence at the local level and ultimately instill proxy control. It is therefore in Iran's best interest to keep these two variables, unstable – as noted above.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Growing Iranian influence within Iraq inhibits US opportunity to support stability operations. As Iraq continues to weaken under the strains of political fragmentation and declining global oil markets, Iran

strengthens its associations throughout the country. By way of augmenting localized welfare programs and support at the community level, Iran is solidifying trust among Iraq's Shi'a population *at the localized level*. Ultimately, the localized level has the most influence within Iraq's political system as masses of Iraq's population can gather at a moment's notice in an effort to affect change through protest.

US Policy makers should understand well the dynamics of the region when assessing Iraq. Iran's influence inside Iraq provides a bridge to Syria, which further opens territory to Lebanon and ultimately, Hezbollah. Dynamically, Shi'a dominant Iran is amassing Shi'a *strategic depth* spanning large swaths of territory to its west. Couple this strategic expansion with Iran's growing nuclear ambitions and the security landscape shifts, dramatically. Sunni dominated Saudi Arabia has attempted to instill its own form of influence inside Iraq via support to Iraq's Sunni tribes. However, to date, the majority of Saudi support inside Iraq has failed mostly due to tribal members perceptions of abandonment by Saudi supporters.

In an effort to recognize where the US may have opportunity to affect and counter Iranian influence, Washington first needs to recognize why Saudi Arabia has failed in its attempts to support Iraq's Sunni tribal communities *and assume these lessons learned* in an effort to reengage this informal power-stream. Tribal dynamics inside Iraq place a greater emphasis on loyalty rather than financial support. Loyalty in fact is the most important foundational concept throughout Iraqi society. Additionally Washington should recognize the lever which enables Iran with power inside Iraq, *ultimately stems most from Iraq's weak economy*. Iraq's economy remains weak due to declining global oil markets and the lack of economic diversification. This provides Iran opportunity to support. However, who has the ability to control global oil markets more; Washington or Teheran?

Iraq must diversify its economic base and develop plans to support private industries, which replicate pre-oil Iraq economic sectors. Agriculture, fisheries, and private industry should be a primary focus. Unfortunately, for Iraq today - it is the lack of economic diversification common among rentier-based economies, which is having the most profound effects at the local level of society, which Iran has capitalized on most.

On the other side of this equation, it may behoove Washington to remain in the background for the time being and *capitalize on the opportunity to observe* what Iran is doing by way of political support as well as assess what social services Iran is providing. These observation can provide analysts with a unique glimpse of Iran's capabilities. In assessing what Iran is capable of doing - - analysts can also notate *the lack of capabilities* and assess where Iran's efforts are falling short or are deficient in an effort to capitalize on this weakness or vulnerability. In addition, Iran's continued engagements inside Iraq will keep Iran *engaged and distracted* from other activities, most notably – its continued activities inside Yemen. Thus, there are several options available where the US has opportunity to use to an advantage in the region.

Comments on Post-ISIL Iraq

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Judging from areas liberated to-date, Iraqis will be unable to stabilize areas on their own due to competition between security and political forces, and mistrust between local populations. To date, in most but not all areas, stabilization efforts are on hold because of a lack of political and security arrangements. While the USG is pursuing a hands-off, light footprint policy in Iraq, we can play a role in trying to secure deals so that stabilization and reconstruction efforts can proceed.

Friction Points

If Iraqis are left to their own devices, at worst, it could lead to a variety of conflicts in the short and long term:

- Intra Shia conflict between militias over territory (e.g. Tuz Khormatu) especially with upcoming elections
 - Though somewhat prevented, mollified by Iran
- Intra Kurdish conflict between PUK and KDP forces (e.g. Kirkuk)
- Conflict between Kurds / Peshmerga forces and Shia populations/ PMU forces (e.g. Tuz Khormatu)
 - Though somewhat prevented, mollified by Iran
- Continuing Sunni marginalization (e.g. preventing return) by Shia (in areas of Salahddin, Diyala) and by Kurds (Zumar and areas of Dohuk/ Erbil/ Ninewa)
- Intra Sunni conflict (e.g. Anbar) Most, though not all, of those not invited to the deal-making table (by the Kurds and by Shia militia leadership) are Sunni Arabs.
- Conflict between new local forces (e.g. Yezidis) demanding autonomy and traditional state actors (Erbil, Baghdad)
- Conflict between Baghdad and Erbil over DIBs especially considering the most recent Kurdish land grab

Opportunities for USG, Coalition, CENTCOM to prevent these conflicts and help ensure stability

Politics (national and local) post ISIL

- The USG should play the role in the short and long term as mediator and facilitator, a neutral third party, alongside upper level EU and UN representatives, in local and national political and security

deal-making and arrangements in post ISIL Iraq. On a local level, this could come in the form of reduced, smaller “coalition” PRTs. The USG can work by, through and with local partners to make arrangements in post ISIL territories but will have to be at the table to reinforce the deals.

- The USG should use its leverage to promote accommodationist and inclusive policies among Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish national leadership and vis a vis the demands of local populations.
- The USG should take into account that everything in Iraq is hyper-localized and fragmented and there is no blanket policy that will work even for an entire province or district. Reasons for instability in one district are different than another. However, generally speaking political competition, mistrust among local populations, and influence of radical Iranian backed Shia militias are drivers of instability.
- The USG should appoint a Special Envoy for Iraq (Ryan Crocker comes to mind) whose sole job is to negotiate among Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish leadership as well as leverage national leadership to give local deal-making necessary space. The position would also serve to counter, and engage with Iranians on Iraq.
- The USG should prioritize local deals in the short term, which are not achievable and will allow stability as leverage is used to forge national deals.
- The USG should be actively engaged in the KRG – federal Iraqi Government relationship. The Kurds have an interest in maintaining chaos and instability in Baghdad and Iraq, and that interest and role needs to be tempered and mollified by the USG. Kurds need to be given certain incentives and guarantees that Baghdad, Iraqi stability will not mean less autonomy, etc. for the Kurds.
- While Iraq’s external borders may not change, internal boundaries and structures (provinces, districts) should be on the table.

Security post ISIL

- The USG should prioritize the reinstatement of the local police force and departure of Shia militias in post ISIL towns and departure of Shia militias. In many areas liberated from ISIS, Shia militias have remained. In others, local police have been reinstated. In towns where the local police force has been reinstated, local populations have mostly returned and there is some stability. However, in areas where Shia militias have remained, there has been little return and stability.
- The USG should pay particular attention to strengthening the legitimacy of the ISF, which will weaken the influence and support of Iran and Iraqis for pro Iranian extremist Shia militias like Asa’ib Ahl al Haq, Kata’ib Hezbollah and Saraya Khorsani.

- The USG should prioritize and use leverage for the plan for demobilization (and integration, especially Sunnis to prevent another Sahwa situation) of PMU forces. Those who do not wish to return to their day jobs and wish to remain in a security force should either be part of a new National Guard-like force or able to join the ISF.

Economy

- The most stated concern among local populations in liberated territories is about control of reconstruction funds. This could either pave a way to a new transparent and accountable economic system or be another layer on local corruption and criminal behavior regarding contracts, smuggling, and patronage around elections.

Justice/ Social

- While a very local indigenous issues, the USG should support or advise on local justice courts set up to determine the fate of those accused of supporting ISIL, to avoid another round of revenge, and potential AQI, ISIL 3.0.

Case Studies

(I just included these in case they are helpful – I have been following these and a couple others areas other the past year and a half or two years.)

- **Sleiman Beg.** (Subdistrict in Tuz Khormatu, Salahddin) The town was liberated from ISIL by Shia militias almost two years ago, but the population of 70,000 Sunni Arabs has not been allowed to return. Local Shia populations in the area, especially in Amerli, will not allow the population back, or to form a local Sunni Hashd branch. Peshmerga have also refused to let the population of Sleiman Beg form a Peshmerga unit. Some of this is history – after years of being threatened by AQI and other Sunni extremist nationalist groups, they finally have an opportunity to be rid of these groups and their perceived enablers. Some of this anti return sentiment is flamed by Shia militias, particularly those supported by Iran like Asa'ib Ahl al Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah and Saraya Khorsani. The director of Sleiman Beg, Talib Muhammed, has been a good partner to both Kurd and the Shia leadership in Baghdad. He traveled to Najaf to met Sistani's representative and lives in Sulaimaniya. He is an example of a local partner willing to make deals.
- **Yathrib and Saadiya.** (Yathrib is in Salahddin and Saadiya is in Diyala, Khanaqin district) provide examples of how remaining Shia militia presence is preventing return of local Sunni Arab populations. In Yathrib, while the local Sunni population is allowed to return, only 1700 of 75,000 have gone back due to the remaining presence of extremist pro Iranian Shia militias. These militias refuse to leave and will not allow the reinstatement of the local police force. Unlike in Sleiman Beg, the local Shia tribes and populations of Balad and Dujail have mostly agreed that the Sunni Arabs of Yathrib can return. Similarly, in Saadiya, a majority Sunni Arab town in Khanaqin district close to the border with Iran, PMU forces controlled by Badr forces are in charge. While dozens of families have return, most remain displaced, and do not want to go back with the Badr/ PMU

securing the town. In each place, there are local partners who are willing to make deals, that are sometimes dashed by national figures and forces with personal narrow political agendas.

- **Sinjar.** In Sinjar various Yezidi groups are pushed and pulled in different directions by the KDP/ KRG, the PKK/ YPG and Baghdad. There are also independent forces that have been at times aligned with Erbil and with Baghdad. While they are divided by the competing Kurdish forces, as well as by their own visions for Sinjar, there is a deal to be made among Yezidis, but it will require the facilitation of an outside, neutral third party like the United States. Sinjar is an example of a post ISIL territory where local populations have lost trust in the state and its political and security structures, and therefore want increased autonomy. It can be best addressed through a possible redrawing of internal Iraqi boundaries, and administrative “upgrades” (e.g. a district becomes a province). Sinjar can also be used as a case study for minority areas that will be liberated around Mosul (NE, E, SE).
- **Tuz Khormatu.** Tuz Khormatu has been plagued by violence between local Kurds and/or Peshmerga force and local Turkmen and/or Shia militiaman. The conflict is a product of the lack of security and political arrangements between PMU/ Shia militia forces present in the Shia Turkmen parts of town, and Peshmerga/ KRG forces present in the Kurdish side of town. For example, most fights start at checkpoints manned by one side which the other side deems illegitimate. Tuz is a disputed territory, so of course there are two different sets of rules, and competition between Baghdad and Erbil over the area on local and national levels. Iran has participated in negotiating deals between the PUK (which is the overwhelming forces in the area) and Badr, the main militia in town, and other Shia militia/ PMU forces in town.

Another troubling dynamic in Tuz is that among the Shia militias here. Asa’ib Ahl al Haq and Kataiib Hezbollah are usually blamed for starting trouble to challenge Badr’s control of the town. This could happen in other areas, especially in the context of an election.

Author Biographies



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Hassan Abbas is Professor of International Security Studies and Chair of the Department of Regional and Analytical Studies at National Defense University's College of International Security Affairs (CISA). He is also currently a Senior Advisor at Asia Society. He remained a Senior Advisor at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (2009-2011), after having been a Research Fellow at the Center from 2005-2009. He was the Distinguished Quaid-i-Azam Chair Professor at Columbia University before joining CISA and has previously held fellowships at Harvard Law School and Asia Society in New York.

He regularly appears as an analyst on media including CNN, ABC, BBC, C-Span, Al Jazeera and GEO TV (Pakistan). His opinion pieces and research articles have been published in various leading international newspapers and academic publications. His latest book titled *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier* (Yale University Press, 2014) was profiled on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in August 2014. Abbas' earlier well acclaimed book *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror* (M E Sharpe, 2004) remains on bestseller lists in Pakistan and India. He also runs WATANDOST, a blog on Pakistan and its neighbors' related affairs. His other publications include an Asia Society report titled *Stabilizing Pakistan Through Police Reform* (2012) and *Pakistan 2020: A Vision for Building a Better Future* (Asia Society, 2011).



Hala Abdulla joined USMC Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL) in September 2010 as the CENTCOM regional researcher and Subject Matter Expert under the Regional Cultural Language Familiarization (RCLF) team. Prior to 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), she worked for al-Arab daily International Newspaper in Baghdad office. Following OIF, she worked for four years as a journalist and cultural advisor with the U.S. Army Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (JPOTF) in Baghdad's Green Zone. Since coming to the United States ten

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Middle East History

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Selected Research: "The 2003 Iraq War Did Not Take Place: A First Person Perspective on Government Intelligence and Iraq's WMD Program," *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 May, 2014; "[Reconceptualizing Sectarianism in the Middle East and Asia](#)," The Middle East Institute, June 18, 2014; "Sadrabilia: The Visual Narrative of Muqtada Al-Sadr's Islamist Politics and Insurgency in Iraq" in Sune Haugobolle and Christianne Gruber (eds.), *Rhetoric of the Image: Visual Culture in Modern Muslim Contexts*(Indiana Univ. Press, 2013)



Allison Astorino-Courtois

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

Previously, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007) where she served as a STRATCOM liaison to U.S. and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University

in College Station, TX (1994-2003) where her research focused on Middle East politics and the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. She has received a number of academic grants and awards and has published articles in multiple peer-reviewed journals. She has also taught at Creighton University and as a visiting instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Astorino-Courtois earned her Ph.D. in International Relations and MA in and Research Methods from New York University. Her BA is in political science from Boston College. Finally, Dr. Astorino-Courtois also has the distinction of having been awarded both a US Navy Meritorious Service Award and a US Army Commander's Award.



Dr. Munqith Dagher

Dr. Munqith Dagher conducted Iraq's first-ever public opinion poll and since that time has been responsible for undertaking 1,500,000+ interviews for a range of agencies and topics. Munqith established IIACSS in 2003 while he was a Professor of Public Administration/ Strategic Management at Baghdad University. He has managed more than 300 public opinion and various market research projects. He has lectured widely and published several articles and books in different countries in the world.

Recently and since ISIL took over Mosul, on June 2014 , Munqith has dedicated most of his time to study the reasons behind the sudden uprising of this terrorist organization and how to defeat it. For this reason he has run three rounds of quantitative and qualitative research in Iraq. Munqith published the some of these results in the Washington post and gave number of talks and presentations in the most well-known think tanks in the world as the Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington and King's College in London.

Munqith holds a Ph.D. in Public Administration from the University of Baghdad, College of Administration and Economics, master degree in Human resources and Master degree in war sciences .He was professor of public administration and strategic management in Baghdad, Basrah and National defence universities. Munqith has also finished course in principle of marketing research in the University of Georgia,US.

On June 16th 2015, Munqith awarded the Ginny Valentine Badge of Courage ,on behalf of the Research Liberation Front , for Bravery in keeping the research alive in multiple conflict zones.



Alexis Everington is the Director of Research for Madison Springfield, Inc. His qualifications include 15 years program management experience leading large scale, cross-functional, multi-national research & analytical programs in challenging environments including Iraq, Libya, Mexico, Syria and Yemen. Alexis advised both the Libyan opposition government during the Libyan revolution of 2011 and its immediate aftermath and most recently, the Syrian opposition military. He has also helped train several other foreign militaries and has taught at the NATO School. In addition, Alexis developed the Target Audience Analysis methodology that is currently employed across the US national security community and has been applied most recently in Afghanistan, Jordan, and Lebanon. His educational credentials include a Master of Arts from Oxford University in European and Middle Eastern Studies and his language skills

include a fluency in Arabic, Spanish, French and Italian as well as a proficiency in Mandarin. Alexis is currently leading large-scale qualitative and quantitative primary research studies in Libya, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.



Daveed Gartenstein-Ross is the Chief Executive Officer of Valens Global. His professional focus is on understanding how violent non-state actors (VNSAs) are transforming the world. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, as well as a Fellow with Google's Jigsaw, an Associate Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, and an Adjunct Assistant Professor in Georgetown University's Security Studies Program.

Gartenstein-Ross is the author or volume editor of twenty-one books and monographs, and a member of the Editorial Board of the leading peer-reviewed journal *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. As a practitioner, some of Gartenstein-Ross's recent projects have included:

- delivering regular briefings and assessments to U.S. government agencies on such topics as ISIS's European attack network and the implications of the failed coup in Turkey;
- organizing and facilitating a conference in Nigeria, as an EU-appointed Strategic Communication Expert, helping civil society activists understand militant groups' use of social media and forge a strategic action plan for countering it;
- mapping the online counter-ISIS narrative space for a leading tech firm designing a pilot project to divert users who may be susceptible to the jihadist group's propaganda;
- and serving as a subject-matter consultant on militant groups during live hostage negotiations.

Gartenstein-Ross has testified on his areas of core competency before the U.S. House and Senate a dozen times, as well as before the Canadian House of Commons. He holds a Ph.D. in world politics from the

Catholic University of America and a J.D. from the New York University School of Law. He can conduct research in five languages.

David C. Gompert. The Honorable David C. Gompert is currently Distinguished Visiting Professor at the United States Naval Academy, Senior Fellow of the RAND Corporation, and member of several boards of directors.

Mr. Gompert was Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence from 2009 to 2010. During 2010, he served as Acting Director of National Intelligence, in which capacity he provided strategic oversight of the U.S. Intelligence Community and acted as the President's chief intelligence advisor.

Prior to service as Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence, Mr. Gompert was a Senior Fellow at the RAND Corporation, from 2004 to 2009. Before that he was Distinguished Research Professor at the Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University. From 2003 to 2004, Mr. Gompert served as the Senior Advisor for National Security and Defense, Coalition Provisional Authority, Iraq. He has been on the faculty of the RAND Pardee Graduate School, the United States Naval Academy, the National Defense University, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Mr. Gompert served as President of RAND Europe from 2000 to 2003, during which period he was on the RAND Europe Executive Board and Chairman of RAND Europe-UK. He was Vice President of RAND and Director of the National Defense Research Institute from 1993 to 2000.

From 1990 to 1993, Mr. Gompert served as Special Assistant to President George H. W. Bush and Senior Director for Europe and Eurasia on the National Security Council staff. He has held a number of positions at the State Department, including Deputy to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs (1982-83), Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs (1981-82), Deputy Director of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (1977-81), and Special Assistant to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1973-75).

Mr. Gompert worked in the private sector from 1983-1990. At Unisys (1989-90), he was President of the Systems Management Group and Vice President for Strategic Planning and Corporate Development. At AT&T (1983-89), he was Vice President, Civil Sales and Programs, and Director of International Market Planning.

Mr. Gompert has published extensively on international affairs, national security, and information technology. His books (authored or co-authored) include *Blinders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn*; *Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific*; *The Paradox of Power: Sino-American Strategic Restraint in an Age of Vulnerability*; *Underkill: Capabilities for Military Operations amid Populations*; *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*; *BattleWise: Achieving Time-Information Superiority in Networked Warfare*; *Nuclear Weapons and World Politics (ed.)*; *America and Europe: A Partnership for a new Era (ed.)*; *Right Makes Might: Freedom and Power in the Information Age*; *Mind the Gap: A Transatlantic Revolution in Military*

Affairs.

Mr. Gompert is a member of the American Academy of Diplomacy and the Council on Foreign Relations, a trustee of Hopkins House Academy, chairman of the board of Global Integrated Security (USA), Inc., a director of Global National Defense and Security Systems, Inc., a director of Bristow Group, Inc., a member of the Advisory Board of the Naval Academy Center for Cyber Security Studies, and chairman of the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Study of Early Childhood Education. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering from the U. S. Naval Academy and a Master of Public Affairs degree from the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University. He and his wife, Cynthia, live in Virginia and Maine.



Zana Gulmohamad is a Ph.D. candidate in the Politics Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, where he focuses on Iraqi security and foreign relations. He was previously a senior security analyst for the Kurdistan Regional Government and has published articles in a variety of outlets including Jamestown Foundation’s Terrorism Monitor.

Vern Liebl is an analyst currently sitting as the Middle East Desk Officer in the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL). Mr. Liebl retired from the Marine Corps and has a background in intelligence, specifically focused on the Middle East and South Asia. Prior to joining CAOCL, Mr. Liebl worked with the Joint Improved Explosives Device Defeat Organization as a Cultural SME, and before that with Booz Allen Hamilton as Strategic Islamic Narrative Analyst. He has also published extensively on topics ranging from the Caliphate to Vichy French campaigns in WW2. Mr. Liebl has a Bachelors degree in political science from University of Oregon, a Masters degree in Islamic History from the University of Utah, and a second Masters degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College (where he graduated with “Highest Distinction” and focused on Islamic Economics).

Clark McCauley (B.S. Biology, Providence College, 1965; Ph.D. Social Psychology, University of Pennsylvania, 1970) is a Professor of Psychology and co-director of the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at Bryn Mawr College. His research interests include the psychology of group identification, group dynamics and intergroup conflict, and the psychological foundations of ethnic conflict and genocide. He is founding editor of the journal *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward Terrorism and Genocide*.

Other Research Interests

- What does it mean to essentialize a group, our own or others, and how does essentializing enable killing by category?
- What is the role of emotions (disgust, humiliation, anger) in intergroup conflict, and what is the relation between interpersonal emotions and intergroup emotions?
- How can polling be used to track variation over time in support for terrorism?
- What is the process of radicalization that leads individuals from support for terrorism to acts of terrorism?
- [Psychology of Terrorism](#)

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.



Laura Jean Palmer-Moloney is Founder, CEO, and Sr. systems consultant for Visual Teaching Technologies, LLC. She holds two Ph.D.s—one in Coastal Resources Management with a focus in wetlands ecology and hydrology from East Carolina University; the other in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus in Geographic Education from the College of Education, University of Denver. Dr. Palmer-Moloney specializes scalable water-food-energy nexus issues. She is dedicated to working on the social justice aspects of climate change at the watershed scale.

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, an affiliated faculty member at George Mason University’s Center for Narrative and Conflict Analysis, and an External Research Associate with the U.S. Army War College. 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 in 2015. 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, American Foreign Policy, 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 also done freelance business consulting for European, South American, and Middle Eastern clients interested in security and defense procurement. Diane is a member of the Military Writers Guild, an associate editor for *The Bridge*, and a member of the Terrorism Research Analysis Consortium.



Yezid Sayigh is a senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, where his work focuses on the Syrian crisis, the political role of Arab armies, security sector transformation in Arab transitions, the reinvention of authoritarianism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and peace process.

Steffany A. Trofino is a graduate of the University of Aberdeen Scotland having obtained her Master's Degree with honors in Strategic Studies - Global Security. Ms. Trofino also studied Russian Language at Moscow State University, Moscow Russia in 1992. She is an honor graduate of the Navy Intelligence Officers Program (NIOBC), Damn Neck Virginia as well a graduate of the Department of Defense Strategic Debriefing certification program. Ms. Trofino has published several reports on weak and failed states and the manner by which such conditions foster and support terrorist activity including an assessment of Russian FSB Operations in Dagestan. In addition, Ms. Trofino has produced several White Papers on terrorism and counterterrorism initiatives including assessments of terrorist activity in Sub-Saharan Africa.



In 2012, Ms. Trofino developed a theory, The Reverse Assessment of Asymmetric Warfare, which was used as a foundational model for an Army 5-5 study. Her assessments have been used by former Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), the Honorable James Woolsey to support his testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade. She has worked with the US Department of Justice, Sub-Saharan Africa Division as well as the US Department of Defense. Ms. Trofino specializes in research and analysis of proxy activity in weak and failed states including understudied, underdeveloped regions of the world.

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.



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

SMA Reach-back



Question: *What opportunities are there for USCENTCOM to shape a post-ISIL Iraq and regional security environment promoting greater stability?*

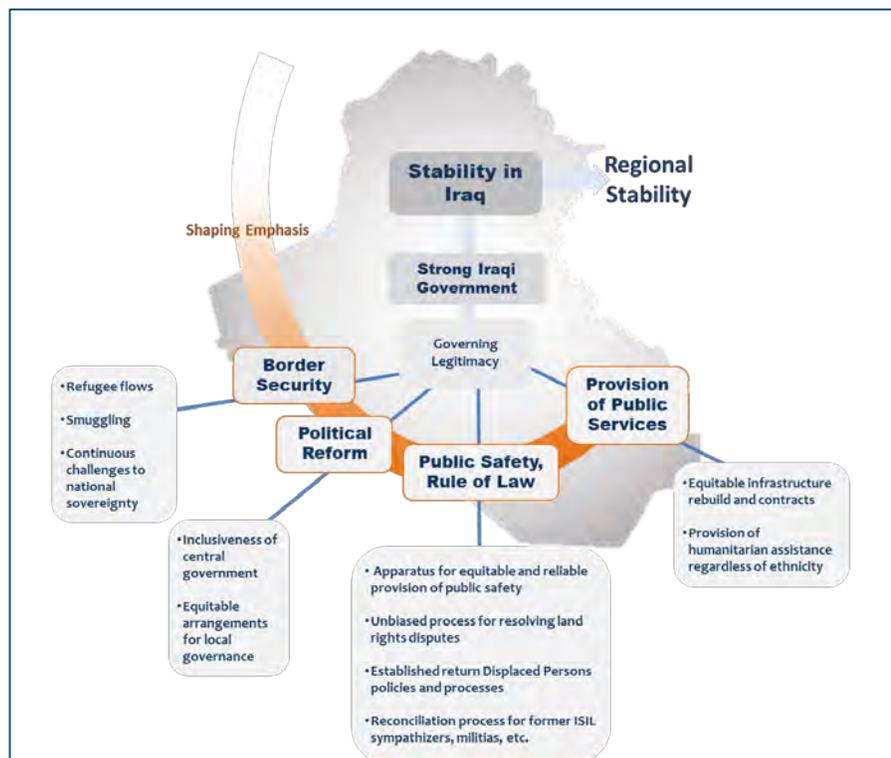
Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The expert contributors to this paper agree on the relationship between regional security and stability in Iraq: A strong and stable Iraqi government is a fundamental component of regional stability. The key to stability in Iraq is the popular legitimacy of central and local governance. Rather than operationally specific proposals, the experts suggest “shaping objectives” that USCENTCOM can use to prioritize and guide planning of shaping and engagement activities in four areas most critical for enhancing stability in Iraq: Political Reform, Border Security, Public Safety/Rule of Law, and Provision of Public Services. While USCENTCOM may take the lead in assisting Iraqis with issues such as border security and public safety, it likely would play a supporting role on the political and rule of law issues discussed below.

The Meaning of “Post-ISIL”

First, a point of clarification. “Post-ISIL” may be a misleading term. John Collison of USSOCOM and David Gompert of RAND caution US and Coalition planners to avoid the trap of



assuming that a “post-ISIL” Iraq or Syria means that no ISIL elements are present. Rather, what might more accurately be called the “post-Caliphate” phase in Iraq should be understood as one in which ISIL no longer holds significant territory, but “remnants” of the group remain in control of some small towns and villages.

Shaping Opportunities for a more Secure Environment

There is (uncharacteristic) agreement among international relations scholars on the factors that determine the stability of a state: 1) the extent to which it is seen as a legitimate governing authority by its population; 2) the degree to which the state has a monopoly on the use of force within its borders (i.e., internal sovereignty); and 3) the state’s ability to secure those borders (a component of external sovereignty).

Shaping Objective: Enhance GoI Governing Legitimacy among all Factions

Means: Support political reform, confederal system that decentralizes governance and political power while retaining the state

Drs. Belinda Bragg and Sabrina Pagano of NSI use causal loops to illustrate the stability dynamics in Iraq and why it is impossible to ameliorate security concerns without also addressing the political and social factors that determine how people view the government. They write that in Iraq, “security is intrinsically linked to perceptions of governing legitimacy and the dynamics of ethno-sectarian relations.” As a consequence, political reform that forges reconciliation between Shi’a and Sunni, and accommodates Kurdish and Arab desires for greater autonomy is an unavoidable prerequisite for a stable and legitimate Iraqi state. Similarly, Dr. Dianne Maye (Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) argues that encouraging local autonomy, decentralizing power out of Baghdad, and structuring the government to avoid “concentration of power in any one ethnic, political, or religious group” are prerequisites for stability in Iraq. She recommends that the USCENTCOM should support work to shape the political environment in ways that promote “strong, yet dispersed, self-governance in a confederal system” in Iraq that balances central government decision-making with the desire for increased autonomy in the provinces.

Shaping Objective: Enhance GoI Internal Sovereignty

Means: Increase the capacity of, and popular trust in, the Iraqi Security Forces, e.g., by:

- **putting Iraqi forces in front only when able to provide effective, impartial service**
- **including Sunni Arabs at highest ranks of ISF**
- **encouraging consolidation of security authority while allowing for local preferences**

Security forces and police are often the most visible reflections of the domestic intentions and capability

of the state. This is especially the case in a highly volatile security environment. In Iraq, it is likely that a potent, locally-appropriate but nationally-coordinated security apparatus will be essential for implementing and assuring stability-enhancing political reforms. USCENTCOM activities that encourage the capacity of, and help develop popular trust in, the state's security forces, regardless of ethnic or sectarian divisions, will be very important. The goal should be to shape Iraqi security activities to demonstrate the professionalism, impartiality, and capacity of the security apparatus. The *raison d'être* of a government is to provide service to its citizens. When it is unable or unwilling to do so, it loses the trust of its constituents. Whenever possible and whenever it can be done fairly and impartially, the Government of Iraq, rather than sectarian security forces, Coalition forces, or even NGOs, should provide citizens with services such as public safety and policing, justice and reconciliation, humanitarian assistance, and border control. Doing so not only improves internal security and public safety but enhances the legitimacy of the government as well. While allowing non-Gol entities to provide local services may be expedient, it erodes trust in the government, and thus in its longer-term ability to govern. When security forces are not seen as impartial and dependable protectors of all segments of society, more credible alternative sources of security will be found. This is precisely the context that facilitated ISIL's rapid rise in Iraq.

Bragg and Pagano (NSI) recommend two ways in which USCENTCOM might help shape the situation. First, they suggest that USCENTCOM encourage consolidation of Iraqi security forces. This does not necessarily mean forging a single, central government tightly controlled national security organization, but instead that there is a single authority that sets the standards for national and regionally appropriate security forces. Second, encouraging recruitment of experienced Sunni officers—many of whom will be former Ba'athists—into the highest ranks of the Iraqi Security Forces and local police may help “alleviate fears that the process of removing ISIL forces will be used as cover for reprisals against Sunni populations ... and as a means of bolstering Shia political and military dominance.” Failure to incorporate Sunni in leadership roles “increases the probability that Sunni tribal elders will look to provide their own security in the future,” which will expand the number of sectarian militia and the number of security forces laying claims to authority.

Shaping Objective: Enhance Gol External Sovereignty

Means: Build Iraqi capacity to secure and control its borders

Dr. Diane Maye (Embry-Riddle) discusses another prerequisite of stability in Iraq: the Government's ability to secure its borders, a key component of external sovereignty. Here again, the capacity to secure its own borders is not solely a security issue but a political one as well: it is a visible means of demonstrating and enhancing the credibility of the Baghdad government as a capable and legitimate political authority to domestic constituents as well as foreign interventionists. As a result, Maye recommends that US and Coalition forces work to ensure that Iraq's security apparatus is able to secure its international borders. Without secure borders, Maye predicts that Iranian smugglers will continue to “freely traffic narcotics, arms, organs, and other illegal merchandise across the region. Furthermore, the Jordanians, Lebanese,

and Europeans will be host to ever-increasing numbers of refugees. Nefarious organizations will achieve their aims as they obtain more and more political, economic, and military power.”

Mosul as a Template for Shaping Operations in other areas

Shaping Objective: Demonstrate Success in post-battle Environment

Means: Encourage post-liberation calm in Mosul, e.g., by:

- helping negotiate multi-group security arrangements
- prohibiting retribution
- helping to forge policies for Displaced Persons’ return; reconciliation

Finally, John Collison of USSOCOM offers suggestions for promoting security prior to, and following, the liberation of Mosul from ISIL. These efforts not only would help stabilize the volatile environment around Mosul, but could serve as a template or set of precedents for post-battle shaping in other areas of Iraq. In coordination with USG and Coalition partners, USCENTCOM can engage with key military and militia leaders to help manage post-liberation expectations and quell jockeying for political position, resources, and territory among the groups operating in and around Mosul. Collison (USSOCOM) highlights two issues that demand particular and immediate attention: 1) the need to establish common understanding of the policies and procedures that will be used to return displaced persons to their homes in a reasonable and equitable manner; and 2) articulation of reconciliation policies and procedures that will be used for those accused as ISIL sympathizers or having committed sectarian violence (e.g., screening process, arrest criteria, who would stand trial, etc.)

Immediately following liberation of Mosul, USCENTCOM can use its access to the leaders of multiple security forces to shape an environment conducive to stability by ensuring that: 1) Iraqi Security Forces allow humanitarian assistance to reach all displaced persons (DP) regardless of ethnicity; 2) post-conflict security arrangements are seen as equitable and at least minimally acceptable by all of the various security forces around the city; 3) Iraqi Forces establish security buffers to prohibit violent retribution against vulnerable ethnic populations and those accused as ISIL sympathizers; and 4) public services (e.g., water, food, justice/police, fire, medical) are rebuilt and/or provided to Iraqis regardless of ethnicity. This may require oversight of which Iraqi groups stand to benefit from what are likely to be very lucrative reconstruction contracts post-conflict.

Contributors: Dr. Belinda Bragg and Dr. Sabrina Pagano (NSI); David C. Gompert (RAND); John Collison (USSOCOM); Dr. Diane Maye (Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University)

Editor: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)

Post-ISIL Iraq and Regional Stability

Diane L. Maye, Ph.D.

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Background – Iraq’s Crisis of Governance and its Regional Implications

The rapid rise of the Islamic State in Iraq is one of the best examples of how nefarious organizations succeed in ungoverned regions. After the US left Iraq, the newly-appointed Shiite government restricted political power-sharing with Sunni political rivals. Sunnis in the outlying provinces felt abandoned and were not fully integrated into the country’s political or security apparatus. In the absence of governance, to maintain civil order, the most organized groups began to declare their authority in matters of religion, justice, and the law. In the case of Iraq, the most organized and experienced groups were the ones in direct opposition to the standing government: former Ba’athists and rogue elements of the Al Qaeda network. In the wake of the US departure from the region, competing militias, religious tyrants, and subversive groups have posed a direct threat to Baghdad as well as standing governments across the region.

“...While some US academics and politicians have posited the idea of partitioning Iraq along three ethno-sectarian lines ... Iraq does not have a neat set of dividing lines between its major factions; territorial disputes are likely to erupt if partitioning favors one faction over another...”

A weak central government in Iraq is likely to continue to aggravate the balance of political power across the entire Middle East. For instance, Turkey will have considerable influence in Iraq’s northern Kurdish areas, which is likely to instigate the ethno-separatist Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) and rival Kurdish political groups.

The Shi’a in southern Iraq will bend to Iranian interests, which in turn puts enormous pressure on the governments – of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Without being able to maintain strict control of Iraq’s borders, Iranian smugglers are able to freely traffic narcotics, arms, organs, and other illegal merchandise across the region. Furthermore, the Jordanians, Lebanese, and Europeans will be host to ever-increasing numbers of refugees. Nefarious organizations will achieve their aims as they obtain more and more political, economic, and military power.

Recommendations to USCENTCOM

It is in the interest of the US and coalition forces to deny jihadist groups and malevolent regional stakeholders the ability to gain political, economic, and military power. The US and coalition forces will achieve these aims by promoting a stable and strong Iraqi state: a government that has a monopoly on the use of violence, territorial integrity, and legitimate political control over its population. In order to create political stability in Iraq after the defeat of ISIL: the U.S. and coalition forces should ensure Iraq’s security apparatus is effective, promote strong, yet dispersed, self-governance, and actively work to secure the nation’s borders.

Security Apparatus

The combination of eliminating a terrorist network and replacing the network with new security apparatus proved to be a winning formula during the Sunni Awakening of 2006 – 2008. Before leaving the region, it is imperative that US and coalition forces ensure the post-ISIL security apparatus is effective. In order to be effective, the state must have a monopoly on the use of violence, there must be a method for due process, and the general population must see the new security apparatus as a legitimate extension of state power.

Promote Dispersed Self-Governance

While some US academics and politicians have posited the idea of partitioning Iraq along three ethno-sectarian lines: Sunni Arab, Kurdish, and Shi'a, there are very important consequences to this action. First, the ethnically mixed areas in Diyala, Ninewa, Tamim, Saladin as well as Baghdad and Kirkuk will be difficult, if not impossible to partition, without massive internal displacement. The oil rich Kirkuk, a city whose inhabitants identify as Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, and Assyrians will become increasingly sectarian and violent. Finally, Iraq does not have a neat set of dividing lines between its major factions; territorial disputes are likely to erupt if partitioning favors one faction over another. Therefore, instead of partition, a better solution would be a move towards confederal government, which would allow central decision-making in Baghdad, but increased autonomy in the provinces. The government should be structured in such a way that it does not permit the concentration of power in any one ethnic, political, or religious group.

Prioritize Border Security

Given the instability in neighboring Syria and the influx of refugees and foreign fighters, border security should have been a top priority for the Maliki administration after the US departure from the region. Instead, contracts were delayed and cancelled, and the borders remained so porous they were an easy way for criminals and terrorists to enter back into the country. There was some speculation that border security was kept in this ambiguous state in order to appease Tehran's support for the Assad regime in Syria. Porous borders meant that Tehran could control the supply lines all the way to Damascus, a vital Iranian security interest given the strict economic sanctions on the country. The borders remained a gateway for illegal activities, including smugglers, drug-runners, and arms dealers trafficking goods between Iran, Iraq, and Syria. In order for Iraqis to fully control their territory, they need to have control over their borders.

Comments on Opportunities to Shape post-ISIL Iraq

John Collison³¹

USSOCOM

Potential Target Countries for opportunities to shape regional security: Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran (those surrounding Iraq)

Potential Non-State & Pseudo-State Actors impacting opportunities for shaping regional security: Kurds (PKK, YPG/PYD, KRG (KDP & PUK)), ISIL, AQ, Lebanese Hezbollah (LH)

“Post-ISIL” assumptions and why the assumption is necessary:

- **ISIL no longer holds ‘major’ territories in Iraq** – definition of the meaning of ‘post-ISIL Iraq’; the context for action within Iraq and other adjacent countries. This does not imply that ISIL holds no territories. Expectation is ISIL will continue to hold current strongholds, such as Haweja (near Kirkuk) and other small towns/villages. This implies follow-on US support operations to ‘police up the battlespace’.
- **ISIL continues to hold major swaths of territory in Syria** – this is a critical assumption as it speaks to the context for actions within Iraq and adjacent countries, and the potential for ISIL forays cross-border into Iraq causing instability and exacerbating older grievances.
- **Syrian ‘civil war’ is still on-going** – this is a critical assumption as a context for action with respect to the region, and the potential for Iraqi-Kurdish support to Syrian-Kurdish elements as well as Shi’a Militia/Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU) support to pro-Assad forces and the corresponding potential for instability within Iraqi populations/constituencies.
- **Turkish forces remain in Northern Iraq and Western Syria** – a critical assumption from a standpoint that it influences the context for US action with respect to Iraq, and freedom of action for Iraqi and Iraqi-Kurd security forces in Northern Iraq.
- **Iran will not relinquish its support (and influence) over the Government in Baghdad and specific Al Hashd/Shi’a Militias** – this will be a key condition that CENTCOM faces with regard to any military/military-diplomacy task undertaken, and potentially create force protection issues with regard to Shi’a militia “threats.”

Opportunities for shaping

³¹ Views expressed herein do not reflect positions of HQ USSOCOM, USSOCOM-FMD, or FMD-J9. They are the opinions of the author.

The immediate challenge for opportunities will occur in the short-term (i.e., 0-2 years) to set up success in stability, influence, and regional operations in the longer-term (i.e., 3-8 years). I have addressed here what I see as the three primary 'opportunities' in the short-term that will affect stability and freedom of action in the longer-term to act and adapt to what will be ever-evolving conditions.

Immediate Challenges & Opportunities

- **Support Stabilization and Governance Development in/around Mosul.** US support to Iraqi Government efforts post-liberation. CENTCOM forces, formations, and leaders on-ground need to be prepared to engage with Iraqi Security forces (principally advised/assisted elements) to facilitate the following;
 - Humanitarian assistance – for displaced populations and populations within city limits irrespective of ethnicity.
 - Initial security arrangements/agreements between competing forces, factions, and militias must be seen as responsive and equitable; they may not like the agreement, but security must be seen as fair and applicable to all groups.
 - Safeguards to prevent retribution attacks on people and infrastructure – includes former/suspected ISIL sympathizers; Sunni; Shi'a; Yezidi; Christian/Chaldean; etc.
 - Initial governance organization and structures - in outlying villages and towns and within Mosul districts.
 - Establishment of control and operation of city/village utilities and emergency services.
 - Provision of services for populations throughout region – water, food, justice/police, fire, medical.
 - Establishment of displaced persons (DPs) returns policies and procedures.
 - Policies and procedures for arrest, screening, and reconciliation of former ISIL.

- **Support Negotiation and Development of Northern Iraq Security and Administration.** US support to the Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional governments in negotiations and agreements on the security arrangements and civil administration of NW Iraq. This might be more specifically called 'military diplomacy'. CENTCOM forces, formations, and leaders on-ground need to coordinate with the Department of State (DoS) to ensure 'military diplomacy' is synchronized with USG policy, and to inform and develop that policy where it is absent, with regard to security and administration of Northern Iraq with key (formal and informal) leaders and groups in the sub-region. This includes, but is not limited to, the following critical stakeholders (not all with GCC/military as primary engagement element);
 - Government of Iraq and aligned Hashd / Shi'a Militias
 - Governorates of Nineveh, Salah al-Din, and Kirkuk/At Tameem
 - Government of Turkey and surrogates (i.e. Turkman militias)
 - Government of Iran and aligned Hashd / Shi'a Militias
 - IRGC/Qods 'advisors' within area of operations
 - Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)
 - Governorates of Dohuk & Erbil
 - KDP Peshmerga and surrogates
 - PUK Peshmerga and surrogates

“...foreign occupation and large-scale counterinsurgency, in the classical sense, will be unnecessary if not also unhelpful to counter post-Caliphate ISIL.”

- PKK Peshmerga and surrogates
 - Others – i.e., Yezidi and Christian militias aligned with one or more of the above.
- **Building Partner Capacity through Security Force Assistance (SFA)** CENTCOM in coordination with USG policy objectives need to be prepared to support/conduct SFA post-Mosul liberation post-ISIL with elements that can and will contribute to maintaining security of populations within Iraq, and in coordination with US interests and objectives. While this is generally a part of the broader stabilization, post-liberation of Mosul/post-ISIL, I’ve captured here

as a potential mid-term task to build greater foundation for stability in Iraq.

Longer-term

- **Support to the negotiation of equitable land / property disputes policies and procedures.** Not a military task, but does provide ‘leverage’ for micro-level ‘military diplomacy’, and does represent the context for other, military/security-specific coordination and tasks.
- **‘Military-diplomacy’ to support the movement of Turkish forces out of N. Iraq.** As per assumption, Turkish forces may remain in the short-term. It will become increasingly CRITICAL to demonstrating ‘trust’ to the GoI that the USG and CENTCOM are ‘partners’, as well as a principle means to limited increased Iranian influence of GoI.

After the Caliphate: Understanding and Countering Salafist Threats

David C. Gompert

RAND

The loss of Mosul—and for all intents and purposes Iraq—could be the beginning of the end of the territorial Islamic State. Yet we know, and ISIL’s leadership has warned, that serious threats in the region and to the West will remain. Understanding what forms these threats will take is the first step toward shaping strategies to counter them.

We now know (if we did not already know) that ISIL depends fundamentally on radicalization and recruitment of *individuals* to kill and die in the cause of Salafist extremism. Larger Sunni communities and populations tend not to sympathize with but instead are brutalized and antagonized by ISIL. This suggests

that foreign occupation and large-scale counterinsurgency, in the classical sense, will be unnecessary if not also unhelpful to counter post-Caliphate ISIL.

Still, individuals, groups, and networks of fighters and terrorists will be motivated to continue violent jihad, whether against local regimes, the West, Shiites, or apostate Sunnis. Since ISIL's seizure of expansive populated real estate, recruits have had a dual motivation to commit violence: the siren call of Salafist extremism and the historic creation of the Caliphate. The Caliphate's demise may lessen the intensity and the breadth of Salafist-extremist motivation.

Post-Caliphate ISIL threats will take two main forms:

3. Remnants of fanatical forces in the region, including in Iraq, Syria, and Libya
4. Radicalized individuals in or returning to the West

The persistence of violent fanaticism in the region could continue to stoke individual radicalization and terrorism in the West. Thus, the destruction of ISIL remnants in the region could in time lessen, though not end, threats in the West. (This point is important in placing responsibility within the US Government for countering these two threats—see below.)

The first of these threats is likely to take the form of comparatively small units with light combat equipment, modest economic resources, minimal popular backing, and only fleeting territorial sanctuary. With suicide terrorist methods and wanton executions, they will be extremely dangerous to civilians. But they could be overmatched by well-equipped, trained and led indigenous forces, e.g., Iraqi Army or Peshmerga. They may also be targets for liberated Sunni populations (e.g., tribes). Remnants might fight to the death or melt into rural or urban terrain. Some might seek a more normal life, but we should not count on this. While ISIL remnants will be hard to eliminate entirely, loss of territory will increase their vulnerability.

As for the second form of threat, individuals in or returning to the West could be American or European citizens—inconspicuous but potentially suspicious to those who know them through work, family, or mosque. They will continue to identify with the Umma and embrace Salafism mainly via websites and social media. The motivation of these individuals could ebb with the end of the Caliphate, though it takes very few of them to create havoc, as we well know. They could engage in various types of suicide terrorism. While they may be networked, they are unlikely to have significant support, direction, or sophistication.

By objective standards, neither of these post-Caliphate threats on their own presents as severe a danger to U.S. interests as Caliphatic ISIL has presented. However, the potential for further Salafist extremist violence in the volatile Middle East and for lone-wolf terrorism in the United States and Europe cannot be ignored. With the notable exception of Syria, threats from ISIL remnants in the region can be destroyed by indigenous forces—possibly police but certainly combat units—supported by US ISR and US or allied air power and advisors. Remaining or new high-value post-Caliphate targets could be eliminated by air strikes or SOF. Responsibility for spelling out and executing this strategy is mainly CENTCOM’s.

Countering the second threat—radicalized post-Caliphate lone-wolf (or lone-group) terrorism in the United States—requires a different strategy, of course. Lead responsibility is the FBI’s, and the “battlefield” is mainly the Internet and other information domains. Enhancements are needed in intelligence collection, data management and analytics, and cyber operations. More robust capabilities and operation are achievable with current and coming technology. However, protections of privacy and freedom of expression need to be debated, agreed, and assured.

A final note about policy. In Iraq, insistent encouragement of a non-sectarian federated democratic state is paramount for the post-Caliphate anti-ISIL strategy to work. In Syria, the strategy leaves open the difficult question of what to do about the Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian backers, though it is possible that the destruction of the Caliphate would remove an excuse for regime brutality against Sunni opponents.

Promoting greater stability in post-ISIL Iraq: Analysis of the drivers of legitimacy, security, and social accord for key Iraqi stakeholders

Dr. Belinda Bragg and Dr. Sabrina Pagano (NSI)

This report summarizes insight from analysis³² of a set of qualitative loop diagrams³³ of the security dynamics of Kurds, Shi’a, and Sunni Arabs, constructed around social accord and governing legitimacy in Iraq. We focus on broad ethno-sectarian divisions in Iraq: Sunni Arab, Shi’a, and Kurd. While we recognize

³² A full analysis of the loop diagrams as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the social accord and legitimacy section of the StaM stability model is available from the authors upon request.

³³ A qualitative loop diagram is a visual heuristic for grasping complex recursive relationships among factors, and is a useful means of uncovering unanticipated or non-intuitive interaction effects embedded in complex environments such as those we see in Iraq. It is intended to serve as a “thinking tool” for analysts, practitioners, and decision makers. Loop diagrams are a useful means of uncovering unanticipated or non-intuitive interaction effects embedded in this incredibly complex environment. While these types of diagrams are often referred to as “causal loop” diagrams, no presumptions of direct causation are made in these analyses. In addition, although they resemble system dynamics models as used here, they are neither computational models nor intended to be strictly predictive.

that there is variation both within and outside of these groups, the discussion and insights here capture the interests and grievances of a wide segment of the Iraqi population.

The relationships and feedback loops for each of the key stakeholders (Shi'a, Kurd, and Sunni Arab) have been developed through the application of NSI's StaM model.³⁴ Our analysis focuses specifically on the dynamics that drive the security and stability challenges facing post-ISIL Iraq. A clear understanding of the system that links Iraqi politics and social relations to security is a critical prerequisite for identifying areas in which USCENTCOM activities might have the greatest positive impact, and those where the risk of unintended consequences is highest. Our analysis indicates that, for each group, there is a key interest—both driving and driven by their relations with other groups—that is central to understanding how the security-legitimacy-social relationship manifests for that group. For the Sunni, it is their perception of equality (or lack thereof) and fear of retribution (Figure 1), for the Shia, their drive to maintain political dominance (Figure 2), and for the Kurds, their desire for greater autonomy (Figure 3).

Implications for USCENTCOM

Examining the individual loop diagrams helps inform our understanding of the dynamics shaping the goals and driving the actions of Iraq's key stakeholders. However, in order to gain insight into the extent to which these goals combine to drive either stability or instability, and derive implications for USCENTCOM engagement activities, we need to compare across the three.

Political representation and inclusion of key stakeholders is critical to governing stability in Iraq. There is a fundamental tension at play in Iraq between the desire of the Kurds and Sunni Arabs for greater autonomy and substantive representation in the national government, and the Shia's desire to maintain political dominance. To achieve reconciliation, the Abadi Government needs to break from its recent history of Shia dominance and create an inclusive, non-sectarian democracy. If Iraq is to become a unified and stable state, with a legitimate and sovereign government, it will require political reconciliation between Shi'a and Sunni, and accommodation of Kurdish and Sunni Arab desire for greater power sharing and autonomy.

Political representation must be matched by substantive representation within the state security apparatus. The presence and strength of Shi'a and Kurdish forces, particularly in Sunni majority regions

³⁴ The StaM framework consolidates political, economic, and social peer-reviewed quantitative and qualitative scholarship into a single stability model based on three dimensions – governing stability, social stability, and economic stability- and, critically, specifies the relationships among them. As such, the StaM represents a cross-dimension summary, which draws on rich traditions of theory and research on stability and instability from diverse fields, including anthropology, political science and international relations, social psychology, sociology, and economics. The StaM aids users not only in identifying the factors that explain the stability or instability of a nation-state, region, or other area of interest, but also in making the connections between and among the various stability factors apparent—allowing users to derive all implications of a potential engagement strategy.

of Iraq also undermines Sunni Arab perception of their security situation. Increased Sunni representation in police and ISF forces can alleviate fears that the process of removing ISIL forces will be used as cover for reprisals against Sunni populations, based in the sectarian conflict between Shi'a and Sunni Arabs, and as a means of bolstering Shia political and military dominance. Failure to incorporate Sunni in leadership roles within the police and security forces increases the probability that Sunni tribal elders will look to provide their own security in the future. Establishing these kinds of security forces will increase both the number and capacity of sectarian militia in the country, further moving the government away from monopoly over the use of force (a key feature of sovereignty) and, by decreasing groups' reliance on the state security apparatus, further undermining the legitimacy of the national government.

Consolidation of military power by the government is critical for legitimacy and security. All of the key stakeholders (Sunni Arabs, Shi'a, Kurds) have militia or paramilitary groups. Yet, as Table 1 below shows, levels of trust among these groups are low³⁵. That is, in most cases, the presence of sectarian forces is seen by other groups to undermine the credibility of the national security apparatus, and through this, their perception of their security situation. Much of this distrust is rooted in the contentious and sometimes violent nature of political and social relations among these groups. Furthermore, there is also significant political factionalization *within* each of these key stakeholder groups, and specific militia may have stronger ties to one Shia (or Sunni Arab or Kurdish) political faction than another.

³⁵ Coding for this table was determined through examination of recent literature and SME evaluations, and analysis of the full loop diagrams. More detailed discussion of the factors contributing to these codings, and a full analysis of the loop diagrams is available from the authors by request. Below is a summary of the key source materials used: Al-Marashi, I. (n.d.). *Sadr's challenge to Iraq's sectarian politics*. Retrieved November 3, 2016; Amnesty International. (2016). *Punished for Daesh's crimes: Displaced Iraqis abused by militias and government forces*. London: Amnesty International Ltd.; Arango, T. (2015, April 30). *Proposal to arm Sunnis adds to Iraqi suspicions of the U.S.* New York Times; Connable, B. (2014). *Defeating the Islamic State in Iraq*. Congressional Testimony Presented before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on September 17; Dawod, H. (2015). *Sunni Tribes in Iraq*; Dodge, T. (2014). *Can Iraq be saved? Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 56, 7–20; Eisenstadt, M. (2014, July 15). *Managing the Crisis in Iraq: Testimony submitted to the United States House of Representatives Subcommittees on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and the Middle East and North Africa*. U.S. House of Representatives; Fahim, K. (2016, October 24). *Iraqi Sunnis fleeing Islamic State rule in Mosul brace for revenge*; Fumerton, M., & Van Wilgenburg, W. (n.d.). *Kurdistan's Political Armies: The Challenge of Unifying the Peshmerga Forces*; Hauslohner, A., & Cunningham, E. (2014, September 1). *As battle lines shift in Iraq, Sunnis who welcomed the Islamic State now fear retribution*; Hendawi, H., & Abdul-Zahra, Q. (2016, March 21). *Fears in Iraqi government, army over Shiite militias' power*; Iraq's Sunnis: *The choice between ISIS and Shiite militia*. (n.d); Mansour, R. (2016). *The Sunni Predicament in Iraq - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Retrieved October 7, 2016.

Table 1: Key Stakeholder perceptions of major military and militia groups

Key stakeholder perceptions of major military and militia groups		Sunni Arab	Shi'a	Kurd
Credibility of national security apparatus	Trust in Shi'a-led Iraqi Security Forces	Weak negative	Strong positive	Weak positive
	Trust in Sunni-led Iraqi Security Forces	Strong positive	Weak positive	Weak positive
	Trust in PMF	Strong negative	Strong positive	Weak negative
	Trust in Iranian-backed Shi'a militia	Strong negative	Strong positive	Strong negative
	Trust in Peshmerga	Weak positive	Strong negative	Strong positive
Perception of legitimacy of Abadi government	Trust in Shi'a-led Iraqi Security Forces	Weak negative	Strong positive	Weak positive
	Trust in Sunni-led Iraqi Security Forces	Strong positive	Weak positive	Weak positive
	Trust in PMF	Strong negative	Strong positive	Weak negative
	Trust in Iranian-backed Shia militia	Strong negative	Strong positive	Strong negative
	Trust in Peshmerga	Weak positive	Strong negative	Strong positive

	Strong positive		Weak negative		Weak positive		Strong negative
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Directly funding and training non-government forces (militia and Peshmerga) may have short-term benefits for security; however, doing so has significant negative implications for longer-term stability, and may contribute to increased sectarian violence in post-ISIL Iraq. Legitimacy and sovereignty require that some solution be found to the fractured nature of the security and militia forces currently active in Iraq. Sovereignty requires that the government have the sole legitimate right to the use of force, a condition that cannot be met when autonomous militia are active within a state. Furthermore, the continued presence of such forces increases sectarian tensions and the likelihood of a resurgence of violence, particularly between Sunni and Shi'a, which will contribute to negative social conditions (e.g., reduced intergroup integration, reduced social accord, decreased sense of national identity) that undermine the legitimacy of the national government.

Lack of social accord is a significant barrier to increased governing legitimacy and a driver of Sunni Arab and Kurdish desire for greater autonomy.³⁶ Across all three loop diagrams, a similar pattern emerges around social accord. A lack of trust between and among groups prohibits the attainment of social accord, which influences perceptions of political power (representation and voice) and multiple forms of justice (distributive and procedural). Absent this social harmony and cooperation group dynamics emerge that undermine the perceived legitimacy of the government: Shi'a work toward maintenance of their dominance, undermining Sunni representation and voice, unequally distributing resources for Sunnis and Kurds, and engaging in human rights abuses against Sunni Arabs. These dynamics represent violations of both distributive justice (fairness in outcomes) and procedural justice (fairness in decision making procedures and/or general treatment). These social factors, individually and collectively, and directly (first-order effects) and indirectly (second- and third-order effects), contribute to the perception that the Abadi government is not legitimate. This in turn feeds into Sunni Arab and Kurdish desire for greater autonomy and movement away from a unified and stable Iraqi state.

Conclusion

That defeat of ISIL is essential for the stability of Iraq and the well-being of its people is perhaps one of the few issues on which there is almost complete accord among Iraq's many ethno-sectarian groups. However, it would be dangerous to interpret this specific shared goal as indicative of a more general social accord among Iraq's key stakeholders. There are ongoing and profound social cleavages among Iraq's ethno-sectarian groups, which are reproduced in, and magnified by, the political organization of the state. Furthermore, each of these groups is (to various extents) dominant in specific geographic areas of the country, and has its own sectarian militia or fighting forces.

It is possible that fighting against ISIL served to erode some of the barriers of mistrust and competition among these groups, and demonstrated the utility of working cooperatively. In this case, Iraq and USCENTCOM have a possibly unique opportunity to build on this development, and work toward greater political and social reconciliation. Increasing political representation and voice, satisfaction with the process and outcome of revenue and resource distribution, and perceptions of equality among these groups should mutually and individually improve perceptions of the legitimacy of the Abadi government, creating the condition for short-term stability. In the longer term, these same factors should move through the social system to increase social accord, which can in turn provide a more resilient bulwark for governing legitimacy.

³⁶ Social accord—the degree to which harmony among individuals and groups is achieved—is an overarching construct that comprises multiple factors. Social accord is more likely to be attained within a population when relevant sub-groups are well integrated with one another and on equal footing, there is a lack of intra-group strife, and there is a high degree of social certainty among the population as a whole.

Unfortunately, it is also possible that this shared goal will not be sufficient to trigger the development of a superordinate national identity and common national goals. Rather, it may be the case that the advent of ISIL has created conditions, especially perceived Sunni support for the group and greater Kurdish autonomy, which could form the basis for intensified sectarian conflict once ISIL is eliminated. If this is the case, that conflict will take place among groups that are now considerably better armed, trained, and experienced than they were before ISIL, and will unfold amidst a population that has already endured years of conflict and dislocation, with a government that lacks both resources and legitimacy.

It is clear that at present Iraq stands at a critical juncture between the opportunity for change and stability, and the risk of disintegration. The challenge for U.S. planning is to provide contingency plans for both of these distinct possible futures. Our analysis suggests that attempting to isolate security engagement efforts from the broader political and social forces at play in Iraq is futile. Security is intrinsically linked to perceptions of governing legitimacy and the dynamics of ethno-sectarian relations. Thus, whatever diplomatic, informational, military and economic levers the U.S. employs in Iraq, attention must be paid to the influence they might have on both of these factors. That is, will these actions contribute to the development of a superordinate Iraqi national identity and to mitigating sectarian conflict should it erupt after the fall of ISIL, or will they reinforce existing perceptions of inequality and mistrust?

Full loop diagrams

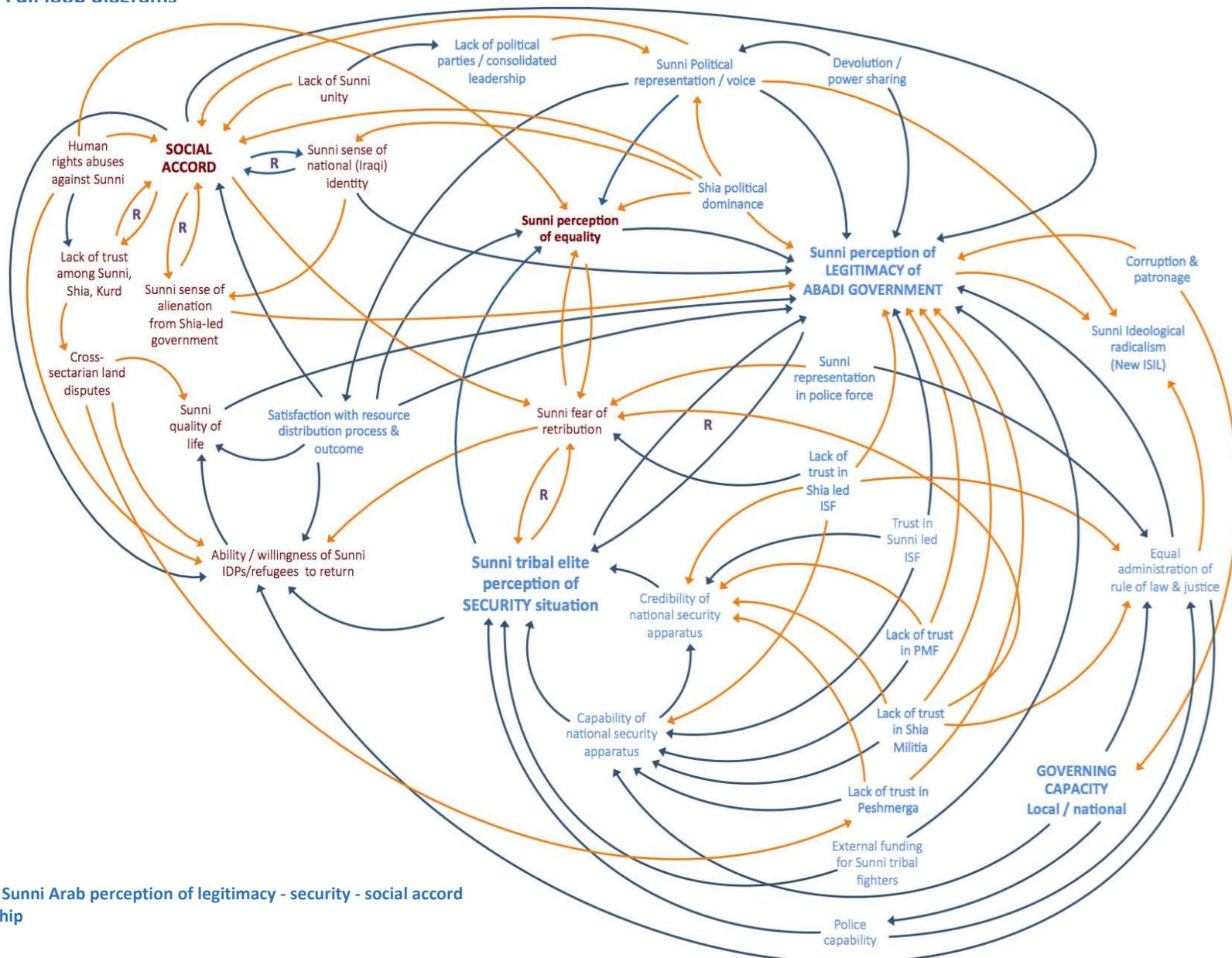


Figure 1: Sunni Arab perception of legitimacy - security - social accord relationship

This paper does not represent official USG policy or position.

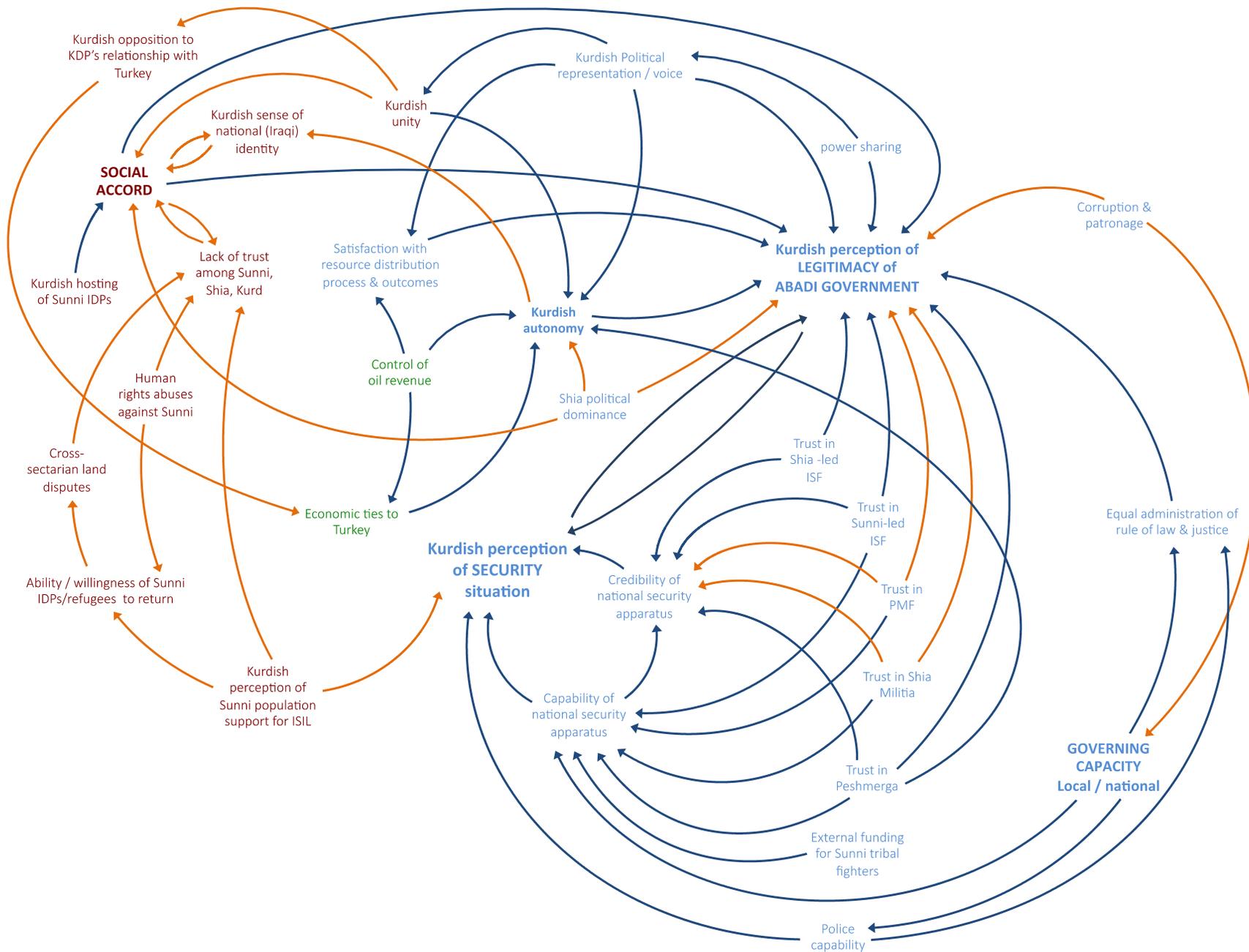


Figure 1: Kurdish perception of legitimacy - security - social accord relationship

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. 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, an affiliated faculty member at George Mason University's Center for Narrative and Conflict Analysis, and an External Research Associate with the U.S. Army War College. 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 in 2015. 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, American Foreign Policy, 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 also done freelance business consulting for European, South American, and Middle Eastern clients interested in security and defense procurement. Diane is a member of the Military Writers Guild, an associate editor for *The Bridge*, and a member of the Terrorism Research Analysis Consortium.



Dr. Sabrina Pagano

Dr. Sabrina Pagano is an experienced project leader and principal investigator, with almost 15 years of experience leading teams and projects both in academia and industry. She earned her Ph.D. in Social Psychology (minor in Statistics) from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a dual BA with highest honors in Psychology and Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has led and been an active contributor to work in both the government and commercial domains. Though supporting a wide variety of projects and proposals, her work at NSI has focused in three main areas, including serving as the Principal Investigator and Project Manager for a multi-year contract investigating progress in conflict environments, providing

project oversight as the project manager for two AAA titles at a top gaming company, and as one of two developers of a corporate offering focused on enhancing dignity in interactions with customers and employees. Prior to NSI, she served as the Director (Acting) of a growing behavioral sciences program, as well as a Faculty Fellow Researcher and Lecturer at UCLA. Dr. Pagano's work has spanned a wide variety of topics, with particular depth in intergroup relations, injustice, basic and moral emotions (e.g., empathy, moral outrage), and prosocial/antisocial behavior. She maintains an active knowledge base in the broad field of social psychology, and knowledge that spans multiple fields given over a decade of experience and leadership specifically on multidisciplinary projects.



Dr. Belinda Bragg

Dr. Belinda Bragg is a Principal Research Scientist for NSI. She has provided core support for DoD Joint Staff and STRATCOM Strategic Multi-layer Analysis (SMA) projects for the past six years. She has worked on projects dealing with nuclear deterrence, state stability, U.S. –China and U.S.-Russia relations, and VEOs. Dr. Bragg has extensive experience reviewing and building social science models and frameworks. She is one of the two designers of a stability model, (the StaM) that has been used analyze stability efforts in Afghanistan, state stability in Pakistan and Nigeria, and at the city-level to explore the drivers and buffers of instability in megacities, with a case study of Dhaka. Prior to joining NSI, Dr. Bragg was a visiting lecturer in International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station. Her research focuses on decision-making, causes of conflict and political instability, and political uses of social media. Dr. Bragg earned her Ph.D. in political science from Texas A&M University, and her BA from the University of Melbourne, Australia.

The Honorable David C. Gompert

The Honorable David C. Gompert is currently Distinguished Visiting Professor at the United States Naval Academy, Senior Fellow of the RAND Corporation, and member of several boards of directors.

Mr. Gompert was Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence from 2009 to 2010. During 2010, he served as Acting Director of National Intelligence, in which capacity he provided strategic oversight of the U.S. Intelligence Community and acted as the President's chief intelligence advisor.

Prior to service as Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence, Mr. Gompert was a Senior Fellow at the RAND Corporation, from 2004 to 2009. Before that he was Distinguished Research Professor at the Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University. From 2003 to 2004, Mr. Gompert served as the Senior Advisor for National Security and Defense, Coalition Provisional Authority, Iraq. He has been on the faculty of the RAND Pardee Graduate School, the United States Naval Academy, the National Defense University, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Mr. Gompert served as President of RAND Europe from 2000 to 2003, during which period he was on the RAND Europe Executive Board and Chairman of RAND Europe-UK. He was Vice President of RAND and Director of the National Defense Research Institute from 1993 to 2000.

From 1990 to 1993, Mr. Gompert served as Special Assistant to President George H. W. Bush and Senior Director for Europe and Eurasia on the National Security Council staff. He has held a number of positions at the State Department, including Deputy to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs (1982-83), Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs (1981-82), Deputy Director of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (1977-81), and Special Assistant to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1973-75).

Mr. Gompert worked in the private sector from 1983-1990. At Unisys (1989-90), he was President of the Systems Management Group and Vice President for Strategic Planning and Corporate Development. At AT&T (1983-89), he was Vice President, Civil Sales and Programs, and Director of International Market Planning.

Mr. Gompert has published extensively on international affairs, national security, and information technology. His books (authored or co-authored) include *Blinders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn*; *Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific*; *The Paradox of Power: Sino-American Strategic Restraint in an Age of Vulnerability*; *Underkill: Capabilities for Military Operations amid Populations*; *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*; *BattleWise: Achieving Time-Information Superiority in Networked Warfare*; *Nuclear Weapons and World Politics (ed.)*; *America and Europe: A Partnership for a new Era (ed.)*; *Right Makes*

Might: Freedom and Power in the Information Age; Mind the Gap: A Transatlantic Revolution in Military Affairs.

Mr. Gompert is a member of the American Academy of Diplomacy and the Council on Foreign Relations, a trustee of Hopkins House Academy, chairman of the board of Global Integrated Security (USA), Inc., a director of Global National Defense and Security Systems, Inc., a director of Bristow Group, Inc., a member of the Advisory Board of the Naval Academy Center for Cyber Security Studies, and chairman of the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Study of Early Childhood Education. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering from the U. S. Naval Academy and a Master of Public Affairs degree from the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University. He and his wife, Cynthia, live in Virginia and Maine.

John Collison

John Collison is a Special Applications Group (SAG) contractor supporting the USSOCOM Directorate of Force Management & Development (FMD), J9 Concept Development and Integration (CD&I). A Strategic Planning and Integration Analyst supporting FMD-J9, Mr. Collison's duties include support to Joint and SOF Concept development, analysis, and assessment, and SOF capabilities development. He previously supported the Headquarters' Security Force Assistance (SFA) office where he addressed DoD SFA policy and process development, and SOF integration of SFA concepts and doctrine.

Mr. Collison retired as a Lieutenant-Colonel in July 2012 after 26 years of active duty service in the Army Civil Affairs and Infantry branches. He served at HQs USSOCOM, the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, the United States Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs Command, and in various Infantry assignments from Infantry Platoon Leader to Infantry Battalion Executive Officer, to include a tour on the Army Staff, prior to transitioning to the Civil Affairs branch. In Civil Affairs he served at the Detachment, Company and Brigade levels as a Company Commander and Brigade Operations Officer. Mr. Collison is a 1985 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and was commissioned an Infantry Officer.

Mr. Collison's overseas assignments and deployments include; Alaska, Cambodia, Egypt, Honduras, Bosnia and Iraq.



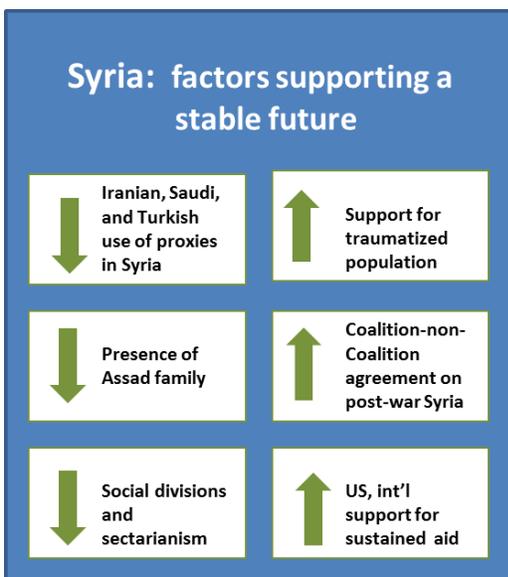
SMA Reach-back

Question: *What are the factors that will influence the future of Syria and how can we best affect them?*

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Experts varied from pessimistic (chronic warfare) cautiously optimistic regarding their expectations the future of Syria, yet mentioned many of the factors that they felt would influence Syria’s future. Most of these key factors – ranging from external geopolitical rivalries to the health and welfare of individual Syrians – were outside what typical military operations might affect. Instead they center on political and humanitarian recovery, healing of social divisions and the solid backing of international actors that agree on what that recovery will entail. The six factors are described below.



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External Factor: the use of Iranian, Saudi proxies in Syria

Iranian and Saudi use of proxy forces is one of the wild-cards in the future of Syria and is probably quickest way to reignite violence in the wake of any cease-fire or negotiated settlement. In fact, the intensity of the Iran-Saudi regional power struggle and how this might play out in Syria was the factor most mentioned by the SMA experts.

Encouraging the conditions necessary for stability in Syria requires discouraging Iran-Saudi rivalry in Syria. This can be done in a number of ways including offering for security guarantees or other inducements to

limit proxyism in Syria (e.g., for Iran promise of infrastructure reconstruction contracts). Unfortunately, Iran stands to have greater leverage in Syria following the war, regardless of whether Assad stays or goes. If Assad or loyalist governors remain in Syria they will be dependent on Iran (and Russia) for financial and military support. As Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center) writes, “even total victory leaves the regime in command of a devastated economy and under continuing sanctions.” Still, if Assad is ousted and Iranian political influence in the country wanes, its economic influence in Syria should remain strong. Since at least 2014 Iran, the region’s largest concrete producer has been positioning itself to lucrative gain post-war infrastructure construction contracts giving it significant influence over which areas of Syria are rebuilt and which groups would benefit from the rebuild. Under these conditions, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and/or Turkey could ramp up their efforts to contain Iranian influence by once again supporting aggrieved Sunni extremists. This would be all the more likely, if as Josh Landis predicts, “Assad, with the help of the Russians, Chinese, Iraqis and Hezbollah, will take back most rebel held territory in the next five years.”

External Factor: the degree of Coalition-non Coalition agreement on the governance and security conditions of post-war Syria

Lt Col Mel Korsmo an expert in civil war termination from Air University concludes that a negotiated settlement is the best path to political transition and resolution of the civil conflict in Syria. Others felt that any resolution of the Syrian civil conflict would depend on broad-based regional plus critically, US and Russian (and perhaps Chinese) agreement on the conditions of that resolution. The first question is whether there remain any elements of 2012 Geneva Communiqué or UN Security Council resolution 2254 which endorsed a roadmap for peace in Syria that might be salvaged. Lacking agreement among the major state actors, the authors expected that proxy warfare would continue in Syria. Moshe Ma’oz (Hebrew University) and others however argued that it may be too late for the US to wield much influence over the future path of Syria; it has already ceded any leverage to Russia and Iran. Others argue that the way the US might regain some leverage is by committing to the battle against Assad with the same effort given to defeating ISIL. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that it is imperative to attempt now to forge agreement on the clearly-stated steps to implementing a recovery plan for Syria.

External Factor: US and Coalition public support for sustained political, security and humanitarian aid for Syria

Another condition that must be met if the US and Coalition countries are to have impact on political and social stability in Syria is popular support for providing significant aid to Syria over an extended period of time. This may be a tall order, particularly in the US where the public has long thought of Syria as an enemy of Israel and the US in the Levant. Compounding this, the experts argue that when warfare comes to an end in Syria the regime will be so dependent on Russia (and Iranian) aid, that the Syrian government will lose its autonomy of action. While encouraging Americans to donate to charitable organizations aiding Syrian families may not be too difficult, gaining support for sustained US government assistance in the amounts and over the length of time required is likely to be a significant challenge. It is also one that could be quickly undermined by terror attacks emanating from the region.

Internal Factor: the role of Assad family

Osama Gharizi of the United States Institute of Peace³⁷ points to the current “strength and cohesion” of the Syrian opposition and argues that a “disjointed, weakened, and ineffectual opposition is likely to engender [an outcome] in which the Syrian regime is able to dictate the terms of peace” –a situation which would inevitably leave members of the family or close friends of the regime in positions of power. Unfortunately, many of the experts believe that while there may be fatigue-induced pauses in fighting, as long as the Assad family remains in power in any portion of Syria civil warfare would continue. Furthermore separating Syria into areas essentially along present lines of control would leave Assad loyalists and their Iranian and Russian patrons in control of Damascus and the cities along the Mediterranean coast with much of the Sunni population relegated to landlocked tribal areas to the east. Such a situation would further complicate the significant challenge of repatriating millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom lived in the coastal cities.

Acceding to Assad family leadership over all or even a portion of Syria is unlikely to offer a viable longer-term solution, unless two highly intractable issues could be resolved: 1) the initial grievances against the brutal minority regime had been successfully addressed; and 2) the Assad regimes’ (father and son) long history of responding to public protest by mass murder of its own people had somehow been erased. The key question is how to remove the specter of those associated with Assad or his family who would invariably be included in a negotiated transition government. Nader Hashemi of the University of Denver suggests that US leadership in the context of the war in Bosnia is a good model: “the United States effectively laid out a political strategy, mobilized the international community, used its military to sort of assure that the different parties were in compliance with the contact group plan ... it presided over a war crimes tribunal ...” In his view, prosecuting Assad for war crimes is an important step.

Internal Factor: What is done to repair social divisions and sectarianism in Syria

Nader Hashemi (University of Denver) and Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute) observe that the open ethnic and sectarian conflict that we see in Syria today has emerged there only recently – the result of over five years of warfare, war crimes committed by the Alawite-led government, subsequent Sunni reprisals, the rise of ISIL and international meddling. As a result, there is now firmly-rooted sectarian mistrust and conflict in Syria where little had existed before. Other than pushing for inclusive political processes and rapid and equitable humanitarian relief, there is little that the US or Coalition partners will be able do about this in the short to mid-term. As Hashemi says, healing these rifts will be “an immense challenge; it will be a generational challenge; it will take several generations.” On the brighter side, he also allows that in his experience most Syrians “are still proud to be Syrians. They still want to see a

³⁷ The opinion and analysis expressed is solely that of the author and does not necessarily represent USIP’s position.

cohesive and united country.” While separation into fully autonomous polities is untenable, reconfiguring internal administrative borders to allow for “localized representation” and semi-autonomy among different groups may be a way to manage social divisions peacefully.

Internal Factor: Demographics and a traumatized population

There is a youth bulge in the Syrian population. Add to this that there is a large segment of young, particularly Sunni Syrians who have grown up with traumatic stress, have missed years of schooling so are deficient in basic skills, have only known displacement and many of whom have lost one or both parents in the fighting. There is hardly a more ideal population for extremist recruiters. Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute) calls this “a social recipe for disaster” that he believes in the near future will be manifest in increased crime and terrorist activity. As a consequence, it is important for the future of Syria and the region to assure that children receive education, sustained counseling and mental health services and permanent homes for families and children.

Contributors: *Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center), Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute), Moshe Ma’oz (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Nader Hashemi (Center for Middle East Studies, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver), Josh Landis (University of Oklahoma), Lt Col Mel Korsmo (Lemay Doctrine Center, Air University), Osama Gharizi (U.S. Institute of Peace)*

Editor: *Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

Transcript of Virtual Think Tank Interview with Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute)

Ms. Sarah Canina, NSI

Murhaf Jouejati: On the international level, one of the important factors, of course, is the Russian engagement in Syria, which is shaping the future of Syria. If Syria is left in near future in one unit, it is going to remain as it has been the past fifty years in the Russian cap, which means that, me, the opportunity to flick Syria into the Western cap would be lost. It would give Russia a great strategic advantage over its international rivals in that it would have major airbase in Syria, which it already has, extending its reach into the Middle East. Also, it could have the access it does to the Mediterranean through the Port of Tartus. would be a great strategic advantage for the Russians, and would be much much more than, I don't want to say a Russian province, but certainly it would lose its autonomy, this is a disadvantage of western countries.

“At the social level, I am really not only in fear but almost in a panic for Syrians because now, we have a generation that is going to grow up of mostly displaced people and mostly traumatized people ...you have a social recipe for disaster, and this is going to, in the future, lead to a lot more crime, and certainly, terrorist organizations are going to do a lot of

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Another international factor (and here, it has to do with the United States and that also, I think, impacts the future of Syria) is the partnership (it's been some time now) between the United States and the PYD. I'm sure it is well-intentioned, but what that does is create more friction than already exists between Kurds and Arabs. Even though the United States has been making efforts to include in this Syrian democratic force a lot of Arab elements, still, the optics are that this is in support of the Kurds, which attracts the ire of the Arab force and attracts the ire of Turkey (an ally). So, I think what that does...the impact of this in the future is it will increase the ethnic strife between the Arab and Kurd.

At the regional level, of course, the major influence is Iranian, and that is already shaping the future of Syria. Iran not only has its IRGC there, not only has its advisors, and not only has its allied Shia militia in Syria, but it also has, as you know, the credit lines to Syria. With that it is buying a lot of property, whether private property or even public property, and the Iranians are truly consolidating their power on the ground and their economic power on the ground in addition to their military, making it such that in the

future, Syria is going to be again no more than an extension of Iranian power into the Levant. That would truly cement that bridge between the Teheran and Damascus and Hezbollah in the south of Lebanon. The impact of that is also very nefarious, that would be, if at all possible, even more sectarian strife between Sunnis and Shiites, which inevitably is going to lead to a lot of radicalization among Sunni Iraqis. Now, the Sunnis in Syria aren't a majority, but this Shia minority keeps on growing in power, so you're going to have increasingly (I think) Sunni terrorism coming out from Syria as a result of this increasing Iranian influence.

At the national level, the ethnic and sectarian strife in Syria has never in recorded history been higher, but still, I think we have a window. It is not too late. There is a sense of a Syrian national identity. I don't want to say it supersedes the sub-national identities, that would not be true, but there is still a sense of a national identity, and if played right, there is no reason for Syria to break up and to cause more headaches to not only the region but internationally as well. You know, if this strife continues to increase, if everything stands as it is today, of course there is going to be even more spillover into the region, and you are going to have increasing cross-boundary strife along sectarian lines with all its implications for the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. I know there's a lot more to add on this factorial level, but these are the most strategic things that I can think of.

At the micro level, I'm looking at the economic aspect and where reconstruction is going to take place in the future in Syria, that is going to shape the future of Syria, and it all depends on the assistance where it mostly comes from. Since the Iranians are consolidating their power now in Syria (their economic power) my guess is that a lot of the reconstruction contracts will go to the Iranians and the Russians, and that is going to again cement Syria with Iran and with Russia at the expense of the West. There are already the demographic changes that Iran is trying to force. There are neighborhoods and homes that had been Sunni and that have been devastated and now are being increasingly being taken over by Shias; the same is true in Damascus. In Damascus, even in the old city, some Christian neighborhoods are beginning to feel this increasing Shia influence in that a lot of Shias are buying places there. You have the same phenomenon happening in Raqqa, which was recently vacated by force and, again, you do have Shias moving in there. So, the regime has an interest in changing the demographics so that in the areas of its power, like Damascus, it would have a more equitable balance of sectarian power.

Also, at the economic level, if Syria had been carved up, if the regime continues to control the areas it controls now, which are, of course, along the Mediterranean coast down to the central city of Homs in Damascus, and you have the breakup of Syria, you have the rest of the land to worry about. It would be landlocked, and there it is dominated by tribes. What you will have is tribal coalitions and even potential alliances with those who have become radicalized, and there you have a very, very dangerous marriage of tribal coalitions and terrorist groups. So that is something to worry about.

At the social level, I am really not only in fear but almost in a panic for Syrians because now, we have a generation that is going to grow up of mostly displaced people and mostly traumatized people. You have, now, the youngsters without an education who have been displaced and who...some of them have no more parents. So, you have a social recipe for disaster, and this is going to, in the future, lead to a lot more crime, and certainly, terrorist organizations are going to do a lot of recruiting among those traumatized youth, and we will have on our hands a huge [group] of terrorists. So, again, sectarianism is at an all-time high, which is not only true in Syria, I feel that here; it is across the region. So, if everything remains the same, as our friend Kenneth Waltz says, if everything remains the same, you are going to have, in the future (I don't know when, I don't have a crystal ball), but the potential for a redrawing of the Middle East map. So, something has to be done now.

What can the US do?

Now, I've heard all of the different ideas about what people would like the United States to do. I'm not going to say that the US should invade Syria and fight the Russians; I am not that crazy. But, there are a certain number of things that the United States -- at least the next administration if not this administration -- can do. One is to support the Turkish efforts in the north, and these Turkish efforts happen to supply and to support the free Syrian army. Everybody has poo-pooed the free Syrian army. If the free Syrian army has been weak and divided, it is as a lack of foreign support. But once Turkey put its mind to it and grouped these folks, they did very well on the ground, and they were very good partners for the Turkish initiative. What the US can do is to support the Turkish initiative. In order to create some sort of harmony among ethnic groups in the north, it could bring in the KNC, the Kurdish National Council. These are, in fact, a majority of the Kurds who aspire to some sort of autonomy, aspire to be under some sort of federal system in Syria but do not want to break away. In this manner, we Americans would be helping our Turkish ally in its quest for security along its border without the fear of any Kurdish violence. It would bring Arab and the Kurd together, and it's a force that already exists on the ground. So, I think that if the United States were able to partner with the partners of our Turkish ally, the FSA, if it were to make an effort to unify the Iraqis, to train, and equip, I think we would have on the ground a force that could be credible and that we could count on.

You know ... in Lebanon and Turkey (certainly Turkey), inside the camps and outside the camps, you have hundreds of former army officers who have defected, who are moderate. There is nothing Islamist or jihadist about them. They are itching to go back home, and they are itching to participate in this. But they are not alone. They are not alone outside the camps or, in the case of those I met in Gaziantep, they are not also alone to move around. So, you have a formidable manpower that is available that is pro-Western, that is pro-democratic, and that is trained as a result of their past professions who provide major support to this Turkish effort, and again, if the US and Turkey can marry their efforts, I think they would do wonders.

In terms of containing the Russians, we can end the Assad regime and fighting ISIL because the FSA ... has won battles against ISIL. There is also, if the US were to take this track...and then I am not talking about US boots on the ground; I'm not talking about US armed force against anybody. But, if the United States were to make some effort also in terms of information and to bring back the lights up to the fact that this is not a western imperialist Zionist conspiracy against the Syria but this is a national uprising against a dictator and that the people want freedom.

Now, especially in the United States, most folks seem to think that this is a fight between a regime we don't like very much because it is bloody and brutal and corrupt and a bunch of thuggish murderers in ISIL. Well, it is those who are sandwiched in between who are our natural allies ...I don't want to go into the past to cry over spilled milk, but if these things had been done in the past, we wouldn't be here today. ... I'm still of the view that things can change for the better for Syrians and the region and the entire world if things are properly stopped.

Sarah Canina: I really appreciate that. You know, coming from inside the DOD, it's really hard because everyone in the region seems to hate the United States, and it's so hard for us inside because we're trying to do our best...

Murhaf Jouejati: ... and my heart is in the United States. But truly, what has come out of Washington in the past 5 years would only exacerbate those negative feelings towards the United States because the view in Syria and in the Middle East, and I think throughout the world, in the beginning, was this is an open-shut case. These are peaceful demonstrators demonstrating for freedom, much as in Hungary in 1956 or Prague in 1968 or in the wall falling in Berlin or the Iron Curtain breaking, and now these democracies flourish in Eastern Europe. So, people were thinking of these things when this happened, and then the United States would, again no boots on the ground, would support them in their fight for freedom. What we got is a United States that tied its hands behind its back, allowed the Russians everything under the sun, allowed the Iranians everything under the sun, and still, 6 years into this, there is hesitation in Washington. ... It doesn't feel good to be hated. Why should we run to a place where we are hated, but by not doing anything also, we are creating even more hatred?

Sarah Canina: And it's really...it seems to me that the US reputation is a huge problem in the area, that we have so little credibility that some polls in ISIL controlled areas, which who knows how good they are, are saying that they would rather have ISIL than the US on their territories. So...

Murhaf Jouejati: The United States is not a reliable partner. It's not because it wants to be not a reliable partner, but because there are domestic politics in the United States. When you are in the United States, and you feel these domestic politics and the debate inside; those outside don't see it. What they see is a decision from the US, regardless of what happens inside, and the decision of the United States now is, despite chemical attacks against the civilian population, despite a Russian air force bombing hospitals day in and day out, despite Iranians and all of their allied militias, including Hezbollah, killing right and left, the United States wants to pursue diplomacy, which is good, but a diplomacy without teeth, and diplomacy without teeth does not work. So, you and I know this, but the United States continues in its diplomacy without teeth, and so, people now have come to question the credibility and the reliability of the United States.

Sarah Canna: This is concerning because what happens if the populations prefer Russia's involvement in the region because they are a more reliable partner? I know that's hard for the Sunni population in particular to ever embrace Russia, but...

Murhaf Jouejati: When I was in Syria, and we had dozens of Bulgarian movies at night and Soviet movies, and so on. We knew that we had to be patient and wait for Thursday nights until *Love Boat* comes on, and this is true for Sunnis and Alawis and Christians and everybody else. We wore jeans, we liked Madonna... you know, the Russian-Syrian connection is not an ideological one, but it comes ... mostly as a result of the US-Israeli partnership. No, Syrians do not prefer things Russian to things American, but America is not investing where it should.

Sarah Canna: So, I had another question getting back to what the US can do. So, what has to happen first: do we have to get rid of ISIL first or get rid of Assad first? Or what's the first step towards stability? Or is it not that simple?

Murhaf Jouejati: Well, it's not simple. The US should continue, I think, in what it is doing in this US-led coalition against ISIL; there is no doubt about that. But, it should now take steps against the Assad regime. Again, analytically, and I have looked at a lot of articles and a lot of evidence and so on. There has been cooperation between the Assad regime and ISIL; ISIL is in the interest of the Assad regime because Assad can portray himself to the world as the secular leader opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. If ISIL did not exist, the man would be in very serious trouble. He had released what is now the top leadership of ISIL from Syrian jails in the name of releasing political prisoners. He has bought, and continues to buy, oil from ISIL. He has bought, and continues to buy, power from ISIL. So, he has enriched them in many ways. Talk to the very recently defected mayor of Palmyra, and he will tell you how the entire loss and recapture of Palmyra was a hoax. He was there, and Assad had every interest to show ISIL in Palmyra, and the

destruction of Syria's cultural heritage, which is humanity's cultural heritage, and then of him, thank the Lord, taking it back. I don't know if these things are difficult for Westerners to see, but Middle Easterners and Syrians see through Assad in everything that he does. So, it is very important to take ISIL out, but it is also very important to take the other side of the coin out, not with boots on the ground, not with American boys and girls coming back in body bags, but employing a local population that wants him out.

Sarah Canna: So, let's skip ahead to the point where the civil war is over, and we're ready to do political reconstruction. How is that possibly going to work when Sunnis are a majority, and the Shia minority is not used to giving up power?

Murhaf Juejati: Your question is all a function of whether Assad is in there or not, but the equation that was agreed upon by the United States and Russia, initially, in Geneva, is a very good one. It is a transition to a transitional government, and that transitional government would be half regime, half opposition. The regime part and the opposition part would include people with no blood on their hands. ... Both sides have to agree on the selection of the others, and in this way, and only this way, it has to be constitutional as well; minorities would have a guarantee that they are represented at the table.

Comments on Syria's Future

Dr. Moshe Ma'oz

Professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies,

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

The strategic balance of power in the Syrian conflict has been in the regime's favor for several years now, notably following Russia's military intervention about a year ago. Consequently, it is fairly likely that Bashar [al Assad] will continue to govern a "little Syria" in the foreseeable future will endeavor to expand his control to more regions.

Bashar has demonstrated dedication, stamina and brutality in his aim to hold power, and has been assisted his dwindling army, his Alawite community and its militias, particularly by Iranian troops and Shi'i militia groups, notably Hezbollah, and above all - Russian air power. Both and Russia also have rendered to Bashar massive financial diplomatic support; they are likely to sustain their help to Bashar (even though Moscow would not insist that he personally stay in power as long as Russian strategic interests in the region are not compromised.

"The U.S. has changed its position concerning Bashar's role and now is ready to tolerate his position as Syria's president for a short period ... In this respect, Washington's position has been reduced in favor of Moscow's prominent role in Syria and beyond."

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The U.S. has changed its position concerning Bashar's role and now is ready to tolerate his position as Syria's president for a short period within the framework of a political settlement. In this respect, Washington's position has been reduced in favor of Moscow's prominent role in Syria and beyond. Already in 2013 Russia manipulated the U.S. concerning the Syrian chemical weapons, thwarting American plan to destroy by air Syrian strategic sites thus contributing to Bashar's fall.

Other elements that may tolerate Bashar's continued rule, for different reasons, are Turkey, Israel and growing groups of Syrians. Some of the latter are exhausted by the brutal conflict and its terrible implications and may be ready to accept Bashar as president while developing illusions regarding a fair political settlement in Syria.

Other factors that have contributed to Bashar 's survival is essentially the lack of a strong, united military opposition to his government, the deficient coordination among them and among the states that support opposition forces, namely: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the U.S. The latter's objection to Jabhat Fath A-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra,-- a proxy of Al-Qaida) which is (unlike ISIL) composed of many Syrians --has served to weaken the opposition efforts to oust Bashar from power.

ISIL's threat to Bashar has been minor but the international effort to fight it plays into the hands of Bashar, Putin and Rouhani. Consequently, not only Bashar is likely to survive ,but Iran will expand its endeavors

to construct a Shi'i Crescent alliance with the Syrian Alawi(not Shi'i) regime ,Hezbollah ,perhaps also Iraq and Yemen; this as a strategic threat to Sunni Muslim states the U.S. position and to Israel as well as to regional oil resources.

Washington should thus review its strategic thinking regarding Syria and the region; its goal must be ousting Bashar and helping the Sunni majority population (65% Arabs and 10% Kurds) to establish a new democratic, pluralist Syria. The U.S. should also assist the Sunni -Muslim states in the region to thwart Tehran's dangerous ambitions.

Comments on Syria's Future

Alexis Everington
Madison-Springfield, Inc.

The single largest factor outside of Syria is the US relationship with Russia. Until US and Russia come to a viable and enforceable agreement that both sides respect, war by proxy will continue. Similarly, the second most important factor outside is the relationship between KSA and Iran. Until this is resolved, again both countries will support proxies to fight each other – more for political gains than even sectarian ones (for example there is much evidence to suggest that KSA needs wars in the region to divert internal focus from its own domestic problems).

The single largest factor inside Syria is consensus on who will lead the country. If Assad stays in power there will be no peace. The pro-Assad contingent must move towards accepting a Sunni leader but the Opposition contingent must move towards accepting real support for government and institutions.

Excerpt of Virtual Think Tanks Interview with Nader Hashemi, September 2016

Sarah Canina, NSI

Nader Hashemi: ... Syria no longer exists. I mean, the country has been completely destroyed over the last 5 years, and I'm not talking about simply the people, but I'm talking about the infrastructure, any sense of sort of normality, government system. So, the country would have to be completely rebuilt from scratch, and one of the big factors that I think will weigh in on any sort of future viable Syrian state will be whether the scars of the war will be able to heal, and I'm speaking specifically about this deep virus of

sectarianism that has spread throughout the country. Syria did not have deep seeds of sectarianism before, but now they're so deep that they're trying to patch that up and put together some sort of cohesive political community where everyone can cooperate together in the context of a functioning state. That will be an immense challenge; it will be a generational challenge; it will take several generations. But first and foremost, none of that can happen... we can't have a serious conversation about the future of Syria unless the fundamental underlying root problem of why there has been a conflict in Syria is addressed. That goes back to the 45-year-old rule of one family in Syria, the house of Assad (currently the son), and his inability, refusal, reluctance to share power and concede power is I think the number one factor that has produced this war. Until there is some clarity on what is going to happen with the Assad family, whether he will depart the country, whether he will be relegated to some area of the country, that's the million-dollar question. I don't think there can be any sense of stability in Syria as long as that person and that political regime are still in power. The war will still continue in some form or another as long as that regime is around. So, I think that's the big question.

"I don't think there can be any sense of stability in Syria as long as [Bashar Assad] and that political regime are still in power. The war will still continue in some form or another as long as that

Of course, because of the diplomatic paralysis that we're facing right now, it doesn't seem as if that question is going to be resolved any time soon because Russia and Iran are in the driver's seat. The US government refuses to get involved directly on that issue with respect to Syria. So, I think this speaks to the... the biggest factor is really the question of the internal political settlement in Syria. If there can be some political settlement that has at least a semblance of legitimacy in the eyes of Syrians, that there can be some sense of a transition to something better, a process where there will be genuine self-determination for Syrians, a genuine sense of inclusiveness and political stability, then we can start to talk about reconstruction, rebuilding, reintegration, return of refugees, etcetera. Until then, those underlying issues are at the heart of this conflict, and they revolve around the political issues related to the house of Assad and the legacy of 45-year-old rule. With what has happened particularly over the last 5 years, unless we start dealing with those questions, any talk of a future Syria I think is completely irrelevant.

Sarah Canna: So, I struggle with this myself because when you think about the future of Syria, as you said, you hit this roadblock of, you know, is Assad going to stay or is he going to go. Do you have any sense of whether a political settlement can be reached with Assad in power or does he have to go?

Nader Hashemi: Yeah, he would have to go because he symbolizes all that has gone wrong in Syria over the past 5 years in terms of the war and also all that has gone wrong with Syria over the last 45 years in terms of the legacy of political authoritarianism, the individual figure of Assad. If he's still in power, even sharing power hypothetically or with his power diminished, he will be such a lightning rod of opposition

because he embodies that in the eyes of the vast majority of Syrians, and I would argue to people in the Arab and Islamic world, the embodiment of political tyranny. So, he would have to go, that person and his family. Now, what happens afterward? Will some remnant of the regime be allowed to stay or not? That's where we give in to difficult issues of interpretation and judgment. My understanding of Syria is that the country is now effectively run like in a mafia state. So, if you remove the mafia don at the top, all of the other ministers and people in positions of power are all so loyal to the mafia don so that if the mafia don leaves, then everything else collapses.

Now, having said that, there has to be, I think, when you talk about the future of Syria, a consideration and a set of built-in safeguards so that if Assad leaves that there are guarantees for minority protection, particularly among the 12% Alawites that are supporting the regime. The ruling family comes from that community, and they have legitimate fears of retribution and revenge should there be a transition to political power. That guarantee of protection of minority rights, broadly speaking, would have to be built in. Now, how that works itself out, what the arrangement will be, those are subject to debate, but in my view, this conflict cannot end and will not end as long as the figure of Assad and his ruling regime are still in power and control the military, the major institutions of the state. This is of course a big stumbling block because Russia and the United States and their respective allies don't agree on this, and Russia and Iran still I think mistakenly believe that you can have political stability and a future for Syria while the house of Assad still remains in power, and they're hoping to do this militarily and crush the opposition. Let's say they were able to crush the opposition and recapture Aleppo. I would argue that you would have a intensity war of attrition that would carry on for decades, if you just stop and think about it for a moment, this shouldn't be difficult to fathom. According to all of the human rights assessments, the Assad regime is overwhelmingly responsible for the vast majority of war crimes and crimes against humanity, totaling about half a million over the last 5 years. To think that the person responsible for that level of violence can be retained in power and that could preside over a period of stability is wishful thinking at best. He has to go, and as long as he doesn't go, this conflict will continue, either at a high intensity or a low intensity, but it certainly will continue.

“Right, now the United States is viewed by many Syrians in a very confused way. They sort of see the United States striking a deal with Iran, and Iran is backing the dictator; they're unsure

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Sarah Canna: Now, the difficult part of this question is how can we, the US, best affect positively the future of Syria? If you assume that the US interest here is in regional stability, you know, what can the United States do?

Nader Hashemi: That's a good question. Well, I think one problem now is the United States has a credibility problem in the eyes of most Syrians and in the broader region, but we want to just focus the conversation among Syrians right now. Syrians are deeply frustrated and angry and upset because as these atrocities have been taking place, as Aleppo has been besieged, US aircraft are flying in the same airspace that the Russian aircraft is and that the Syrian government aircraft is, bombing civilian targets, while the United States is not engaged and has no interest in stopping those atrocities. So, one, there's a sense that the United States in the past 5 years under President Obama did not want to do anything substantive to help a political transition or to help the process of political change. So, you talk to most Syrians today, they're very frustrated with the United States. So, that's one big problem; there's a credibility problem.

Assuming that we can get over that, what the United States I think can do and should do is the United States has to be on the side of the political aspirations for self-determination, for dignity, and for democracy that I think most Syrians aspire to. Right now, the United States doesn't have that reputation. Right, now the United States is viewed by many Syrians in a very confused way. They sort of see the United States striking a deal with Iran, and Iran is backing the dictator; they're unsure of what US intentions are. But broadly speaking, beyond those perception problems, I think the United States has an interest in a stable Syria because, as we've seen over the last 5 years, because Syria has become unstable, it has created a vacuum where ISIS has inserted itself, and it has created this terrorist state.

So, you know, the way that you deal with that question is there has to be a process in place in Syria where there is a political transition away from the old regime. There has to be a sense that Syrians have a voice in a future post-Assad regime, there's a sense of economic reconstruction, political stability, minority rights protection, and that people are not going to be living as second class citizens effectively as they have been under the Assad regime, where if you weren't part of the ruling apparatus, you were essentially disenfranchised. The United States has to be a part of that process, and because the United States is the biggest country, most powerful country still in the world, people, even Syrians who are critical of US foreign policy, still look to the United States for leadership. They see the United States very half-heartedly engaging with Russia, going to conferences while Russia is bombing hospitals and creating mayhem, that doesn't instill confidence and doesn't help the reputation of the United States in Syria.

Of course, there is a broader, deeper historical problem where the United States is viewed by most Arabs and Muslims as the inheritor of great power legacy and great power influence in the region. In other words, the United States is viewed as sort of the successor to British and French great power politics in the Middle East, and they don't view the United States as a country that is aligned with the popular aspirations of the people on the street, for democracy, for social justice, for dignity. They view the United States as striking deals with dictatorial regimes and pursuing an agenda that is at odds with the aspirations of the average person and that allows extremist groups like ISIS, like Al Qaeda, to exploit and recruit young

people who see this chasm between when the United States rhetorically says it stands for, its values, and what it actually does in terms of pursuing its interests, which are, you know, allying itself with dictatorial regimes or not getting involved when there is mass atrocities. Extremist groups exploit this tension, this chasm between US values and US interests, and they're successful in recruiting some people who have no other choice.

So, there is I think long term things that the United States can be doing in terms of the stability of Syria, and that requires I think a fundamental reorientation of US foreign policy towards the region where it is more supportive of democratic transitions, political reform, democratization. In many ways, some of the things that president Obama said during the Arab spring uprisings where he gave several important speeches in 2011 sort of articulated those goals. Specifically, with respect to Syria, the United States I think can play a positive role if it sort of starts to champion what it has done in the past and in other violent conflicts where it is a voice for a process of transitional justice for the accountability of war crimes, for making sure that there is a judicial system in place that will try war criminals and bring them to trial and allow the Syrian society to start to heal again. Those types of things are something that the United States has a lot of strength in based on its past record: the role in the Nuremburg trials, the support the United States gave for the international war tribunal in the former Yugoslavia, those types of things will go a long way in terms of increasing the prestige and the image that the United States has in the eyes of many Syrians.

Sarah Canna: Now, do you think that a unified Syria is the only future pathway that's going to result in stability? What about like a smaller, an Assad Syrian, a Sunni?

Nader Hashemi: Yeah, that's the big question these days, and I don't think there is any possibility of dividing up Syria and creating new states. Number one: because there is zero support in the international community for redrawing the borders despite what some people may think, and I don't think the problem in Syria as your question sort of implies is because the borders that were drawn were colonial borders and were illegitimate borders. Yes, they were colonial borders, and yes, they were in that sense illegitimate. However, the problem in Syria today is not because the borders were drawn on the wrong places on the map. The problem is what has been happening inside those borders by political leaders who have come to power in the post-colonial era. Having said that, if you talk to most Syrians today, the vast majority of them, even on different sides of this conflict, still identify with this sense of Syrian nationality. They are still proud to be Syrians. They still want to see a cohesive and united country. Now, where there is difference of opinion and where I think there is some room for reconfiguring the structure of politics in Syria is to keep the borders intact but to redraw the internal administrative borders so there can be more localized representation among the different groups that exist in Syria. I'm talking about specifically a federal type of arrangement where, for example, Syrian Kurds will have more autonomy in terms of the governing of their own affairs, or Syrian Alawites may be able to have their own sort of autonomous

federal region, but within the framework and within the overarching architecture of an existing Syrian state that coincides with the current borders. That's I think where there is room for discussion and where questions of minority rights and representation can be accommodated, but trying to dismantle the Syrian state and redraw the borders along an Alawite state or a Sunni state, that's not in the cards. There's zero support for that internationally, and the main reason is because people fear the precedent of what that might mean for other countries if we start redrawing the borders. Internally the redrawing of the administrative borders along a federal system I think is where we should put our emphasis in terms of trying to solve some of the tensions until perhaps some future time when Syrians can overcome their sectarian differences, which are a result of this war and then perhaps among themselves agree on new administrative guidelines and structures of governing themselves. But I don't believe that the redrawing of the borders is really a serious option.

Sarah Canina: Now, I have one more question before I want Allison to have the chance to ask a couple of questions. Someone has mentioned that they are concerned that the Sunni population in Syria is just exhausted by the war that they might be willing to fair settlement and just become part of Syria under once again. Do you see that as a potential future?

“If you talk to most Syrians today, the vast majority of them even on different sides of this conflict ... are still proud to be Syrians. They still want to see a cohesive and united country. Now, where there is difference of opinion ... is to keep the borders intact but to redraw the internal administrative borders so there can be more localized representation among the different groups that exist in Syria.”

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Nader Hashemi: Absolutely, and Syrian people are different than any other people. This has been a war, and people are exhausted. Now, it's just a question of survival. But, if that were to happen, would simply be a short term proposition because eventually, within a short period of time, the same political grievances, the same set of frustrations to the uprising in March of 2011, will resurface. It's basically suggesting now that Syrians are so exhausted of trying to break out of the jail that were in that they are simply willing to go back into the prison system to recuperate. But, eventually, they're going to want what everyone else in the world wants, and that's a basic life of dignity where they have political representation, when there is a judicial system that functions with some resemblance of justice, where people can have the freedom to travel. The notion implied in this question is that somehow the best way out of this mess is to just try to convince Syrians to just go back into the collective prison that they were in under the house of Assad, and then we can all just sort of wash our hands and go home. That might be very tempting, and many Syrians might want that in the short term, but that's a guaranteed I think recipe for disaster in the medium and long term because the same sets of political grievances will inevitably resurface, and on top of that, we've got 5 years of a brutal borderline genocidal war. To think that the genocidal mastermind of this war who's overwhelmingly responsible for the vast majority of war

crimes and crimes against humanity can reconstitute power and political legitimacy and by rule of force keep his society under control. Again, it might be a short term possibility, but that's going to eventually lead to reprisals, revenge, and instability. There's no way that someone who has presided over this much bloodshed can be a force for stability. So, I think the premise of the question in my view is a complete non-starter.

Sarah Cana: Alright. On that note, Allison, did you have any questions that you would like to ask?

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Yes, actually, and thank you so much for your insight and really interesting views on this. I really wanted to ask you a little bit more about what happens after Assad goes. So, it's my understanding, and you yourself suggested that we have a sort of mafia-run state, right? So, should we not expect that there would be additional civil warfare even if Assad were to go tomorrow between the various groups within the Syrian opposition now, or do you think that would be such a relief that Assad was gone that those differences could be settled?

Nader Hashemi: No, I think that if Assad goes, you'll have another Libya, and that's perfectly understandable. Let's not forget the enveloping context here. This has been a war that has been far more bloody than Libya, far more bloody than Iraq; it is a war that has taken place against the backdrop of 40 years of extreme political tyranny and then the last 5 years of a borderline genocidal war. To expect that after the demise of the dictator that you're going to get all of these liberal-minded political actors agreeing to reconstitute a new Syria is wishful thinking. People are going to respond based on the recent political history that they're coming out of, and that's a political authoritarian regime, arguably of the worst sort that the Arab war has seen under the Assad family and then 5 years of a bloody and brutal, borderline genocidal war.

So, the forces that are going to come out of this, they are going to be at each other's throats. There's no reason to expect a transition to political stability, and that speaks to I think the bigger question that we cannot seriously envision a future Syria that is stable unless we have a very detailed and sophisticated plan in place for the day after. So, if Assad leaves, if he packs up and goes, what's the plan for political stability, stabilization, and a transition in the immediate aftermath of his demise? I think that's a very difficult question to answer, and it requires a lot of political thinking. It would require a serious international intervention of some sort to make sure that you don't have a situation that replicates what we saw in Libya. There has to be a plan in place for ... security forces that could then lead to a political process, but thinking that it's just a question of removing Assad and then Syria is going to transform itself into Sweden or Canada as some people implicitly think, just suggests that there's a complete disconnect from the reality of what's happening in Syria today.

So, the answer to the question is that if Assad leaves, that's not the end of the story. In many ways, that's the beginning of a new phase, and there has to be a serious concrete plan in place in order to guarantee that the situation doesn't go from extremely bad to arguably much worse in the aftermath of the collapse of the Assad regime. There has to be a detailed plan for someone to take political authority that has legitimacy, and there has to be a stabilization force. Now, who's going to compromise that stabilization force which troops which countries, no one has really investigated or talked about that yet, and I think that's where the conversation should be going.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Is there anybody or are there any characters now that you could see who might serve as that legitimate political leadership?

Nader Hashemi: No, I think that's something that ultimately in terms... if you're talking about political leadership. That's something that I think the Syrians themselves are going to have to determine, and I think that the way that that could be suggested is that there has to be a very clear plan that's announced well in advance of the demise of the Assad regime, this is how it's going to work. So, there will be a transitional authority whose job will simply be governing and trying to stabilize the country until we can get to a point where there can be an election that can represent the aspirations of the Syrians, and that sort of election would start to provide the political leadership that has some sense of political legitimacy. But there's not one particular individual now I suspect that's, given my reading of Syrian public opinion, there will be a multiple number of potential political parties or leaders that could contest for leadership, and the best option at least would be some sort of national governing coalition that represents the sort of broadest, sort of swath of Syrian public opinion to preside over a period of political transition. But no, there's not one individual that can take over, and I don't think there is one individual that I can finger at this time.

So, it's less about individuals, and it's more about sending a message to the Syrian people, but now that the old dictatorship is gone away, there will be an opportunity within the foreseeable future for the Syrian people to exercise their voice and to elect their political leaders who will then be accountable to them, and if they don't measure up, they will then be subject to democratic checks and balances. That has to be built into the plan, and then we have to leave it up to the Syrian people to see who they would elect as a leadership.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay, so one last question on this, and thank you so much for indulging me, but you're suggesting that the plan needs to be...the US role really could be in helping just forge a plan before moving forward, not determine the plan, not shape the plan, but helping the party to form it themselves?

Nader Hashemi: Yes.

Allison Astorino- Courtois: So, it seems to me that that would then require us to do one of the things that you, and this is just practicalities... one of the things that you suggested was detrimental to sort of the perception of the US as an honest broker in the area, which is to come to some agreement with Iran on what's going to happen at least in sort of western areas of Syria, right? So basically, what we're telling the US government here is, "Okay, you need to suck it up, and people in Syria are going to feed into their already suspicious view of the US, but this is what has to happen." Do I have that correct?

Nader Hashemi: I see what you're saying, but I think there are still things that can be done. I think if, in the aftermath of the election in November, assuming Hillary Clinton gets in, if she comes and announces that she is articulating a new US foreign policy towards Syria that breaks with the old policy, the United States will now be on the side of the Syrian people and strongly support the agreed upon peace plan articulated in UN Security Council Resolution 2245. The United States is now going to be a voice for peace and for political transition in Syria, and it actually demonstrates that it is going to stand up to the Russian position, stand up to the Iranian position, and try to identify both rhetorically and practically with the aspirations of most Syrians. Then, I think the Syrian people are going to start to judge the United States based on what it's actually doing, and so if the United States provides some sort of no-fly zone or safe zone for Syrian civilians as Hillary Clinton has said, that's going to affect hearts and minds. If the United States' aircraft are simply not going to fly over Aleppo and watch the devastation down below but perhaps send a message to Syrian aircraft that if you're going to bomb Aleppo, you're going to come up against our aircraft, and we're not going to allow you to fly in this no-fly zone. I think that if you take just one concrete example, if Hillary Clinton were to announce that we are having a no-fly zone over a section of Syria, this is going to be a safe zone where Syrian civilians can go where they'll be protected from Syrian regime bombardment. That immediately would have a huge transformative effect in how many Syrians view the United States.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Unfortunately, US's own strategic interest would argue against that course of action, right?

Nader Hashemi: Right. That's the position of the Obama administration, right. Although, Hillary Clinton has articulated a different vision, and there is a debate, as you know better than I do. I was just watching Charlie Rose the other night, and he is just one voice among many where he had a long, detailed interview (it's worth looking at) on these specific issues. He was interviewing General Petraeus, and General Petraeus was going into a detailed analysis of what could happen and might happen that would change

the political balance of power in Syria and would lead to something better, and he was saying basically what I just articulated.

So, I think also that the role that the US can play under a new administration, if the United States were to show that it's actually using its power and influence on the global stage to bring the world together, to organize, let's say, an international conference on reconstruction and economic development in Syria. The United States leads the way in bringing together the best experts in international criminal law to establish a war crimes tribunal for accountability in justice, and the United States is seen as being the leading voice in organizing and bringing the international community together, of course, ideally, better under the auspices of the United Nations, which would give it more legitimacy. That type of activity that the United States did play post-1995 in the context of Bosnia, where the United States effectively laid out a political strategy, mobilized the international community, used its military to sort of assure that the different parties were in compliance with the contact group plan as it was called back then and then set up a period of... it had forces on the ground, it led to a process of transition, and also at the international level, it presided over a war crimes tribunal, which was an international war crimes tribunal, but the United States was one of the leading parties in making sure that that was established. That's a potential model there that I think is worth investigating. It's not a direct parallel, but I think there's lessons to be learned from the conflict in Bosnia that also apply to the question of Syria.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Thank you so much, and I will hold the other one million questions that I have for you for another time; I don't want to use up all of your day.

Sarah Canna: So, I said we would take half an hour, and we're at that point. So, what we're going to do is I'm going to make a transcript of this conversation, and I'll forward it to you if you'd like to review it. Allison and I are going to collate all of the responses. We have a number of people who are contributing to this question; they're going to be put into a report, and Allison and I are going to write an executive summary, a 1-2 page... a review of what everyone has said and the key points, and you'll get a copy of that. As we get any feedback from CENTCOM, we'll be sure to forward it to you.

Nader Hashemi: Wonderful, thanks. Good luck.

Comments on Syria's Future

Yezid Sayigh

Senior Associate, Carnegie Middle East Center

The principal factor affecting the future of the Syrian conflict is that the Assad regime is not simply unwilling to engage in any degree of genuine power-sharing - it is unable to do so without the risk of unraveling. But the key issue here is not simply that it will therefore continue to fight for outright military and political victory. Rather, even total victory leaves the regime in command of a devastated economy and under continuing sanctions without the resources to rebuild its power or consolidate its hold over the country. So its logical goal has to be to regain access to external capital and markets, and to get sanctions lifted. In theory, it has little hope of achieving this thru normal diplomacy and will face severe reluctance from the US, EU, and GCC countries and Turkey, and so it will extend the fighting inside Syria as a means of coercing external powers into accepting its demands. This is not something that will start to happen in a year or two or only after a political deal is reached; the regime is probably thinking along these lines now. I suspect that Russia (and others such as China) will endorse regime demands, arguing that the "Friends of Syria" governments can't demand a transition or peace in Syria and then be unwilling to increase its chances of success by lifting sanctions and allowing trade in goods and capital flows to resume. Turkey will also have an interest in getting back into the Syrian market, as will Lebanon and Jordan, which have suffered the most economically and are desperate to repatriate refugees and revive their flagging economies and business sectors. The regime knows this and has been adopting new laws since late 2015 designed, at least in part, to attract investors and Syrian flight capital. Securing the regime financially and economically will, I believe, become the real purpose behind much of its military operations (i.e. as leverage and coercion of external governments) and the focus of behind-the-scenes discussions with the US and EU (et al), probably mediated by Russia, once the new US administration picks up the foreign policy reins from Spring 2017.

Comments on Syria's Future

Dr. Josh Landis
Director, Center for Middle East Studies & Full Professor
University of Oklahoma

I believe that Assad, with the help of the Russians, Chinese, Iraqis and Hezbollah, will take back most rebel

held territory in the next five years. Of course, the regime is very weak both militarily and financially so the US could stop it from defeating the rebel factions by either throwing in more arms or helping regional actors take or hold parts of Syria. The Israelis may want to support various militias around the Golan to protect its border. We, of course, have influence in Israel and could in turn influence this process. Jordan too, may want to maintain proxy militias on its border with Syria rather than allow Assad to retake all the Deraa region, but I don't suspect that Jordan would push hard for this if the US and Saudi Arabia give up their support for their proxies along the border. Jordan may prefer Assad at this point, because if he restores stability to the Deraa region, many refugees will probably return to their homes in Syria. Jordan could begin combatting terrorism with Damascus again, despite the bad blood between them.

“If the US helps the Iraqi government take back all ISIL controlled territory, Baghdad will eventually help Assad regain ISIS territory on the Syrian side of the border. Baghdad will not want a Sunni rebel controlled statelet in Eastern Syria. If the US tries to support rebel militias or tribes to replace ISIL, it will have to remain in the region to defend them against Assad and Baghdad.”

We still don't know how much of Syria the Turks hope to take and populate with rebel militias. The US has influence over this process because of our remaining relationship with

Erdogan and the PYD. How much land will the PYD (Kurds) take in addition to the areas it now controls? The US can partially control this process by either arming them to take more ISIL territory or not. The price of the Kurds taking more Arab majority territory is that they will not want to return it to Arab rule and the US will be exacerbating local ethnic rivalries and injustices in order to destroy ISIL.

If the US helps the Iraqi government take back all ISIL controlled territory, Baghdad will eventually help Assad regain ISIS territory on the Syrian side of the border. Baghdad will not want a Sunni rebel controlled statelet in Eastern Syria. If the US tries to support rebel militias or tribes to replace ISIL, it will have to remain in the region to defend them against Assad and Baghdad. Baghdad will also not want the Kurds to spread too far into ISIL territory. If the US does not want Assad to take back territory from ISIL, it will have to find an Arab partner to replace the Syrian Arab Army in these ISIL territories. This will place Washington in opposition to Baghdad's interests.

The dominant militias in Norther Syria are the Islamist militias associated with Nusra - now the Syria Conquest Front. Most believe that America is supporting a War against Islam and has secretly sided with Iran, Assad and Russia to destroy them. It will be hard for the US to dissuade them of this conspiracy. The "moderate" militias are no match for the Islamist factions and have no interest in separating from them. This leaves the US in a quandary about their future and about further support and arms for them. I don't

have an answer for this problem. I do not think that there is much that the US can do to win their support or to ween them away from Salafism or convince them to adopt more liberal, West-friendly views.

Strategy Considerations for the Syrian Conflict:

Civil War Termination and Its Implications

Lt Col Mel Korsmo, USAF, Air University

The Endstate

If the United States desires an end-state in Syria that involves political transition of the leadership there (namely the removal of Assad), the primary pathway that this will be accomplished—particularly given the present coalition of 50+ states, the involvement of the UN, and the host of external intervening states such as Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—will be through a negotiated settlement. Russia's abandonment of the ceasefire agreement arguably represents not a move for all-out military victory, but rather strategy to surge, freeze the conditions on the ground, and enter the next round of negotiations from a stronger position.

Why a negotiated settlement?

All civil wars eventually come to an end. Civil war scholarship indicates four prominent termination pathways exist for civil wars. These include: (1) military victory by the rebels; (2) military victory by the government; (3) ceasefire/stalemate; or (4) negotiated settlement (i.e. peace agreement) (Toft 2009). Since the end of the Cold War, the preponderance of civil wars now end in negotiated settlements (by one dataset, 54% of civil wars in the 1990s (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003a; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003b) and 15 of 19 (79%) of wars from 2000-2006 (Hartzell and Hoddie 2015). This is the preferred, dominant method pursued by the UN and the international community, especially when multiple parties are engaged in an internal conflict.

When negotiated settlements occur, decision-makers select from a menu of political, military, territorial, and economic power-sharing provisions for the peace agreement. The selected provisions impact military strategy significantly, for these provisions affect:

- How long peace lasts (peace duration)
- Whether the government continues to violate human rights (political repression)
- The degree of political dissension and the number of terrorist attacks
- How to address the challenges of ethnic regions (e.g. Kurds, Turkish enclave)

Ceasefires = stepping stones to negotiations (or to renewed conflict).

Ceasefire/stalemates are rare on their own; ideally they serve as transitions to peace agreements. Said differently, the cessation of hostilities in play in Syria at the end of September—and any ceasefires hereafter—should not be perceived as a final destination but rather as a stopgap measure en route to the final destination of a negotiated settlement. In addition, the desired end state of a political transition—assuming continued UN involvement and a large international coalition—will necessitate codifying that transition process in a negotiated settlement between interested parties.

What defines a negotiated settlement?

Negotiated settlements are distinguished by the physical preservation of the conflict adversaries and by the initiation of contractual government-rebel guarantees—more commonly referred to as peace agreements—that establish post-war allocation of valued state resources.

Why does this matter? It matters because the war termination pathway reliably impacts the duration of peace that follows the war.

Empirical research shows civil wars ending in military victory—especially rebel victory—result in more durable, long-lasting peace than when wars end in negotiated settlements (Toft 2009). However, with respect to human rights, wars ending in military victory are more likely than negotiated settlements to result in acts of genocide and mass killing after the conflict formally ends (Harff 2003; Licklider 1995).

Peace is less likely to endure w/negotiated settlements.

Since peace is *less* likely to endure, are there any provisions within the peace agreements that might help peace last longer? The short answer is yes, with qualifications that are covered later below. *The principal provisions within peace agreements that actors can influence are power-sharing arrangements (PSAs).* PSAs are divided into four main dimensions: political, military, territorial, and economic power-sharing arrangements. Examples:

- *Political* power-sharing measures include guarantees of proportional representation in the legislative branch, in the executive branch, and in the civil service.
- *Military* power-sharing agreements may involve integration of the opposition into the main defense force or into leadership positions of the military.
- *Territorial* power-sharing measures involve either allocating separate powers to sub-state units (federalism) or granting autonomy to an opposition group to control local issues in a certain region.

- *Economic* power sharing is rarely used and is void of any empirical support; I will not detail it further.

How do power-sharing agreements (PSAs) impact the durability of peace?

PSA advocates contend that any civil war resolution must address three major security-related concerns about power, authority, and resources. These concerns include: 1) who controls the use of coercive force (resolved by military PSAs); 2) who controls the distribution of political power (resolved by political PSAs); 3) who controls the distribution of resources (resolved by territorial and/or economic PSAs).

Three main views exist in the empirical literature on this: Some scholars have demonstrated that the different dimensions reinforce each other; the more power-sharing that exists, the more that peace will endure (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003a; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003b; Hartzell and Hoddie 2007). Others show that only certain dimensions really matter. Military and territorial dimensions, for example, are less easily implemented. Such concessions therefore reflect “a higher degree of a higher degree of commitment by the parties” (Jarstad and Nilsson 2008) that makes peace more likely to prevail.

A third major perspective is that power-sharing agreements in negotiated settlements are dangerous. The argument here is PSAs reify the identities of contending groups and are therefore “as likely to recreate the security dilemma as solve it” if powerful external parties do not intervene and guarantee the settlement (Walter and Snyder 1999). I will address this argument on third-party security guarantees later below. Additionally, any parties excluded from the original agreement will be encouraged to re-engage in violence in order to secure similar concessions.

Caution: Peace ≠ just the absence of war.

Intervention success is not based solely on whether civil war recurs—that only assesses the government’s ability to deter internal violence. It says nothing about what life is like for the people in the state, and whether they live without anxiety or fear for their personal safety. Does the government assure its own population that it will not personally threaten the well-being of its citizens after the conflict ends? In other words, does the government continue to *politically repress* its own people by violating their physical integrity rights (e.g. through *kidnapping, extrajudicial killing, torture, and illegal imprisonment*)?

Why should we care about the absence of political repression?

First, *insecure people turn elsewhere for their security*. Many Sunnis, for example, turned to ISIS for security when their interests were no longer protected. As one scholar put it in 2014, “The fundamental

problem in Iraq now is not that the government did not have enough coercive capability but that the governors were using that capability against the Sunnis” (Saideman 2014). Second, *a government’s respect for its citizens’ physical integrity rights is empirically demonstrated to reduce the number of terrorist attacks in that state* (Walsh and Piazza 2010). Third, this *challenge of balancing a government’s ability to deter and its ability to assure the population is not new*. Madison forecast these difficulties in Federalist no. 51, asserting that “In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty is this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself.” We ignore the second element at great risk.

Do power-sharing agreements help or hurt the degree of political repression?

This is an under-researched issue. My dissertation research on the subject, covering 36 civil wars that ended between 1989-2005 in negotiated settlements, indicates that political repression decreases—i.e. human rights improve significantly—in the short term (defined as two years after the civil war has ended) when certain conditions are present:

1. *Human rights improve when military PSAs are excluded*. All nine causal pathways leading to significant improvement in human rights involved the *absence* of both types of military power-sharing measures. In contrast, 11 of the 12 pathways leading to worse or unchanged human rights involved the *presence* of integration of opposition parties in the defense force.
 - a. Implication: Do *NOT* advocate for a new integrated military defense force. It will in all likelihood lead to *worse* political repression by the government, which is likely to lead to increased dissension and terrorism.
2. *Political repression consistently decreases (human rights improve) when the territorial PSA of autonomy is excluded*. Preliminary data, using cross-tabulation procedures, indicates that the relationship of autonomy on human rights is consistently negative and statistically significant at five years and ten years after the war has ended. Control variables were not included, so this observation should be confirmed further. It aligns with other theoretical and empirical cautions about partitioning as a solution to civil war (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl 2009).
 - a. Implication: Do *NOT* advocate for full territorial autonomy for the Kurds or any other ethnic group. Instead, consider alternatives such as federalism.
 - b. The relationship between federalism and political repression is positive over the medium and long term (nominal impact in short term). This relationship falls short of statistical significance (likely due to the fact only 4 of 36 cases used this measure; all 4 resulted in improved human rights).
3. *Political repression consistently decreases (human rights improve) when robust third-party security guarantees are included*. Robust third-party security guarantees were defined here as the combination of a strong mandate allowing for the use of force and a substantial footprint of at least 5,000 armed peacekeepers to enforce that mandate. Syria will need much more.
 - a. Implication: We need to be thinking about who in our coalition (or from the UN) will be providing boots on the ground. Without a third-party guarantee to monitor and enforce, the ability of any parties to credibly commit to an agreement against recent opponents is highly unlikely (Walter 1997; Walter 2002).

The Caveats (aka challenges in specifically resolving the Syrian conflict):

Multiple, shifting combatants generally lead to really long wars with more battle deaths, more likely genocide or politicide, and less stable ceasefire agreements that break down more quickly (Cunningham 2011). Likewise, multi-party negotiations present additional barriers to peace not found in two-party conflicts. Of 233 civil wars starting after WWII and ending before 2003, 81 (35 percent) involved multiple combatants: 46 had three parties, 17 had four parties, 7 had five parties, and eleven had six or more. The last group includes the long-lasting conflicts in Afghanistan, Colombia, the DRC, Somalia, and Uganda.

1. Implications: Following Clausewitz, “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment” that needs to be established here is “the kind of war on which [we] are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.” This strategic question must be addressed.
2. Implication #2: Any public explanation of our involvement and engagement here ought to reference this complexity and its inherent challenges.
3. Implication #3: Multi-party negotiations present additional barriers to peace. Recent research on long, complex civil wars provides several key ideas (Cunningham 2011):
 - a. The key “veto players”—those sets of actors with separate preferences over the conflict outcome and with both capacity and incentive to block an end to war—must be incorporated into any agreement if it is to conclude without all-out victory by one side.
 - b. Simultaneously, international actors/intervenors must consider ways to *reduce*, rather than expand the number of veto players in civil war.
 - c. Targeted sticks and carrots are more effective tools for inducing combatants to negotiate rather than fight.

Summary

- The Syrian conflict reached another ceasefire, albeit one that quickly reverted to renewed, if not intensified violence. Ceasefires should be understood as merely a stepping-stone en route to either renewed conflict or an eventual negotiated settlement, not a final destination.
- Negotiated settlements with multiple parties are complex. Beyond including key veto players, certain adaptations should be made to the menu of potential carrots and sticks:
 - Exclude: Autonomy and integration of the military (in main ranks & leadership)
 - Include: Robust third-party security guarantees; possibly federalism
- These adaptations balance the ability of the state to deter internal repression while assuring the population. In other words, civil war recurrence is more likely to be delayed and political repression to be reduced. In turn, this is empirically shown to reduce political violence and terrorist attacks.

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Comments on Syria's Future

Osama Gharizi

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Entering its seventh year, the increasingly intractable Syrian civil war has displaced nearly 12 million people, taken the lives of another 300,000, and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure and sense of national cohesion. What once began as a civic uprising against a corrupt, exclusionist regime quickly descended into a host of conflicts among and between a myriad of militias and armed groups, including extremists such as the so-called Islamic State (IS), all with their own zones of influence, governing structures and international patrons. Given this complex reality, the future of Syria will be influenced by a variety of factors, two of which stand out: the strength and cohesion of the Syrian opposition; and the extent to which the actions of, and rivalries between, key regional actors can be managed and mitigated.

“Unsurprisingly, a fragmented and weakened opposition skews any political settlement process towards the

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The strength and cohesion of the Syrian opposition will be a key determinant to the future trajectory of the country: a strong, cohesive and unified opposition is more likely to induce and influence a peace process that results in more inclusiveness in, and reform to, the flawed political system that initially catalyzed the civic uprisings in 2011. A disjointed, weakened, and ineffectual opposition is likely to engender the opposite outcome, one in which the Syrian regime is able to dictate the terms of peace.

Today, the conflict dynamics in Syria are such that the latter is the more likely scenario to emerge. Once the main objective for many in the international community, support for moderate opposition elements battling the regime in Syria has been superseded by the fight against IS and other extremist groups. As a result, those in opposition to the regime, such as the Free Syrian Army, have been eschewed in favor of those that prioritize defeating extremist groups first, be they IS or in the case of Turkey, PYD units along its southern border. The Syrian Democratic Forces, comprised of mainly Kurdish units and supported by the US, along with the Sunni Arab and Turkmen groups backed by Turkey, have benefited most from this shift in approach. Though gains are being made towards the immediate objectives laid out by the groups and their respective backers (defeat of IS; and weakening the PYD and its military arm, the YPG), the opposition as a whole, already tenuously organized and linked, has suffered. Whatever common cause

³⁸ The opinion and analysis expressed is solely that of the author and does not necessarily represent USIP's position.

or ultimate objective that may have once existed among opposition forces is today nonexistent. Instead, opposition forces are consumed by parochial objectives ranging from the grandiose, such as establishing a semi-autonomous Kurdish enclave in the northeast, to the most basic, like surviving the regime's onslaught of Aleppo or holding on to whatever territorial gains they have mustered against the regime and/or other opposition groups.

Unsurprisingly, a fragmented and weakened opposition skews any political settlement process towards the regime. On a local level, evidence already exists of how the Syrian regime leverages its military advantage vis-à-vis opposition communities and groups to dictate outcomes in their favor: local reconciliation pacts – essentially capitulation agreements – are imposed on areas retaken by the Syrian government, with terms almost always encompassing provisions related forced displacement and arrest of key individuals and groups. If terms are not initially agreed to by local communities, then shelling and bombardment commences, as was the case recently in Hama, until opposition communities surrender to the terms presented. Little to no negotiation takes place. This tactic also seems to be underlying the regime's approach to the national political peace process enacted following UN resolution 2254 in December 2015 and is only strengthened by the divisions and lack of cohesion among the opposition as a whole.

The extent to which the actions of and tensions between regional actors, particularly Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, can be managed and mitigated will also be a pivotal factor in determining the future trajectory of Syria. The Syrian conflict has become an extension of the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, both of which are jockeying for regional supremacy and influence. Neither country desires Syria to completely fall under the orbit of the other, a fact which is only fueling and radicalizing the conflict, as evidenced by the strong linkages each country has to the more radical Sunni and Shia elements fighting in Syria. The rivalry will also impact the overall nature of the peace process as each side has certain red lines that any agreement should not cross. Without an attempt to defuse tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia on a regional level – and the unbridled support given to their Syrian proxies – Syria will continue to bear the brunt of the rivalry's blowback. As for Turkey, its involvement in the Syrian conflict centers on reversing the gains made by the PYD and nullifying any attempt to unify territories under PYD jurisdiction. The Kurdish issue is set to become one that exacerbates the conflict in the immediate term if no consensus emerges to both the limits of Turkey's engagement and the role of the PYD in a future Syria.

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Yezid Sayigh is a senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, where his work focuses on the Syrian crisis, the political role of Arab armies, security sector transformation in Arab transitions, the reinvention of authoritarianism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and peace process.

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SMA Reach-back

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

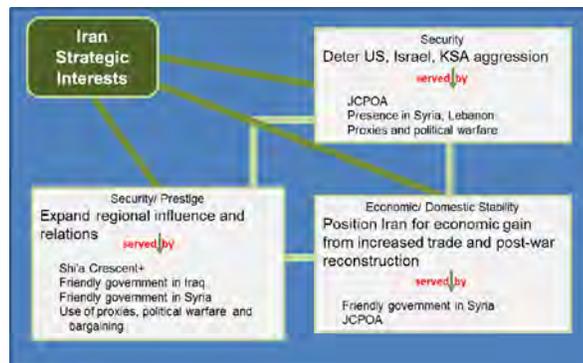
Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

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

Implications of JCPOA for the Near-term Battle: Marginal

Iran experts in the SMA network generally believe that JCPOA has had negligible, if any, impact on Iran's strategy and tactics in Syria and Iraq.³⁹ While Iran does appear to have adopted a more assertive regional policy since the agreement, the experts attribute this change to regional dynamics that are advantageous to Iran, and Iran having been on "good behavior during the negotiations" rather than to Iran having been emboldened by the JCPOA. Tricia Degennaro (TRADOC G27) goes a step further. In her view, the impact of the JCPOA on the battle against ISIL is not insignificant, but concern about it is misdirected: "the JCPOA itself will not impede Coalition's ability to prosecute the war ... and create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability. Isolation of Iran will impede the coalition's mission."



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³⁹ Alireza Nader (RAND) explains that the reason we are unlikely to see a "cooperation dividend" emerge from the agreement, and why Iran's regional strategy will not change even following the Spring 2017 election is that Rouhani and moderate voices are simply unable to overcome the power wielded by the Ayatollah Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards and other "reactionary or conservative forces in Iran."

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

Implications of JCPOA for Post-ISIL Shaping: Considerable Potential

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

Provoking Friction as a Bargaining Chip. A classic rule of bargaining is that the party that is more indifferent to particular outcomes has a negotiating advantage. At least for the coming months, this may be Iran. According to the experts, Iran is likely to continue to use the JCPOA as a source of friction – real, or contrived – to gain leverage over the US and regional allies. The perception that the Obama Administration is set on retaining the agreement presents Tehran with a potent influence lever: provoking tensions around implementation or violations of JCPOA that look to put the deal in jeopardy, but that it can use to pressure the US and allies into negotiating further sanctions relief, or post-ISIL conditions in Syria and Iraq that are favorable to Iran. However, because defeat of ISIL and other groups that Iran sees as Saudi-funded Sunni extremists,⁴⁰ the experts feel that if Iran were to engage in physical or more serious response to perceived JCPOA violations, they would choose to strike out in areas in which they are already challenging the US and Coalition partners (e.g., at sea in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea; stepping up funding or arms deliveries to Shiite fighters militants in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Yemen) rather than in ways that would actually impede ISIL's defeat.

Increased Proxy Funding. Iran has often demonstrated a strategic interest in maintaining its influence with Shi'a communities and political parties across the region, including of course, providing support to Shi'a militia groups (Bazoobandi, 2014).⁴¹ Pre-JCPOA sanctions inhibited Iran's ability to provide

⁴⁰ Nader clarifies that because of its ambitions for pan-Islamic leadership, Iran is careful to identify ISIL and like groups that they oppose as "takfiris" – Wahhabis that maintain that Shi'a are not true Muslims.

⁴¹ Bazoobandi, S. (2014). Iran's Regional Policy: Interests, Challenges, and Ambitions (Analysis No. 275). ISPI. Retrieved from http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/analysis_275__2014_0.pdf

“continuous robust financial, economic or militarily support to its allies” according to Tricia Degennaro (TRADOC G27). An obvious, albeit indirect implication of the JCPOA sanctions relief for security and political stability in Iraq in the longer term is the additional revenue available to Iran to fund proxies and conduct “political warfare” as it regains its position in international finance and trade.⁴² It will take time for Iran to begin to benefit in a sustainable way from the JCPOA sanctions relief. As a result it is not as likely to be a factor in Coalition prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Syria, but later, in the resources Iran can afford to give to both political and militia proxies to shape the post-ISIL’s region to its liking.

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Editor: *Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

SME Input

Implications of JCPOA on the Fight against ISIL

Tricia Degennaro, Threat Tec, LLCI

The Iran Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is the international agreement to halt the nuclear program in Iran.⁴³ Under the agreement Iran contracted to eliminate programs that the international community suspected could lead to the production of nuclear weapons. The agreement does not prevent Iran from producing, purchasing or refurbishing weapons as long as they are not of categories under the WMD guidelines.⁴⁴

⁴² An expert in the Iranian business sector, reports that with the signing of the JCPOA “after years of sanctions and limitations on business interactions” the agreement has engendered “a new hope in Iran for a revival” of its pre-1979 economic vitality. Still, the economic situation in Iran has yet to improve as a result of JCPOA and “there’s a lot of public dissatisfaction.”

⁴³ The agreement was signed in Vienna on 14 July 2015 between China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and Germany, <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/jcpoa/>

⁴⁴ Iran is signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and can be held accountable for its obligations to halt all production of WMD. This is reiterated in the JCPOA.

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

“... it would behoove coalition partners to work with Iran to conduct stability operations that lead to conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability in the region. The challenge for the coalition is current US policy on the Syrian

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

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

It is in Iran's immediate and long-term interest to bring stability to the combat operations of all parties in Syria. Iran, however, has no interest in losing its alliance with Syria, Iraq, Turkey or Russia. Iran is situated in a Sunni-dominated region which exerts pressure on the Iranian regime.⁴⁵ More importantly, Iran is at odds with Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners not about religion, although religion is used quite strategically by both parties to create divisions; rather, it is about the ability to be seen by the region's population as a legitimate authority. Again, the Shi'ite/Sunni card is often used to exert power to shape and influence the behaviors of regimes, monarchies, populations and non-state actors alike.

For its part, ISIL is no fan of Iran. In fact, many ISIL followers view Iran as an entity worse than Israel. The ideology ISIL preaches is opposed to all people of any faith, including Muslims, who do not follow the strict ISIL interpretation of Islam. Although monies from Gulf countries are funneled to this ruthless

⁴⁵ The American backed coup against democratic elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh is fresh in the Iranian regimes mind. To date, right or wrong, Iranian leaders are convinced that U.S. intentions are to overthrow the regime. This is reinforced with the rush to remove Saddam Hussain and now Bashar al-Assad.

organization, ISIL does not view any of the monarchies as legitimate either. What can the US and coalition forces do in order to help stabilize the region?

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

Consider leveraging Iran's relationship with Turkey

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

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

Pay attention to narratives and Iranian leadership rhetoric

Narrative is powerful in many domains. In the Middle East the feeling that the US has rejected the desires of the people and has abandoned them is paramount. The American withdrawal of support to the Kurds during the Clinton Administration, US ardent support for Israel, and the continued meddling in government leadership (Hussain, Assad, Ghaddafi, Mubarak, Saleh and others) has directly reinforced these beliefs. Reading into the greater narrative can inform actions.

For example, when the Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Ghasemi, welcomed the US-Russia deal, he told reporters in Tehran that "Iran has always welcomed a cease-fire in Syria and the facilitation of humanitarian access to all people in this country." He added, "The cease-fire needs to be sustainable and

enforceable, not providing the terrorists with any opportunity to beef up [their forces] and [re-equip].”⁴⁶ Interpreting these words, one can surmise that Iran will continue to fight non-state group actors fighting against Assad whom they are labeling terrorist much like the US labels Hezbollah (although one can argue that Hezbollah is legitimately part of the Lebanese government, this argument cannot hold true with the non-state anti-Assad groups in Syria). Further, Iran expected that the US will halt any support given to anti-Assad groups and hold them to the cease fire. This did not happen. Perhaps the halt of hostilities is not within US control; however, the flow of US arms to the region and the fact that non-state groups are using them is all the information they need.

Further, the Khan Touman battle on May 6, following the Feb. 27 cease-fire, saw dozens of soldiers fighting under Iranian command being ambushed, killed and some captured. Back then, Iranian officials thought that the cease-fire was “merely an opportunity for the recruitment and reinvigoration of the terrorist groups by the governments that support them.”⁴⁷ The “governments that support them” refers to the US and Israel by proxy much like the Iran is blamed for arming of the Houthis in Yemen. Foreign military assistance is one thing arming rebel groups is another. This should be rethought if populations are going to be influenced by US and coalition forces and, in return, weaken Iran’s hold in the region or, move to strengthen Iraq, to equalize Saudi and Iranian influence so it is less destructive.

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

Commit to Iraq and Syria sovereignty

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

⁴⁶ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/us-russia-syria-agreement-iran-unfazed-collapse-truce.html#ixzz4N4FR8Agh>

⁴⁷ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/us-russia-syria-agreement-iran-unfazed-collapse-truce.html#ixzz4N4Fm10Sv>

Summary

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

Transcript of 9/29/2016 SMA Speaker Series Telecon with

Alireza Nader (RAND Corporation)

Moderated by Meg Egan, SRC

Meg Egan, SMA Office: Today, we have Mr. Alireza Nader, and he is a senior international policy analyst at the Rand Corporation and an author of *The Days After the Deal with Iran: Continuity and Change in*

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

Iranian Foreign Policy. His research is focused on Iran's political dynamics, elite decision making, and Iranian foreign policy. Prior to joining Rand, Nader served as a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses. He is a native speaker of Farsi. He also received his MA in International Affairs from the George Washington University. Today, Ali is going to discuss Iran's regional policy after the nuclear agreement.

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

Alireza Nader, RAND: Thank you very much, and Good Morning. I want to give a brief presentation, then we will open up the discussion to questions and answers so we can

have more of a discussion. I want to briefly talk about Iran's approach towards the United States after the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA or the nuclear agreement) and then really focus on what Iran has been doing in the Middle East, Iran's threat perceptions, its military and national security doctrine, and what we could potentially expect in the future.

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

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

Islamic Republic of Iran has always had pan-Islamic aspirations and sees itself more than just the Shia revolutionary power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, what can we expect in the future? I made the argument that Iran's policies are largely driven by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the revolutionary guards. I think, even if President Rouhani is reelected in 2017, his chances of reshaping Iran's foreign policies are very minimal, and I would expect US-Iran relations to actually potentially become more hostile with the next US president coming and with the fact that forces that shape Iran have not changed. It will be interesting to see what happens when Ayatollah Khamenei dies and his successor is chosen. Right now, there are not any major indications of radical change after Khamenei, although I don't really think we can predict what happens after him. So, that will

be interesting to watch. In terms of the Saudi-Iran competition, once Daesh recedes and becomes less of a threat, we can actually expect the Saudi-Iran rivalry to heat up even more. Looking at the Saudi leadership, there is really very little enthusiasm for engaging Iran or even communicating with it, and while figures in Iran like President Rouhani were in the past eager to engage Saudi Arabia, I don't think chances of that are high even if Rouhani is reelected. With that, I'd like to open the discussion to questions on any issue that you may have. Thank you.

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

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

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

Question 2: I am originally from Syria, and I have two questions. First is do you think that the rival of Shia militias, like the NPU in Iraq, are an answer for the rise of Sunni extremists like ISIS and AQ? Second, talking about the economic dependency, many articles in Arabic are stating that the Iranians are buying land in the heart of Damascus and are resettling Shia Iraqi families. In that regard and the Russian of taking over the airport, do you think that along the way, if we manage to stop the armed conflict, do you see along the way some kind of clash between Iran and Russia on a piece of the cake? Thank you.

Alireza Nader: Those are both very good questions, and yes. There are many reasons for the rise of Daesh and Sunni jihadism, and not all of them have to do with Iran and the Shia, but I think Iran sectarian policies in Iraq and Syria and throughout the Middle East do contribute to the rise of Sunni jihadi groups. I can never really separate the factors and say what Iran does contributes the most, but it is a big factor, and

when we look at Iran's involvement and Iraq's especially, but to a smaller extent in Syria, Iran does use religion as a motivating force to get people to fight for it. So, that's definitely a factor. I've also read that Iranians are buying a lot of land around Damascus and probably close to the Zaynab shrine, part of it is probably because Iran wants to have a lot of influence after the conflict.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alireza Nader: I think that there is a great amount of respect and fear and distress for the United States among Iran's elite. I think that there are different approaches toward the United States. For example, Khamenei and much of the guards and more conservative forces think that Iran should be aggressive towards the United States, whereas president Rouhani and foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif argue

for a more diplomatic, pragmatic approach towards the United States and see the United States more as a traditional rival than a hardcore ideological competitor, which is really Khamenei sees in the United States. I don't get any indications that the Iranian leader still thinks the United States is about to go away from the Middle East, that its position is fundamentally in decline in the region necessarily, although Iranian officials have exploited opportunities in Iraq and Syria to extend their power. In terms of the next US president, Iranian officials are not hopeful that major changes will come. Khamenei always says that it doesn't matter who is president of the United States, whether it's a democrat or republican; the fundamental US position towards the Islamic Republic will not change. So, I think for the immediate future and for the long term future, Iran's leadership views the United States as a rival to be countered, and that rivalry is not going to go away any time soon. So, a lot of Iran's approach toward developing its military is going to be focused on combatting the United States and US allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel in the future.

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

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

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

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

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

By Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights

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Abstract: Neither the JCPOA nor the eventual defeat of ISIL in Iraq will likely prove game changers. The future of the nuclear agreement remains uncertain, and Iran will probably continue the more assertive regional policy it adopted in its wake. And barring major changes in Iraqi politics, the defeat of ISIL will most likely herald the rise of “the next Sunni insurgency.” Historically, developments in Iraq have been the main driver of Iranian actions there, though U.S. actions have also shaped Iranian behavior. Accordingly, the more the U.S. steps back in Iraq, the more Iran will step forward. For this reason, the U.S. should lock-in the multinational Coalition’s support for Iraq via a multi-year ITEF II package, rethink how to be a more effective Security Force Assistance partner, help Baghdad resist pressure by Tehran to institutionalize the PMUs as a separate, parallel military organization, and bolster deterrence against Iranian-sponsored proxy attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq.

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

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

Iran, Iraq, and the JCPOA

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

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

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

If Iran-U.S. relations were to deteriorate significantly, perhaps due to a JCPOA-related crisis, Iran might double down in areas where it (or its proxies and partners) are already challenging the U.S. and its allies: harassing U.S. vessels in the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa; providing arms and EFPs to Shiite militants in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia; and transferring advanced weapons (such as anti-ship cruise missiles) to Shiite militias in Lebanon (Hezbollah) and Yemen (the Houthis). In Iraq too, the driver of Iranian conduct

is likely to be related to Iraq or, after the fall of Mosul, internal power struggles in Iran, with the IRGC flexing its muscles abroad to demonstrate that it remains in control of Iran's regional policies and to show that "the age of missiles" has not passed, as former president Rafsanjani recently claimed. The U.S. knows how Iran tends to escalate in Iraq, which is likely to use proxy warfare to try to hasten a U.S. drawdown in Iraq after the battle of Mosul. Iran's leaders are creatures of habit, and generally operate from a well-worn playbook. Their repertoire of actions is fairly predictable, even if the course of action they decide on in any particular case is not.

Impact of the eventual fall of Mosul

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

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

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

Drivers of Iranian Conduct

The key driver of Tehran's conduct in Iraq will not be a change in Iran's perception of the U.S. threat there; the IRGC already considers America a threat but is unlikely to act as long as Iraq needs America as an ally. Instead of being threat-focused, Iran will likely be opportunistic. The U.S. should therefore focus on the kinds of opportunities in Iraq that might present themselves to Iran in the years ahead. These might include:

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

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

US Actions and Options

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

For these reasons, the U.S. should consider four steps to counter Iranian influence in Iraq and prevent the return of ISIL: First, the United States should lock in the international Coalition’s commitment to Baghdad, helping it to secure its borders (especially with Syria) and to deal with the heightened terrorism threat that is almost certain to emerge in the wake of ISIL’s defeat as a quasi-conventional military force, to create the basis for a multi-national security venture that will outlast the current phase of the war against ISIL. CJTF-OIR should be extended and maintained as a broad-based multinational coalition, and not be allowed to shrink back into a U.S. mission with a few allies as “window dressing.” A new three-year Iraq Train and Equip Fund II funding package for the Iraq Security Forces (ISF) should be approved to cover 2017-2020, to supplant the first three-year ITEF which covered 2014-2017.

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

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

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

To this end, an inform and influence campaign documenting malign Iranian activities in Iraq—including unfair business practices, undue influence in politics, and sponsorship of violence against Iraqis—might provide leverage against Tehran, especially if such information were used as warning shots and released via non-U.S.-leaning media outlets. In particular, Iraqis might be interested to know how expensive Iranian

military support and gas and electricity imports can be, the violence that underpins Iranian domination of the religious tourism industry, or the impact on Iraqi farmers of customs-free Iranian food exports to Iraq.

Comments on the Implications of JCPOA

Alex Vanatka
Air University

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

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

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

Comments on the Implications of JCPOA

Richard Davis
Artis International

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

What is more challenging to the US approach in the region comes from the fact that hardliners in Iran and Arabia want the Iran Nuclear Deal to fail... At a time which sub-state and trans-state groups are emerging consolidating gains within states that are failing or the great nations are embroiled in proxy warfare in Syria and Yemen. Mortal enemies like Iran and Saudi Arabia are deeply involved in these conflicts, both believing that the outcome may determine the survivability of their respective regimes. In discussion with leaders from Iran and Saudi Arabia, we have learned that both believe that nuclear capability, including weaponization, is essential to nation's future and regime survival if the other seeks capability. Layered on top of this, the leaders tell us that aggression by the other across the region represents the danger to their own regime and proves that the other cannot be trusted. The international community has attempted to prevent nuclear proliferation within Iran by negotiating a nuclear deal that normalizes relations between Iran and the West in exchange for Iran scaling back its nuclear program. But, leaders in Israel told us in face-to-face interviews that the Iran Nuclear Deal ensures that there will be war with Iran at some-point in the future. Leaders from Saudi Arabia say that the Deal ensures a nuclear Iran and that when this happens they will have no choice but to build a weapons program.

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

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

Concurrently, hardliners in Saudi Arabia also represent a significant threat to the Iran Nuclear Deal. If the deal collapses, Saudi Arabia will be seen to have legitimacy to pursue a nuclear weapons program that counters the nuclear breakout capability of the Iranians. The emergence of “anti-Nuclear Deal factions” in Iran and Saudi Arabia underscore the critical problem in understanding the implications of these influences on regional conflict and international stability. The complex alignment of interests and alliances in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen demonstrate

that factions and spoilers have an outsized role in international security and the affairs of many states, particularly in the fight to defeat ISIL and to stabilize Syria and Yemen.⁴⁸

Author Biographies



Tricia Degennaro

Patricia (Tricia) DeGennaro is a Senior Geopolitical Risk Analyst for Threat Tec., LLC. She currently supports the US Army TRADOC G27 as an analyst in the Advanced Network Analysis/Attack the Network Directorate. DeGennaro has lectured at West Point and New York University on International Security Policy and Civilian and Military Affairs. She was selected as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) on the Middle East, Iraq, and Afghanistan for various projects under the TRADOC G2, the commander of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq, commander of the Special Operations Command Central, and the US Department of Defense Strategic Multilayer Assessment program. DeGennaro was nominated by the US Department of State as a Franklin Fellow where she served in USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance - Office of Civilian and Military Cooperation (DCHA/CMC) as a Senior Policy Advisor to support the Office and an Agency-wide Civilian-Military Cooperation Steering Committee in an extensive revision to the Agency's Civilian-Military Cooperation Policy. DeGennaro capitalizes on over twenty years of experience as an academic, author and consultant in international security. Much of her work focuses on stabilization in the Middle East and surrounding region, countering violent extremism, and transitioning nations from war.

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

⁴⁸ Artis is collecting data as we speak on this issue in Saudi Arabia and Iran and should have more relevant data in the coming weeks, including much more information on the hardline groups that would like to see the deal fail.



Michael Eisenstadt

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

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

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



Dr. Michael Knights

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

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

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



Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

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

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

Alireza Nader



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

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



Alex Vatanka

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

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

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

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



Richard Davis

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

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

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

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



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

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Iran’s Approach in Iraq

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

Iran’s Post-ISIL Strategic Calculus

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

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

Safeguarding Iran's national security by:

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

Defending Iran's internal sovereignty by:

- Managing public dissatisfaction within Iran; quelling unrest
- Securing Iran's borders and seacoast

Relieving economic stress and associated public discontent by:

- Defending Iranian economic assets and investments in Syria and gaining a foothold in the post-conflict economies (e.g., via construction contracts) in Syria and Iraq
- Working with other suppliers to increase global oil prices
- If and when Reformists are given leeway by the clergy and conservative forces in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), opening economic relations with the EU⁴⁹

Defending the Islamic identity and leadership of the regime by:

- Clergy and Supreme Leader balancing the independent political influence of the IRGC against popular and reformist views in the government

Impact of JCPOA

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

A political football? The success or perceived failure of the JCPOA may have important domestic political implications in the run-up to Iran's May 2017 presidential election. Specifically, the perceived failure of the Agreement to produce widely anticipated improvements in the Iranian economy is a point on which

⁴⁹ Even Iranian officials perceived as more moderate, such as Abbas Araghi, a senior nuclear negotiator, have consistently stressed that “enmity between . . . [Iran] and America is still in place. . . . America from our view is still the Great Satan and nothing has changed.” From: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/22/elusive-equilibrium-america-iran-and-saudi-arabia-in-changing-middle-east-pub-55641>

President Rouhani and other reform-minded thinkers will be particularly vulnerable.⁵⁰ In fact, Gallagher et al. (2016) reported this summer that while Rouhani was still the front runner, his lead over former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had dropped to a narrow margin largely on account of Rouhani's perceived failure to improve the economy—a significant basis of the popular support for the JCPOA including that of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This fall, apparently at the express request of Khamenei, Ahmadinejad announced that he would not run in May 2107 citing a meeting he had had with the supreme leader in which he was told that his candidacy would not serve the interests of the country. (Quds Force commander Major General Qasem Soleimani who also had been mentioned in the press as a potential candidate has similarly announced that he does not intend to run.) Speculation is that the Khamenei is determined to both avoid a repeat of the 2009 popular protests following Ahmadinejad's divisive "stolen election", and to put up attractive conservative candidates to challenge the relatively moderate Rouhani. However, there is also conjecture that Khamenei, who has been a vocal opponent of the JCPOA and a number of Rouhani's other policies may not approve Rouhani's run for re-election either. The official, vetted candidate list will be announced in April 2017.

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

Shaping Opportunities

The SMEs offer a number of suggestions for opportunities to:

Counter Iranian influence in Iraq

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

Increase stability in the region

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

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

- Provide security/prestige guarantees to Iran in exchange for its encouraging sincere efforts at sectarian power-sharing by the Abadi government in Iraq (Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI)

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

Editor: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)

SME Input

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

Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Neither the JCPOA nor the eventual defeat of ISIL in Iraq will likely prove game changers. The future of the nuclear agreement remains uncertain, and Iran will probably continue the more assertive regional policy it adopted in its wake. And barring major changes in Iraqi politics, the defeat of ISIL will most likely herald the rise of "the next Sunni insurgency." Historically, developments in Iraq have been the main driver of Iranian actions there, though US actions have also shaped Iranian behavior. Accordingly, the more the US steps back in Iraq, the more Iran will step forward. For this reason, the US should lock-in the multinational Coalition's support for Iraq via a multi-year ITEF II package, rethink how to be a more effective Security Force Assistance partner, help Baghdad resist pressure by Tehran to institutionalize the PMUs as a separate, parallel military organization, and bolster deterrence against Iranian-sponsored proxy attacks on US personnel in Iraq.

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

“A decision by the new US administration to take a tougher line after January 2017 regarding JCPOA implementation or to support the Syrian opposition with arms, safe havens, or no-fly zones could cause Iran to respond with countermoves in Iraq (once Mosul has been “liberated”) or elsewhere in ways that might put the JCPOA under pressure.”

Iran, Iraq, and the JCPOA

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

Iran’s strategic style in Iraq is subtle and thrifty. It does not push on closed doors: it rarely asks Iraqi leaders to take actions that are clearly opposed to Iraqi interests. Instead it works with the grain as often as possible, helping Iraqi leaders to achieve their objectives where they broadly coincide with Iran’s. This strategy of pushing on open doors or half-open doors has served them well, and will continue.

The IRGC, which oversees policy in Iraq, has many commercial interests there, particularly in religious tourism, but Iran does not have ambitious economic goals in Iraq. Development of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) into an IRGC equivalent would be a plus for Tehran, giving it more leverage in Baghdad, but it is not a driver of Iranian policy. In this sense, Iranian policy in Iraq is “solution-agnostic.”

As long as the aforementioned objectives are furthered, the Iranians will work with (and if need be, abandon) any faction in Iraq.

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

“Unless there is a fundamental change in the nature of Iraqi politics, the fall of Mosul (and its potentially messy aftermath) may simply pave the way for “the next Sunni insurgency” ...”

If Iran-US relations were to deteriorate significantly, perhaps due to a JCPOA-related crisis, Iran might double down in areas where it (or its proxies and partners) are already challenging the U.S. and its allies: harassing U.S. vessels in the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa; providing arms and EFPs to Shiite militants in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia; and transferring advanced weapons (such as antiship cruise missiles) to Shiite militias in Lebanon (Hizballah) and Yemen (the Houthis). In Iraq too, the driver of Iranian conduct is likely to be related to Iraq or, after the fall of Mosul, internal power struggles in Iran, with the IRGC flexing its muscles abroad to demonstrate that it remains in control of Iran’s regional policies

and to show that “the age of missiles” has not passed, as former president Rafsanjani recently claimed. The US knows how Iran tends to escalate in Iraq, which is likely to use proxy warfare to try to hasten a US drawdown in Iraq after the battle of Mosul. Iran’s leaders are creatures of habit, and generally operate from a well-worn playbook. Their repertoire of actions is fairly predictable, even if the course of action they decide on in any particular case is not.

Impact of the eventual fall of Mosul

The success of the coalition campaign against ISIL in Iraq will likely result in their being driven underground, rather than out of Iraq; this will create opportunities for Iran. To the degree that ISIL has a fair amount of Baathist DNA in its makeup (a significant number of its leaders are former Iraqi military and intelligence officers), it will likely go to ground to fight another day—as previous generations of Baathists did after the 1963 pro-Nasserist coup, the 2003 U.S. invasion, and the 2007 U.S. surge—rather than fight to the death. ISIL has shown that it can function very well as an underground terrorist network (as it did between 2011-2014) and that Baghdad lacks the capabilities to deal with this threat. Unless there is a

fundamental change in the nature of Iraqi politics, the fall of Mosul (and its potentially messy aftermath) may simply pave the way for “the next Sunni insurgency”—whether ISIL 2.0, son of al-Qaida in Iraq, a revived neo-Baathist JRTN organization (the Army of the Men of the Naqshabandi Order), or something else. This will be especially so if ISIL remains ensconced in Syria, and can use its presence there to stage operations in Iraq.

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

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

Drivers of Iranian Conduct

The key driver of Tehran’s conduct in Iraq will not be a change in Iran’s perception of the US threat there; the IRGC already considers America a threat but is unlikely to act as long as Iraq needs America as an ally. Instead of being threat-focused, Iran will likely be opportunistic. The US should therefore focus on the kinds of opportunities in Iraq that might present themselves to Iran in the years ahead. These might include:

- The defeat of ISIL in Mosul and their elimination as an overt threat might lessen Baghdad’s need for the US and hence Tehran’s incentive to restrain its proxies in Iraq. Thus, the post-Mosul phase could bring with it certain dangers for US personnel in Iraq. This may especially be the case if the defeat of ISIL is seen as a triumph for the kind of professional military forces that the United States is trying to create in Iraq, versus Iran’s militia proxies.
- A surge of popular support for PMU-linked politicians in Iraq, including former premier Nouri al-Maliki, in the 2017 provincial elections and 2018 national elections (assuming they are held as planned) might cause Iran to provide them money, media and political support.
- A repeat rapid drawdown and disengagement of Coalition forces from Iraq (as occurred previously in 2009-2011) might tempt Tehran to become more assertive in Iraq. Moreover, if the

multinational aspect of CJTF-OIR were to dissolve in the wake of the fall of Mosul and to once again become a unilateral U.S. effort, Iran would find it easier to foment domestic opposition to the US military presence in Iraq.

- The death of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani could offer opportunities for Tehran to support actors in the political and religious establishment who are closer to it. This is a moment that Iran has been preparing for, though it is possible that less change may occur during a post-Sistani transition than expected.

“Iraq’s government and religious establishment is the key shaper of Iranian policies in Iraq. The stronger the US relationship with Baghdad, the better protected US equities in Iraq will be.”

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

US Actions and Options

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

For these reasons, the U.S. should consider four steps to counter Iranian influence in Iraq and prevent the return of ISIL:

Steps to Consider

First, the United States should lock in the international Coalition’s commitment to Baghdad, helping it to secure its borders (especially with Syria) and to deal with the heightened terrorism threat that is almost certain to emerge in the wake of ISIL’s defeat as a quasi-conventional military force, to create the basis for a multi-national security venture that will outlast the current phase of the war against ISIL. CJTF-OIR should be extended and maintained as a broad-based multinational coalition, and not be allowed to shrink back into a U.S. mission with a few minor allies as “window dressing.” A new three-year Iraq Train and Equip Fund II funding package for the Iraq Security Forces (ISF) should be approved to cover 2017-2020, to supplant the first three-year ITEF which covered 2014-2017.

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

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

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

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

Comments on Iran's Decision Calculus

Alex Vatanka

The Middle East Institute

The official Iranian line is that ISIL 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 too many threat scenarios that this regime in Tehran is unable to tackle and there 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.

Transcript of 10/7/2016 Mideast Memo Interview with Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute)⁵¹

“..., the Mideast Memo spoke recently with Alex Vatanka, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute who specializes in Middle East security and Iranian foreign policy. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

RCW: *Let's start with Mosul and the PMUs. What kind of an effect, if any, will these militias have on the bid to reclaim the city?*

VATANKA: The first thing to point to is how the PMUs first about. This goes back to 2014, when Islamic State was rapidly taking territory in Iraq, prompting Iraqi spiritual leader Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to issue a fatwa calling Iraqi Shiites to take up arms against the jihadi militant

“For the Iraqi army, this is going to be a long-term struggle not just against ISIS, but also the sons of ISIS.”

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⁵¹ http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2016/10/07/what_does_iran_want_in_iraq_alex_vatanka_mosul_popular_mobilization_units.html

group. If we don't get this important point right, then we're going to mistakenly point to Iran and blame them exclusively for the development of Shiite militias in Iraq, and in the process miss the real dynamic in the country. This of course does not mean that Iran's role has been minor, but it is important to understand what was evolving politically in Iraq at that time, and why that moment has since passed. It is no longer 2014, and the need for the formation of militias has dissipated. For the Iraqi army, this is going to be a long-term struggle not just against ISIS, but also the sons of ISIS. Defeating these extremist forces in the country will also require a political solution, however, and one that involves Iraq's Sunni communities. This cannot be accomplished through sectarian militias.

RCW: How does Iran view the PMUs? Do they hope to model them after their own Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)?

VATANKA: The Iranians are pretty clear that they would prefer to establish a state within a state inside Iraq -- something like the Revolutionary Guard or Hezbollah in Lebanon, if they could get away with it, which is doubtful. In truth, the Iranians have some fundamental objectives in Iraq. First and foremost, nobody in Iran wants to see Iraq ever again develop into a power that could threaten Iranian security. Outside of this, however, the Iranians have demonstrated some flexibility. If Tehran's baseline preference is to keep Iraq militarily weak, it still has a tremendous amount of middle ground to bring in aggrieved Sunni communities to help stabilize the country. Iran knows as well as anyone that these communities will be essential to not only defeating ISIS, but ISIS-ism. They've seen firsthand the longevity of groups like the Taliban in Afghanistan.

RCW: So Tehran doesn't want Iraq to be a failed state?

VATANKA: Iran doesn't want a Gaza as its neighbor, no. Why settle for that when it could instead exert influence over a much stabler country? Iraq has developed into one of Iran's biggest trading partners -- we're talking billions of dollars. Sure, Iran could sell weapons to Iraq, but you can't sell cars and refrigerators to a failed state.

In Tehran there is a minimum consensus on Iraq. The Rouhanis of the world want to develop state-to-state relations, whereas the IRGC sees Iraq more as a little brother. But Iranian officials need to come up with a more uniform approach, because while its current policy might make perfect sense in Tehran, it is the image of the meddling Revolutionary Guard that is most prevalent.

RCW: *And that is the image being broadcasted to the world.*

VATANKA: It's a real problem for them. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the Revolutionary Guard is the face of the Islamic Republic around the world.

RCW: *Mosul is about 85 km from Erbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdish region, and Kurdish Peshmerga forces have played a key role in the fight against ISIS. How do policymakers in Tehran view the Kurds in post-ISIS Iraq?*

VATANKA: Iran has traditionally been closer to one particular Kurdish faction, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, or PUK, but it has also worked in more recent

“the Arab states in the Gulf and the Middle East have missed an opportunity to match Iranian influence in Baghdad. If, instead of looking at Iraqi Shiites as Shias first and Arabs second, the region's Arab powers should try to view it the other way around, and really focus on the Arab character of Iraq.”

years to keep longtime Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani in power. Iran has never really taken full Kurdish independence seriously, but Iranian generals got a taste for fighting the Kurds about 40 years ago during the 1979 Kurdish rebellion. Iran, remember, is an imperial state with many different minority groups, not just its own Kurds. It has multiple restive communities to worry about and keep in check.

RCW: *Would Iran accept more Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq as a tradeoff for stability in the region?*

VATANKA: Iran has already accepted a great deal of Kurdish autonomy, and in 2014, when Iraqi forces were dropping their weapons and fleeing, it was the Iranians who rapidly moved into Iraq to assist in the fight against ISIS. The Kurds haven't forgotten this.

RCW: *The political situation in Baghdad remains tenuous. What role does Iran have in the country's current political discord, and how does it hope to exert influence in Baghdad moving forward?*

VATANKA: I look at the Iraq-Iran relationship a different way. I believe the Arab states in the Gulf and the Middle East have missed an opportunity to match Iranian influence in Baghdad. If, instead of looking at Iraqi Shiites as Shias first and Arabs second, the region's Arab powers should try to view it the other way around, and really focus on the Arab character of Iraq. Iraqi Shiites fear that Arab states ultimately want

to install another Sunni strongman in Baghdad. If the Gulf states, rather than disregarding these fears, instead examined and exploited the differences between Arab and Persian societies, and also how unusual the model of government in Iran is as compared to Shiite history, this could present them with an opportunity.

RCW: It's a rather modern concept, the Iranian supreme leader.

VATANKA: It was completely made up by one man in 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Compare that to Iraq, where you have Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, more of a quietist, and you have a model that could not only work in Iraq but throughout the Shiite world. But if Iraqi Shiites remain convinced that marauding Sunnis are going to come and murder them, this will only continue to push Iraq's Shia toward Tehran.

Transcript of 9/29/2016 SMA Speaker Series Telecon with

Alireza Nader (RAND Corporation)

Moderated by Meg Egan, SRC

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

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

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

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

There was a lot of talk after the nuclear agreement that either Iran's approach to engaging the United States would change after President Hassan Rouhani became president and delivered the nuclear agreement. A lot of people, in Washington DC especially, argued that the nuclear agreement provided a ripe opportunity for Iran and the United States to engage each other and cooperate in the Middle East,

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

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

Now, I'd like to focus on two specific areas where Iran is very active in terms of its political warfare strategy and expanding influence: Iraq and Syria. I'm sure many of you are very familiar with both, and some of the information I'm going to present is not going to be new to you, but in terms of Iran's strategy in Iraq, as you know, Iran has gained a lot of power in Iraq since the 2003 US invasion and the ascendance of Shia parties in Baghdad. I argue that the rise of Daesh actually has been beneficial to Iran because it has allowed it to expand its power in Iraq. The failure of the Iraqi Shia-led military forces in countering Daesh in the very beginning ... really helped Iran expand its power in Iraq because a lot of the Shias turn to Iran

for support, and Iran was really one of the first countries or parties to directly get involved in the fight against Daesh. If you remember, in the Kurdish regions, Iran really stepped up its support for the KRG or the Kurdish regional government, and there were reports even of Iran sending troops and military equipment into those areas in Iraq, and both the Shia in Iraq and the Kurds were very much appreciative of that.

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

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

I'm going to briefly turn to Iran's strategy in Syria in terms of political warfare. I think, in terms of Iran using political warfare and religious influence in Syria, it has faced many more challenges than it has had in Iraq. Syria has been tough for Iran in terms of expanding its ideological influence, but it has done certain things in Syria that we find in other places, like Iraq. For example, Iran played a big role in setting up the national defense forces in Syria, and it has attempted to indoctrinate the national defense forces with Iran's revolutionary ideology, probably not with much success. As you know, Syria has a very, very small Shia population, about 300,000 people (that is an estimate). The Alawites are not really truly Shia; they're depicted as being Shia, but religiously, they're very different than the Iranian Shias ... The Alawite elite tend to be secular, so Iran has had a difficult time indoctrinating the largely Sunni and Alawite and

Christian populations in Syria. It has even tried indoctrinating some of the Christian forces fighting with the Syrian regime. However, one area in which Iran has been very successful is using religious appeal to attract foreign fighters to Syria. One of Shia Islam's holiest sites is near Damascus, the Zaynab shrine, and Iran has used the Zaynab shrine to motivate Shia fighters from Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and of course Iran to come and fight on behalf of the Syrian regime. So, in that regard, Iran's political warfare has been relatively successful because it has created what I call a foreign legion in Syria to fight for it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Question 2: I am originally from Syria, and I have two questions. First is do you think that the rival of Shia militias, like the NPU in Iraq, are an answer for the rise of Sunni extremists like ISIS and AQ? Second, talking about the economic dependency, many articles in Arabic are stating that the Iranians are buying land in the heart of Damascus and are resettling Shia Iraqi families. In that regard and the Russian of taking over the airport, do you think that along the way, if we manage to stop the armed conflict, do you see along the way some kind of clash between Iran and Russia on a piece of the cake? Thank you.

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

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

respect each other's sphere of influence. So, I'm not necessarily sure that they're going to clash over Syria once the conflict ends.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

is going to be focused on combatting the United States and US allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel in the future.

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

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

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

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

Two Elements of Iran’s Strategic Decision Calculus

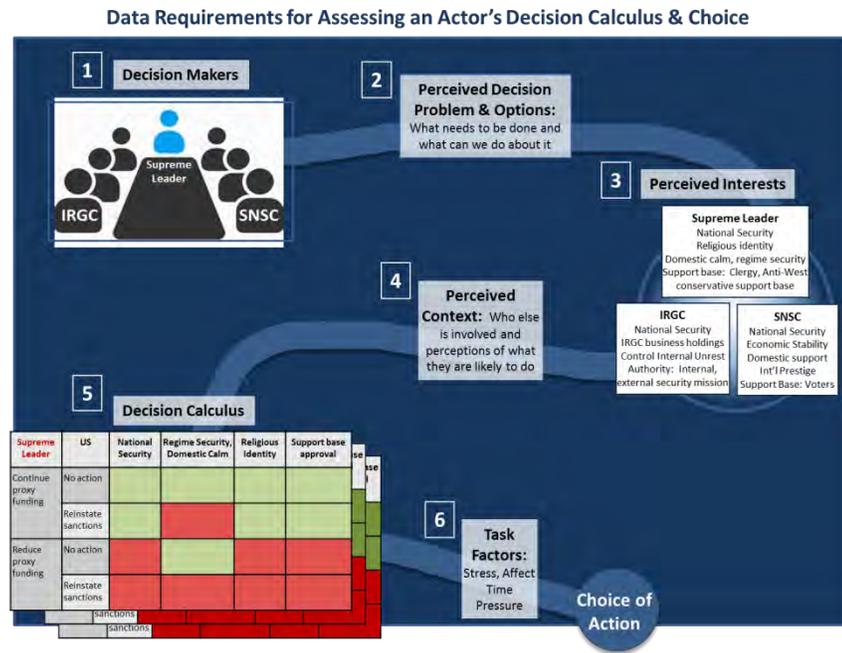
Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

NSI, Inc.

Previous research⁵² shows the pivotal role that Iran will play in the way the future unfolds in the Levant and Gulf region. Specifically, the courses of action that Iranian leaders choose in order to further security, economic, prestige and domestic political interests can either 1) quell tensions and facilitate Shi’a-Sunni reconciliation in Iraq and Syria, or 2) very easily keep the region in persistent sectarian conflict. What factors will determine Iran’s strategic calculus? And, more importantly, is there anything that the US or Coalition actors might do to incentivize Iran to choose the first, less conflict-prone path?

The elements of a strategic calculus

Before turning to Iran, it is helpful to clarify some of the terms we are using. First, in decision science, a “decision calculus” refers to a specific step in an actor’s decision process. It implies that a decision maker has already: 1) identified and framed a problem or circumstance that requires a choice; 2) completed at least an initial search to identify possible courses of action he may take; 3) identified which of his interests he believes are at stake relative to that problem; and 4) has identified other actors he believes are involved and the options he believes they would consider in response to his chosen action. Combining each of the decision maker’s perceived options with those attributed to his opponent generates a list of potential outcome scenarios. The decision calculus is an evaluation of each of the outcomes and associated actions based on the degree to which interests are satisfied.



⁵² The study, Allison Astorino-Courtois (2015) Analysis of the Dynamics of Near East Futures: Assessing Actor Interests, Resolve and Capability in 5 of 8 Regional Conflicts is available on request from the SMA office.

What is “calculated”?

We can best understand the decision calculus as the evaluation that occurs when the actor’s decision options and outcomes are evaluated against its interests. What is “calculated” are the acceptable trade-offs on the potential loss or satisfaction of interests associated with each potential option across the actor’s interests. Decision calculuses that require no trade-offs between interests are, quite literally “no brainers.” That is, where all interests point to a single choice (e.g., the cheapest car is also the sleekest, most fuel efficient and safest) very little cognitive energy is required to make the choice. In general, these are also the more difficult choices or behaviors to influence. However, applying influence at points where an actor must make trade-offs between conflicting interests often can guide the actor’s choice in one direction or another.

The data that an analyst would need to assess an actor’s calculus and ultimate COA choice mirror those of the decision steps outlined above with the addition of one additional input: information about the setting in which the decision is taken, i.e., the “task factors.” The presence of decisional stress, positive or negative emotions or highly complex choice problems among other factors impact the ways in which people make their decisions (choice rules) and thus the outcome and final choice of action.⁵³

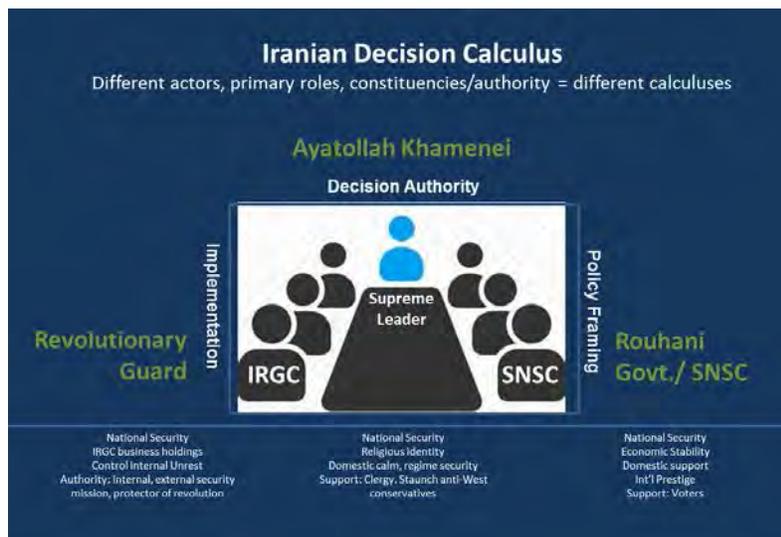
Iran’s Decisions

Identifying Iran’s post-ISIL decision calculus in specific, operational terms requires a specific decision or choice problem as perceived by Iranian leaders. Lacking that, we still can discuss two important inputs to modeling Iran’s decision calculus: who the decision makers are likely to be on a security-related topic, and which strategic interests might be in play.

⁵³ Note that the decision model described here illustrates a cognitive or subjective decision analysis. While structured it relaxes rational choice assumptions about value trade-offs (there are none in rational choice) and allows the possibility that decision makers or decision units would employ less than normative (strictly rational) choice rules.

Decision Unit: Whose calculus is it?

A closer look at Iranian security decisions than was presented in SMA Reachback V7 allows us to represent the elements of the Iranian foreign policy decision process at a bureaucratic (rather than nation-state) level. The key actors are 1) the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who espouses conservative views; 2) Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – the officer corps of which can also be characterized as conservative; and 3) the Government of President Rouhani who was elected as a Reformist.⁵⁴



Key Actors in the Decision Process

The Government. Although most Iran watchers would identify Iranian security policy as directed by the conservative views (and interests) of the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guard, reality may not be so black and white.⁵⁵ True, Ayatollah Khamenei is the ultimate decision authority. However, the views of Rouhani and other Reformist voices can enter policy calculations in the pre-decision stage by way of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) chaired by the President.⁵⁶ The SNSC is tasked with researching and framing foreign policy issues, and typically reports the pros and cons of options to the Supreme Leader. In terms of the decision model discussed above, the SNSC functions to shape problem identification, identify options and evaluate these over various interests (i.e., pros and cons); if not always Step 1, the SNSC is involved in setting up the decision calculus by taking on Steps 2, 3 and some of 4.

The Supreme Leader. According to the Iranian Constitution, authority for Step 5 in the decision process – “solving” the decision calculus to make the final choice – rests with the Supreme Leader. However, in

⁵⁴ Although in reality none of these is a unified bloc organ but is comprised of individuals with a range of primarily conservative to primarily reformist views, for the purposes of a broad decision analysis it is reasonable to consider them three entities on the presumption that the differences in interests and preferences between the three groups are greater than the differences among them.

⁵⁵ Shahidsaless, Shahir. Iran Pulse, Al Monitor March 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/iran-khamenei-decisions-snsc.ht>

⁵⁶ President Rouhani appoints the SNSC Secretary (a representative of the Supreme Leader, and currently, a former head of the IRGC Navy) and the Government Ministers (e.g., intelligence and security, interior) who serve as members of the Council (the Speaker of the Parliament is elected by Parliament which has of late been supportive of Rouhani). Still, the other members of the Council, namely the Chief of the Army Staff, Chief of the Army, Chief of the IRGC, the Chief Justice and of course his own representative are appointed by the Supreme Leader.

practice Shahidsaless (2015)⁵⁷ reports that Khamenei often serves as a balancer between the popularly elected Rouhani government and more conservative views typically associated with the IRGC and military although in the “overwhelming majority of cases,” Khamenei has decided in line with the views of the majority of the Council.

The IRGC. While the views and interests of the IRGC clearly influence Iran’s strategic decisions both via IRGC representation on the SNSC and the broad network of Iranian civilian authorities who are retired IRGC officers, it can be argued that the Revolutionary Guard’s role in implementing security-policy one decided offers its greatest latitude to influence Iran’s security behaviors. In other words, much of the IRGC’s direct power over Iranian strategic behaviors happens after the decision calculus and choice in how (or whether) that choice is implemented.⁵⁸

Why is this important to consider when assessing Iranian security decisions and behavior?

Because the different worldviews and competition between the IRGC and Government can insert domestic political concerns into Iranian security decisions that have nothing to do with the security problem but reflect the domestic political competition for power within the leadership. Leaving these real issues out of analyses of the Iranian security calculus can greatly skew our understanding of the real motivations and processes the drive Iranian behaviors.

Strategic Interests

While its tactics may change, there is little to suggest that Iran’s key strategic interests will be changed with ISIL defeat. What may change however, and may be open to US/Coalition shaping, are the priorities that the Iranian leadership assigns to these interests. By and large the three groups involved in foreign policy decision making in Iran hold many of the same strategic interests. The differences among them are the priorities each gives to these, which trade-offs are seen as acceptable, and therefore what each sees as the best choice of action.

Key, enduring strategic interests that we can be confident will feature in decision calculus for most issues in the near to mid-term are outlined briefly as follows:

⁵⁷ Shahidsaless, Shahir. Iran Pulse, Al Monitor March 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/iran-khamenei-decisions-snsc.html>

⁵⁸ While the primary mission of the IRGC is internal protection of the revolution, it has operational responsibility for the Strait of Hormuz and engages in foreign activities notably via its Al Quds brigade. As is the case with the military establishments of many countries in the region (e.g., Syria, Pakistan) the IRGC is both a security organization and has accumulated significant economic clout mainly via its control of major engineering and construction conglomerates and holding companies in Iran. CRF Backgrounders, Council on Foreign Relations, June 14, 2013, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/irans-revolutionary-guards/p14324>

Prestige; National Security: Increase Iranian political influence in Iraq, the region

SUPREM REFORM, IRGC
E ROUHANI
LEADER

X	X	X
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Iran’s grand strategy is to become a regional powerhouse by expanding its influence, support, and power within the region (Morell, 2015). It 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, & Natali, 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015) and pro-Iran governments in Iraq and Syria. Providing military support to Iraq and aid to Shiite militias in the fight against ISIL (Almukhtar & Yourish, 2015; Martin et al., 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015) both strengthens Iran’s influence in Iraq and addresses the existential threat posed by ISIL-like Sunni jihadism. 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).

National Security: Dominate/ sustain Shi’a balance of power; mitigate threat from Israel, Saudi Arabia, US

SUPREM REFORM, IRGC
E ROUHANI
LEADER

X	X	X
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Iran has a demonstrated interest in providing support to Shiite groups in the region with the intent of reinforcing Shiite-led governments or overthrowing Sunni Arab regimes (Morell, 2015). Sunni grievances in the region have increased in recent years, fueled by these “endless interventions” by Iran and the staunch support given to Maliki and Assad who are seen as persecuting Sunnis. Syria is the lynchpin of Iran’s deterrent against Israel. 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).

Economic; Domestic/Constituent Support: Expand economic/trade ties in region and perhaps with Europe

SUPREM REFORM, IRGC
E ROUHANI
LEADER

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Beyond a tactic for strengthening Iran’s economy, President Rouhani and Reformist voices support improving relations with the EU and Western countries – what the Reformist Shargh Daily referred to as Rouhani’s task of “breaking taboos.” Conservatives not so much. Perhaps unexpectedly, the success or perceived failure of the JCPOA may have important domestic political implications in Iran now and in the run-up to the May 2017 presidential election. Specifically, the perceived failure of the Agreement to produce widely anticipated improvements in the Iranian economy is a point on which Rouhani and other reform-minded thinkers will be particularly vulnerable to advances by conservative

opponents.⁵⁹ In fact, Gallagher et al (2016)⁶⁰ report that although President Rouhani is still the front runner for the 2017 presidential election his lead over former President Ahmadinejad has dropped to a narrow margin largely on account of Rouhani’s perceived failure to improve the economy – a significant initial hope associated with the JCPOA. As popular support for the Reformists diminishes, the IRGC gains influence in the policy decision process. Eisenstadt and Knights (The Washington Institute) point to IRGC harassment of US forces in the Gulf as related to domestic political competition. Specifically, it is the IRGC “flexing its muscles abroad to demonstrate that it remains in control of Iran’s regional policies.” In a recent example of the push and pull of political power in internal Iranian politics, the Foreign Ministry sent the kind of crossed messages that illustrate the different priorities of reform and conservative factions. At the end of October Mohammad Javad Larijani, head the Human Rights Council of Iran’s judiciary criticized an EU resolution calling for opening an embassy in Tehran saying “They should know that the judicial system will definitely not allow such a nest of corruption to be established in Iran.” On November 6, Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi announced that, “It is now crucial to open the EU office in the Iranian capital... ‘Since we have more collaborations [with the EU] due to new developments, it is unmanageable for an ambassador of another European country to take care of Iran-European Union relations.” The next day however a Foreign Ministry spokesman denied there was a “decisive and comprehensive view” on opening an EU office in the city.

Economic; Domestic/Constituent Support: Defend economic assets in Syria and Iraq; gain foothold in post-conflict economy

SUPREME LEADER
REFORM, ROUHANI
IRGC

X	X	X
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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 Syria to prop up its economy and rebuild infrastructure (al-Saadi, 2015). 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 official in Damascus according to an 18 May 2015 news report (Press TV, 2015). Iraq has also been the recipient of large amounts of Iranian investment and has become Iran’s largest trading partner.

⁵⁹ When it was first concluded the JCPOA was a domestic win for Rouhani and Reformist voices in Iran and Rouhani saw a large spike in already high public approval while approval of conservative politicians declined (Gallagher et al 2015). At the time polls indicated that the Agreement was overwhelmingly popular with Iranians many of whom anticipated rapid improvements in their quality of life as a direct result. By summer 2016 however, support had fallen but remained greater than 50% of those polled. Gallagher et al (2016) surmise that this drop off occurred because a majority had not seen expected improvements in their standards of living. Gallagher et al (2016) report that although President Rouhani is still the front runner for the 2017 presidential election his lead over conservative former President Ahmadinejad has dropped to a narrow margin largely on account of Rouhani’s perceived failure to improve the economy – a significant initial hope associated with the JCPOA.

⁶⁰ Gallagher, Nancy, Ebrahim Mohseni and Clay Ramsay. 2016. “Iranian Public Opinion, One Year after the Nuclear Deal,” Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, <http://cisssm.umd.edu/publications/iranian-public-opinion-one-year-after-nuclear-deal>.

Regime Security: Defend Islamic identity and leadership of the regime

SUPREM REFORM, IRGC
E ROUHANI
LEADER

X	x	x
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The Supreme Leader and his conservative religious colleagues have the most to gain from maintaining the religious identity of the Iranian state – the main justification for their political power and authority. This amounts to the security of their leadership of the regime. For this reason, Khamenei is not likely to rule exclusively in line with the preferences of the IRGC – or exclusively in opposition to it, but to check IRGC power with that of the government, especially as the Revolutionary Guard gains independent political and economic strength and with it pose a potential threat to the religious leadership.

Constituent Support; Security: Ensure domestic calm; Iranian internal security and sovereign control

SUPREM REFORM, IRGC
E ROUHANI
LEADER

X	X	X
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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 in 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, Reformist voices are keen to avoid unrest that would cause concern among foreign investors. The IRGC of course has the mission of protecting the revolution from both internal and external threats. 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 Units (PMU), 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).

Opportunities for Shaping

The Iranian interest matrixes presented below were developed for a larger study of drivers of regional stability and instability.⁶¹ They outline Iran’s interest-based preferences in three of eight important regional conflicts: the war against ISIL in Iraq, its use of regional proxies to diminish the threat from Saudi Arabia, and the nature of the post-ISIL government in Iraq and are a useful way to identify shaping opportunities that might shift Iranian preferences to align with US/Coalition interests.⁶²

⁶¹ The study, Allison Astorino-Courtois (2015) Analysis of the Dynamics of Near East Futures: Assessing Actor Interests, Resolve and Capability in 5 of 8 Regional Conflicts is available on request from the SMA office.

⁶² Note that these are not precisely a decision calculus as it does not reflect a decision or choice to be made. Each interest is considered independently (down the column) and possible outcomes are ranked according to which best satisfies that interest (1=best). Unweighted ranks are totaled to produce a score or overall rank.

ISIL in Iraq: Iranian interests align with US objectives without necessity for shaping.

As shown in the matrix at right, Iran’s interest-based preferences in the war against ISIL in Iraq are easily calculated. Each of Iran’s interests is best served by the same outcome: the defeat of ISIL in Iraq. This is very much in line with US/Coalition objectives and thus requires no shaping efforts.

ISIL in Iraq	IRAN INTERESTS				SCORE (rank, 1=best)
	PRESTIGE; NATIONAL SECURITY Increase Iranian influence in Iraq, region	SECURITY Dominate/ sustain Shi’a balance of power; mitigate threat from Israel, Saudi Arabia, US	ECONOMIC; DOMESTIC/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT Defend economic assets (e.g., in Syria); gain foothold in post-conflict economy	ECONOMIC; DOMESTIC/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT Defend economic assets (e.g., in Syria); gain foothold in post-conflict economy	
Outcome A. ISIL ousted, fully defeated and/or neutralized as a force in Iraq	1	1	1	1	3 (1 = best outcome)
Outcome B. No resolution/ war of attrition; ISIL contained but retains territory in Iraq	2	2	3	3	7 (2)
Outcome C. ISIL solidifies, expands its control over currently held Iraq territory	3	3	2	2	8 (3)
Outcome D. ISIL expands into Baghdad and returns attention to south	4	4	4	4	12 (4)
Outcome E. ISIL dominates, controls most of Iraq	5	5	5	5	15 (5 = worst outcome)

Regional Rivalry with Saudi Arabia (KSA): Perceived security threat and desire for regional influence strongly incentivize Iranian proxyism to combat KSA. Shaping efforts that provided Iran security guarantees and economic incentives would be required to change Iran’s strategy.

A second, critical issue for eventual regional stability is the intensity of Iran’s regional rivalry with Saudi Arabia. Of the posited outcomes the pattern of Iranian interests shows that moderation of the conflict and some stabilization of Iran-relations but continuation of proxy funding and interference in other states best satisfies Iranian interests. is driven by prestige security interests. highlighted column shows the Reformist interest in economic opening to Europe the West.

Iran-KSA Rivalry	IRAN INTERESTS				Score (rank, 1=best)
	PRESTIGE; NATIONAL SECURITY Increase Iranian influence in Iraq, region	SECURITY Dominate/ sustain Shi’a balance of power; mitigate threat from Israel, Saudi Arabia, US	ECONOMIC; DOMESTIC/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT Expand acceptance and trade with Europe, West	ECONOMIC; DOMESTIC/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT Defend economic assets (e.g., in Syria); gain foothold in post-conflict economy	
Outcome A. <i>Cooperate.</i> KSA/ Iranian relations stabilize: regional accommodation ; each ceases violent proxy funding; cooperate on future of Iraq	3	3	1	3	10 (3)
Outcome B. <i>Stabilize.</i> KSA/ Iranian relations stabilize but funding of Sunni and Shi’a proxies, and meddling in Iraq continue	1	1	2	2	6 (1)
Outcome C. <i>Low level interference.</i> Proxy funding and regional interference continue; occasional indirect intervention in hostilities. No direct confrontation between state forces	2	2	3	1	8 (2)
Outcome D. <i>Direct Warfare.</i> Iranian-Saudi proxy funding/ interference prompts regional warfare including larger actors (e.g., Egypt; Turkey) more funding and direct confrontation between state forces	4	4	4	4	16 (4)

KSA

This and The

and

Disincentivizing Iran’s use of regional proxies could occur by linking its proxy funding to economic interests – specifically its ability to expand regional and European trade ties, while mitigating security threats from Israel and Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, given what we know of the relative influence of the key actors in the decision process, it is unlikely that the US or Coalition countries could do much to encourage conservative forces in Iran to prioritize this interest above others. Looking at multiple Iranian interests suggests that shifting Iran’s preference to cooperation (Outcome A) in line with US preferences requires that Iran sees that outcome as offering both greater prestige and security against its major threats than continuing its current practices. Given that the US remains one of these security threats, this may be a difficult sell. One other potential opportunity is to encourage Iran to give priority to satisfying its interest in expanding economic ties with Europe. Again, another hard sell as conservative forces in Iran have thus far held the day against the Rouhani government’s reformist efforts.

Governance in Iraq: Iran has little incentive at present to press for stabilizing governing reforms in Iraq at the cost of its own influence there. Shaping efforts to reinforce Iranian influence in Iraq and downplay US/coalition influence may succeed in encouraging Iran to press for significant governance reforms in Iraq.

Finally, under current circumstances, Iran has little incentive to influence Iraqi government to be more inclusive of non-Shi’a voices – precisely what experts point to as a critical requirement for post-ISIL stabilization in Iraq. Rather, Iran’s interests are best served by the Abadi government offering political changes that appease Kurdish and Sunni groups but fall short of extending significant political power to them. Incentivizing Iranian leaders support inclusive government in Iraq would require convincing them that 1) they would not lose influence – especially to Saudi Arabia or the US in such a government and that such a government in Iraq would not become a security threat to Iran in the future.

IRAN INTERESTS				
Domestic Outcome in Iraq (Gol v. Sunni v. Kurds v. Shi’a hardline)	PRESTIGE; NATIONAL SECURITY Increase Iranian influence in Iraq, region	SECURITY Dominate/sustain Sunni-Shi’a balance of power; mitigate threat from Israel, Saudi Arabia, US	ECONOMIC; DOMESTIC/CONSTITUENT SUPPORT Defend economic assets (e.g., in Syria); gain foothold in post-conflict economy	SCORE (rank, 1=best)
OUTCOMES				
Outcome A. Stable, unified, inclusive Gol seen as legitimate and fair by all sides	4.5	3	1.5	9 (3)
Outcome B. Gol makes concessions to address Kurdish, Sunni (and former Bathist) grievances but does not devolve power	2	1.5	1.5	5 (1)
Outcome C. Gol does little to address Kurdish, Sunni grievances or constrain/control Shia militia; sectarian hostilities	1	1.5	3	5.5 (2)
Outcome D. Gol grants Sunni, Kurdish areas semi-autonomous control	3	4	4	11 (4)
Iraq breaks into autonomous Sunni, Kurdish and Shi’a regions	4.5	5	5	14.5 (5)

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to

Comments on Iran's Decision Calculus

Dr. Robert Elder

George Mason University

and

Dr. Hunter Hustus, HAF/A10

Iran's Strategic Interest in Iraq

With progress in the battles to retake former ISIS strongholds, questions about the future are being asked: What will be Iran's strategic calculus regarding Iraq and the region post-ISIS? How will the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) impact that calculus? And what opportunities exist for the US/Coalition to shape the environment favorable to U.S. and partner interests?

In thinking about Iran, it is useful to consider a multi-level framework that recognizes that its strategic calculus will be shaped not only by its global and regional objectives, but also by its strategies to advance its key interests in the region and hedge against new threats, as well as the motivations of its key actors as they posture to advance their own internal domestic agendas.

Strategic Calculus

"If Iran saw the [Syrian] war in strictly strategic terms, talks might also have the potential to produce immediate progress toward peace. But the war is seen differently in Tehran than in Washington or Moscow. Iran is far less inclined to compromise than Russia or the United States, because its interest in Syria is not only strategic: It considers the war a personal, sectarian, and even existential matter for the Alawites in Syria and Shiites in neighboring states. If the Assad regime loses Syria, Iran and its allies feel they may lose the region. Iran has thus not wavered from its support for Assad and has not appeared to have done anything to temper Assad's ambitions in the conflict."⁶³

Iran has demonstrated a tendency to use foreign policy for internal ends and leverage the fact that some of its political factions are more hostile to [the U.S.] than others. "We thus often end up faced with Iranian

⁶³ (It's Time to Negotiate with Iran Over Syria War, 2016)

actions intended to provoke a response from [the U.S.] that will empower more anti-American currents.”⁶⁴

Identifying “Iran’s interests in Iraq are not straightforward: it needs both the government in Baghdad and the Shiite militias to succeed in their own ways. The militias must continue to expand their influence domestically and in Iraq’s security sector. The more critical territory the militias effectively control (such as military bases, highways, checkpoints, border crossings, and key towns and villages), the easier it will be for the IRGC to conduct its business in Iraq. Iran needs the Iraqi government, however, to reassert its authority in Mosul and to have that authority appear legitimate to the largely Sunni residents of the area. To do that, sectarian abuses must be avoided. For now at least, Baghdad has been able to keep the pro-Iranian militias on the margins of the Mosul campaign.”⁶⁵

“Post-Saddam Iraq represents the main area where Iran has achieved some foreign policy success. By supporting and prodding them to cooperate, Tehran has played since 2003 a major role in consolidating the dominance of Shi’i political and armed groups. This, in turn, has helped ensure that Iran’s key interest in Iraq has been fulfilled: that Iraq would be neither led by a pro-United States or anti-Iran Sunni Arab nationalist regime, nor that it would collapse or break apart.”⁶⁶

“The potential involvement of Turkey further complicates matters. Although Iran has better relations with Turkey than with Saudi Arabia, both are enemies in Syria, and perhaps now in Iraq, where Turkey has military advisors and is training proxies. To the objections of Baghdad and Tehran, Ankara has recently asserted its right to be involved in liberating Mosul. It has also mobilized a large force along the Turkish–Iraqi border, threatening that it is willing to advance toward Mosul.”⁶⁷

In short, an ISIS defeat will have limited impact on the overall regional environment. “The expulsion of the militants from Iraq will probably neither decrease the number of armed groups in the country nor limit the potential for violence there. Far from portending the end of Iraq’s current turbulence, ISIS’ demise could have the opposite effect, creating opportunities for violent competition in the areas that the militant group abandons.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ National Review, 2016

⁶⁵ Ostovar, 2016

⁶⁶ Juneau, April 2015

⁶⁷ Ostovar, 2016

⁶⁸ Mironova, 2016

JCPOA Impact

According to Professor Charles Hill, Distinguished Fellow of the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy at Yale University, “Iran has leveraged the American desire for JCPOA compliance to frustrate America efforts to reduce Iran’s sphere of Shiite influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon by preventing the US from taking more proactive retaliatory measures. Should the U.S. push too hard, Iran can always walk away from the deal.”⁶⁹

Despite expressions of concern, there is a “more cynical strategy. Iran is using ISIS’ ascendance in the Middle East to consolidate its power. The country is now the key ally keeping Iraq’s Shiites and the Alawite Bashar al-Assad regime standing against well-armed and tenacious Sunni jihadists. In those battles, Tehran will likely do just enough to make sure the Sunnis don’t conquer the Shia portions of Iraq and Assad’s enclave in Syria, but no more. Meanwhile, in ISIS’ wake, Tehran will strengthen its own radical Shia militias.”⁷⁰

“With the rise of ISIS, and the consequent rise of Iranian hard power, Tehran has become noticeably less concerned about Iraqi perceptions and intra-clerical harmony. Gone, too, are the days in which Tehran worried much about moderate Sunnis...By embracing sectarianism, Iran now plays a pivotal, if not dominant, role throughout the region.”⁷¹

“Iran’s biggest gains were handed to it by America when, after the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, it removed hostile regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran has continued to extend its influence, even after a wave of Sunni uprisings that started in 2011 seemed likely to weaken the Shia regime’s pull. The Quds Force, the foreign wing of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, has exploited the region’s instability. Its tactics include assassinations and bombings overseas, and supplying arms and training to militias deemed helpful to its interests. “The Iranians are experts at taking advantage of chaos,” says Shimon Shapira, a retired military man now at the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, a think-tank. ... Similarly Syria has fallen ever more under Iran’s spell. Where Hafez al-Assad, father of the current president, kept Iran at arm’s length, his son “sold Syria to the Iranians,” says a defected general. Mr Assad relies on Tehran for cash, advice and training for its paramilitary fighters. In Lebanon, Hezbollah’s military force rivals that of the country’s army, and it has maintained a tenuous military balance with Israel.”⁷²

Turning to the effect of the JCPOA on Iran, “Many other aspects of Iranian behavior– and US-Iran relations– remain unchanged,” Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes said. “Iran has not ceased its support for terrorist organizations like Hezbollah or its threats toward Israel. Iran has continued to test ballistic missiles. From Iraq to Yemen, Iran has continued to engage in destabilizing support for proxy

⁶⁹ He, 2016

⁷⁰Takeyh, 2016

⁷¹Takeyh, 2016

⁷²The Long Arm, 2015

organizations... "In short, Iran's approach to its nuclear program has changed, but thus far, its broader foreign policy— and the nature of its regime— has not." ⁷³

"At the end of the year [2016], the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) expires — and with it, the regime of existing U.S. sanctions lawmakers say are essential to ensure Washington can "snap back" punitive measures against Tehran should Iranian leaders violate the terms of the nuclear deal that went into effect earlier this year. But if lawmakers go too far in their bid to renew and possibly stiffen the sanctions, the White House fears Tehran could interpret it as a U.S. violation of the deal — and take that as a cue to fire up their nuclear reactors again."⁷⁴

A year ago, Iran seemed on the verge of a new relationship with the United States and the world. In his address to the United Nations last fall, President Hassan Rouhani said the nuclear deal just signed, lifting sanctions and setting limits on Iran's nuclear program, was a foundation for change. "We were not solely seeking a nuclear deal," he said. "We want to suggest a new and constructive way to re-create the international order." Flash forward a year, and Rouhani's optimism has been replaced by disappointment and finger-pointing. In his U.N. speech and a wide-ranging news conference this week, Rouhani bitterly accused the United States of failing to live up to its obligations under the nuclear deal. In the eight months since the deal was implemented, he said, Washington had delayed licenses for business transactions and blocked Iran's access to banks. 'The lack of compliance . . . on the part of the United States in the past several months represents a flawed approach that should be rectified forthwith,' he said Thursday [22 Sep 2016]."⁷⁵

Shaping Opportunities

Turning to opportunities to favorably shape the regional environment, "If Iran saw the [Syrian] war in strictly strategic terms, talks might also have the potential to produce immediate progress toward peace. But the war is seen differently in Tehran than in Washington or Moscow. Iran is far less inclined to compromise than Russia or the United States, because its interest in Syria is not only strategic: It considers the war a personal, sectarian, and even existential matter for the Alawites in Syria and Shiites in neighboring states. If the Assad regime loses Syria, Iran and its allies feel they may lose the region. Iran has thus not wavered from its support for Assad and has not appeared to have done anything to temper Assad's ambitions in the conflict."⁷⁶

⁷³Wilner, 2016

⁷⁴Demirjian, 2016

⁷⁵Morello, 2016

⁷⁶It's Time to Negotiate with Iran Over Syria War, 2016

“If we want to help the moderate factions within the Iranian government, we should be happy with Amir-Abdollahian’s removal [as deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs] and encourage our Arab and European partners to seek a new understanding with Tehran. We could interpret the nuclear deal in a more lenient way and hold back from tougher sanctions in separate areas. We might even look at pursuing further negotiations, offering the Iranians a possibility of further concessions on our side. On the other hand, if we look at Soleimani’s [General Qassem Soleimani, head of the Quds Force] firm statement of support for our ally, and possibly further actions (joint exercises, deeper military cooperation and so forth) would be natural. The key problem is that these policies, pursued together, could undermine each other. The soft, moderate-centered approach would only amplify GCC concerns and would suggest U.S. indifference to an IRGC-funded “bloody intifada” outside the gates of its bases—the sort of signal that might make Iran more likely to see that as a viable policy approach if the cleric is harmed. ... And a tough U.S. response would undermine those same moderate figures: their critics would argue that Rouhani and others had shown weakness, and they in turn would have to show their mettle. Further escalation could be the result, and securitizing politics tends to benefit the security services.”⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the U.S. and its partners do have opportunities to increase stability in the region as a precursor for a long-term improvement in the strategic environment. The United States and Iran approached the JCPOA nuclear deal from very different perspectives: For Iran, it was an opportunity to re-create the international order. Consistent with its own objectives, the U.S. can provide Iran incentives for positive behaviors that reinforce their sense of progress toward this objective. Secondly, recognizing that Iran views the Syrian War as an existential matter for the Alawites in Syria and Shiites in neighboring states, the U.S. can tailor its activities to allay Iranian concerns in this area and encourage its partners to do the same. Thirdly, steps to improve the legitimacy of the Iraqi government among the Sunni population offers areas for cooperation with the Iranian government and reduce the attraction of ISIS-like organizations to disaffected elements of the population. Finally, given the diverse motivations which drive different elements of the Iranian government and its population, the United States and its partners can avoid actions that while appearing in Iran’s best strategic interests (from a U.S. perspective) inadvertently empower more anti-American currents.

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⁷⁷National Review, 2016

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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.



Michael Eisenstadt

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

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

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



Dr. Robert Elder

Lieutenant General Robert Elder (USAF, retired) joined the George Mason University faculty as a research professor with the Volgenau School of Engineering following his retirement from the Air Force as the Commander of 8th Air Force and U.S. Strategic Command's Global Strike Component. He currently conducts research in the areas of integrated command and control, operational resiliency in degraded environments, strategic deterrence, and the use of modeling to support national security decision-making. General

Elder served as the Central Command Air Forces Deputy Commander for Operation Enduring Freedom and later as the Air Operations Center Commander and Deputy Air Component Commander for Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was the first commander of Air Force Network Operations and led the development of the cyberspace mission for the Air Force. General Elder also served as Commandant of the Air War College, and holds a doctorate in engineering from the University of Detroit.



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

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



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

Nader's other RAND publications include *Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry*; *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran*; *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy*; *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of*

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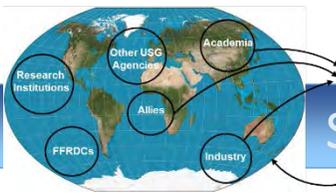


Alex Vatanka

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.*"



Question: *What significance will small military groups, particularly in Northern Syria, have in a post-ISIL Levant? How should CENTCOM best shape or influence these groups?*

Contributors: *Mr. Vern Liebl (Marine Corps University); Mr. Faysal Itani (Atlantic Council); Dr. Craig Whiteside (Naval War College)*

Executive Summary

Dr. Kathleen Reedy, RAND Corporation

The primary theme that all of the experts touched upon is that there will be no single unified situation regarding either the military groups or status of northern Syria in a post-ISIL environment. The current fractured nature of the resistance groups in the area will continue, with different sub-regions experiencing different likely outcomes with different actors. Dr. Craig Whiteside (Naval War College) also includes the important caveats that a) post-ISIL means after ISIL loses its ability to control extended territory, as it will likely continue to hold control of villages across Syria and Iraq for some time to come; and b) this question is predicated on continued U.S. strategic interest in engaging in Syria in the near- and medium-term future. A third assumption is that these militant groups continue to operate. If a political solution can ever be reached, some of these militias will likely sign on to the agreement and may disarm or be incorporated into regime security forces, meaning many of them may be removed from consideration.

Assuming that the U.S. will continue some level of involvement in Syria, the wide variety of actors and situations on the ground will necessitate taking a broad variety of tactics, as each organization and population will require different approaches. In some instances, this may mean acknowledging that CENTCOM will be unlikely to be able to engage in effective ways and even where it can, as Mr. Vern Liebl (Marine Corps University) notes, may have to be resigned to only having limited and short-term influence.

Wide Variation by Region and Actors

The experts agree that there will be a wide degree of variation in what happens with the military groups after ISIL loses control over the extended territory of the caliphate. Faysal Itani (Atlantic Council) and Liebl both suggest that the vacuum left by ISIL will be filled by the Syrian regime, Kurdish forces, and the broad spectrum of Syrian opposition groups. Whiteside considers the remainder of the ISIL forces and those they manage to recruit part of this milieu as well.

Itani and Liebl offer that the Kurdish population will be one of the dominant players in northern Syria after the fall of ISIL, with the PYD continuing to serve as the political arm and the YPG as the militant one. The Kurdish groups are likely to hold their current territory along the northern border of the country as well as contest areas in the northeast. Their ability to hold ground much in more ethnically diverse territories may be less effective, but as a militia and a political force, they are likely to remain a key player. Itani notes that some of the Kurdish power in the northeast will be contested by various Arab militias, some of which participated as part of Euphrates Shield. Liebl describes the wide variety of militias that are likely to compete for power, each of which has their own agenda. Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS, formerly al-Nusra) may attempt to gain some control here as well, but is likely to be poorly received by the local population and may instead be coopted by ISIL.

Northwest of Aleppo and into Idlib Province, where ISIL has had no real influence, are likely to continue to see the influence of JFS and the only somewhat more moderate Salafi Ahrar al-Sham. The only major contender for control against them in the region will be the regime coming from the south and Aleppo, but it may take extended periods of counterinsurgency efforts to fully eliminate them (unless they can be brought into a political solution, which JFS has shown no interest in and Ahrar al-Sham seems to be divided on), meaning they are likely to remain active and violent, if underground.

Whiteside focuses on the Salafi groups, particularly on what the remnants of ISIL will likely do in the wake of such an event. Under different names, he argues, the Islamic State has been in a similar position twice before, which will likely serve as an indicator of how they may react in the future. A defeated ISIL would find core areas in Iraq and Syria where the reach of the government is limited, which would include dozens of places in Iraq (particularly in Anbar, the Jazira desert, and Diyala and Salahuddin provinces) and even more in Syria. In these locations, they would try to keep the flames of resistance alive while waiting for opportunities to take advantage of the environment (such as poor governance or sectarian behavior). They would likely not only do so using their own forces, but would attempt to recruit and coopt other Salafi groups and fighters into an umbrella movement, as they did (as Tawhid wal Jihad and later AQI) in Iraq in 2003-2006, using financial and political rewards as a recruiting incentive.

In addition, there are a number of other, more pro-regime militant organizations that will be vying for control, including the regime itself and Hezbollah (as well as the Syrian-based Shi'a militias backed by Iran). These groups will be attempting to solidify the regime's control, but what and how they do so, and how they interact with other extant militias, is highly uncertain at this point.

CENTCOM Engagement Will Have to Be Tailored

All of the experts agree that future engagement from CENTCOM will have to be tailored to the specific group they are attempting to influence and much of it will depend on how the political situation unfolds. Itani notes that relationships do exist between the US and some groups, but were mainly forged in the covert operations rooms set up in Jordan and Turkey rather than via CENTCOM, and have been strained by local perceptions that the United States is no longer concerned with the war and focuses exclusively on ISIL and, increasingly, JFS. Repairing these relations and re-establishing credibility will be a challenge, but important if CENTCOM wishes to exert lasting influence rather than just transactional engagements. Below are examples provided by the experts of particular militant groups and advice on how to engage them.

- **PYD/YPG:** Liebl describes the history of U.S. engagement with the Kurdish forces. In essence, the U.S. has been inconsistent with its support, supplying more and less of it at various points since 2013. While the Kurds have generally been happy to work with U.S. forces and will undoubtedly continue to do so, they may not see the U.S. as a “stable” ally, especially when Turkey and Russia are involved. Maintaining credible and consistent relations with them will be an essential part of CENTCOM's approach, though the Kurds may always hedge.
- **Anti-Regime Militias:** This umbrella consists of a wide and diverse range of militant groups, each with very different relations toward the U.S. and very different agendas. Some will be more accessible to CENTCOM influence, but some may be out of reach. Liebl cautions that the U.S. will need to be realistic about how much influence it can actually wield with these groups. He provides examples, including
 - The Syriac Military Council, allied to the PYD, but with little connection to the U.S., meaning the U.S. will likely have little ability to influence it
 - The Turkmen Sultan Murid Division, which is anti-PYD and neo-Ottoman, affiliated with the FSA and closely coordinates with the Turkish Army may be another group the U.S. may not be able to influence
 - The Turkmen Seljuk Brigade, which is pro-Kurdish now, may be more amenable to U.S. support in terms of training and financing.
 - The Sunni Arab Hamza Division, associated with the FSA, and Jbhat Thuwar al-Raqqqa were both part of the U.S. train and equip program are likely to continue to be amenable to U.S. support and leverage.
 - The al-Mu'tasim Brigade, also with the FSA has received support from the U.S., but is more closely allied with Turkey, so should be treated with caution.
 - The Jaysh al-Thuwar are largely independent in their anti-ISIL fight, and having not yet accepted U.S. aid, are unlikely to do so.
- **Pro-Regime Militias:** There are a number of these of different ethnic and religious backgrounds that the U.S. is unlikely to ever be able to influence, given the political differences between the regime and the U.S., including, the regime itself, Hezbollah, and smaller regional groups like the Assyrian Gozarto Protection Force and Sootoro.
- **Hardline Salafi Groups:** The remnants of ISIL and JSF will continue to be a combative one.

- **Ahrar al-Sham:** Itani notes that engaging this group will be somewhat more complex than the other Salafi organizations, because while it has often worked closely with JFS, it does not aspire to a transnational jihad. This group is internally divided between those who are pushing for outreach to the U.S., and others who are committed to a more hostile form of Salafism. This is a powerful group and an important one. The U.S.' best bet is to try to separate the reconcilables from the hostiles, by offering a choice between US support (including against ISIL and the regime) and conflict.

SME Input

Comments on Small Military Groups Post-ISIL

Vern Liebl

Marine Corps University

In examining small military groups in northern Syria, bearing in mind a U.S. desire to leverage and/or influence them, it is best to at least initially focus only upon those groups in northeastern Syria, as those are the most accessible to the U.S. The first “minority military group” would have to be the Kurds, nominally described as the “PYD”, and separated, at least initially, into three distinct pockets.

The Democratic Union Party (PYD) with the KNC (Kurdish National Council, an umbrella organization of many small Kurdish political organizations), have established an interim government based upon the three non-contiguous autonomous areas or *cantons*, Afrin, Jazira and Kobani. It has been a major effort by the PYD to join these three enclaves into a single geographically contiguous band stretching east to west along the southern side of the Turkey/Syria border, naming itself Rojava (“the West” aka Federation of Northern Syria). The political system of Rojava is best described as inspired by democratic confederalism and communalism; it is influenced by anarchist and libertarian principles, considered to be a type of libertarian socialism.

Economically the private sector is comparatively small, with a focus on expanding social ownership of production and management of resources through communes and collectives. According to the Rojava Ministry of Economics, approximately three quarters of all property is under community ownership and a third of production transferred to direct management by workers councils. There are no taxes on the people or businesses in Rojava, instead money is raised through border crossings, and selling oil or other natural resources. Oil and food production exceeds demand so exports include oil and agricultural products such as sheep, grain and cotton.

The military of Rojava is the People's Protection Units, in Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG), also known as People's Defense Units. There are also Women's Protection Units, in Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, (YPJ), also known as Women's Defense Units, as well as allied Sinjar Resistance Units, in

Kurdish: *Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê*, (YBŞ), formerly called King Peacock Units, in Arabic: Malik Al-Tawus. The YPG and YPJ are collectively known as Peshmerga, a term used by all Kurdish military units, whether in Rojava, the KRG in Iraq, the PKK in Turkey, or the KDP-I and PJAK in Iran.

In trying to apply leverage to induce movement or actions favorable to U.S. interests, the recent history of U.S. interaction with Rojava military forces needs to be borne in mind. On 13 Oct 2015, Turkey informed the U.S. and Russian ambassadors of Turkish disapproval in providing arms and material supplies to PYD in its fight against the Islamic State, one week later Russia offered to supply PYD forces (YPG & YPJ) in their fight against Islamic State forces. Subsequently, the U.S. cut its aerial support to PYD forces.

The PYD declared its “happiness” in getting Russian support against ISIS. On 24 Nov 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian warplane, bringing the region to the brink of an even larger (potentially global) war. On 16 Dec 2015, Russia openly began discussing the “Kurdish card” in relation to Turkey. Additionally, Turkey had unilaterally abrogated the Turkish-PKK ceasefire of 2013, initiating security crackdowns on PKK and the associated People’s Democratic Party (HDP). With this rising internal conflict between Turkish security forces and PKK, on Jan 2016, Russia demanded the Syrian Kurds be included in any Syrian peace talks. This movement openly alarmed the Turks as they see the PYD Kurds of Rojava as sponsored surrogates of the PKK. Simultaneously, the PYD opened Rmeilan airfield to U.S. forces in northwestern Syria.

In May 2016, the U.S. renewed its air support to the PYD after several months of Russian air support to YPG and YPJ units, followed in June 2016 with a peaceful rapprochement between Russia and Turkey. These twin events both lessened regional stress and increased pressure on the Islamic State. Then, in Aug 2016 the Turks conducted an incursion into Syria at Jarabulus, supporting Free Syrian Army forces trained and equipped by the U.S. (the “Syrian Train and Equip Program”) against PYD and PYD-affiliated forces also trained and equipped by the U.S.

So, with that brief reprise, it is likely clear that the U.S. is not considered to be a stable “player” in the region for the PYD Kurds. They very much like Americans on the personal level, and have at times enjoyed limited military support (the aerial support at the Battle of Kobani (Sep 2014 to Mar 2015) as well as the new U.S. base at Rmeilan). However, with the constant drumbeat of Turkish diplomatic and political demands of the U.S. to stop support for the PYD, almost always linked to references of PYD-PKK alliance and collusion (with notation that the U.S. has carried the PKK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization since Oct 1997), any U.S. support has always been a tenuous and tentative thing since Jul 2013.

Looking at a few affiliated units with the PYD, specifically within the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), we can first look at the Syriac Military Council (in Syriac Mawtbo Fulhoyo Suryoyo [MFS]), essentially an Assyrian Christian militia operating in Al-Hasakah and Raqqa provinces as part of the SDF, allied, supplied and supported by the PYD Kurds. U.S. leverage with this organization is likely very slight. These Assyrians are not to be confused with the geographically co-located Assyrian Gozarto Protection Force (GPF) and Sootoro, a combined organization comprised of Assyrian Christians and Armenian Christians resident in Qamiishli in Al-Hasakah province. Their loyalties are to the Baathist regime in Damascus, therefore they can be considered fairly hostile to U.S. interests. All of the above Assyrian-based organizations receive some unofficial assistance from the American Mesopotamian Organization (the AMO also provides support to Iraqi Assyrian militias and was shocked to find out it was supporting the anti-U.S. GPF).

Putting the above in historical context, these “Christian militias” (as they are often termed) of northeastern Syria are now battling the Islamic State alongside Kurdish forces. However, these groups did not simply emerge spontaneously as a response to Islamic State persecution: they are the latest incarnations of the Dawronoye movement, which first appeared on the European and Middle Eastern political scenes twenty years ago. While they are indeed Christian, their fight is not primarily for their faith, but for their nation, which is neither Syria nor Kurdistan. In their native tongue, a contemporary descendant of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus, they call their people Suryoye (Syriacs) and their homeland Bethnahrin (Mesopotamia). Thus, for at least some in northern Syria this is a clash of civilizations in which they do not understand why the U.S. - in their eyes a nation of Christian antecedents - does not aid them.

When looking at Turkmen, estimates maintain somewhere between 800,000 to upwards of 3.5 million (most unlikely). As with the Turkmen of Iraq, they are unrelated to the Turkmen of Central Asia and are descendants of Turkic people of the former Ottoman Empire. As such they are often pro-Turkish.

For example, operating under the Hawar Kilis Operations Room, which is affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and closely coordinates with the Turkish Army, is the Sultan Murid Division. This organization (not a unit) is anti-PYD and neo-Ottoman in outlook, and participated in the Aug 2016 Turkish incursion at Jarabulus. It has also skirmished with YPG forces in Oct 2016 north of Manbij. Another organization along the same lines is the Liwa Ahfad Saladin (Descendants of Saladin Brigade), a combined Syrian Arab and Turkmen organization who also participated with the Turkish Army at Jarabulus. Extension of the Turkish Republic or resurrection of Neo-Ottomanism is their primary aim, not reknitting of a unified Syrian state.

Contrasting with them is the Seljuk Brigade, (not to be confused with the anti-ISIS and anti-Kurdish “Syrian Turkmen Brigades”), who while formerly allied with Turkey have now switched to supporting the PYD in

the wake of the Turkish incursion at Jarabulus. The Seljuk Brigades is a member of the SDF. An affiliated SDF organization is the Manbij Turkmen Brigade. The problem is nobody has a clear idea of total Syrian Turkmen manpower participating in the regional conflict. Estimates vary between 8,000 to around 25,000, split between the various anti-Kurd and pro-Kurd organizations. The anti-Turkish Turkmen organizations are intent on aiding the Kurds in establishing a Kurdish state.

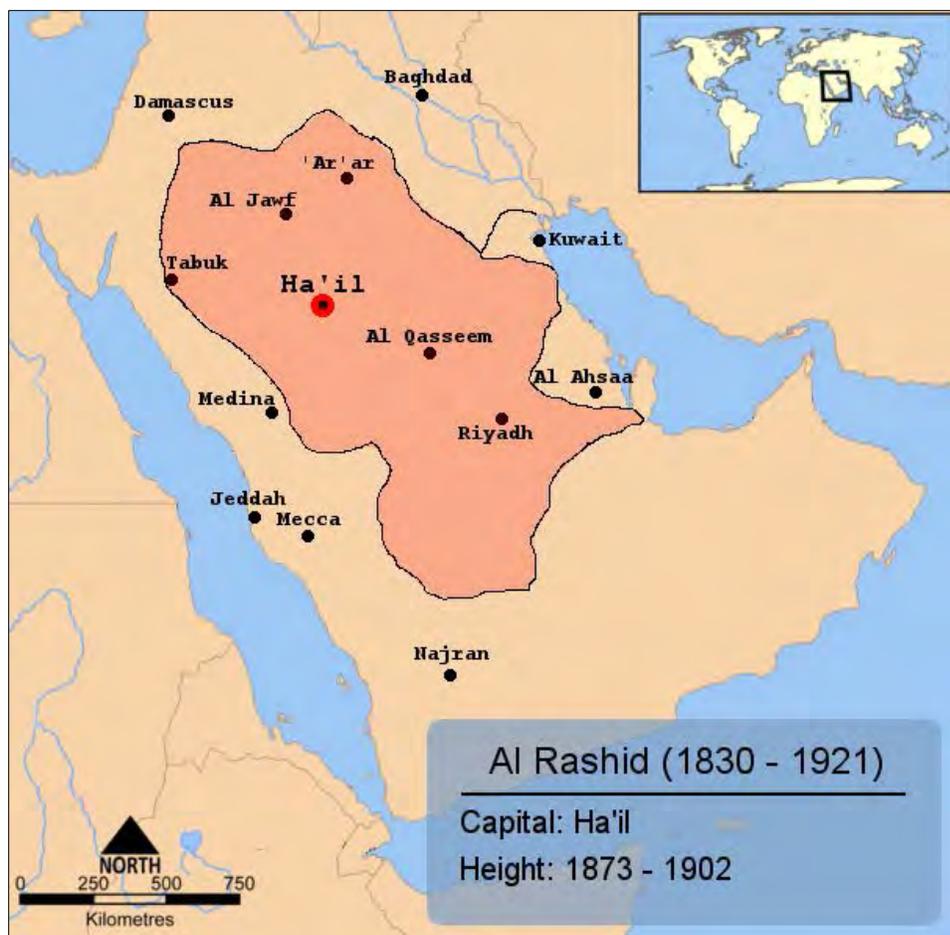
Allied with the Turks are the Hamza Division, a largely Arab Sunni organization associated with the FSA. It is part of the U.S. "Syrian Train and Equip Program" and is considered anti-Islamic State and Anti-PYD. It supported the Turkish incursion at Jarabulus and has skirmished with YPG/YPJ elements north of Manbij in Oct 2016. Another FSA unit, the Al-Mu'tasim Brigade, also largely Arab Sunni, is anti-PYD and part of the U.S. "Syrian Train and Equip Program". Both of these organizations, while benefitting from U.S. aid, are pro-Turkish and willingly subvert U.S. aims and goals if they contravene Turkish aims and goals. The possibility that they will support the PYD is nil and the goal of anti-Islamic State combat is secondary to Turkish goals.

Looking at multi-ethnic organizations affiliated with the SDF, the first we can examine is the Jaish al-Thuwar (Army of Revolutionaries), who refused U.S. aid but has always been allied with the PYD. They restrict themselves to fighting the Islamic State and are not supported in anyway by Turkey. A similar organization is the Jabhat Thuwar Al-Raqqa (Front of Raqqa Revolutionaries), who have accepted U.S. aid as beneficiaries of the "Syrian Train and Equip Program" and are also part of the SDF. However, this organization has its differences with the PYD and has in the past engaged in skirmishing with the YPG. They are both aligned against the Islamic State. U.S. leverage is possible here the latter group.

Tribal forces are part of the equation. There is the Euphrates Jarabulus Brigade, based primarily on the small Al-Jader tribe and a member of the SDF. They have faced off against both the Islamic State and the Turks, they ethnically Arab and allied with the PYD Kurds. The Liwa Siqur Al-Badiye is the Al-Sheitat tribal militia, an Arab tribe mainly located in the vicinity of the Syrian Euphrates River. Allied with the SDF, it has suffered losses of over a thousand tribesmen since 2014 in a fierce war with the Islamic State. The Al-Nukhbat Brigade is a combined organization of Sheitat and Shammar tribesmen, also with the SDF. Smaller tribal militias working with the SDF but primarily based in Iraq are the Sharabiyya and Zubaid tribes. All the above tribal forces are part of the "Euphrates Volcano", a joint rebel/resistance organization in northern Syria which is anti-ISIS but 'not necessarily' anti-Damascus, pro-U.S. but anti-Turkey (see SDF). Provision of U.S. weapons, training and limited assistance to all these tribes would likely sway them to U.S. aims, at least temporarily (very likely not long-term).

A very critical tribal militia, also allied with the SDF, needs to be addressed here in reference to post-conflict aims and U.S. ability to shape or influence. That would be the Shammar tribe. As referenced in an earlier response (S-3), the Shammar is a tribal confederacy of over 12 million members, with approximately half a million resident within northeastern Syria. There are approximately 3 million in Iraq, in the main fiercely opposed to the Islamic State, and a further 6.5-7 million in Saudi Arabia (another 2.5 million or so are spread among Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain). In northeastern Syria, the tribal militia is called the Al-Sanadid, usually shortened to the Sanadid Force. It is part of the SDF and has participated in numerous battles against the Islamic State.

What makes this force interesting is what are its goals and what would it take the U.S. to shape and/or influence this group. The Shammar in this part of Syria (as well as those in northern Iraq) have had a close and largely cooperative relationship with the Kurds since the 18th century (there have been short periods of violence and conflict). The Sanadid Force and the (northern) Shammar are considered very pro-Kurdish. The stated goals of tribal leaders has been to preserve tribal autonomy and security, as they are in essence similar to an undeclared nation crossing recognized international borders. They are neither supporters of nor opponents to the Baathists of Damascus. The tribal leaders have also clearly articulated their hostility to the tenets of Wahhabism and would like to break-up the Saudi state. They would like to reclaim the former Emirate of Jabal Shammar, also known historically as the Emirate of the House of Rashid, which existed from 1830 to 1921 (and was a supporter of the Ottomans). Below are the territorial aspirations of the Shammar.



So, an interesting question is how does the U.S. aka CENTCOM want to address Shammar aspirations in order to shape or influence a post-Islamic State Middle East?

In conclusion, how CENTCOM approaches all the above noted entities is extremely susceptible to past experience with the U.S., with current local political realities, and traditional provision of aid in light of a zero-sum environment. Support and blandishments will not be long-lasting and likely will not have any relation to expressed U.S. goals towards democratization, women's rights, gender diversification, etc. However, acknowledgement of local grievances (most related to religious and/or ethnic issues) as well as recognition that the Westphalian system as it relates to Middle Eastern national borders is dead.

As well, there has been no discussion about the status of the Damascus-based Syrian regime of Bashar Assad in relation to a post-Islamic State situation. Staying strictly within northeastern Syria, the current Syrian regime and its military/security forces could definitely be considered a "minority military group". What those forces will do post-Islamic State is unknown, as the Assad regime has already outlived almost everyone's expectations. It is a given that those forces and Bashar Assad himself understand that the U.S. is hostile to them, thus precluding almost all CENTCOM efforts at local shaping with them.

So, bottom line, flexibility and honest realization that short-term is the only way to advance should be the two keys. There are no easy approaches here that are all-inclusive. It should also be noted that this is not an all-inclusive list of "minority military groups" within northern/northeastern Syria nor has there been addressal of many of the linked-entities operating in northern Iraq (such as the Shammar).

Comments on Small Military Groups Post-ISIL

Faysal Itani

Atlantic Council

Depending on specific geography and the local balance of power, the vacuum left by ISIL will be filled by the Syrian regime, Kurdish forces, and the broad spectrum of Syrian opposition groups. The largest Kurdish force will be the YPG with whom the US military and intelligence communities will have a good deal of familiarity and relationships. The Syrian opposition groups are more complex. ISIS territory liberated by the Turkish-led Euphrates Shield coalition will be taken by Sunni Arab insurgent groups including moderates and Islamists, some of whom have worked closely with the United States as part of a covert program directed at fighting the regime, or under the Department of Defense's counter-ISIL train and equip program.. This coalition will find itself in tension with both the regime and Kurdish forces. It will dominate northern Aleppo province unless the regime and its allies or the YPG can successfully push it out - they will be deterred somewhat by the Turkish involvement and presence in the Euphrates Shield coalition. Barring such a direct attack on Turkish interests, much of Aleppo province will be controlled by these Arab militias. Unlike Aleppo city itself and its immediate western and southern approaches, Euphrates Shield-controlled territory does not include and likely will not include the presence of the Al Qaeda offshoot Jabhat Fateh al Sham (normally Jabhat al Nusra). Finally, there are of course a large number of pro-regime (and largely Iranian-backed) militias operating in Aleppo, particularly Hezbollah and Iraq militia.

In contrast, the north western province of Idlib (and parts of Latakia and Hama provinces) contain a strong Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS) presence. There is no ISIL presence and no effective militia competition in this area. The less extreme but still conservative Salafi group Ahrar Al Sham is powerful in this area as well, and has cooperated with though remained independent of JFS. The main challenge to these groups' dominance in this geography will come from the regime to the west, south, and possible East if Assad captures Aleppo. Idlib will remain a conservative Islamist opposition area regardless, even if the militias are defeated. ISIL is unlikely to return, having been driven out by Syrian opposition groups in 2014.

In the northeast, areas lost by ISIL will also be contested by the regime, the YPG and possibly some Arab allies, Euphrates Shield Arab militia, and JFS. This is a tribal area and authority is likely to be decentralized for a while. Despite Kurdish gains in this area, in Arab territories these gains are fragile and unpopular (the area is partly Kurdish, partly Arab). Authority will likely remain decentralized in Raqqqa province. Arab militia will play a marginal or secondary role to the YPG in Kurdish Hasakeh province. The militias' role in Deir al Zour is unclear: It is held by ISIL and the regime. JFS is likely to try to fill the post-ISIL vacuum in

these areas, but it is not popular and will face local hostility. Militias organized along tribal lines and the regime itself will likely dominate these eastern areas.

The best way to shape or influence the militias likely to replace ISIL is to identify areas of overlapping interests and exploit them. Northern Syria does not lend itself to a single unified US approach. For example, JFS is not reconcilable to US interests, and will likely need to be defeated, though a conventional counterterrorist approach is likely inadequate and local partners will be essential. The most salient reality for the opposition non-extremist militias likely to replace ISIS is their conflict with the regime. They will gravitate to whomever patron can consistently provide money to pay salaries, and weapons, equipment, and ammunition to fight the regime and protect their own populations. This is the reason for their deference to Turkish influence and agreement to participate in Euphrates Shield against ISIL. It follows that there are two ways to shape the local militia environment on the opposition side: Help them fight the regime, or help end the war (or both). In return, these local groups are the best 'inoculation' against the re-emergence of ISIL. In addition, they are the ones best placed to fight JFS on the ground, but that itself is only likely to happen if military pressure from the regime is lessened, and there is enough trust between the US and these opposition groups to form the basis for a local alliance against JFS. These relationships do exist between the US and some groups, but were mainly forged in the covert operations rooms set up in Jordan and Turkey rather than via CENTCOM, and have been strained by local perceptions that the United States is no longer concerned with the war and focuses exclusively on ISIL and, increasingly, JFS.

One group deserves separate mention: Ahrar al Sham is the hardline Salafi Islamist group that has often worked closely with JFS, but does not aspire to a transnational jihad. This group is internally divided between pushing for outreach to the US, and others who are closer to the ideologically hostile form of Salafism. This is a powerful group, and an important one. The US' best bet is to try to separate the reconcilables from the hostiles, by offering a choice between US support (including against ISIL and the regime) and conflict.

The pro-regime groups such as Hezbollah offer a different challenge, of course, and they are likely to retain a powerful presence in northern Syria. These groups are essentially under Iranian control, without independent agency, and should be seen through the prism of US-Iranian relations.

Comments on Small Military Groups Post-ISIL

Craig Whiteside

Naval War College

Assuming the region is still a key area of interest to the United States, and that we have a desire to reduce the factors in the environment for the return (yet again) of ISIL or a politically similar group anathema to the United States or its local partners.

I also assume that “post-ISIL” as a phrase means: after the caliphate is collapsed and ISIL fails to control territory as the governing body of any significant polity above a small town. Certainly post-ISIL would not mean an environment where ISIL does not exist. They will continue to exist, much as they did after 2006-7 and the Sahwa movement/Surge period. Insurgent groups rarely die; hopefully they will fade away in time. There is a very small possibility they will fracture and collapse.

My research focuses on the doctrine and strategy of the Islamic State movement, and I have little knowledge of the Syrian groups in question, including judgments on their ideology, political goals, or history. That said, the Islamic State has been in a similar position twice before and I think it is safe to say that their behavior in such a situation in the near future would be similar. A defeated ISIL would find core areas in Iraq and Syria where the reach of the government (Syrian or Iraqi) is limited. That would be dozens of places in Iraq (particularly in Anbar, the Jazira desert, and Diyala and Salahuddin provinces) and even more in Syria. In these locations, they would try to keep the flames of resistance alive while waiting for opportunities to take advantage of the environment (such as poor governance or sectarian behavior).

In 2003-6, the IS movement (Tawhid wal Jihad and later AQI) worked diligently to recruit small Salafi-aligned groups into an umbrella movement. Prior to the declaration of an Islamic State (in 2006), the movement leadership understood the imperative of rallying the disparate groups in the Iraqi resistance to the occupation to their banner. They were moderately successful in this regard, but failed to recruit larger groups into the Mujahideen Shura Council (Jan-Oct 2006). Their gambit was successful; in the end, small groups that could not compete with the larger groups (1920s, Islamic Army, Mujahideen Army) joined ISIL, which lavished them with incentives. For example, small group leaders gained high positions within the MSC and later the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in return for pledging allegiance and joining the political front.

When the Sahwa tribal movement rose against AQI/ISI in 2006-7, many of the larger groups joined the Awakening to oppose the Islamic State movement. What observers didn't realize was that these groups (insurgent groups) were not monolithic, and fractured in the 2008-2011 period. While many joined the

Awakening, many more fighters sat out and were easy prey for ISI recruiters who were selling a message of anti-government/sectarian resistance that many of the irreconcilable members wanted to hear.

Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that six years after the split, none of these groups maintain a viable opposition to either the state or the Islamic State. They have been coopted and undermined by the Islamic State writ large. The same can be said for the Sunni tribal structure in Iraq, with some exceptions (tribes that have been independent from ISIL since 2004, and some permanent enemies).

The Islamic State movement has demonstrated exceptional ability in recruiting smaller groups that need resources, protection, and a larger name brand. Despite their reputation for inflexibility when they are dominant – when weak, they become very malleable in order to regain some momentum toward their political goals. We are well aware of the groups that joined in 2006-7 (only because ISIL told us), but the fate of the resistance groups after 2008 and the IS tribal engagement strategy has been under-examined. I would imagine that we will soon learn that the majority of ISIL recruits after 2010 came from the fractured Sunni resistance groups (including some former prisoners).

A key to preventing or managing the return of the Islamic State to Syria after its caliphate collapses is to emphasize the grooming and coalescing of these small Syrian resistance groups by the U.S. and its allies/partners, if only to prevent their recruitment by ISIL or JFS. This could be a relatively cost-effective risk abatement measure to forestall any defections to a relatively wealthy insurgent group that has learned to harness economic resources very efficiently to fulfill its military and political goals, and has strong name brand appeal.

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Comments on Small Military Groups Post-ISIL

Kathleen Reedy

RAND Corporation

One of the major unknowns in answering such a question is what will happen if and when there is a political solution in Syria. If there is, undoubtedly some of the militant groups will sign on to it, and will either disarm or find themselves incorporated into the regime security forces in some way. However, there are those that will refuse to do so, either because of the specifics of the agreement or because they have stated from the beginning that they do not intend to cooperate (or are disallowed from doing so by the international community). Some members of these primarily extreme Salafi groups, including JFS, ISIL, and (sometimes) Ahrar al-Sham, are likely to flee Syria and continue to plan jihad from other territories (primarily North Africa), but those that remain will be spoilers and continue their fight in a more insurgent style. Non-Salafi groups may also continue to fight, but the sharp drop off in resources from international supporters should an agreement be reached will limit their effectiveness as militant organizations. The areas northwest of Aleppo are likely to be strongholds for JFS and Ahrar al-Sham, while ISIL will undoubtedly continue to exert influence in the east and northeast.

The major exceptions are the Kurdish organizations, which, given their size and support from the international community, are likely to remain powerful players in a post-ISIL Syria even if they are part of a political agreement. With or without an agreement (depending on near- versus long-term perspectives here), they will likely remain a force in particularly the northeast of the country, in addition to maintaining control of their current territory. They will likely be involved in continuing to remove pockets of ISIL fighters and other spoilers.

As for engagement from CENTCOM, as in so many cases in the Middle East, it will have to be very tailored to the individual groups. The role of other international actors will be an additional complicating factor, so weighing that role, the changing nature or aims of any given group, and the broader political situation in Syria will require a great deal of finesse.

Author Biographies



Dr. Kathleen Reedy

Kathleen Reedy is an anthropologist and mixed methods researcher at the RAND Corporation. Her background is in Middle Eastern culture and politics. In particular, her research has focused on nationalism, political identities, governance, rule of law, and the gaps between policy and practice in war zones. Prior to joining RAND, she served as a CENTCOM SME for the USAF and as a social scientist for the Army's Human Terrain System, embedding with BCTs in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her graduate fieldwork included 13 months of ethnographic research in Syria, and she has also worked in and on Egypt, the Gulf, China, and Japan.

Since joining RAND in 2014, Dr. Reedy has led or participated in studies on strategic posture and presence; Islamic extremism; right-wing nationalism; the human domain in remote sensing operations; policy options for Syria, Yemen, and Iran; military education and training; and military gender integration.

Dr. Reedy received her Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh, and her undergraduate degree from Penn State.



Mr. Faysal Itani

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

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

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

Mr. Vern Liebl

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

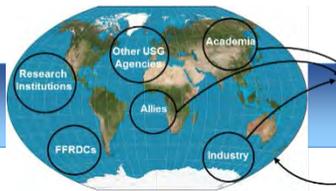
Prior to joining CAOCL, Mr. Liebl worked with the Joint Improvised Explosives Device Defeat Organization as a Cultural SME, and before that with Booz Allen Hamilton as a Strategic Islamic Narrative Analyst. He has also published extensively on topics ranging from the Caliphate to Vichy French campaigns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

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



Dr. Craig Whiteside

Dr. Craig Whiteside is an Associate Professor at the Naval War College Monterey, California where he teaches national security affairs to military officers as part of their professional military education. He is a senior associate with the Center on Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island and a fellow at the International Centre for Counter-terrorism – the Hague. Whiteside’s current research focuses on the doctrinal influences on the leadership of the so-called Islamic State movement and its evolving strategies. He has a PhD in Political Science from Washington State University and is a former U.S. Army officer with combat experience. His recent publications on the Islamic State can be found [here](#).



SMA Reach-back

Question How does the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict influence, affect, and relate to current conflicts in the region?

December 29 2016

Contributors: Professor Michael Brecher (Angus Professor of Political Science at McGill University), General (Ret.) Shlomo Brom (Senior Research Associate at the Tel Aviv University Institute for National Security Studies), Professor Aron Shai (Eisenberg Professor for East Asian Affairs, Departments of History and East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University), Professor Shibley Telhami (Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, and Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution), Dr. Jonathan Wilkenfeld (University of Maryland)

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The Israel-Palestine conflict has been a constant presence in the Middle East since Israel's independence in 1948. But even earlier in the 20th century, Arabs and Jews were in conflict over competing claims to the same territory. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, which provided a home for the Jewish people in parts of Palestine, along with the Sikes-Picot Agreement of 1916 which divided up the territories formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire, remain a continuing thorn in the side for Arab states in general, and for Palestinians in particular. It is also true that the rise of Arab nationalism, coupled with the centuries-old Sunni-Shi'a divide, have shaped the perceptions and destinies of Arab leaders and populations.

The critical question is the extent to which these seemingly separate conflicts overlap such that developments in one impact the others. In particular, under what circumstances does the status of the Israel-Palestine conflict today impact the larger conflict dynamics at play in the region? Is Israel-Palestine at the heart of all conflicts in the region, or is it merely a convenient whipping boy and perhaps even a singular unifying factor for populations and states riven by seemingly unrelated competitions for power?

Not surprisingly, then, the subject matter experts we have consulted on this question have expressed a considerable diversity of opinion. Nevertheless, one critical theme has gained traction. For the most part, the SMEs argue that Israel-Palestine has little to do with the broader conflict dynamics that characterize the region today. The quest for greater participatory democracy that typified the Arab Spring movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen would seem to be unrelated to developments in Israel-Palestine. Similarly, the overarching competition for power in the region between Shi'a and Sunnis, as reflected in the intense competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, has on the surface little to do with Israel-Palestine. But as all the SMEs observe, Israel-Palestine is invoked at the level of a "sacred value," in this case a deep-rooted feeling of shame and helplessness that periodically rises to the surface and is invoked either as a scapegoat by failing governments or as an unfulfilled quest by their restless populations. And so even as all dismiss the notion that the Israel-Palestine conflict is the primary driver of all conflict in the region, its invocation as a continuing grievance and as a motivating force must be factored into our own perceptions of these other conflicts and their underlying causes.

And thus, the answer to the Command's seemingly straightforward question is complex. The circumstances under which Israel-Palestine becomes a central narrative for Arab leaders and their populations with quite diverse local conditions and goals can include these and other factors:

- National leaders seek to divert attention from internal divisions and their inability to address local grievances – economic, social, and political
- Local populations express anger with the US and the West for their historical support for authoritarian regimes through criticism of their role in perpetuating the Israel-Palestine conflict
- Islamist revolutionary movements seek a unifying theme to garner support from local populations through championing the Palestinian narrative

In the following passages, we summarize the key points made by the group of SMEs consulted on this issue. This is followed by their full input, and biographical sketches.

Professor Michael Brecher (Angus Professor of Political Science at McGill University) takes the position that to view the Israel-Palestine conflict as a central driver of all conflict in the Middle East is to ignore dynamic forces of change in the region, particularly increasingly positive relations between Israel and several of its Arab neighbors. This latter trend has the effect of blunting the impact of Israel-Palestine tensions. Even though the relations between these former inter-state adversaries could not move beyond a Cold Peace, their bilateral conflicts and the Arab/Israel Conflict as a whole had begun the process of accommodation and conciliation. The extent of change became clear at the turn of the century (2000), when the Arab states adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, which offered Israel recognition and normal relations with all members of the Arab League, in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from its occupation of Arab territories in 1967 and acceptance of the Palestinians Right of Return, in accordance with the UN 1949 Resolution. Israel did not accept those conditions and the conflict continued. Nonetheless, Israel's right-wing Prime Minister publicly accepted the 'two state' solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict in 2009. Moreover, the Arab League renewed its 'Peace initiative' in 2007 and 2014.

General (Ret.) Shlomo Brom (Senior Research Associate at the Tel Aviv University Institute for National Security Studies) argues that while neither the Arab Spring uprisings nor the current Sunni-Sh'ia divide have anything to do with Israel-Palestine, sometimes Israel serves as a convenient card played by these regional powers in their struggles. For example, Iran is using its hostility to Israel as a way to buy influence in Sunni Arab societies. Nevertheless, Arab societies' frustrations that led to the present chaos in countries like Libya, Yemen, and Syria were fed also by feelings that they were wronged by the Western powers and Israel and the perceived injustice done to the Palestinians are part of these wrongs in the Arab psyche. One can also argue that the Arab authoritarian regimes that are another cause for the present situation fed on the Arab-Israeli conflict and used it to justify their rule and the huge expenditure on security and the armed forces that were the base of their rule.

Professor Aron Shai (Eisenberg Professor for East Asian Affairs Departments of History and East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University) posits that it is easy to dismiss Israel's culpability in the larger regional, ideological, and religious conflicts sweeping the region today. But for Israel's current right wing government, the mere fact that Arab states and extremist movements invoke Israel-Palestine as a basis for struggle, is used as justification for not seriously initiating sincere steps towards peace. Arab and Palestinian views tends to magnify the impact of the conflict and in fact internationalize it. This serves Israel's interests quite well.

Professor Shibley Telhami (Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, and Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution) offers the following listing of instances where the Israel-Palestine conflict has been a factor in seemingly unrelated conflicts.

- The social media groups that were critical for the Arab uprisings in 2010 were initially mobilized over the 2008-9 Gaza war between Israel and Hamas
- Opposition groups, including militant Islamists, continue to invoke Palestine centrally in their mobilization efforts

- The verdict is still out on how much stability will come to both Egypt and Jordan, with the opposition in both continuing to invoke Palestine/Israel
- Despite the Arab media focus on the Arab uprisings, especially Syria, once war flared in Gaza again in 2014, Palestine overtook all other stories including Syria
- Despite stable peace agreements between Israel on the one hand and Egypt and Jordan on the other hand, Egyptians and Jordanians continue to reject Israel over its occupation
- While some Arab states in the GCC would like to cooperate even more with Israel over some issues like Iran, they fear a domestic backlash (as happened recently over Saudis who made contacts with Israelis). And the take has been that Israel would make it harder for the Saudis to ask other Muslim nations to take its side against Iran if Israel is seen to be on the Saudis side.
- The Jerusalem issue remains one that resonates across the Muslim world. Crises could bring this to the top.

Michael Brecher (*Angus Professor of Political Science at McGill University*)

The Arab/Israel Conflict and other Middle East Conflicts

The apparent assumption by CENTCOM officials that the Arab/Israel Conflict has a profound effect on all Middle East conflicts 2016 is flawed in that it does not reflect an understanding about conflict persistence among states: it ignores the crucial reality of CHANGE, both in terms of a conflict relationship over time and the impact of one conflict on conflicts in the region in which it occurs. The Arab/Israel Conflict flourished over a lengthy period, from Israel's emergence in May 1948, accompanied by the first of many Arab/Israel wars, and earlier in the inter-communal phase of the Arab/Jewish Conflict. Its spill-over effects continued for three decades. However, change was evident as early as the mid-1970s, when many elite groups in Egypt began to perceive that the longstanding Arab goal, the destruction of Israel, sanctioned by the three Noes proclaimed at the Khartoum Conference of Arab League members in August 1967, "No peace with Israel, No recognition of Israel, No negotiations with Israel", was no longer a viable policy, in terms of Egypt's primary, compelling national interest –regaining the territories, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, conquered by Israel in the June 1967 Six Day War.

The result was a major change, dramatized by the signing of peace agreements between Egypt and Israel in 1979 and between Israel and Jordan in 1994, and a premature Israel/Palestine Oslo Accord in 1993. Even though the relations between these former inter-state adversaries could not move beyond a Cold Peace, their bilateral conflicts and the Arab/Israel Conflict as a whole had begun the process of accommodation and conciliation. The extent of change became clear at the turn of the century (2000), when the Arab states adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, which offered Israel recognition and normal relations with all members of the Arab League, in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from its occupation of Arab territories in 1967 and acceptance of the Palestinians Right of Return, in accordance with the UN 1949 Resolution. Israel did not accept those conditions and the conflict continued. Nonetheless, Israel's right-wing Prime Minister publicly accepted the 'two state' solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict in 2009. Moreover, the Arab League renewed its 'Peace initiative' in 2007 and 2014, including the rare public call, in an Israeli newspaper, Ha'aretz, by the Saudi monarch to be, for peace with Israel in 2015. Further, Israeli and Palestinian senior officials came close to an agreement on an overall peace agreement, based on the "Clinton Parameters", especially in the Taba Talks (2001). Moreover, while the direct negotiations between the President of the Palestine Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, and Prime Minister Olmert in 2008 did not produce a mutually-acceptable peace deal, it indicated that the conflict between the two principal adversaries in the Arab/Israel Conflict were/are capable of serious negotiations aimed at a meaningful peace agreement, fulfilling the promise of the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords.

As for the sweeping assumption by CENTCOM officials that the Arab/Israel Conflict permeated all conflicts in the Middle East, this too is belied by the reality of conflict in the Middle East. While Saddam Hussein attempted to link Iraq's behavior in the 1990-91 Gulf Crisis-War to the Arab/Israel Conflict, this did not prevent Egypt and Syria from participating in a war against another Arab state. More recently,

there is evidence of meaningful cooperation between Saudi Arabia and all of the smaller Gulf states with Israel. Furthermore, there is virtually no-spillover from the Arab/Israel Conflict to the Arab struggle for control of Syria during the past five years.

In sum, the Arab/Israel Conflict influenced the behavior of several other conflicts in the Middle East. However, that linkage diminished during the past 25 years, especially since the first Gulf War. What remains, as so often in international conflicts, is ideological incompatibility and verbal hostility between Israeli nationalism and Arab nationalism, with a steadily-declining impact on other regional conflicts.

These are examples of Middle East conflicts in which the Arab/Israel Conflict did not play any role:

1. The Iran/Iraq conflict, that included a devastating war, with one million casualties in their 1980-88 War; this age-old rivalry for influence in the Middle East dating to antiquity, continued well-beyond 1988
2. The Iraq/Kuwait War in 1990 that mushroomed into Gulf War I in 1991
3. The Iran/Saudi Arabia non-violent conflict between Sunni and Shiite major powers for pre-eminence in Middle East international politics
4. The Turkey/Saudi Arabia rivalry and conflict over power in the Middle East region, continuing
5. The Turkey/Kurdish conflict, unabated, with periodic outbursts of violence
6. The Egypt/Saudi Arabia conflict in the 1960s for control over Yemen, with on-going current Saudi involvement in a long-term Yemen civil war
7. The conflict between Egypt and Syria versus Iraq that included the involvement of the first two states in the U.S.-led Coalition against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in Gulf War II

In none of these conflicts was the Arab/Israel conflict directly, even indirectly involved, though Saddam attempted to embroil Israel by air attacks on Israel in Gulf War I. Moreover, Israel may have sent military hardware to the Kurds in their endless struggle against Turkey and the Iraq regime. Deep in the psyche of Middle East Muslims, officials and mass publics, Israel remains anathema; but even with this there is evident a growing willingness of Middle Eastern Muslim states to move towards normal interstate relations with Israel, especially Saudi Arabia, the lesser Gulf states and Jordan.

Shlomo Brom (*Senior Research Associate at the Tel Aviv University Institute for National Security Studies*)

After 7 years of violent tremors in the Middle East that were initially called the Arab Spring I think it is clear to all observers of the Middle East that many of the violent conflicts in the Middle East have nothing to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. For example, the Sunni-Shiite divide is rooted in almost 1400 years of Muslim history and in current competition among regional power (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and others) that has nothing to do with Israel. For example, the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia on Hegemony in the Gulf sub-region has nothing to do with Israel. Though, sometimes Israel serves as a convenient card played by these regional powers in their struggles. For example, Iran is using its hostility to Israel as a way to buy influence in Sunni Arab societies but one of the few positive effects of the recent years' developments is that this blunt instrument became much less effective because many Sunnis are much more concerned with the growing power of Shiite Iran than with Israel.

The main bloody conflicts; the civil wars in Syria, Libya and Yemen have nothing to do with Israel as well as the conflicts in Iraq among Sunnis, Shiite and Kurds.

On the other hand, it is not true that there is no linkage at all between the Israeli- Palestinian conflict and the wider Israeli-Arab conflict and broader developments in the Middle East. Arab societies' frustrations that led to the present chaos were fed also by feelings that they were wronged by the Western powers and Israel and the perceived injustice done to the Palestinians are part of these wrongs in the Arab psyche. One can also argue that the Arab authoritarian regimes that are another cause for the present situation fed on the Arab-Israeli conflict and used it to justify their rule and the huge expenditure on security and the armed forces that were the base of their rule.

Aron Shai (*Eisenberg Professor for East Asian Affairs, Departments of History and East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University*)

Firstly, I'd like to underline an obvious and well known assertion -- methodologically speaking, as we are not talking about an issue in the realm of the experimental sciences, we cannot guarantee that our observation(s) are indeed fully valid. There are numerous hidden factors – local and others – which one always misses and is unaware of, these factors being totally foreign to one's mentality, experience etc. I think we are unable to weigh and/or insert those factors properly into our formulae. Can we really determine that radical Islamization, in say, Central Asia, Xinjiang (East Turkistan, China) or deep in black Africa is influenced by, or a spillover from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and if so, to what extent? – Negligible! The almost evaporation of Christian communities in some regions of the Middle East, has it got anything to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Indeed, the world goes global and the Middle East is brought home to television sets along the Silk Road as well as to different corners of the globe. But still, proportions should be observed.

The question posed is a pretty naive view of the Middle East in general, and the Israel-Palestine conflict in particular. This week, for example, we learned that the Chinese authorities don't mind Islamic extremists as long as they are not Uighur! State control over religious activity depends on ethnic and geographical factors. Beijing is particularly anxious about terrorism as an ideological problem, treating it as an ethnic one, trying to contain it in Xinjiang on account of security considerations i.e. anxiety regarding China's territorial integrity. Where does the Israeli-Palestinian conflict factor come into this recipe?

As for Q12, I believe that indeed, it could be asserted that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does influence and does affect various conflicts in the immediate region, but I do not think that it is the *primary* driver for all conflicts around us, certainly not in the second or third circle. Even being a spillover from Israel-Palestine into other regional conflicts is doubtful. If we take recent upheavals in Egypt, for example, can it seriously be argued that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the reason for what the people of this country are experiencing? Or, rather, it is at times a comfortable rhetorical diversion or red herring which serves respective quarters.

It is useful (critical is perhaps too strong a word) to understand, let alone be aware of, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, one should by no means regard it as critical or as a major reason. It certainly helps us examine other conflicts. It should not be regarded as policy guidance.

Interestingly enough, if we look into the internal political scene in Israel, the current government and right-wing circles here tend to argue that it is not the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which influences conflicts in various corners of the world. Rather, there are deeper historical trends which are by far more significant. This tactic removes the onus for not seriously initiating sincere steps towards peace from the Israeli decision-makers. Arab and Palestinian views tends to magnify the impact of the conflict, in fact internationalize it. This serves them quite well. My own view is that had there been a more relaxed situation in the Israeli-Palestinian front, say, as Prime-Minister Rabin envisaged, perhaps a more desirable atmosphere would have prevailed in our immediate neighborhood as well. But one should not exaggerate and believe that the problems and conflicts we witness in the second and third circles would have evaporated altogether. Indeed, we should take this hypothetical assertion with a grain of salt.

Shibley Telhami (*Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, and Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution*)

The Palestine question has been historically a question of identity for many Arabs, dating back to 1948; even Arabs who were sometimes angered by Palestinian groups, viewed the cause as a way of organizing their attitudes toward the world, friend and enemies. There has always been a gap between public attitudes and governmental priorities, with all Arab governments, like others, focused on maintaining and expanding power, which often meant that Palestine was less of a priority.

The Arab uprisings and the post-Iraq war strategic shift has altered priorities further. Many Arabs are so absorbed by their own pressing issues (Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen), that Palestine is not an apparent priority. And Arab governments, fearing the rise of Islamist opposition/revolt on the one hand, and the rise of Iran on the other, have focused even less on Palestine with some even more open to strategic cooperation with Israel, despite Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories.

But make no mistake: The absence of Israeli-Palestinian peace is still dangerous and has consequences. Good to keep in mind a few things:

- * The social media groups that were critical for the Arab uprisings in 2010 were initially mobilized over the 2008-9 Gaza war.

- *Opposition groups, including militant Islamists, continue to invoke Palestine centrally in their mobilization efforts.

- *The verdict is still out on how much stability will come to both Egypt and Jordan, with the opposition in both continuing to invoke Palestine/Israel

- *Despite the Arab media focus on the Arab uprisings, especially Syria, once war flared in Gaza again in 2014, Palestine overtook all other stories including Syria.

- *Despite stable peace agreements between Israel on the one hand and Egypt and Jordan on other hand, Egyptians and Jordanians continue to reject Israel over its occupation.

- *While some Arab states in the GCC would like to cooperate even more with Israel over some issues like Iran, they fear a domestic backlash (as happened recently over Saudis who made contacts with Israelis). And the take has been that Israel would make it harder for the Saudis to ask other Muslim nations to take its side against Iran if Israel is seen to be on the Saudis side.

- *The Jerusalem issue remains one that resonates across the Muslim world. Crises could bring this to the top.

Biographies

Michael Brecher

Professor Michael Brecher is the R.R. Angus Professor of Political Science at McGill University in Canada. His research and publications over more than six decades can be divided into three phases. In the first, his focus was on political leaders, including books on Kashmir and a political biography of Nehru. The second phase focused on foreign policy as a system of actions. He published four books during this phase, most notable among them the Yale University Press publication of The Foreign Policy System of Israel. The third phase of Brecher's research, still ongoing, focuses on theory and case studies of international crises and protracted conflicts. Thus far, he has published 9 books on these topics, with 4 forthcoming. These latter include the following titles: The World of Protracted Conflict, Political Leadership and Charisma, Dimensions of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and Interstate Crises and Conflicts.

In addition to his appointment at McGill University, Brecher has also taught at the University of Chicago, the University of California Berkeley, and Stanford University. He has been the recipient of numerous grants, including sustained funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and in 2009 received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Political Science Association, Conflict Processes Section.

Shlomo Brom

Shlomo Brom, a senior research associate at the Institute for National Security Studies, joined the Jaffee Center in 1998 after a long career in the IDF. His most senior post in the IDF was director of the Strategic Planning Division in the Planning Branch of the General Staff. Brig. Gen. (ret.) Brom participated in peace negotiations with the Palestinians, Jordan, and Syria, and in Middle Eastern regional security talks during the 1990s. He continued to be involved in Track 2 dialogues on these subjects after his retirement from the IDF. In 2000 he was named deputy to the National Security Advisor, returning to JCSS at the end of his post. In 2005-2006 Brig. Gen. (ret.) Brom was a member of the Meridor committee established by the Minister of Defense to reexamine the security strategy and doctrine of the State of Israel. His primary areas of research are Israeli-Palestinian relations and national security doctrine.

Brom authored *Israel and South Lebanon: In the Absence of a Peace Treaty with Syria*, and edited *The Middle East Military Balance 1999-2000* and *The Middle East Military Balance 2001-2002*. He is the editor of *In the Aftermath of Operation Pillar of Defense: The Gaza Strip*, November 2012, co-editor (with Meir Elran) of *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspectives* and (with Anat Kurz) the *Strategic Survey for Israel* series.

Aron Shai

Aron Shai is the Shoul N. Eisenberg Professor for East Asian Affairs Departments of History and East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University. He is currently Pro-Rector, Tel Aviv University, Rector/Provost (2010-2015). Author of 11 books and an editor of many others, Between 1972 and 2016 published over 50 articles and chapters in scientific and academic journals and edited books, Courses on modern history, China's contemporary history and political economy and on issues relating to Israel studies. Served as a guest/Visiting Professor at Oxford, Toronto, New York, Paris and Jerusalem. Member, the Council of Higher Education. Director at two Israeli insurance companies. B.A and M.A., the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, D. Phil., University of Oxford.

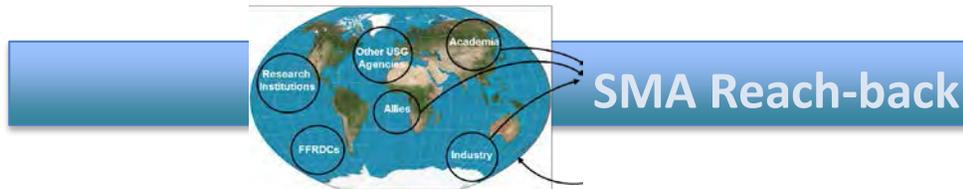
Sibley Telhami

Sibley Telhami is the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. His best-selling book, *The Stakes: America and the Middle East*, was selected by *Foreign Affairs* as one of the top five books on the Middle East in 2003. In addition, his most recent book, *The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East*, was published in 2013. Telhami was selected by the Carnegie Corporation of New York along with the *New York Times* as one of the "Great Immigrants" for 2013. Telhami is a recipient of the Excellence in Public Service Award, awarded by the University System of Maryland Board of Regents in 2006, and the University of Maryland's Honors College 2014 Outstanding Faculty Award. In the past, Telhami served as a senior advisor to the U.S. Department of State, advisor to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, advisor to Congressman Lee Hamilton, and as a member of the Iraq Study Group. Telhami is an expert on U.S. policy in the Middle East, on Arab politics, and on shifting political identities in the Arab world. He regularly conducts public opinion polls in the Arab world, Israel, and the United States. In addition, he was selected by the Carnegie Corporation of New York with the *New York Times* as one of the "Great Immigrants" for 2013.

Jonathan Wilkenfeld

Jonathan Wilkenfeld is Professor and prior Chair of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland and Director of the ICONS simulation project. He is a specialist in foreign policy decision-making, crisis behavior, and mediation, as well as in the use of simulation in policy studies. Since 1977, Wilkenfeld has served as co-Director (with Michael Brecher) of the International Crisis Behavior Project, a cross-national study of international crises in the twentieth century. The project has served as the basis for systematic research into a range of crucial foreign-policy issues, including state motivations during times of crisis, conflict management practices, and protracted conflict trajectories. Wilkenfeld is founder of the International Communication and Negotiation Simulations (ICONS) Project, which provides decision-makers with interactive training experiences in the fields of conflict behavior, negotiation, and crisis management.

Wilkenfeld's most recent books include *A Study of Crisis* (1997 and 2000, with Michael Brecher); *International Negotiation in a Complex World* (1999, 2005, 2010, 2015 with Brigid Starkey and Mark Boyer); *Mediating International Crises* (2005 with Kathleen Young, David Quinn, and Victor Asal); and *Myth and Reality in International Politics* (2015). His current work focuses on mediation processes in international conflicts and crises.



18 January 2017

Question What are the key factors or elements within the Government of Iraq that influence overall stability in Syria and Iraq? What are the tipping points for each?

Contributors: *Dr. Randa Slim, (Middle East Institute); Dr. Harith Hasan al-Qarawee (Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University); Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, (NSI)*

Executive Summary: Jimmy Krakar, TRADOC G27 (CTR, IDSI)

Athena Simulation Modeler: Jumanne Donahue, TRADOC G27 (CTR, CGI)

The TRADOC G27 team assessed that the key factors within the Government of Iraq (GoI) that will influence overall stability in Iraq and Syria are directly related to reconciliation between the GoI and the Sunni population of Iraq.

Previous SMA/CENTCOM research identified the importance of reconciliation and posited four critical factors for Iraqi reconciliation to occur. Two of these factors—limited Shia support for PM al-Abadi and Intra-Sunni competition—are directly related to dynamics internal to GoI. After assessing the range of potential futures, the study team established that the range of futures ultimately reduces to two potential futures with the tipping point for each directly related to reconciliation between the GoI and the Sunnis. The first post ISIL future is the GoI attempts to directly control the territory liberated from ISIL; the second is the GoI devolves political control to a Sunni intermediary body which controls the area and is loyal to GoI.

The study team used the Athena Simulation to model both futures and determine their respective effects on stability in both Iraq and Syria over a one year period, following the military defeat of ISIL.⁷⁸ Figures 1 and 2 show how each Athena run resulted in a distinct

⁷⁸ The Athena Simulation is a decision support tool designed to increase decision-makers' understanding of the effects of PMESII-PT variables on operations in a given

outcome in regards to Iraqi stability. When the Gol attempted to directly control the newly freed territory it resulted in the Gol unable to establish effective control over large parts of Sunni Iraq. When the Gol used a Sunni intermediary to administer the newly liberated territory, the intermediary was able to control most of the liberated Sunni territory; however, this trend towards devolution of control resulted in the KRG controlling Kirkuk. In both futures neither the Gol nor the Sunni intermediary was able to exercise full control of Salah ad Din.⁷⁹ Neither Iraqi future affected stability in Syria (Figure 3, next page).

Stability Results showing Gol direct rule of Sunni areas (Figure 1) and Devolution of Gol control of these areas (Figure 2)

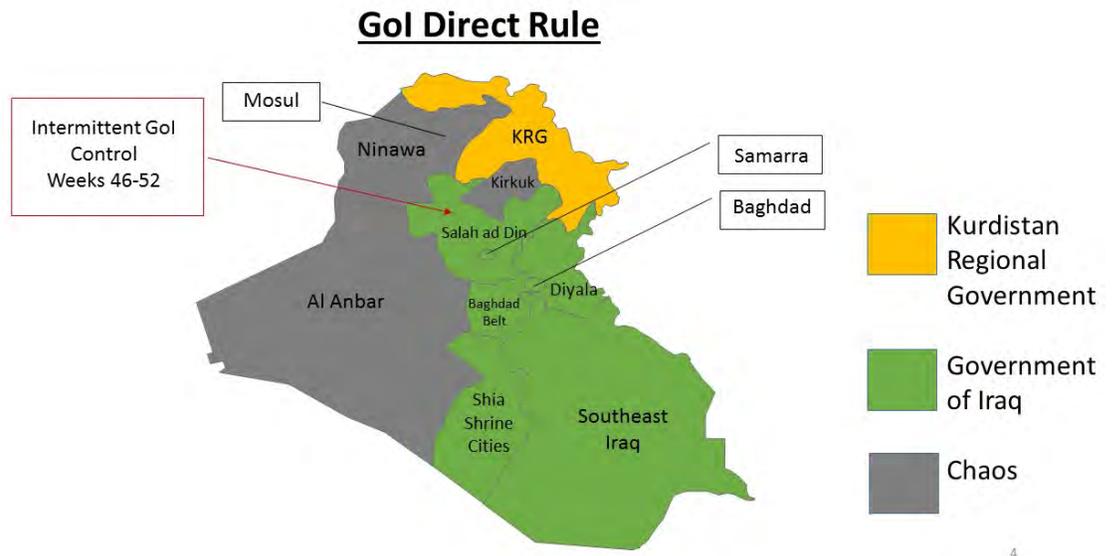


Figure 2: Large portions of Sunni Iraq will be uncontrolled by the Gol.

area over time. It was developed by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in conjunction with the US Army TRADOC G-27 Models and Simulations Branch.

⁷⁹ For simulation purposes the study team modeled the Sunni intermediary as a Sunni Council which was subordinate to Gol.

Devolution

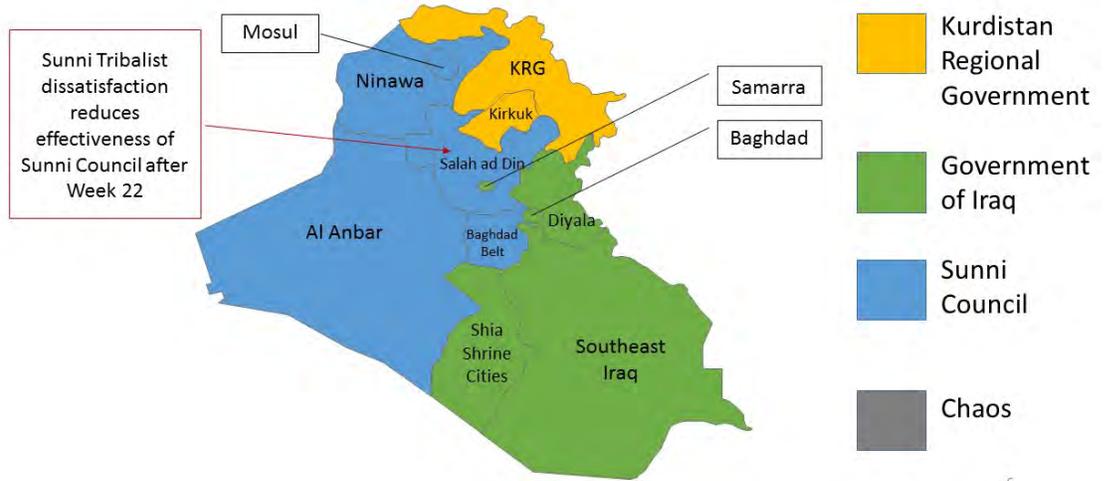


Figure 3: The devolution future results in the Sunni Council controlling most of Sunni Iraq.

Direct Rule and Devolution

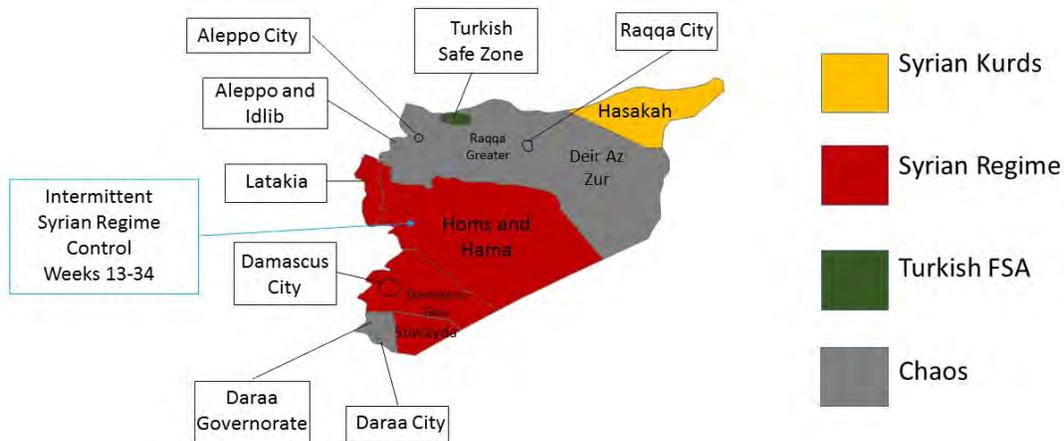


Figure 4: Neither future altered the stability of Syria.

PM al-Abadi's Shia Support

The first condition that the GoI could influence to bring about reconciliation, and subsequently affect stability in Iraq, is comprehensive Shia support for PM al-Abadi. Since his assumption of the duties of Prime Minister in 2014 PM al-Abadi has walked a tight rope between reaching out to the Sunnis and maintaining support of his Shia base. PM al-Abadi currently lacks widespread support among Iraqi Sunnis. Athena analysis shows that the GoI leadership transition from al-Maliki to al-Abadi did not improve affinities between the GoI and the Sunni civilian groups but instead induced an erosion of al-Abadi's Shia political base (Figure 4, below). This issue has not resolved. As noted by Dr Randa Slim, "The government is not focused on reconciliation, it is focused on the anti-ISIL fight, budgetary issues, and Shia in fighting" (R3 QL1). Regarding the future, Dr Hamsaeed noted, "It is not clear that Shia hardliners will ever agree to reconcile or share power with the Sunni population" (R3, QL 1).

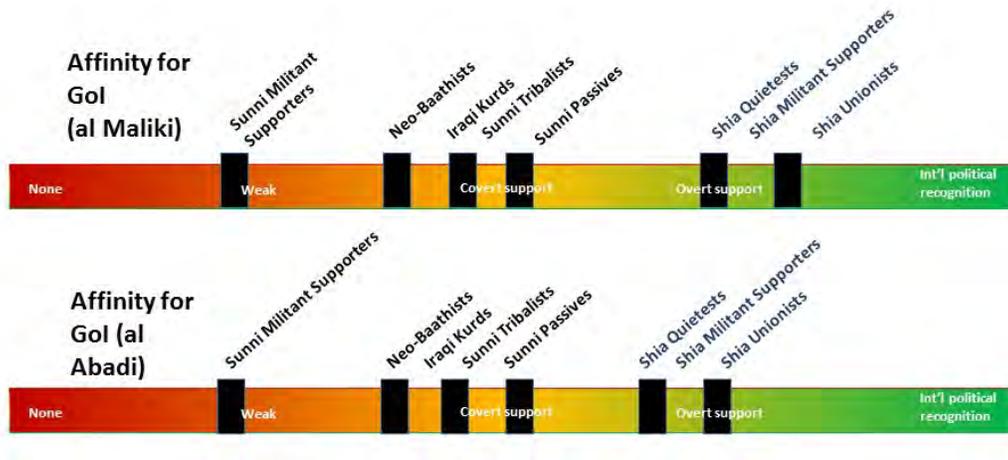


Figure 5: Large portions of the Shia population have less affinity with PM al- Abadi than his predecessor al-Maliki.

Intra-Sunni Competition

The second condition for reconciliation that would influence stability in Iraq is Intra-Sunni competition. Complicating this reconciliation is the fact that the Iraqi Sunnis do not speak with a single voice and do not have a unitary agenda. As Dr Harith al Qarawee noted "The intra-Sunni competitions make it hard to identify a serious and genuine Sunni Negotiator. Sunni groups, competing for recognition and patronage, are not united behind a single and clear agenda" (R3QL1). This greatly complicates matters for the GoI in their attempts to generate some type of Sunni intermediary government such as we modeled.

Methodology

The methodology of this paper was a combination of open source elicitations and simulation. The elicitations primarily consisted of interviews with Subject Matter Experts that took place during the SMA CENTCOM support operation. This provided the qualitative information of what factors could the GoI influence which then led to the study team developing the potential futures which they then modeled with the Athena simulation for a simulated one year period post-ISIL military defeat.

Conclusion

There is little movement toward resolution of the two major factors that the GoI could potentially

influence—PM al-Abadi lacking the support of his Shia alliance and intra-Sunni competition within Iraq. Currently there is little impetus within the Iraqi government to take steps to devolve power in Sunni majority areas to locally acceptable political and security institutions. PM al-Abadi's best strategy is to pursue minimum political changes that appease international funders and, ideally, Sunni and Shia groups without going so far as to alienate his hardline Shia political opponent. The issue is that this future will result in large portions of Iraq not under effective GoI control either directly or indirectly. The future in which Iraq would be relatively stable would involve devolution of power which may be politically untenable due to a splintered Shia alliance and lack of acceptable Sunni leadership.

Contributor Biographies



Randa Slim

Randa Slim is Director of the Track II Dialogues initiative at The Middle East Institute and a non-resident fellow at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced & International Studies (SAIS) Foreign Policy Institute. A former vice president of the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue, Slim has been a senior program advisor at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, a guest scholar at the United States Institute of Peace, a program director at Resolve, Inc, and a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. A long-term practitioner of Track II dialogue and peace-building processes in the Middle East and Central Asia, she is the author of several studies, research reports, book chapters, and articles on conflict management, post-conflict peacebuilding, and Middle East politics.

Education

B.S. at the American University of Beirut; M.A. at the American University of Beirut; Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina

Languages Arabic, French

Countries of Expertise Syria, Iraq, Lebanon Issues of Expertise Peacebuilding, Peacemaking, Negotiation, Track II Dialogue, Democratization, Post-Conflict Reconciliation

Dr. Harith Al-Qarawee

Fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies-Brandeis University

Former fellow at Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies-Harvard University.

Member of the Future of Iraq's Task Force- Atlantic Council

Member of Middle East Strategy Task Force (MEST) – Working group on Religion and Identity - Atlantic Council – (2015).

Writing a book manuscript on Shi'a religious authority in Iraq and its relationship with Iran. Writing commentaries and briefs on the Middle East, with special focus on post-ISIS Iraq. Briefing US government institutions on political developments in the Middle East.



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.

Jimmy Krakar

Jimmy Krakar is a Principal Analyst at TRADOC G-27 Models and Simulations Branch (M&SB) at Fort Leavenworth. Over the last four years he has participated in numerous Operational Environment analytical efforts in support of Department of Defense clients, serving as the Team leader and lead analyst for the M&SB efforts which provided on-site support to SOCCENT and CJTF-OIR.

Previously he worked as a Counterinsurgency Advisor for the COMISAF Advisory Assistance Team (CAAT) in Afghanistan. He has over 25 years of active and reserve military experience in Infantry, Civil Affairs and Human Terrain operations; with deployments to Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Currently he is an Army Reservist assigned to USSOCOM J-8.

Jimmy received his BS in Military History from the United States Military Academy, an MS in Intelligence from American Military University and graduated the Defense Language Institute as a basic Arabic Linguist. His most recent publication was "The Civil Engagement Spectrum: A tool for the Human Domain" published in the Sep/Oct 15 issue of *Military Review*.

Mr. Jumanne Donahue

Jumanne Donahue is a Senior Analyst at CGI Federal, Inc. For the past nine years, he has worked in support of US Joint Forces Command and the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) G-27 Data Science, Models, Simulations directorate in various capacities. He was a cultural researcher and knowledge engineer on the First Person Cultural Trainer simulation developed for DSMS by the University of Texas at Dallas. Mr. Donahue's current position is that of an Athena simulation modeler. In this capacity he has deployed in support of SOCCENT and CJTF Operation Inherent Resolve.

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