

SMA CENTCOM Reach-back Reports



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**Part 4: Regional actor
interests and motivations**

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This is Part 4 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.

7 February 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.

UNCLASSIFIED



UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
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9 September 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR JOINT STAFF, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL
OPERATIONS, DR. HRIAR CABAYAN

SUBJECT: U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) Prioritized List of Study Topics for
Analysis by Strategic Multilayer Assessment Reach Back Cell

1. I greatly appreciate the support you and the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team have provided over the years, and I look forward to institutionalizing our relationship through the establishment of a reach back cell for USCENTCOM. This initiative will provide my staff and components access to your network of scholars and area experts to address questions critical to USCENTCOM in support of ongoing operations in the central region.
2. To kick-off the process, USCENTCOM's list of prioritized study topics organized by recommended analytic approach (Quick Look, Virtual Think Tank [ViTTa], Literature Review, and Simulation) is attached in TAB A.
3. Ms. Elaine McCusker, SES, Director of Resources & Analysis, has kept me well informed on this initiative. Please continue to work through her for any clarification and/or suggestions for improvement in our reach back process.
4. I look forward to reviewing the results of these initial study topics, and again, appreciate the support you provide to our warfighters.

JOSEPH L. VOTEL
General, U.S. Army

Attachments:
TAB A: Prioritized List of Study Topics

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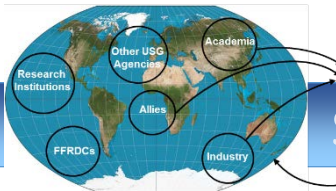
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SMA Reach-back

What are the strategic objectives and motivations of indigenous state and non-state partners in the counter-ISIL fight?¹

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

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

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

ISIL will be defeated in Syria and Iraq

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

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

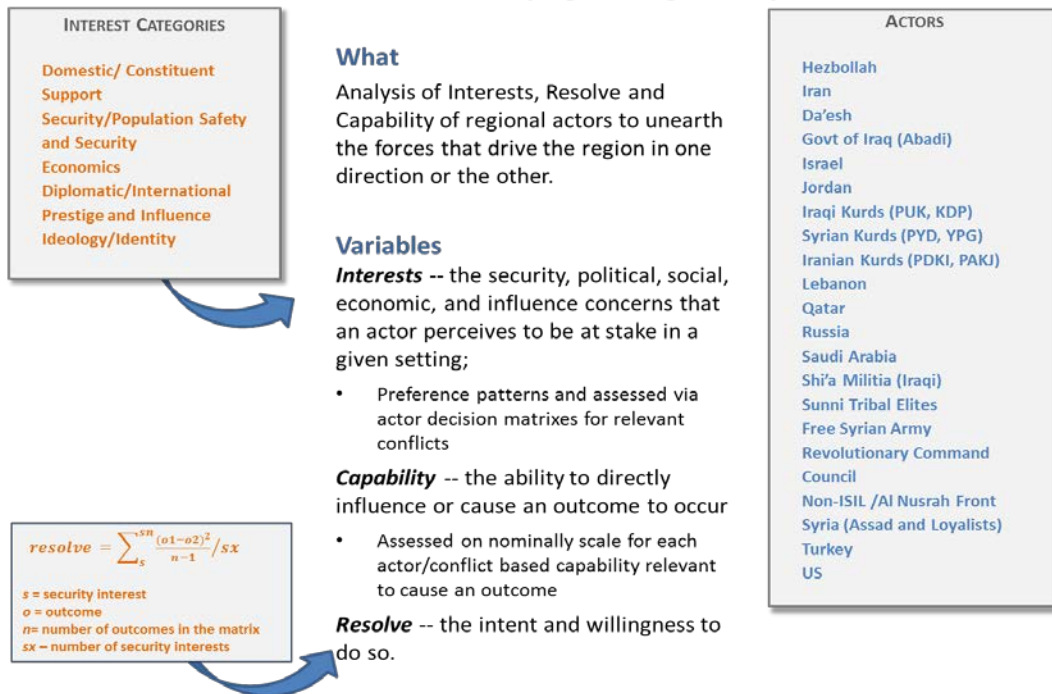
Whether Syrian civil conflict will cease in the context of an ISIL defeat is too close to call. Assad, Russia and Iran have strong untapped capability to drive an Assad victory against the remaining Opposition although none show high resolve (i.e., the security value gained by an Assad victory versus continued fighting in Syria is not widely different. This reflects the Assad regime's competing security interests (i.e., one interest is better satisfied by continued conflict, another by Assad victory). Even when we assume the defeat of ISIL in Syria as a precondition, unless actor interests change dramatically, the number of interests

¹ This white paper does not represent official USG policy or position.

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

served by continued conflict and the generally low resolve on both sides suggests that we should be skeptical of current agreements regarding the Syrian Civil War. Moreover, resolve scores rise sharply when continued conflict is replaced by the possibility of Assad defeat. Together these results suggest that unless Assad's, Iran's and Russia's perceived security concerns are altered significantly, these actors have both the capacity and will to engage strongly to avoid an impending defeat. The high resolve of the three actors to avoid defeat should be taken as a warning of their high tolerance for escalation in the civil conflict.

Basis of Conclusions: Identifying ME Regional Dynamics



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

Gol lacks resolve to make concessions to garner support from Sunni Tribes

While the majority of regional actors favor the Government of Iraq (Gol) making concessions to Sunni and Kurdish groups following defeat of ISIL, only the Government of Iraq, Shi'a Hardline and Militia, Sunni Tribes and Iraqi Kurds have significant capability to cause this to happen or not. Unfortunately, the Gol and Shi'a have high resolve to avoid reforms substantive enough to alter Sunni factions' indifference between Gol and separate Sunni and/or Islamist governance. More unfortunately, when they believe the Gol will not make concessions, Sunni Tribes are indifferent between ISIL governance and the current Government controlling Iraq. That is, they have no current interest served by taking security risks

associated with opposing ISIL. However, the outbreak of civil warfare in Iraq does incentivize GoI to make concessions. Iranian backing of substantial GoI reforms changes the GoI preference from minimum to substantive reforms without the necessity of civil warfare.

Implications: Now is the opportune time to engage all parties in publically visible dialogue regarding their views and requirements for post-ISIL governance and security. Engaging Sunni factions on security guarantees and requirements for political inclusion/power is most likely to be effective; Engaging Kurds on economic requirements and enhancing KRG international and domestic political influence encourage cooperation with GoI. Finally, incentivize Iran to help limit stridency of Shi'a hardline in Iraq eases the way for the Abadi government to make substantive overtures and open governance reform talks.

Saudi Arabia-Iran Proxy funding continues; easily reignites conflict

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

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

Actor Interest Contributors: *Tom Lynch (National Defense University), Dr. Benedetta Berti (Fellow, Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv; Fellow, Foreign Policy Research Institute), Jeff Weyers (iBrabo; University of Liverpool); Dr. Justin Gengler (Qatar University); Marc Hecker and Dr. Élie Tenenbaum (Institut Français des Relations Internationales); Hassan Hassan (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy); Brig. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Brom (Fellow, Center for American Progress); Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute, The Jamestown Foundation); Dr. Hilal Khashan (American University of Beirut), Timothy Thomas (Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth); Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, Dr. Belinda Bragg, Dr. Larry Kuznar, Mariah Yager, George Popp, Sarah Canna (NSI); Eugene Rumer (Russia and Eurasia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace).*

Editor: *Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

Compendium of Actor Interests

Ahrar al Sham Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Jeff Weyers, iBrabo

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | Natio nal securi ty/ popul ation safety | Int'l/ intergr oup prestig e | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constitue nt support | Econo mic surviv al/ prosp erity | Identi ty/ ideolo gy |
| Ahrar al-Sham | | | | | | |
| Moderating Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Jabhat al Nusra) | <i>One of the largest and most effective Islamist groups in the region is Ahrar al-Sham (AaS). Due to early ties to AQ in their emergence they received little traction outside of region players. As time has progressed, AaS has come to demonstrate an interest in being considered a more moderate alternative to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. There are numerous examples of AaS contesting JFS expansion and actions in the region. Due to its size this has generally had the effect of forcing JFS to back down in several instances or pushing issues to sharia court for decisions. In July 2015, AS's head of foreign political relations encouraged dialog and re-examination of labelling of Syrian opposition groups. In October 2016 AS joined Turkey's Euphrates Shield initiative in northern Syria putting it at odds with JFS, and giving the group increased operational relevance.</i> | X | | X | | X |
| Increasing relevance and operational | <i>During 2015 Ahrar al-Sham (AaS) was involved in many of the strategic victories in Syria as a part of Jaysh al-Fatah (Army of Conquest). This led to large territorial gains in Idlib, Latakia and Aleppo. In July 2015, AS's head of foreign political relations encouraged dialog with the US and a re-examination of labels given to Syrian opposition groups. In</i> | X | X | X | | X |

capability in Syria *October 2016 AS joined Turkey's Euphrates Shield initiative in northern Syria putting it at odds with JFS, and giving the group increased operational relevance. In the same month AS gathered a coalition of 50 opposition groups to eliminate Jund al-Aqsa (JaA) after repeated attacks by the group who was sympathetic to ISIS. This forced JaA to pledge to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham to prevent their annihilation and placed JFS and AaS at further odds with each other.*

Bahrain's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Justin Gengler

Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI), Qatar University

INTEREST TYPE

| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | INTEREST TYPE | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | National security / populati on safety | Int'l/ intergr oup prestig e | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Econo mic survival / prospe rity | Identi ty/ ideolo gy |
| Ensure regime security | <i>As with the other Arab Gulf monarchies, the most basic aim of the Al Khalifa family [in the capacity of the]Bahraini government is the preservation of regime security – that is, to ensure continued Al Khalifa rule of the country.</i> | | | X | | |
| Preserve the support of Sunni citizens via sectarian appeals | <i>Political support for the government is extremely low among Bahrain's majority (±55%) Shia population, and thus the ruling family's domestic political survival depends upon the continued sectarian segmentation of the citizenry such that political coordination among Shia and Sunni citizens is untenable. The state has accomplished this by successfully demonizing the Shia-dominated opposition as an Iranian fifth column, positioning itself as the best of two unsatisfying options for ordinary Bahraini Sunnis. The latter have been in effect scared away from cooperation with the opposition, despite a long list of shared grievances, by the threat of a full-scale Shia takeover (in the manner of Iraq) in the event of an overthrow of the Al Khalifa. The continued ability to portray the opposition as backed by a meddling and belligerent Iran is thus a core interest of the state's that is undermined by efforts to diffuse sectarian tensions</i> | | | X | | X |

in the region. In other words, the Bahraini government has a direct domestic political interest in continued Sunni-Shi'a tensions in the Gulf and Levant. (See my article for the MEI, "Sectarian Backfire? Assessing Gulf Political Strategy Five Years after the Arab Uprisings.

<http://www.mei.edu/content/map/sectarian-backfire-assessing-gulf-political-strategy-five-years-after-arab-uprisings>

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| Prevent direct Iranian material support for domestic Shia groups | <i>The state has long made claims of direct material and financial support by Iran for what it calls "terrorist" cells within the opposition. To date, however, it has been unable to produce compelling evidence directly tying Iran to domestic groups. Still, the opportunity for indirect funding and support for opposition groups is considerable, both domestically and from outside, and the state has recently taken several steps to attempt to cut off such support. This includes most notably the banning of the khums ("one-fifth") tax through which Shia followers traditionally support clerics. More generally, the state has sought to bring all local charities and funds under central administration in order to exercise greater oversight.</i> | X | X |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| Maintain the diplomatic support and physical military presence of key international allies (the U.S. | <i>Prior to the emergence of Da'ish in Iraq and Syria, Bahrain was sensitive to efforts by the U.S. Embassy in Bahrain (along with the State Department generally) to facilitate negotiations between the Shia opposition and government (i.e., Crown Prince) that would resolve some of the issues underlying the uprising. The emergence of Da'ish offered Bahrain (and patron Saudi Arabia) a temporary solution to this problem, as it could make its support in the anti-Da'ish coalition contingent upon U.S. withdrawal from domestic Bahraini politics, which has indeed occurred. However, the possibility of renewed U.S. pressure for political</i> | X | X |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|

and the Britain) *reconciliation and/or reform is not far from the minds of the ruling family.*

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Prevent or slow the normalization of Western relations with Iran | <i>Normalization of Western relations with Iran poses direct economic and political threats to the Bahraini state. The latter category is largely addressed above. Regarding the former economic challenge, Iran's reemergence as a major oil exporter threatens to further reduce what dwindling resource rents presently accrue to Bahrain. Bahrain is overwhelmingly reliant upon oil and gas revenues (a majority of which are provided indirectly from Saudi Arabia via the jointly-owned Abu Safaa field).</i> | X | X | X | X |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|

France's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr.s Marc Hecker and Élie Tenenbaum

Security Studies Center

Institut Français des Relations Internationales

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | National security/population safety | Int'l/intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/regime security/constituent support | Economic survival/prosperity | Identity/ideology |
| Limit instability throughout the Middle East | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Middle East's geographic proximity to France makes the region's stability an absolute priority for France's future security - France has been heavily present in the region for centuries and will undoubtedly remain involved in the foreseeable future | X | | | X | |
| Mobilize a large coalition to help stabilize the region | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - France does not have the power to change regional dynamics alone: France needs to build partnerships and act within a coalition - The United States' commitment to the region's security is critical and will remain a prerequisite for any substantial military endeavor | X | X | | | |
| Contain international Jihadism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destroying Jihadist sanctuaries: especially in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen - Controlling the flow of returning Foreign Fighters: especially those returning to Europe; and France's southern neighbors (North Africa) | X | | X | | |
| Limit the flow of refugees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting a more efficient EU external border control - Avoiding the potential negative impact refugee flows may have on the country's economy, security and domestic politics | X | | X | X | X |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|---|---|
| Promote the establishment of a stable and non-hostile state in Syria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ending the civil war without returning to the status quo ante (That Bashar al-Assad remain in power is not an option)</i> - <i>Limiting the influence of radical factions over the future government</i> | X | | | | | X | |
| Promote a cohesive and representative government in Iraq | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Restoring the Iraqi government's full control over its territory</i> - <i>Helping Baghdad regain some degree of legitimacy amongst both Sunnis and Shias</i> - <i>Preserving autonomy for the Kurdish Regional Government</i> | X | | | | | X | |
| Avoid further destabilization in Lebanon | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Helping any Lebanese representative government maintain control over its territory</i> - <i>Limiting Hezbollah's influence over the government</i> - <i>Honoring century-long ties with Lebanon in cultural and religious fields</i> | X | X | | | | X | |
| Move Iran towards a greater opening and a more constructive foreign policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Enforcing the JCPOA and preventing Tehran's to acquire an operational nuclear deterrence capability</i> - <i>Developing business opportunities for French companies in Iran</i> - <i>Limiting the influence of the regime's hardliners within the government</i> - <i>Preventing the escalation of tensions with Gulf monarchies</i> | X | X | | | | X | |
| Strengthening strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Promoting further business partnerships (arms sales, foreign investments) while being cautious of not giving Gulf Monarchies too much clout in France's key economic sectors</i> - <i>Limiting the exportation of radical Islam (Salafi Islam, Muslim brotherhood) towards Europe and especially France</i> - <i>Avoiding greater tensions between Gulf monarchies and Iran</i> - <i>Securing peaceful regimes' successions</i> | X | X | | | | X | X |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Keep on promoting the Two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Preserving a sustainable security environment for Israel</i> - <i>Promoting the establishment of a stable and non-hostile Palestinian state with limited influence coming from Hamas</i> - <i>Avoiding the emergence of new jihadist groups in the Gaza Strip</i> | X | X | X |
| Make sure Turkey remains a stable and reliable ally | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Countering Erdogan's regime's authoritarian evolution</i> - <i>Securing the EU-Turkish agreement regarding Syrian refugees</i> - <i>Making sure Turkey remains a reliable NATO member</i> | X | | X |

Hezbollah’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | National/intergroup/ security/ /prestige/ population ion safety | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival/ /prosperity | Identity/ideology |
| Hezbollah | | | | | |
| Defend against Sunni threat | <i>Hezbollah (the Party of God) emerged in the wake of Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982 intended to eradicate the threat from Palestinian fighters based in the south. Hezbollah’s claimed objectives were to remove the US, France from Lebanese territory and defend Lebanon from and ultimately destroy the Israeli state. Its move into Syria in direct support of the Assad regime, a long-time ally, has led to questions about an expansion of Hezbollah’s original nationalist-religious focus.³ Nevertheless, the group and the Shi’a population do face an existential threat from Sunni radical groups such as the Al Nusra Front, Ahrar al-Sham and ISIL that have taken up operations in Syria, especially as they come closer to Lebanon.</i> | | | | X |
| Preserve links to support, weapons from Iran, Syria | <i>Iran, Syria and Hezbollah form an “Axis of Resistance” to US influence and Israeli presence in the region. Assad’s use of Syrian military forces in Lebanon has served as a “force multiplier” for Hezbollah since the end of the Lebanese civil war, even after Syria officially withdrew from Lebanon</i> | | | | X |

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

in 2005. Hezbollah along with Amal (another Shite party) and Michel Aoun's (Christian) party have also remained a pro-Syrian bloc in Lebanese politics (Berti & Schweitzer, 2013). Crucially, Syria, an in particular the areas around the Damascus airport, is a prime transit way for Iranian funds and weapons to reach Hezbollah directly without having to transit more visible, non-Hezbollah-controlled areas of Lebanon (Bahout, 2015).

Maintain political position in Lebanon; Keep fighting from Shi'a areas *Although Hezbollah began as a militant resistance group, it has taken an active role in Lebanese politics and has built significant power within the legislature (Masters, 2014). Hezbollah leaders have reconciled at least in part to working with the Lebanese state, and other political actors including secular and Christian parties (Hamid, 2014).*

X

Christians and minority groups in Lebanon feel increasingly threatened by the rise of ISIL (Abou Zaid, 2014). Given the weaknesses of the Lebanese Armed Forces, many have looked to Hezbollah for protection. This benefits Hezbollah by enhancing its nationalist political legitimacy and broadening support beyond the Shia community. Putting itself forward as protectors of Christians and minority groups is a way to overcome the backlash from its support of Assad, and a way to reshape its image as a resistance movement protecting Lebanese constituents rather than a group that is seeking its own agenda and protecting its own interests.

There are currently 21 parties represented in the 128-seat Lebanese parliament, with a suitably diverse set of political agendas and sectarian interests. One of the main reasons Lebanese vote

for Hezbollah is that the party makes them feel safe. If Hezbollah can deliver on this, its support base is likely to expand (Deutsche Well, 2014). Hezbollah could emerge from the Syrian war able to play a dominant role in Lebanese politics. Conversely, it could emerge weakened, tarnished, and without a solid base even amongst Lebanon's large Shiite community (Masters, 2014).

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

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

X

Hezbollah initially was cautious about getting involved in the Syrian War and put out conciliatory statements at the outset of the demonstrations against Assad arguing that Assad was cognizant of the need for reform and calling for Syrians to have patience while these were worked out (Berti and Schweitzer 2013). It attempted to frame its support for Assad as consistent with its "resistance" theme and message as it was standing up against the foreign (Western) interests in the region that were supportive of Israel and more moderate, Christian actors in Lebanon. Thus supporting the Syrian regime at least rhetorically became part of Hezbollah's policy of resistance to Israeli occupation and US influence in the area. Berti and Schweitzer (2013) quote Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah as saying that Syria is the core of resistance in the area and "if Syria falls then

Palestine is lost and the resistance in Palestine is lost, Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem will be lost." However, some have argued that Hezbollah's involvement in Syria raises the question of whether Hezbollah has become more interested in protecting Shiite interests regionally, than remaining a Lebanese nationalist organization (Masters, 2014).

Iran's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

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

INTEREST TYPE

| Iran | | National/Int'l/intergr security/ /prestig population ion safety | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival / prosper ity | Identity/ ideol ogy |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | | | | |
| <p>Increase influence in the region;</p> <p>Dominate/sustain Sunni-Shi'a balance power; mitigate threat from Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S.</p> | <p><i>Iran has long sought to establish itself as a key cultural, political, and economic player in the Middle East by strategically engaging Shia populations in the region (Bazoobandi, 2014; Cook, Barkey, & Natali, 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015). As the largest Shia majority country in the region, Iran has a strong interest in offsetting Saudi influence across the region and claiming a place as a regional power with global reach (Bazoobandi, 2014). In Yemen, its backing of the Houthi rebels, a Zaidi Shia group directly opposes Saudi interests and influence (R. Mohammed, 2015).</i></p> <p><i>In Iraq, Iran has sought to maintain strong political influence by investing in a Shia-dominated Iraqi government that supports Tehran's foreign policy objectives in the region (Bazoobandi, 2014; Martin, Cowan, & Mcalaster, 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015). Providing military support to Iraq and aid to Shiite militias in the fight against ISIL (Almukhtar & Yourish, 2015;</i></p> | X | X | | |

Martin et al., 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015) both strengthen Iran's influence in Iraq and address the external threat of 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).

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| <p>Defend economic assets in Syria; gain foothold in post-conflict economy</p> | <p><i>Syria remains a focus of Iranian economic activity and foreign investment, particularly in the face of remaining Western sanctions. Since civil conflict broke out in 2011, and Turkey and Qatar halted Syrian aid, the Islamic Republic has provided nearly \$5 billion in loans to Syria to prop up its economy and rebuild infrastructure (al-Saadi, 2015). Despite the fighting Iran's trade with Syria is growing and expected to reach \$1 billion in 2015 (Press TV, 2015). Iran's economic investments and previous banking and energy agreements may be undermined by an opposition or transitional government replacing the Assad regime (Rafizadeh, 2013). If Assad survives, Iran - the largest producer of cement and iron in the Middle East - will be in a good position to benefit from post-conflict reconstruction projects - a point reiterated by the top Iranian economic official in Damascus according to an 18 May 2015 news report (Press TV, 2015).</i></p> | <p>X</p> | <p>X</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|

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

Iraq's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Iraq (Abadi Govt) | DESCRIPTION | National/intergroup security/prestige/population safety | Domestic politics/regime security/constituent support | Economic survival/prosperity | Identity/ideology |
| <p>Maintain unified Iraq; Kurdish independence, manage sectarian conflict</p> <p>avoid</p> | <p><i>For the Abadi government, maintaining a unified Iraq is a central goal. Gaining the trust of Iraq's Sunni population and stemming momentum for independence among the Kurds requires the Government to seek an elusive balance among the internal interests: forestalling Kurdish separatism, retaining Shi'a leadership of the power positions in the central government -- thereby retaining support among its core Shi'a support base, and at the same time increasing the legitimacy of the central government with Sunnis, e.g., by expanding the inclusiveness of the government and security forces in a way that that diffuses sectarian and ethnic strife.</i></p> <p><i>The policies of Maliki's government that marginalized and in some cases targeted Sunni Iraqis are widely held to have driven much of the sectarian conflict within Iraq in recent years (Connable, 2014; Dodge, 2014; J. T. Mathews et al., 2014), and contributed to the speed with which ISIL was able to advance in Sunni areas (Connable, 2014; Muir, 2015). Sunni Iraqis have long felt disenfranchised from their government, but their opposition to Maliki's government was driven more by fear and distrust of Shia ties to</i></p> | | | | X |

Iran, than a desire to form an independent state. Nevertheless, political reconciliation with the Sunni tribes and former Ba'athists must alleviate Sunni concerns over Iranian influence – complicated by the specter of Gol's dependence on Shia militia (some of the groups responsible for wide-scale violence under the Maliki government). The Gol must stand up to these militias, which have retaken and now control significant towns and territory in Sunni areas. Failure increases the possibility that ISIL is replaced by open Sunni-Shia conflict that could fracture the state. On the other hand, while the government has made some efforts to include Sunni voices and presence in the security forces, it is hindered by fears that armed Sunni militia will turn those arms against the government (Wehrey & Alrababa'h, 2014).

The inability of the Iraqi army to prevent ISIL's take-over of Sunni-majority territories long claimed by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) also presented the KRG with the opportunity to move in and gain de facto control, bypassing the Gol (Stansfield, 2014b). If not negotiated carefully this divide could also fuel sectarian animosities and separatism, especially in the post-ISIL push to repatriate Iraqi IDPs and refugees.

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| Defeat extremists, regime opponents | Sunni Prime Minister Abadi has identified "Takfiri terrorism" as one of the most dangerous threats to Iraq. Given its loss of territory to the group, it is not surprising that, according to the Foreign Minister the government of Iraq considers ISIL "a mortal threat to its existence as a nation and a political system" (Zebari, 2014), and an international threat, not one restricted to Iraq and Syria. The Iraqi government considers confronting ISIL in both Iraq and Syria to be | X | X |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|

necessary for defeating the group. It is also a necessary pre-condition to national reconciliation that serves the cause of unity.

Retain access to economic assets *Iraqis across the country are saddled with three types of insecurity -- physical, financial and food - that impact the government's ability to govern, provide social services and demonstrate its value and legitimacy as a national authority.*

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X

Worsening economic conditions and threats to oil revenue further challenge the government's legitimacy. Over the past decade Iraq has failed to diversify its economy and reduce its economic dependence on oil, leaving it vulnerable. At the end of 2013 and against the wishes of the Gol, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) began independent oil exports to Turkey through their own pipeline (Stansfield 2014b, p. 1333; see also: Stansfield, 2014a; Zangeneh, 2013). Some 84% of Gol revenue comes from oil (Al-Janabi & Al-Khatteeb, 2014). The loss of these funds – whether by KRG independent action or global reduction in oil prices – has significant political ramifications for the Gol which uses oil revenue to finance government jobs that keep down unemployment and increase support for the Gol.

At the same time as salary security is tenuous, years of warfare has decreased food security for many Iraqis: reductions in food production and imports have decreased supply and pushed up food prices throughout the country (Schwartzstein, 2015). Finally, the conflict with ISIL has raised the military and humanitarian expenses of the Iraqi government leaving even

less room to offset rising consumer prices (Schwartzstein, 2015). If workers are laid off or not paid, cannot afford or find food and receive little help from the government the ability of Iraq's to meet their basic needs will be further undermined, inevitably leading to dissatisfaction with the government.

Retain international support in fight, and rebuilding Iraqi forces *As the events of June 2014 demonstrated the Iraqi army is not currently capable of defeating ISIL without assistance. Even before ISIL's successes the Gol recognized its army lacked the expertise and resources to effectively fight the insurgent and terrorist groups that were benefitting from the chaos in Syria. Italians, French, Germans and other coalition members as well as Iran are providing resources and assistance. At present, the US has taken on much of the logistics planning, reform and implementation upon which a mechanized security force is dependent.*

In 2016 alone the US Congress appropriated \$1.4 billion for to support Coalition forces and another \$700 million for the Iraq Train and Equip Fund used to support a number of international actors involved in training and equipping the Iraqi security forces. The requests for 2017 are nearly identical.⁴

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

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

fight against ISIL and for the post-ISIL reconstruction of Iraqi governance.

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

**Preserve Abadi government;
build legitimacy with Sunni and Shi'a communities** *Popular experience with his predecessor, sectarian conflict, food and financial insecurity and the failures of the Iraqi Security Forces to halt ISIL's advance have already undermined the popular legitimacy and political position of the Abadi government. Moving forward, the situation will likely become more tenuous for Abadi before it gets better as Abadi tries to walk a tightrope between two forces. First, he must appease his own core political support that includes hardline Shi'a (led by Maliki) who oppose any government decentralization or other moves that would*

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

empower Sunnis and Kurds in meaningful ways and/or incorporate them into the government of Iraq (Arango, 2015). Second, he will be pressured by much of the international community and Sunni leadership to make those meaningful concessions for political power sharing (or accommodation) that many Shi'a fear but that are an essential step in gaining trust and legitimacy with the Sunni and Kurdish communities.

ISIL's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

INTEREST TYPE

| ISIL | | National/Int'l/intergroup/prestige/population/safety | Domestic politics/regime security/constituent support | Economic survival/prosperity | Identity/ideology |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | | | | |
| Consolidate control and expansion of Caliphate | <i>For ISIL, the ability to control territory and create an actual Caliphate in the land where the end-times battle is to occur has served as an essential element of their legitimacy and cache (Wood, 2015). In fact, it is prophesized as <u>necessary</u> to bring about the end times and therefore must be maintained in some semblance for that ideological reason. ISIL leadership will undoubtedly frame a loss as a temporary setback foretold by the Quran, but it will definitely erode ISIL's its vitality. The fallout could weaken its central control, possibly causing fragmentation within ISIL into smaller jihadist organizations.</i> | | X | | X |

Successful control of territory and populations also supports the financial sides of ISIL operations through extortion and tax collection. According to an analysis of ISIL statements in Dabiq, a Caliphate must provide the essential services of a state in their view, including: continued military success, just leadership that includes taking counsel of advisors and rewarding performance, and the provision of civil services to include basic food and water for all, medical care (although not necessarily to Western standards) to all, and even justice in commerce and against transgression (e.g. Sharia courts) (Kuznar 2015).

Cleanse the faith; defeat opponents (Sunni and Shi'a) *ISIL seeks to foment a showdown between Sunni and Shia and rid Islam of apostates and hypocrites, which includes all Shia, Sunni who do not adhere to ISIL's version of Islam, as well as the "tyrants" who unjustly rule Sunni lands (e.g., Saudi, Jordan). There is also an unstated strategic advantage to this tactic of targeting Muslims – it forces Sunni to ally with ISIL or be labeled as unclean and infidel.*

X

X

Violence is not simply a means to an end for ISIL. Rather according to the Hadith they cite, all of ISIL's goals not only cannot be achieved without violence, they must be achieved with violence. Not only should their actions be violent, but they should be as violent as possible and as supportable through Islamic verse.

Maintain ability to operate, e.g., by attracting acolytes and foreign fighters, holding territory *Maintaining the ability to operate includes preserving tactical and logistical requirements. While not necessary an ideological necessity, demonstrating battlefield success nevertheless*

X

X

aids in attracting foreign and local fighters as well as external funding sources.

Islamist and Jihadist Rebels' Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Hassan Hassan

Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Islamist and jihadist rebels | DESCRIPTION | National security/ population safety | Int'l/intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival/ prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| Political support | <i>With the exception of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the rebels recognize the Gulf state's importance as a buffer between the regime and its backers, and Western countries that may consider abandoning the opposition. Through diplomatic and commercial links, the Gulf states emerged as key guarantors of opposition security on an internal level. Ahrar Al Sham's dependence on Qatar has made it amiable to political compromises when necessary, although such compromises are mostly posturing rather than an expression of real ideological realignment. The Muslim Brotherhood is also extremely interested in maintaining close ties to the Gulf states, especially Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.</i> | | X | X | x | x |
| <i>Jabhat Fateh al-Sham is deeply suspicious of all the Gulf</i> | | | | | | |

states, but it has also sought to avoid stoking their fears about its future plans. It has maintained links by proxy, mainly through Ahrar al-Sham, with Qatar, and is cautious about the close ties between Ahrar al-Sham and Doha. In principle, however, JFS is open to the idea of political engagement similar to the Taliban’s political engagement through its offices in Qatar and Beijing. It, for example, agreed in principle to participate in a political bureau during discussions for unity with jihadist and Islamist groups, primarily Ahrar al-Sham, but it insisted that the office would be “in compliance with sharia precepts”. This is according to a serving high-ranking official of JFS.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Financial support | — The majority of rebel forces, including Islamist and jihadists, view funds coming from the Gulf, mostly from private donors or indirectly to battles against the regime through nationalist forces, to be essential. For Islamists, support from Qatar and Kuwait maintains their ability to dominate and have the upper hand on the ground, even if they dislike occasional pressure from donors. | x | x | X | x |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|

JFS sees reliance on government or semi-government funds to be a time bomb, as this increases the prospect of infiltration and espionage. Its strategy, increasingly explicitly expressed over the past few months, is to make their allies on the ground suspicious of foreign funding. JFS members often blame Ahrar al-Sham’s reluctance to merge with it on foreign support.

The push in the Gulf for Ahrar al-Sham to push Jabhat al-Nusra, before it became JFS, to delink itself from Al Qaeda was partly to allow regional countries to provide support to JFS or to shield their proxies from being associated with Al Qaeda

Israel's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Brig. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Brom

Fellow, Center for American Progress

INTEREST TYPE

| Israel | | National/Int'l/intergr security/ /prestige population safety | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival / prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | | | | |
| Prevent Iran from acquiring military nuclear capability | <i>The JCPOA concluded in 2015 between Iran and the great powers prevents Iran from acquiring military nuclear capabilities for 10-15 years. Israel's interest is to expand this period as much as possible and prevent Iranian violation, as well as being alert of the possibility of other Middle East states following Iran's nuclear path and preempt it. A nuclear Iran will pose an existential threat to Israel and will achieve its ambition to become a hegemonic regional power that will be capable to harness other regional states to its war against Israel.</i> | X | X | X | |
| Prevent Iran from using proxies against Israel | <i>The Islamic regime of Iran calls for the destruction of the state of Israel as an essential part of its identity and ideology. It adopted the use of Arab non-state proxies such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad as a useful tool.</i> | X | X | | |
| Prevent and defend against Hezbollah attacks | <i>Hezbollah is a non-state actor that acquired military capabilities that equal a small powerful state. It has the capability to cover the whole territory of Israel with rockets and missiles, and operates precision guided missiles and UAVs. Since its inception it perceives itself enemy of Israel and is a proxy of Iran and part of the axis of</i> | X | X | X | |

resistance that fights Israel and the Western influence in the Middle East.

Prevent and defend against Hamas attacks *Hamas is an Islamic Palestinian terror organization that controls the Gaza Strip and holds the ideology that Israel should be destroyed. It is part of the axis of resistance and serves sometimes as a proxy of Iran. It acquired the capability to cover large parts of Israel with rockets fire and develops the capability to execute terror and guerilla operations in Israeli territory.* X X X

Break Iran's led axis *Without the axis of resistance that Iran is leading it will be much more limited in its ability to harm Israeli interest. The weaker points in this axis are Syria and Hamas.*

Prevent Palestinian terror attacks in the West Bank and Israel *Palestinian terror groups and individuals (lone wolves) operating from the West Bank and host countries try to execute terror operations against Israel. Some of them do that because they want to end Israeli occupation of the West Bank, others because they have adopted the ideological goal of destroying Israel.* X X X

Prevent Jihadist Salafist attacks against Israel *All the Jihadist-Salafist armed groups share the goal of destruction of Israel though it is not always their priority. It is Israel's interest to prevent their attacks and prevent them from approaching Israel's borders.* X X X

Expand peaceful relationships with Arab states *Israel and the Sunni Arab state have shared interests because of common enemies, Iran, the axis of resistance and the Salafist-Jihadist groups. Its Israel's interest to form coalitions and alliances with these states, and eventually conclude peace with the Arab world.* X X

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Keep strategic alliance with the US | <i>The strategic alliance with the US is one of the main pillars of Israel's security. It provides Israel's for the means to defend itself, as well as security guarantees and it is giving it a diplomatic shield in the international arena.</i> | X | X | X | X | X |
| Keep relations and cooperation with the European powers | <i>Europe is a major trade partner for Israel and a source for scientific and technological cooperation. Israel also perceives itself part of the West and the Judeo- Christian civilization.</i> | | X | X | X | X |
| Prevent from taking step harmful to Israel in the Middle East | <i>Post-Soviet Russia is not ideologically hostile to Israel but its ambitions in the Middle East and its competition with the US cause it to take steps that harm Israeli interests.</i> | X | | | | |
| Expanding relationships with the rising Asian powers: China and India | <i>China and India are playing a significant growing role one the world stage, and are becoming significant economic partners. India particularly is a major market for the Israeli defense industries</i> | X | | | X | |

Jabhat Fateh al Sham’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Jeff Weyers iBrabo

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Jabhat Fateh al Sham | DESCRIPTION | National security / population safety | Int’l/intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival / prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| Maintenance of Territorial gains in Central Syria | <i>Since the emergence of Jabhat al Nusra now rebranded as Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS) one of the core principles was an integrated approach to expansion (based on direction from Al-Qaeda). In this regard JFS has attempted to gain the support of communities while slowly (after several missteps) implementing their version of Salafi Islam. To this extent JFS has become key to some of the major gains that have been accomplished by opposition groups in Idlib, northern Latakia, Aleppo and Hama. It should be noted that the success of this integration, including the coalition known as Jaysh al Fateh, may have been one of the key reasons for Russian intervention in the region. In the fall of 2015 it was widely observed that Syrian Army losses were mounting quickly. That JFS has continued to maintain ground despite Russian airstrikes only deepens their perceived value as an opposition amplifier in the region.</i> | X | x | X | | |
| Strengthening the Expansion of Salafi Jihadist movement in Syria | <i>The efforts of the “moderate” opposition in tempering Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS) have acted as checks and balances to JFS’ application of strict sharia law. There are several instances of opposition groups and communities clashing with JFS as a push back against their attempts for dominance. This has forced JFS to continually test the waters before</i> | | X | X | | x |

proceeding or backing down where they appeared to be losing support. This is in fact part of a larger strategy started by AQ to embed itself in communities. It has also however resulted in JFS taking in more extremist elements as they came into conflict with moderate groups. Perhaps the most concerning example being the acceptance of Jund al-Aqsa (an ISIS sympathetic group) into JFS in early October 2016. Based on these most recent actions JFS is likely to continue to be at odds with larger groups like Ahrar al Sham and Jaysh al-Islam, both of whom are both attempting to present as the “moderate” islamist alternative.

Rebranding

In August 2016 Jabhat al Nusra cut its “official ties” with Al-Qaeda most likely with the goal of avoiding increasing pressure and targeting by Russia and the US. According to the group it intended to remove “external direction” from AQ and continue its focus on opposing the Syrian government. It is also thought that by breaking away it will put JFS in a position to absorb other groups that previously didn’t want to come under the AQ umbrella. While it has changed in name JFS is likely to have retained many of its long-term goals including the creation of an Islamic Emirate within Syria.

X

X

Jordan's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | National/Int'l/ intergr security/ / prestig populat e ion safety | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Econo mic survival / prosper ity | Ident ity/ ideol ogy |
| Jordan | | | | | |
| Domestic regime stability; decrease popular dissatisfaction | <p><i>For the past couple of years there has been concern for the survival of the monarchy as the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist movement gain support in the country. While the regime has taken steps to contain the Brotherhood, Jordanians appear still to have little confidence in the King particularly due to the dire economic situation, perceived corruption and consequent sluggishness or failure of political reforms. Events that the regime seeks to avoid as they could threaten domestic stability include: mass demonstrations that the monarchy will need to use force to contain, success of ISIL and other extremists in neighboring countries who would encourage local support and/or exploit discontent in Jordan to gain a larger presence there and undermine the King.</i></p> <p><i>Palestinians – long at odds with the Hashemite Kingdom -- are a main support base for jihadi groups centered around Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa. Dissatisfaction among this group remains the most significant potential threat to the regime (Satloff & Schenker, 2013). However,</i></p> | | X | | |

dissatisfaction has also increased among the regime's traditional East Bank tribal core supporters. Importantly, this is the group the makes up the majority of the Jordanian armed and security forces – precisely the group that would be called on to put down mass demonstrations and calls for ousting the Monarchy.

Conflict in the region has exacerbated Jordan's challenges with internal stability. Estimates are that the half million plus registered Syrian refugees in Jordan (a country of 7.5 million) is a small percentage of the total who live in cities and towns around the country; the vast majority live in border areas. As a result, the massive influx of refugees has had a detrimental effect on public service provision straining the education and health systems, increasing unemployment rates and sorely taxing the patience and resilience of the population (Jordan Times, 2015b). Iraqis fleeing the conflict there have been deemed "guests" by the regime to avoid the responsibilities that come with a refugee designation and thus do not receive the aid that Syrians do.

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| Retain defense relations with US, West, Israel | <i>Jordan and Israel have developed a mutually beneficial security relationship since signing a peace treaty in 1994. Jordan provides a security buffer for Israel and a defense and intelligence sharing relationship has developed between the two states (Schenker, 2014). This relationship has also extended to the US with foreign military financing increasing from \$9 million in 1993 to \$300 million in 2014 (Schenker, 2014).</i> | X | X |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|

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

Economic stability and growth

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

X

X

Prior to the conflict, Jordan had been instituting structural reforms in education and health and notably adding social security and changing the tax structure in an effort to stabilize the economy and attract foreign investment

(<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview>).

Nevertheless, GDP growth has been flat since the mid-1990s and fell in 2015 (according to the World Bank, real GDP growth dropped to 2.4% in 2015 from 3.1% in 2014) primarily as a result of regional conflict. Unemployment, especially among young people, remains high (between 13-20%). Despite the 1994 peace treaty many

Jordanians continue to oppose cooperation with Israel (Laub 2015), King Abdullah has also faced criticism over his close relationship with the U.S. and stance as a pro-western Arab leader (Schenker, 2014). In October 2016 hundreds protested the huge natural gas deal with the US and Israeli partners (drilling in the Mediterranean off of Gaza) concluded in September as a “shameful” collusion with “the enemy” (PressTV, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/10/07/488062/Jordan-protest-rally-gas-deal-Israel>).

[Kurds] Iranian Kurds' Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

INTEREST TYPE

| Iranian Kurds | DESCRIPTION | National/Int'l/ intergr security/ / prestig populat e ion safety | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Econo mic survival / prosper ity | Ident ity/ ideol ogy |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Defend way of life; identity and Achieve local or full autonomy | <p>There are some 700,000 ethnic Kurds in Iran (about 9% of the population). There are two primary Kurdish groups within Iran, the democratic-socialist PDKI (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan) and the PJAK (Party of Free Life for Kurdistan an off-shoot of the PKK). Although the groups use different tactics they appear to be in alignment on their stated end goal: the establishment of Kurdistan within current Iranian borders. As stated by the PDKI they seek “to attain Kurdish national rights within a federal and democratic Iran”⁶ for Kurds and other “nationalities” in Iran (e.g., Azeri, Baloch and Arab.⁷</p> <p>The Kurds in Iran have long been a target of the government. The Shah was not sympathetic to Kurdish autonomy and, soon after the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini called for a jihad against Kurdish separatism (and ethnic minorities in general). Since the 1980s, the Islamic Republic has attempted to repress Kurdish cultural identity</p> | | | X | X |

⁶ <http://pdki.org/english>

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

(dress, language, etc.) as well as political rights and economic opportunity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

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

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

INTEREST TYPE

| Iraqi (KRG) | Kurds | National/Int'l/ | Domestic | Economic | Identity/ |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | Intergr security/ / prestig populat e ion safety | politics/ regime security/ constituent support | survival / prosper ity | ideol ogy |

Eliminate threats to and retain control of Kurdish areas *In August 2014, ISIL turned its attention to Iraq’s northern territory engaging Peshmerga forces controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and advancing on their capital, Irbil. As of September 2014, the primary interest of the Iraqi Kurds became to “clean the area of ISIL” (Faud Hussein, as cited in Gutman, 2014). ISIL’s activity in Iraq has had both direct and indirect consequences for Kurds living in the Kurdistan region. In addition to losing control of territory to ISIL, Iranian military activity has also caused damage in civilian areas of Kurdistan. (Department of Foreign Relations, 2015c). Finally, KRG territory is threatened by Turkish military activities in pursuit of Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) fighters who have operating bases in KRG territory, and who remain a source of aggravation for the KRG given their ability to provoke Turkish military activity in the KRG.* X

Defend way of life; protect Kurdish rights; retain/enhance autonomy *Culture: Defending their cultural identity, language, ethnicity and way of life is old hat for Iraqi Kurds in the modern world – from the Ottomans Turks, the British, Ba’athists and Islamic extremists. Even during the civil warfare between the PUK and PDK in the 1990s Kurdish identity remained distinct from the Arabs, Persians and Turkoman who surrounded them.*¹¹

X

Autonomy: In one regard the political demands and concerns of Kurdish Iraqis are similar to those of its Sunni population. They seek an inclusive national government that is responsive to their needs and demands, and avoids the sectarian preferences that undermined the legitimacy and performance of Maliki’s government¹² (Cooper & Gordon, 2014). This is both an issue of identity and security. In a March 2015 interview with Al Monitor, Barzani stated “Setting aside the fact that if you asked any Kurd about independence they would say they wanted it, independence has not been and is not presently on our agenda.” However, since 2014 until the present fight in

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

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

Mosul, Barzani has reiterated that it is impossible to return to the centralized political situation that existed before the capture of Mosul (Barzani, 2014).

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

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

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Stabilize Kurdistan economy; reduce government debt</p> | <p><i>KRG PM Barzani called the financial challenges facing Kurdistan its "biggest threat." In 2015 the KRG faced an internal debt of \$17 billion and has borrowed \$1 billion money from Turkey to enable it to operate (Aland Mahwy, 2015; Daily Sabah, 2015). Currently, the KRG is purportedly working economic reform programs with the World Bank and other international institutions and has taken</i></p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

steps to alleviate financial shortfalls.¹³ It has also passed laws and regulations designed to promote foreign investment, however between 2006-2015 investments from the GoI still accounted for 77.83% of total investment capital in the region, with foreign investment accounting for 13.1% and joint ventures 9.07% (Bradley, 2013; Kurdistan Board of Investment, 2015a, 2015b). Although its resources make Kurdistan an attractive investment economically, the security situation and the legal complexities arising from its relationship to Baghdad are impediments to gaining international debt financing or capital investment (Roy, 2014).

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

[Kurds] Syrian Kurd’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|----------|
| Syrian Kurds | | National | Domestic | Economic | Identity |
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | Int'l/intergr | politics/ | survival | ideol |
| | | security | regime | / | ogy |
| | | /prestig | security/ | constituent | prosper |
| | | populat e | support | ity | |
| | | ion | | | |
| | | safety | | | |

Defend integrity of Cantons against military threats from ISIL, Turks *In July 2012 Assad withdrew the majority of his security forces from Kurdish regions of northern Syria and “and yielded effective control over the other towns and countryside to the militias of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) (Caves, 2012). The PYD is allied with the PKK (Turkish Kurdish Workers’ Party) and takes much of its philosophy for governing Rojava from the model developed by Abdullah Ocalan - leader of the PKK (Knapp, 2015). Prior to that move however, Syrian Kurds had suffered decades of ethnic discrimination and political and economic rights violations by the Assad regimes.*

Threat from Violent Extremists: Even despite the Assad regime’s past violence against them, in a 2015 interview PYD Chairman Saleh Muslim asserted Rojava’s “main goal is the defeat of Da’esh ...We would not feel safe in our home so long as there is one Daesh left alive.” However, they were equally threatened by Al Qaeda, Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly Al Nusra), “They all have the same mentality.”¹⁴

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

Specifically, the Rojava Kurds see the ISIL and Salafist groups as infringing on their rights and territory, and are willing to fight it (Mansour, 2015).

Turkey: Turkey remains opposed to establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region on its Syrian borders (Todays Zaman, 2015). After declaration of Rojavan autonomy, Turkey closed the border with the Kurdish region in an effort to undermine the newly formed government. In August 2016 Turkish forces invaded northern Syria and established a buffer zone between that area and Turkey. While the move satisfies multiple Turkish interests, it particularly reduces the threat of ISIL or PKK activities in Turkey and prohibits establishment of a unified Kurdish territory in northern Syria.

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| <p>Defend way of life and Kurdish identity including by establishing int'l diplomatic relations</p> | <p><i>Prior to the Civil War the regime persecuted the Kurdish population for years with activities ranging from “disappearing” to arrest and torture of Kurdish activists and were denied Syrian citizenship.</i></p> <p><i>The Rojavan leadership sees establishing diplomatic relations as important both for political and economic development and also as a protection against Turkey and others who see Rojava as a threat. (D. Murphy, 2015).</i></p> | <p>X</p> | <p>X</p> |
| <p>Govern autonomous Rojava as collectivist, “democratic confederation”</p> | <p><i>On January 9, 2014 the Rojava Cantons declared their autonomy from Syria and announced their own constitution and government structures (D. Murphy, 2015; “The Constitution of the Rojava Cantons,” 2014; The Rojava Report, 2014).</i></p> | <p>X</p> | |

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

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

Qatar's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

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

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Qatar | | National | Domestic | Economic | Identity |
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | Int'l/ intergr security/ / prestig populat e ion safety | politics/ regime security/ constituent support | survival / prosper ity | ideol ogy |
| Expand regional influence/prestige especially relative to that of Saudi Arabia | <i>Qatar's In 1995 Qatar's Emir was overthrown by his son, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (the current Emir's father), who undertook a series of changes to increase Qatar's regional profile and influence. He established the Al Jazeera news network (Kampeas, 2014), doggedly pursued the rights to host the 2022 men's Soccer World Cup, settled border disputes with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (despite being particularly ill-suited to host a world soccer tournament in the summer/fall months), and pursued opportunities to mediate regional disputes¹⁵. Concern over Qatar's international reputation and prestige is demonstrated by the government's response to widespread criticism of its treatment of foreign workers, which led to the hiring of PR firm and the establishment of a government Communications Office. Much like Iran, the key to Qatar's foreign activities appears to be its interest in expanding its regional influence and prestige. Presenting Qatar as a valued and successful global mediator appears to have become a focus of Qatari foreign</i> | X | | | |

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

policy. Hamad abdicated to his son Tamim bin Hamad in 2013. Sheik Tamim has continued his father's international orientation.

Historically, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have had an antagonistic relationship, driven by political and territorial rivalry, and Qatar's desire to minimize Saudi influence over its actions (Haykel, 2013).¹⁶ These relations as well as those with Bahrain and the UAE had been rocky over the past couple of years primarily as result of its funding for extremist groups -- particularly the Muslim Brotherhood and allied groups across the region (e.g., Hamas), and Qatar's previous support of the Houthi rebels in Yemen¹⁷ – a group that Saudi Arabia sees as a terrorist organization operating at its borders. Saudi Arabia funded Salafist factions of the Syrian opposition in part to counter Qatari and Turkish support of opposition groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria (Haykel, 2013). Although both Saudi Arabia and Qatar seek Assad's defeat, they do not agree on which faction they wish to see rise to prominence in the aftermath.

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| Mitigate internal threats to the regime | <i>To achieve regime security Qatar has chosen a “hyperactive style” of diplomacy and foreign policy. It has acted as a mediator and financial supporter wherever it can, in order to make itself valuable to all sides, so no matter which side prevails in the region, it will have some goodwill to protect it. (Dickinson, 2014; Haykel, 2013;</i> | X X |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|

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

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

Kampeas, 2014). Qatar has used its enormous oil wealth to further its interests and maintain ties to Islamist groups in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other MENA states. It has used these same ties to mediate for the U.S. for the release of American hostages (Dickinson, 2014; Goldman & DeYoung, 2014; Londono, 2014; Riechmann, 2014).

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

Support for the Muslim Brotherhood and the presence in Qatar of Muslim brothers poses a potential risk to the Qatari regime. In Saudi Arabia, the influence the Brother's gained culminated in radicalization of young people

against the regime and support for al Qaeda in the 1990s. Qatar has managed to avoid similar radicalization of its younger population, partly due to the more secular nature of Qatari politics (Baskan & Wright, 2011). They have also encouraged the Muslim Brotherhood to focus their attention on the outside world, giving them media and internet outlets, and funding their activities in other states (Haykel, 2013; Roberts, 2014). Additionally, there may be the hope that support for the Brotherhood will ensure that they do not criticize the Qatari regime's policies, or become politically active in the country (Azem, 2012).

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

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| Manage economic reform | Qatari | <i>While GDP growth is expected to remain around 3-4% in the near term, the Government of Qatar recognizes that its dependence on a single economic sector, namely hydrocarbons, is a significant vulnerability and is looking into ways to diversify. In addition, Sheik Tamim has taken an aggressive approach to instituting economic</i> | X | X |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|

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

reforms in Qatar to avoid the decline in standards of living – and subsequent civil discontent – that analysts project for the region as world oil prices continue to remain low. In particular, Tamim’s goal is greater efficiency in government spending and development of a national “culture of planning, work and achievement”, rather than the current mindset which he characterizes as a “culture of consumption” that is no longer tenable. In 2016 the Emirate is projected to endure a \$12 billion deficit -- its first in over a decade.¹⁹ Deficits are expected for 2017 but according to the Qatar National Bank should balance out by 2018. The government is also instituting what will probably be a 5% value-added tax – Qatar’s first consumption tax in a bold move to increase government revenue.²⁰

Russia’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

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

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| Russia | | National | Domestic | Economic | Identity |
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | International security / population safety | politics/ regime security/ constituent support | survival / prosperity | ideology |

¹⁹ “Qatar must tackle ‘culture of consumption’, says emir”, Gulf News, 1 November 2016.

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

²⁰ Parvez Jabri. “Qatar budget back to ‘near balance’ by 2018.” Business Recorder, 21 November 2016

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

| | | | | |
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| Enhance international/regional influence at detriment to US | <i>Since coming to power in 2000, President Putin has been committed to restoring Russia's global status as a world power. As Russia's closest ally in the region Syria is "key to Putin's calculus" as he seeks to position Russia as a counterweight to Western influence in the Middle East (Borshchevskaya, 2013).</i> | X | X | X |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|

Putin's extension of military support to the Assad regime directly challenged the US-led Coalition to defeat ISIL and Assad by building an alternative coalition against ISIL. In July 2015, Russian and Iranian ministers held a series of meetings, arriving at a "common position" on Syria and in September, the Iraqi military announced it had reached an intelligence sharing agreement with Russia, Iran and Syria in the fight against ISIL.

Like Assad, Putin has argued that it was the West's wrong-headed backing of the Syrian rebels not Assad's actions that escalated the violence (Putin, 2013) and led to the crisis in Syria (S. Dagher, 2015; Roth, 2015). From the Russian perspective, if the moderate Syrian opposition continues to erode, the US will have no choice but to moderate its own position on removing Assad. In this case, Russia will be well positioned to use its influence with Assad to gain diplomatic concessions from the West over Ukraine sanctions.

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| Access to Mediterranean; retain port, airfield intel post | <i>The Assad regime has been Russia's closest ally in the Middle East for more than 40 years.²¹ In 2013 President Putin made expansion of Russian naval power one of the "chief priorities" of his third term. This was followed a week later by</i> | X |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|

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

announcement of the biggest Russian naval exercise in the Mediterranean which was seen by some as early indication that Russia did not intend to step away from Assad (Borshchevskaya, 2013). In September 2015 Russia began building a forward air base at Latakia, the port city where Russia maintains a small naval base. Safeguarding the Assad regime preserves Russian naval access to its only port in the Mediterranean where US and NATO forces have important bases and operations (Humud, Woehrel, Mix, & Blanchard, 2015).

Stymie spread of extremism into central states; weaken/defeat Chechen and other extremist fighters *Broader geopolitical interests aside, the Russian leadership has a strong interest in Asian counterterrorism operations and fears that the fall of the Assad regime will bring radical Islamists to power in Syria, destabilize the region and potentially affect the stability of Russia’s southern regions. In short, the Russian position is that supporting Assad is essential if ISIL and other terror groups in the region are to be defeated (Tharoor, 2015).*

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

Demonstrate Russia still has the power to act as a global player *Related to Russia’s interest in extending its global influence, is its interest in demonstrating its “rebuilt” strength and capabilities. There are a number of objectives associated with this. First, testing Russia’s new weapons and command and*

control capabilities (of the new National Defense Control Center in Moscow) affords the military a real-life training opportunity. Second, it sends a clear deterrence message to the US about Russia's resolve to recover its place in the world and shows off the military's "professional competency" that as Timothy Thomas notes, "was lacking in Georgia."

Avoid popular ire at economic downturn; sons dying abroad *While stirring up nationalist sentiment – particularly aimed at the damage aggression does to Russian interests – helps bump up Russian opinion of Putin, the balance of his support rests on the perception that the regime has recharged Russia's economy and international stature.²²*

X

X

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

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

Saudi Arabia's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|----------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | National/Int'l/ intergr security/ / prestig populat e ion safety | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Econo mic survival / prosper ity | Ident ity/ ideol ogy |

Dominant/ sustain Shi'a balance of power; mitigate threat from Iran and proxies *For decades, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran have been engaged in a strategic rivalry for power and influence in MENA. Even before the Iranian revolution in 1979 when both were US allies the two clashed over Iranian military modernization, oil policy, openness to the West and secularism. With the Revolution, the Iranian Ayatollahs upped the ante by calling for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy as un-Islamic. During the Iran-Iraq War beginning in 1980s KSA supported Iraq with funding, diplomatic pressure on Gulf states to do the same and increasing oil production to bring down Iranian earnings. Although there was a thaw in relations around the First Gulf War, with the accession of King Salman to the throne in January 2015, the KSA has taken a more visible role in attempts to influence regional affairs (e.g., intervening in what it perceived as an Iranian-led coup attempt in Bahrain; the civil conflicts in Yemen and Syria) rather than relying on the US to intervene in regional disputes as it had done in the past (Takeyh, 2015).* X

The KSA has been fairly consistent in condemning the Assad regime -- Iran's long-time ally in Syria,

arguing that if Assad had not brutalized the Sunni majority population in Syria, ISIL would not have been able to construct the jihadi narrative that has resonated with militants worldwide (Nazer, 2015). The removal of Assad is also consistent with the KSA's overarching interest in containing the regional influence of Iran.

In short, the KSA continues to see Iran as a very close and existential threat to its national security and to the regime.

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| <p>Quell non KSA Sunni extremism, secularism, Muslim Brother influence at home and abroad</p> | <p><i>Since the heyday of Nasser's secular pan-Arabist challenge to the conservative monarchies in the region, the KSA has pursued a policy of tamping down on secularist, populist or revolutionary sentiments at home, and funding conservative proxies abroad. The KSA tried to stem Arab Spring fervor at home by offering massive hand-outs to government employees including the military (the state is the largest employer) and poor Saudis.</i></p> | <p>X</p> | <p>X</p> | <p>X</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|

As in Qatar, Wahhabism is a foundation of the Saudi state (Baskan & Wright, 2011). The Muslim Brotherhood's Sunni Islamist doctrine challenges not only the Wahhabist basis of the Saudi regime, but also the principle of dynastic rule (El Gamal, 2014). Despite this, there has been a Muslim Brotherhood presence in KSA since the 1950s, after they were exiled by repressive regimes in Syria and Egypt.

The Saudi regime has not forgiven the Brotherhood for supporting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in 1990, hold it responsible for radicalizing Saudi youth, and perceive its presence in KSA as a possible threat to the regime

(Roberts, 2014). In response to the ascendancy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (after the 2011 uprising), the Saudis supported the Egyptian military coup to oust the Morsi government in 2013 (Al-Arian, 2015; Howeidy, 2015). In May 2014, they formally designated the group a terrorist organization, along with al Nusra and ISIL (El Gamal, 2014).

However, since the death of King Abdullah, the Saudi's attitude to the Brotherhood appears to be changing, and exiled Muslim Brotherhood leaders are looking toward the Kingdom as a possible mediator with the Al-Sisi government. The Egyptian Muslim brotherhood, Hamas and Yemen's Islah Party (Muslim Brotherhood's branch in Yemen), have also come out in support of Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen (Al-Arian, 2015). In March 2015 KSA began airstrikes against Houthi forces in Yemen, a move supported by the Islah Party, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas

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

KSA concern over closer relations between the new Egyptian government and Iran (Al-Arian, 2015; Howeidy, 2015) reflects its ongoing drive to contain Iran's regional influence. Similarly, the release of eight Hamas members charged with political campaigning within the Kingdom could

be interpreted as an initial overture to better relations with an influential group that is backed by Iran. There is also the concern that stifling more moderate and mainstream political Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, may be aiding more extreme groups, such as ISIL gain support (Al-Arian, 2015).

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

At this point the extent of the threat to the regime posed by ISIL is in question. However, as the birthplace of Islam and the location of the Two Holy Mosques, Saudi Arabia would be the ultimate prize for ISIL, and the group has made it clear that this is their ultimate goal. Saudi Arabia is a Sunni majority, has a strong government, and ISIL's domestic approval rating has been quite low (about 5%). Nevertheless, KSA has taken multiple actions to counter the ISIL threat to the regime. Part of the campaign involves security operations which have resulted in the arrests of thousands of ISIL sympathizers and a few thousand ISIL sympathizers entered in a rehabilitation program. Media institutions have tried to discredit ISIL messaging on religious grounds.

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

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

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

Shi'a Hardline & Militia Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

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

direct threat to the Shia population in Iraq. Furthermore, ISIL has created a significant disruption to the dynamics of the ongoing sectarian conflict between Iraqi Sunni and Shia militia groups. It is both a threat and an opportunity for Shia groups in their ongoing struggle for influence in Iraq.

Some Shia militia groups, including the Badr Militia, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), have expressed support for, or actively provided fighters for the Assad regime (K. Murphy, 2014). All groups consider the continued presence of ISIL in Syria to be a threat to Shia interests.

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| Maintain influence in Gol; Shi'a dominance of Shi'a governance home and abroad | <i>Concerns over actions by Shi'a militia fighters against Sunni populations are strengthened by the political influence of these groups within the Iraq Gol.²⁴ Until July 2016 Mohammed Ghabban, member of the Badr Organization served as Interior Minister. Shi'a paramilitary group Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq has also build considerable political influence over recent years. Still, the threat to Shia populations from ISIL is real, and to this point, the Shia militias have had greater success in protecting those populations than the Iraqi army. This power to protect could be translated into longer-term political support and legitimacy if they continue to be a successful opposition force to ISIL in central Iraq.</i> | X | X |
| | <i>Shi'a hardline former PM Nouri al Maliki who led a highly sectarian government and was forced</i> | | |

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

*out in 2014 looks to be positioning himself to regain political power and oust PM Abadi once Mosul is liberated from ISIL forces.²⁵ His still strong bloc in parliament has been removing the key Sunni and Kurdish cabinet members of the Abadi government by levying corruption charges, leaving little doubt that they are aiming to push the more conciliatory (and inclusive) Abadi aside. Reuters cites a Maliki advisor Sami al-Askari as saying that Maliki's "aim is not necessarily to become PM but to have the PM chosen supported by him... If Abadi joins Maliki for the elections, Maliki will not choose him to be PM again; if Abadi runs without Maliki, he has no chance to win enough seats."*²⁶

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <p>Retain external material support (e.g., from Iran) while diminishing US influence in Iraq/ region</p> | <p><i>There is significant evidence that the success of Iraq's Shia militias is dependent on Iranian support, both in terms of resources and expertise (Barnard, 2015; Bazoobandi, 2014; Campbell, 2014; Chulov, 2014; Nader, 2015; Spyer & Al-Tamimi, 2014). It has been reported that, since June 2014, Iran has sent more than 1000 military advisors to Iraq, as well as elite units to fight and train Iraqi militias, and has provided more than \$US 1 billion in aid (Ryan & Morris, 2014). This is a mutually beneficial relationship however, as it is in Iran's interest to use these militia to increase its regional influence (Basiri, 2014; Khedery, 2015).</i></p> | <p>X</p> |
| | <p><i>Some of the nationalist Shia militia groups currently fighting ISIL evolved from the Mahdi Army. The Mahdi Army was created under Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in 2003 during Iraq's sectarian conflict and disbanded in 2012. All of these groups were formed with the goal of ending U.S. presence and influence in Iraq. Although the U.S.-led coalition is currently coordinating with Shia militia groups, providing air cover for ground</i></p> | |

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

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

operations against ISIL forces, some groups remain committed to their opposition to any US presence in Iraq. Karim al-Nouri, Badr Militia spokesman and military commander has stated: "We don't need them [the US], either on the ground or in the air. We can defeat the Islamic State on our own. We don't have a problem [with continued US airstrikes], but they should not strike while we are on the ground. We don't want history to record that we conducted an offensive with American cover" (Sly, 2015). Badr leader Hadi al-Amiri, addressing militant fighters stated: "Our mission is to liberate Iraq with Iraqis, and not with foreigners" (Sly, 2015). Even if these militias are willing to tolerate U.S. assistance in fighting ISIL, there is little confidence that this will result in any fundamental change in their attitude toward American involvement in Iraq.

Sunni Tribal Leader’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

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

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Sunni Tribal Leaders | DESCRIPTION | National/intergroup security/ population safety | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival/ prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| INTEREST | | | | | |

Maintain way of life; livelihood; land; autonomy *Sunni Iraqis have long felt disenfranchised from their government, but their opposition to Malaki’s government was driven more by fear and distrust of Shia ties to Iran, than a desire to form an independent state. Adding to their immediate fear of ISIL, Sunni Tribal elites in both Iraq and Syria view with concern the increasing power Shi’a and Kurds have gained as a result of ISIL’s rise. It is seen as a new manifestation of previous governments’ attempts to marginalize their Sunni populations, and interpret it as another attempt to take Sunni lands, power, and resources away (Murray, 2014).²⁷*

²⁷ Many tribal leaders depend on need some kind of patronage in order to maintain power, provide leadership, and ensure a basic level of wellbeing. The tribes not aligned with ISIL seek this patronage from the Abadi government or from the USG (Malas

Because Arab Sunni Tribes' interests are hyper-localized, it is difficult to ascribe a best outcome for all the tribes. However, one consistent narrative is that the tribes want a much greater degree of autonomy from the central government. This ranges from a federated nation with weak central government to a fully autonomous region with very weak ties to the center. This self-determination or autonomy is important to assure the safety, stability, and welfare of Sunni tribe members from the Shia-led Iraqi government. Regional expert Victoria Fontan argued that "[i]f Baghdad promises autonomy to Sunni regions in exchange for their support against IS, that will be a game changer" (Middle East Eye, 2015).

Survival; personal/ family safety *ISIL has made its position with regard to other Muslims very clear: either you submit to ISIL's version of Islam, or you are an apostate. Of all Muslims, non-aligned Sunnis are those whom are considered their main enemy (Braniff & Pereira, 2014; Salama, 2015). ISIL's extremely violent tactics clearly showed tribes the consequences of opposing the group, but without a strong alternative to ISIL to protect them from violence, some tribes may have little choice but to pledge allegiance to ISIL (Malas & Adnan, 2015). So while tribal leaders have publically declared allegiance to ISIL, the duress under which many such declarations were given, makes their reliability questionable (Shaikh, 2014). One expert stated*

& Adnan, 2015). Sunni states—particularly Saudi Arabia and Jordan—have tried to exert influence over the tribes and keep them away from ISIL by providing funds, logistical support, and military training (Wehrey & Alrababa'h, 2014). This is a double-edged sword for both the tribes and the actors seeking influence. On one hand, tribal leaders are likely to play the actors against one another to reap the greatest benefits while trying to remain as independent as possible. On the other hand, no single actor clearly stands to help the tribes achieve their strategic interests over the long term—making it difficult for tribes to feel secure in any potential partnership.

that tribes will not support ISIL in absence of coercion because “they want to trade, they want to drink, they want to smoke, they want to party. And living under Sharia law is probably not the best way they see their life.” This sentiment highlights that many Sunnis do not see themselves—their culture, values, and way of life—reflected by ISIL (Murray, 2014; Yahya, 2014). Any effort by tribes to put up strong resistance to ISIL and participate with the government of Iraq and the Shia militia has resulted in that tribe targeting by ISIL (Salama, 2015), further incentive not to resist.

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

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

Hassan Hassan

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | National security/ population safety | Int'l/intergroup prestige | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival/ prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| Stopping the Gulf states from pursuit of regime change | <p><i>The key Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, remain committed to supporting the Syrian opposition, even though a regime collapse is not their current goal, with the possible exception of Qatar. The regime believes that if the Gulf states stop supporting the rebels, it will be easier to crush the rebellion.</i></p> <p><i>— These states' priorities have changed over the past five years. Saudi Arabia, for example, is currently fearful of a rebel win, given that Islamist and jihadist groups dominate. The UAE has taken the backseat in support for the opposition, mostly focused on the Southern Front closely cooperating with Jordan and other countries. For the regime, these changes vindicate its policy in fighting the rebellion against its rule, and the Gulf role, along with Turkey's, will continue to be the focus of Damascus.</i></p> | X | | X | | |
| Resisting the acceptance of Gulf-friendly Islamists | <p><i>The regime views its struggle with Islamist movements as a zero-sum game. Any compromise given to Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, will undermine the regime's edifice in its entirety. Despite suggestion the regime can accept opposition integration in a future power-share deal, it views Islamism in existential terms, something that the regime's popular base also</i></p> | x | | X | | x |

agree on, broadly. This is due to historical hostilities with the Muslim Brotherhood but also because the regime and its supporters see any compromise as a slippery slope that will ultimately lead to the revival of the challenge it is facing now. The regime's top echelon, including Bashar al-Assad, sees the Gulf states as a source of this push to strengthen Islamism in Syria.

— Even in the event of warming relations, the regime sees interest in maintaining an ideological distance with the Gulf states, whether in terms of their worldview vis-a-vis American role in the region or in terms of Islamic movements.

Turkey's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | National / international security/ / prestige population ion safety | Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support | Economic survival / prosperity | Identity/ ideology |
| Turkey | | | | | |
| Maintain Erdogan, control/influence government | <p><i>Political opposition to President Erdogan strengthened in light of several factors related to the war in Syria. However Erdogan's popularity has risen significantly since the summer 2016 coup attempt. Erdogan is closer to the numbers needed to win a referendum on his long-held ambition: replacing Turkey's parliamentary system with a presidential system that would as a consequence legally and substantially expand his powers.</i></p> <p><i>Changing demographics due to refugee influx into 5 provinces bordering Syria are shifting the balance of power between ethnic groups and increasing the potential for tension and conflict. It also has economic impact on use of services and dropping of wage rates as refugees who are willing to work at lower wages take especially unskilled labor from locals. In the past, voters have not supported the presidential system. Erdogan by changing that in part by linking the referendum to Turkish nationalism and threat perception. "Erdoğan has managed to introduce the idea that he is the only guy who can keep the country together, that Erdoğan's survival is</i></p> | | | X | |

essentially the survival of the state of Turkey.”²⁸

He also has made a number of sensational speeches since the coup appealing to nationalist, neo-Ottoman sentiment and reinforcing his tough stance against the PKK.

Stem **Kurdish** *Kurdish battlefield successes against ISIL in Syria* X
separatism; deny *and Iraq are viewed with trepidation by Turkey.*
PKK safe havens *In particular it remains concerned about arming of Kurdish forces in Iraq (Peshmerga) for fear that those weapons would fall into the hands of its arch enemy, the PKK – a designated terrorist organization -- which has also joined the fight against ISIL.*

Success by Iraqi Kurds, who have been able to significantly expand their territory (Bender, 2014), however is not necessarily viewed as a loss given Turkey’s close economic ties with the Kurdish Regional Government of Northern Iraq. Since the 1990s, and particularly since 2003, Iraqi Kurds have been relentless in trying to convince the Turkish government that they have no real connection to the Turkish Kurds or the PKK. The KRG quite explicitly conveys that it is not and will not play the nationalist, ethnic card to rile up Turkey’s Kurdish population. A 2014 deal between the Kurdistan Regional government and Turkish state energy companies over stakes in the region’s oil and gas fields deepened the

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

relationship between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds (Dombey, 2013).

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

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

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

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

to be seen as the “big brother of the emerging Arab democracies” (Hinnebusch, 2015, p. 16).

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| Enhance Turkey's energy security and trade | <i>Turkey has worked to position itself as energy hub between Europe and Central Asia/ME suppliers (Dombey 2014).</i> | X | X |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|

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

Additional SME Input

Strategic Objectives: Saudi Arabia and Qatar

Dr. Tom Lynch
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Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the two richest Gulf Arab States, have divergent regional objectives but a common cause in Syria to see off the Bashar Assad regime and to destroy ISIL. Qatar and Saudi Arabia have divergent foreign policy agendas with Iran. Since at least 1979, Riyadh has viewed itself to be in a fundamental struggle with Tehran over leadership of the global Muslim faithful and about which will hold the dominant geopolitical position in the Middle East. The Saudis maintained their right to Muslim world ascendance as custodians of Islam's two holy mosques, and rebuffed demands by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini and fellow Shia clerics that Iran be afforded a prominent leadership role with the faithful. Saudi enmity toward the Ayatollah-led Iran collapsed almost all forms of social, economic and political

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

interaction between the two countries. Although similarly alarmed by the religious assertiveness and regional military threat posed by Iran after the 1979 revolution, Qatar has taken a less confrontational approach toward Tehran. A seafaring state, less than 60 miles from Iran at its closest point, and with a long history of maritime trade and barter along the Iranian coast, Qatar supported Saudi leadership of the global Muslim faithful but maintained significant economic and diplomatic ties with Iran after the fall of the Shah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Strategic Objectives: Russia

Eugene Rumer

Carnegie Endowment

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

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

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

Strategic Objectives: Russia

Timothy Thomas
Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth

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

Why did Russia take these preparatory steps and then intervene in this particular conflict at a time when Kremlin leaders were heavily focused on Eastern Ukraine and potential problems in the Baltic? The rationale appeared simple: first, and foremost, to support the Bashar Al-Assad regime, which had lost control of, according to some Russian accounts, up to 70 percent of Syrian territory to the Islamic State (IS) in September 2015.³³ Second, Russia noted with alarm that its southern belly was again exposed to the return of extremists who had fought on the side of IS against the Syrian government and were now bringing back to Russia both their ideology and lessons learned from fighting there. After quieting the near decade long struggle inside Russia in Chechnya, which is very near the region of conflict, Russia's leaders did not want a new threat recreated there or spread to other parts of the country. Both points appeared to have spearheaded the Kremlin's decision-making and influenced its resolve to intervene.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The focus on testing new equipment was prioritized not only under Syria's battlefield conditions but also in exercises. Of interest was that nonstandard (atypical) decisions were emphasized, as there were no scripted solutions. Gerasimov added that as military art develops, defensive operations must be active, since the boundary between defense and the offense is becoming increasingly blurred. Commanders must be able to foresee how to incorporate preventive offensive operations in certain sectors.³⁴ Finally, with regard to missiles and mobility, it was noted that S-400, Kalibr, and Bastion systems were fired, and the Strelets reconnaissance and target attack system was exercised along with air, rail, river, and sea operations.³⁵

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

³⁴ See for example, Aleksandr Tikhomnov, "In the Southwest Sector," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 16 September 2016; and Oleg Falichev, "The Long Arm of the Bastion: Why the Strategic Command Staff Exercise Kavkaz-2016 Elicited Heightened Activity of Foreign Intelligence Services," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online*, 21-27 September 2016.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Comments on Strategic Objectives of Regional Actors

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

NSI

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

addition to the efforts to defeat ISIL

in Syria and Iraq – each of which has a

different roster of participants and

different possible outcomes -- there is

1) the Civil War in Syria between the

Assad regime backed by Russia,

Iran and Hezbollah, against a

fragmented opposition including

the Free Syrian Army groups backed by

the US as well as Islamist groups;

2) Turkey versus the Kurdistan Workers

Party (PKK) – a State Department designated foreign terrorist group which has long pursued Kurdish self-rule by armed rebellion;

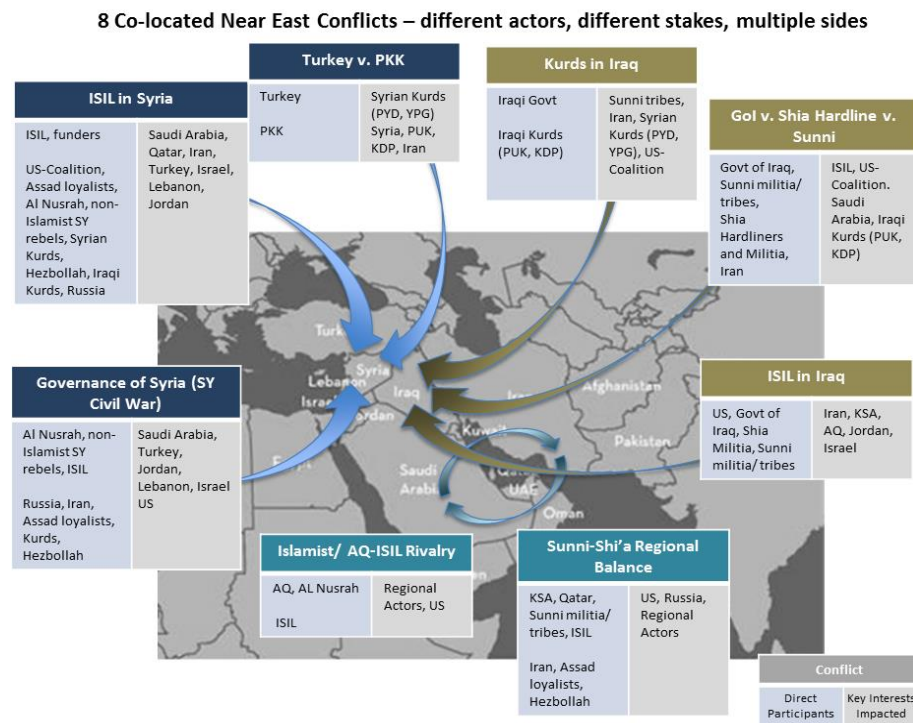
3) Iraqi Kurds versus the central government over self-rule and who controls the valuable oil fields in Kirkuk;

4) Sectarian fighting in Iraq between the Sunni minority and the Shi'a hardline and militias. Iraq's Shi'a Prime Minister al- Abadi is caught between his Shi'a support

base and pressure from the intentional community to form a more inclusive government;

5) Competition for regional power between Shi'a Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia that has been played out via proxies in Iraq, Syria and Yemen; and

6) the violent rivalry between Al Qaeda and ISIL over ideological leadership of Islamic violent extremism.



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

The defeat of ISIL will not end the fighting in Syria

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

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

The defeat of ISIL will not end fighting in Iraq

We can also expect violent conflict to continue in Iraq. Defeat of ISIL in Iraq would not necessarily address the Sunni Arab sense of embattlement and lost dignity that ISIL initially exploited so well in Iraq and the West for that matter. If Iraqi Sunnis feel that the defeat of ISIL was once again a Western attack on the Sunni in favor of the Shi'a, the actions taken by the Government of Iraq, Shi'a militia and international community to defeat ISIL could actually spur domestic conflict and undermine international efforts to build governing institutions and capacity in Iraq. Also, Shi'a militia (and Iran) would likely have played a significant role in the defeat of ISIL in Iraq and should be expected to resist leaving the territories in which they have been operating causing continued sectarian tensions and impeding reconstruction of Iraq's devastated infrastructure. Constructing a viable polity – whether a unified state or autonomous areas – requires both time and some degree of cooperation among groups even if this is just tacit recognition of their differences. With the elimination of ISIL as a common enemy the serious political issues and long-standing rivalries surrounding the make-up of Iraq will be brought to the fore.

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

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

The defeat of ISIL strengthens the Al Qaeda brand

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

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

Comments on Strategic Objectives of Regional Actors

Dr. Benedetta Berti

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

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

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

Comments on Strategic Objectives of Regional Actors

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

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

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

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

Comments on Strategic Objectives of Regional Actors

Alex Vanatka
Middle East Institute

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

Author Biographies



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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

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Dr. Tom Lynch



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

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

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



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

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

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

Dr. Hilal Khashan

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

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

Dr. Benedetta Berti

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

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

Benedetta is a frequent news commentator on international security, foreign policy, Middle Eastern politics and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Her comments and interviews have been featured in a number of prominent news outlets, including the New York Times, Time Magazine, the Wall Street Journal, the Christian Science Monitor, Bloomberg, Reuters and Al-Jazeera. She is also a frequent guest lecturer and

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

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

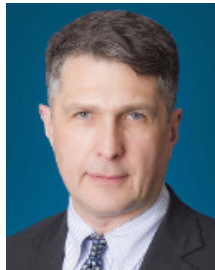
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Jeff Weyers

Jeff Weyers is a decorated police veteran from Ontario, Canada with an academic background in investigative psychology and intelligence studies. He currently lectures in the areas of Terrorism and Open Source Intelligence with Wilfrid Laurier University. He is a regular contributing author to the Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC). Jeff is also a Senior Intelligence Research Analyst with iBRABO, an intelligence research group based in Canada and the UK. With iBRABO Jeff was one of the lead analysts involved in producing daily SOCMINT/OSINT reports on Syria in support of the Access to Justice and Community Security (AJACS) program in 2015. As a result Jeff has developed an intimate understanding of many of the groups and conflict dynamics still ongoing in the region. He is currently in the final year of his PhD studies with the Tactical Decision Making Research Unit at the University of Liverpool where he is examining extremist social media, monitoring and prevention. He is a recognized expert in terrorist's use of social media and open source intelligence gathering and has assisted governments and intelligence agencies around the world in this regard.



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

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Hassan Hassan is a resident fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy focusing on Syria and Iraq. He is the author, with Michael Weiss, of *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, a New York Times bestseller, and was previously an associate fellow at Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Program in London and a research associate at the Delma Institute in Abu Dhabi. He is a columnist for the National in Abu

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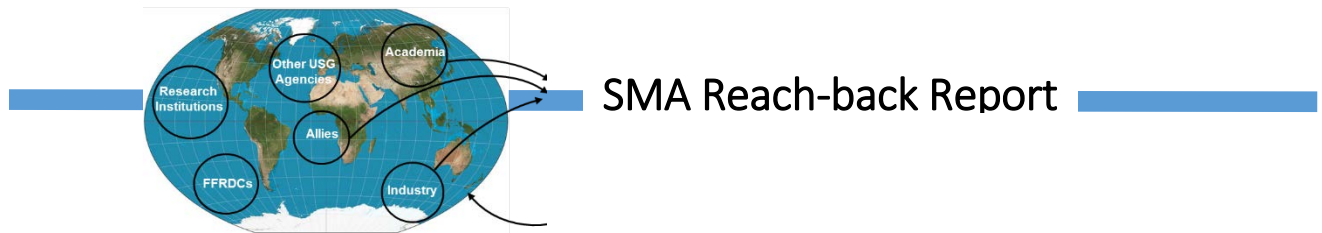
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SMA Reach-back Report

In light of their divergent goals and interests, what are the necessary factors that would permit the U.S.-led Coalition, regional stakeholders (including Israel, Russia, and Iran), or jihadist groups to achieve their aims in Iraq? Where do disparate groups' interests align and where do they diverge? What can the U.S. coalition do to deny adversaries the ability to achieve their goals?

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Executive Summary

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Considering their divergent goals and interests, experts assessed the necessary factors that would permit the U.S.-led Coalition, Israel, Russia, France, Bahrain, Iraq, Turkey, the Kurds, the Assad regime, Iran, and jihadist groups to achieve their aims. They assessed where several disparate groups' interests align and where they diverge. When looking at the broad range of actors, a few patterns emerged. The first is in terms of where national security goals and interests were in alignment. Unsurprisingly, perennial allies such as the U.S., Israel and France had several specific points of convergence, as did Russia and Syria. The second is in areas of divergence. As expected, nefarious actors such as the jihadist groups were completely divergent from the interests of the other actors. When assessed at the macro-level three major generalities surfaced.

Aims – Alignment

Promoting Strong and Stable States. The first overarching theme was the goal of promoting strong and stable nation states. While not all the actors agreed on which nation states should be promoted, nearly each actor in the assessment had at least one state that was a priority. Both Bahrain (Gengler) and Russia

seek their own regime's survival (Thomas). Both the U.S. and France see the value of strong Iraqi state (Maye, Tenebaum). France also seeks to limit instability across the Middle East, avoid destabilization in Lebanon, and promote non-hostile state in Syria (Tenebaum).

Relationship Building and Cooperation. A second major generality that emerged was in relationship-building and cooperation. Each of the actors that the experts assessed is prioritizing their relationships or ability to cooperate with strategic partners. For instance, the Israelis are seeking to expand relations with European powers and Arab states, maintain their strategic alliance with the U.S., and develop relationships with rising Asian powers like India and China (Brom). For military reasons, Bahrain needs to maintain its ties to the British and the Americans (Gengler). France seeks to strengthen strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies (Tenebaum). Strategic cooperation with China and the BRICS is a key tenet of Russian foreign policy (Thomas), yet the Russians are also open to areas of cooperation with the U.S. and NATO on Syria (Thomas). Even the Islamist groups, who are non-state actors, must maintain relationships with wealthy Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Hassan).

Aims – Divergence

Pressure Other States. The third major pattern emerged is where national security goals and interests diverged. Each of the actors in this study seeks to limit the expansion, interference, or hegemonic aspirations of another state. From the Russian perspective, NATO seeks to contain Russia (Thomas). Israel and Bahrain seek to break/slow Iran from regional hegemony or acquiring nuclear weapons (Brom, Gengler). Russia seeks to put pressure on European Union (Thomas). Assad wants to stop the Gulf States from pursuing regime change in Syria (Hassan). Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran would prefer to see less U.S. support for the Kurds (Carreau).

U.S./ Coalition Partners - Recommended Actions

Due to the complex nature of each actor's goals and interests, it will be very difficult for the U.S. and Coalition partners to create win-sets that will appease each group, yet nearly each actor (aside from the non-state actors and jihadist groups) would agree to the following generalized courses of action:

1. Develop a front to contain international jihadism (Tenebaum, Carreau)
2. Promote strong, yet sovereign, nation-states (Maye)
3. Uphold formally agreed upon spheres of influence (Carreau)

Points of Divergence / Negotiation

The central points of negotiation for the U.S. and Coalition partners is likely fall into the following three areas:

1. **Sovereignty** – While promoting strong and sovereign nation states is a goal, the issues of a two-state solution for Israel/Palestine; the independence of Kurdistan; and dispersed security/governance for Sunni Arabs in Syria and Iraq are going to be key points of negotiation.
2. **Regime leadership in Syria** – Each of the major players in this study would prefer to see stability in the Middle East, especially in Syria. The issue that U.S. policy-makers will face is compromising with Russia and Iran on who exactly will be the face of the regime in Syria; the Russians and the Iranians see value in the Assad regime, but a point of compromise may be in removing Assad yet keeping the regime Alawite (Carreau).
3. **Spheres of Influence** – It will be in the best interest of the major players to craft a reasonable “spheres of influence” strategy for the region (namely between Turkey, Russia, Iran, the GCC and

the Western powers) while still upholding major tenets of the JCPOA, ensuring Israel's security, and not alienating the Sunni populations of Iraq and Syria (Carreau).

The table below shows a generalized composite summary of the interests/goals of the U.S., France, Israel, Russia, Iran, Bahrain, the Iraqi government, Iraq's Sunni factions, the Kurds, Turkey, the Assad regime, Syrian rebels and Jabhat Fateh al Sham, taken from the experts.

| INTEREST/GOAL | U.S. | FR | IS | RU | IRAN | BA | IQ-Gov | IQ Sunni | KURDS | TURK | ASSAD | SY REBS | JFAS |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----|----|----|------|----|--------|----------|-------|------|-------|---------|------|
| Support Kurdish factions fighting ISIL | ✓ | | | | - | | - | - | ✓ | - | - | - | - |
| Promote a strong Iraqi state | ✓ | ✓ | | | - | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| Defeat/degrade ISIL | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Expand peaceful relationships with Arab states | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Expanding relationships with the rising Asian powers: China and India | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Limit instability throughout the Middle East | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | - |
| Contain international jihadism | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | - |
| Promote the establishment of a stable and non-hostile state in Syria | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| Avoid further destabilization in Lebanon | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Resisting the acceptance of Gulf-friendly Islamists | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| Prevent Russia from taking step harmful to Israel in the Middle East | ✓ | | ✓ | - | | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent direct Iranian material support for domestic Shia groups | ✓ | | ✓ | | - | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| PREVENT IRAN FROM ACQUIRING MILITARY NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES | ✓ | | ✓ | | - | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent Iran from using proxies against Israel | ✓ | | ✓ | | - | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent Palestinian terror attacks in the West Bank and Israel | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Keep relations and cooperation with the European powers | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Contain Russia via political, economic, military and information pressure | ✓ | ✓ | | - | | | | | | | | | |
| Mobilize a large coalition to help stabilize the region | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Limit the flow of refugees | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Promote a cohesive and representative government in Iraq | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Move Iran towards a greater opening and a more constructive foreign policy | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Maintain the diplomatic support and physical military presence of key international allies (the U.S. and the Britain) | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Stop the Gulf states from pursuit of regime change in Syria | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| Exert pressure on the European Union | - | - | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Keep the United States from exerting too much influence over the region | - | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Strengthen Russian defense | - | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Restore Russian influence in the Middle East | - | | | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | - | - |
| Provide support to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad | - | | - | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | - | - |
| Curtail outside support of Kurds | - | | | | | | | | - | | ✓ | | |
| Provide monetary and political support to Iraqi Shi'ia groups | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | - | | | ✓ | |
| Push an Iranian soft power strategy in Iraq | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | - | | | - | |
| Two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict | | ✓ | | - | | | | | | | | | |
| Keep strategic alliance with the US | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent or slow the normalization of Western relations with Iran | | | ✓ | | | - | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Prevent and defend against Hezbollah attacks | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent and defend against Hamas attacks | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Break Iran's led axis | | | ✓ | | | - | | | | | | | |
| Prevent Jihadist Salafist attacks against Israel | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strengthening strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Make sure Turkey remains a stable and reliable ally | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Guarantee Russian regime survival | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Return Russia to great power status | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| Implement Russian military policy through strategic deterrence | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Deflect attention away from Russian activities in Crimea, Ukraine | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Conduct integrated operations with Iranian, Hezbollah, and Syrian forces | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Ensure (Bahrain's) regime security | | | | | - | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Preserve the support of Sunni citizens via sectarian appeals | | | | | | ✓ | | | - | | | | | |
| Gain more political support from Gulf States | | | | | | | | | | | - | | | |
| Gain more monetary support from Gulf States | | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Maintain an Alawite-led Government in Syria | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Maintain control over Iranian Kurds | | | | | ✓ | | | | | - | | | | |
| Degrade the PKK | | | | | | | | | | - | ✓ | | | |
| Maintenance of Territorial gains in Central Syria | | | | | | | | | | | - | | | ✓ |
| Strengthening the expansion of Salafi Jihadist movement in Syria. | | | | | | | | | | | - | | | ✓ |
| Rebranding Jabhat Fateh al-Sham | | | | | | | | | | | - | | | ✓ |
| Upholding JCPOA | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Moderating Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Jabhat al Nusra) | | | | | | | | | | | - | | | ✓ |
| Increase Jabhat Fateh al-Sham relevance and operational capability in Syria. | | | | | | | | | | | - | | | ✓ |

| INTEREST/GOAL | U.S. | FR | IS | RU | IRAN | BA | IQ-Gov | IQ Sunni | KURDS | TURK | ASSAD | SY REBS | JFAS |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----|----|----|------|----|--------|----------|-------|------|-------|---------|------|
| Support Kurdish factions fighting ISIL | ✓ | | | | - | | - | - | ✓ | - | - | - | - |
| Promote a strong Iraqi state | ✓ | ✓ | | | - | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| Defeat/degrade ISIL | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Expand peaceful relationships with Arab states | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Expanding relationships with the rising Asian powers: China and India | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Limit instability throughout the Middle East | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | - |

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Contain international jihadism | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | | - |
| Promote the establishment of a stable and non-hostile state in Syria | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Avoid further destabilization in Lebanon | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Resisting the acceptance of Gulf-friendly Islamists | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Prevent Russia from taking step harmful to Israel in the Middle East | ✓ | | ✓ | | - | | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent direct Iranian material support for domestic Shia groups | ✓ | | ✓ | | | - | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| PREVENT IRAN FROM ACQUIRING MILITARY NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES | ✓ | | ✓ | | | - | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent Iran from using proxies against Israel | ✓ | | ✓ | | | - | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent Palestinian terror attacks in the West Bank and Israel | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Keep relations and cooperation with the European powers | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Contain Russia via political, economic, military and information pressure | ✓ | ✓ | | | - | | | | | | | | | |
| Mobilize a large coalition to help stabilize the region | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Limit the flow of refugees | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Promote a cohesive and representative government in Iraq | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Move Iran towards a greater opening and a more constructive foreign policy | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Maintain the diplomatic support and physical military presence of key international allies (the U.S. and the Britain) | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Stop the Gulf states from pursuit of regime change in Syria | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Exert pressure on the European Union | - | - | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Keep the United States from exerting too much influence over the region | - | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strengthen Russian defense | - | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Restore Russian influence in the Middle East | - | | | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | - | - |
| Provide support to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad | - | | - | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | - | - |
| Curtail outside support of Kurds | - | | | | | | | | | - | ✓ | | | |
| Provide monetary and political support to Iraqi Shi'ia groups | | | | | ✓ | | - | ✓ | | - | | | ✓ | |

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Push an Iranian soft power strategy in Iraq | | | | | ✓ | - | ✓ | - | | | - | | |
| Two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict | | ✓ | | - | | | | | | | | | |
| Keep strategic alliance with the US | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent or slow the normalization of Western relations with Iran | | | ✓ | | - | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Prevent and defend against Hezbollah attacks | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent and defend against Hamas attacks | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Break Iran's led axis | | | ✓ | | - | | | | | | | | |
| Prevent Jihadist Salafist attacks against Israel | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strengthening strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Make sure Turkey remains a stable and reliable ally | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Guarantee Russian regime survival | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Return Russia to great power status | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Implement Russian military policy through strategic deterrence | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Deflect attention away from Russian activities in Crimea, Ukraine | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | |
| Conduct integrated operations with Iranian, Hezbollah, and Syrian forces | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| Ensure (Bahrain's) regime security | | | | | | - | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Preserve the support of Sunni citizens via sectarian appeals | | | | | | | ✓ | | - | | | | |
| Gain more political support from Gulf States | | | | | | | | | | | - | | |
| Gain more monetary support from Gulf States | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Maintain an Alawite-led Government in Syria | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Maintain control over Iranian Kurds | | | | | ✓ | | | | | - | | | |
| Degrade the PKK | | | | | | | | | | - | ✓ | | |
| Maintenance of Territorial gains in Central Syria | | | | | | | | | | | - | | ✓ |
| Strengthening the expansion of Salafi Jihadist movement in Syria. | | | | | | | | | | | - | | ✓ |
| Rebranding Jabhat Fateh al-Sham | | | | | | | | | | | - | | ✓ |

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|
| Upholding JCPOA | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Moderating Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Jabhat al Nusra) | | | | | | | | | | | | - | | ✓ |
| Increase Jabhat Fateh al-Sham relevance and operational capability in Syria. | | | | | | | | | | | | | - | ✓ |

SME Inputs

Shlomo Brom, INSS

Actor: Israel

| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | NATIONAL SECURITY / POPULATION SAFETY | INT'L/ INTERGROUP PRESTIGE | DOMESTIC POLITICS/ REGIME SECURITY/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT | ECONOMIC SURVIVAL/ PROSPERITY | IDENTITY / IDEOLOGY |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| PREVENT IRAN FROM ACQUIRING MILITARY NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES | THE JCPOA CONCLUDED IN 2015 BETWEEN IRAN AND THE GREAT POWERS PREVENTS IRAN FROM ACQUIRING MILITARY NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES FOR 10-15 YEARS. ISRAEL'S INTEREST IS TO EXPAND THIS PERIOD AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE AND PREVENT IRANIAN VIOLATION, AS WELL AS BEING ALERT OF THE POSSIBILITY OF OTHER MIDDLE EAST STATES FOLLOWING IRAN'S NUCLEAR PATH AND PREEMPT IT. A NUCLEAR IRAN WILL POSE AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO ISRAEL AND WILL ACHIEVE ITS AMBITION TO BECOME A HEGEMONIC REGIONAL POWER THAT WILL BE CAPABLE TO HARNESS OTHER REGIONAL STATES TO ITS WAR AGAINST ISRAEL. | X | | X | X | |
| Prevent Iran from using proxies | The Islamic regime of Iran calls for the destruction of the state of Israel as an essential part of its identity and ideology. It adopted the use of Arab non-state proxies such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad as a useful tool. | X | | X | | |

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|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|--|
| against Israel | | | | | | |
| Prevent and defend against Hezbollah attacks | Hezbollah is a non-state actor that acquired military capabilities that equal a small powerful state. It has the capability to cover the whole territory of Israel with rockets and missiles, and operates precision guided missiles and UAVs. Since its inception it perceives itself enemy of Israel and is a proxy of Iran and part of the axis of resistance that fights Israel and the Western influence in the Middle East. | X | | X | X | |
| Prevent and defend against Hamas attacks | Hamas is an Islamic Palestinian terror organization that controls the Gaza Strip and holds the ideology that Israel should be destroyed. It is part of the axis of resistance and serves sometimes as a proxy of Iran. It acquired the capability to cover large parts of Israel with rockets fire and develops the capability to execute terror and guerilla operations in Israeli territory. | X | | X | X | |
| Break Iran's led axis | Without the axis of resistance that Iran is leading it will be much more limited in its ability to harm Israeli interest. The weaker points in this axis are Syria and Hamas. | | | | | |
| Prevent Palestinian terror attacks in the West Bank and Israel | Palestinian terror groups and individuals (lone wolves) operating from the West Bank and host countries try to execute terror operations against Israel. Some of them do that because they want to end Israeli occupation of the West Bank, others because they have adopted the ideological goal of destroying Israel. | X | | X | X | |
| Prevent Jihadist Salafist attacks | ALL THE Jihadist-Salafist armed groups share the goal of destruction of Israel though it is not always their priority. It is Israel's interest to prevent their attacks and prevent them from approaching Israel's borders. | X | | X | X | |

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

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| Expand ing relation ships with the rising Asian powers : China and India | China and India are playing a significant growing role on the world stage, and are becoming significant economic partners. India particularly is a major market for the Israeli defense industries | X | | | X | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|

Bernard Carreau, NDU

Joint Staff/J7 commissioned NDU’s Center for Complex Operations to conduct a classified study that is nearing completion on the question of whether U.S. national security decision-making and strategic planning processes were effective in achieving national objectives in Syria. The research touches on all the study topics listed above. While these SMA topics are diverse enough to call for different approaches at the operational level, the findings of the research indicate that at the policy/strategic level they could potentially all be addressed by a change in OIR strategy.

Methods:

The study covers the period from 2011 through early 2016. It is based on interviews of high-level and mid-level officials involved in Syria policy at the National Security Council, the Departments of State and Defense, the Agency for International Development, and the intelligence community, as well as on a review of classified and unclassified U.S. policy documents, including NSC discussion papers, military options papers, State Department reporting cables, intelligence assessments, and other intergovernmental correspondence. It draws on public policy pronouncements made by the President and senior administration officials, as well as a literature review of academic and expert outside commentary on U.S. Syria policy.

Results:

Realigning U.S. Policy to Accommodate Divergent Interests of Allies and Regional Rivals

A major factor preventing the U.S from achieving its objectives in Iraq, Syria, and the C-ISIL campaign is the U.S. inability, or unwillingness, to accommodate the interests of our allies, especially Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States, and regional stakeholders, including Russia and Iran. ISIL is not the priority of any U.S. ally nor of any U.S. regional competitor. Yet U.S. policy is largely centered on making it their

priority. Rather than continue to work at cross-purposes, there may be a way to meet our allies and regional rivals half-way while narrowing but preserving core U.S. interests in the region. One prime example is U.S. policy toward the Kurds. Extensive and deepening U.S. support for the Kurds may be providing short-term gains at the expense of long-term regional stability. Over-reliance on Kurdish forces has exacerbated far more important U.S. relations with regional allies and adversaries alike, including Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. An equally pernicious by-product of over-reliance on the Kurds is the perception among Sunni Arabs that the U.S. is encouraging Kurdish encroachment on Sunni Arab lands, similar to Sunni perceptions that the U.S. continuously supports Shi'a regimes over Sunni regimes. The U.S. should continue to protect Kurdish populations, but it should consider significant adjustments to its support of Kurdish forces, including the Peshmerga and the YPG.

In Syria, the U.S. should consider maintaining the same policy goals but altering the strategic objectives and the strategy for achieving them. The new strategy would accept the already *de facto* sphere of influence of Russia and Iran in Syria, including the continued reign of Assad, at least for some time. If the U.S., Russia, and Iran could eventually agree to pressure Assad to step aside, the U.S. might still be prepared to accept an Alawite-dominated government, but one offering much stronger protections for Sunni populations (discussed more fully below). With respect to Iran, the U.S. would seek a quid pro quo: accept Iran's close ties and influence with Damascus but insist on no threats to Israel and no support for terrorist activities by Hezbollah. The U.S. would have considerable leverage over Iran, including vigilant enforcement of JCPOA, and a reduction in support of Kurdish forces. Iran will have an interest in maintaining JCPOA, in controlling its Kurdish population, as well as in controlling the restive Kurdish populations in both Syria and Iraq. Iran will also have an interest in degrading and defeating ISIL. The biggest leverage the U.S. will have over Iran would be a proposed reconfiguration of the C-ISIL campaign, complementing it with an explicit program of support to Sunni communities in Syria and Iraq, as explained below.

Turkey could become the most valuable U.S. ally in Syria and Iraq if the U.S. would simply curtail its support of the Kurds. Turkey might accept the U.S. disinclination to remove Assad in exchange for reduced U.S. support to the Kurds and perhaps even more U.S. support to Turkey in helping to degrade the PKK. The U.S. should welcome the Turkish incursion into northern Syria and could do so most effectively by reducing its support of the SDF and YPG.

OIR and a Sunni Empowerment Strategy

In addition, the U.S. could complement the C-ISIL campaign with a "Sunni Empowerment Campaign." The point would be to counter what LTG Nagata has observed is a strong perception in the region that the U.S. will support "anyone but Sunnis." The U.S. could exert considerable leverage over events in Iraq, Syria, and Iran in accordance with U.S. national interests if it were able to provide greater support to Sunnis in the region. Such a strategy could act as a check on Iran's regional hegemony, discourage Saudi and Gulf State support of AQ and other extremist groups, check Sunni oppression by Assad in Syria, or his successor, and check Sunni oppression by Abadi and the Shi'a militias he relies on, in Iraq. *Most important, a Sunni empowerment strategy will create the strongest and most effective antidote to ISIL's magnetism (including for local recruits and foreign fighters) and worldwide expansion (including lone wolf attacks in the west) because it will finally provide an outlet for Sunni grievances and a viable alternative to violent jihadism as protection against various forms of Shi's oppression.* Current U.S. policy to "degrade and defeat ISIL" is only half-baked: U.S. policy must further answer the question "and replace it with what?" A viable Sunni empowerment strategy would answer that question.

The main elements of a Sunni Empowerment Campaign might be (details about issues such as the nature of the safe zone and types of arms to be supplied would be included in a classified annex):

- Scale back training and equipping all Kurdish forces. Reassure Sunni Arabs that the U.S. will assist them to maintain control of their traditional lands.
- In Syria, greatly expand CIA support for rebel forces, not with the intent of overthrowing Assad, but with the intent of protecting rebel-held lands from bombing raids and providing essential services and humanitarian assistance. The rebels would be advised, trained, and equipped sufficiently to cause major hardships for Assad and Iran, with the point being to force Assad into making political concessions.
- Consider establishing a safe zone around rebel-held areas, perhaps using Turkish forces, if Turkey could be persuaded to do so in exchange for U.S. reducing support to the Kurds.
- Train and equip Syrian Sunni (*not* Kurdish) militias in eastern Syria and let them fight the enemy that most oppresses them—whether Assad’s forces or ISIL forces. For the current train and equip program in Syria, drop the requirement that they swear off fighting Assad and only fight ISIL, and provide close air support to protect them when they engage.
- In Iraq, continue supporting the ISF, but also institute train and equip and advise and assist programs aimed at creating an Iraqi “National Guard”—i.e., well-trained Sunni militias in al Anbar and al Ninawah.
- A U.S. Sunni Empowerment Campaign might encourage Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States to support U.S. efforts to train and equip moderate Sunni militias in Iraq and Syria and cease their support of radical groups.

Justin Gengler, University of Michigan

Bahrain’s Strategic Interests (Threats and Opportunities) regarding Regional Conflict

Actor: Bahrain

| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | NATIONAL SECURITY / POPULATION SAFETY | INT’L/ INTERGROUP PRESTIGE | DOMESTIC POLITICS/ REGIME SECURITY/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT | ECONOMIC SURVIVAL/ PROSPERITY | IDENTITY / IDEOLOGY |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Ensure regime security | <i>As with the other Arab Gulf monarchies, the most basic aim of the Al Khalifa family qua Bahraini government is the preservation of regime security – that is, to ensure continued Al Khalifa rule of the country.</i> | | | X | | |

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| <p>Preserve the support of Sunni citizens via sectarian appeals</p> | <p><i>Political support for the government is extremely low among Bahrain's majority (±55%) Shia population, and thus the ruling family's domestic political survival depends upon the continued sectarian segmentation of the citizenry such that political coordination among Shia and Sunni citizens is untenable. The state has accomplished this by successfully demonizing the Shia-dominated opposition as an Iranian fifth column, positioning itself as the best of two unsatisfying options for ordinary Bahraini Sunnis. The latter have been in effect scared away from cooperation with the opposition, despite a long list of shared grievances, by the threat of a full-scale Shia takeover (in the manner of Iraq) in the event of an overthrow of the Al Khalifa. The continued ability to portray the opposition as backed by a meddling and belligerent Iran is thus a core interest of the state's that is undermined by efforts to diffuse sectarian tensions in the region. In other words, the Bahraini government has a direct domestic political interest in continued Sunni-Shi'i tensions in the Gulf and Levant. (See my article for the MEI, "Sectarian Backfire? Assessing Gulf Political Strategy Five Years after the Arab Uprisings. http://www.mei.edu/content/map/sectarian-backfire-assessing-gulf-political-strategy-five-years-after-arab-uprisings)</i></p> | | | <p>X</p> | | <p>X</p> |
| <p>Prevent direct Iranian material support for domestic Shia groups</p> | <p><i>The state has long made claims of direct material and financial support by Iran for what it calls "terrorist" cells within the opposition. To date, however, it has been unable to produce compelling evidence directly tying Iran to domestic groups. Still, the opportunity for indirect funding and support for opposition groups is considerable, both domestically and from outside, and the state has recently taken several steps to attempt to cut off such support. This includes most notably the banning of the khums ("one-fifth") tax through which Shia followers traditionally support clerics. More generally, the state has sought to bring all</i></p> | <p>X</p> | | <p>X</p> | | |

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

Assad Strategic Interests (Threats and Opportunities) regarding the Gulf region

Actor: Assad

| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | NATIONAL SECURITY/POPULATION SAFETY | INT'L/INTERGROUP PRESTIGE | DOMESTIC POLITICS/REGIME SECURITY/CONSTITUENT SUPPORT | ECONOMIC SURVIVAL/PROSPERITY | IDENTITY/IDEOLOGY |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Stopping the Gulf states from pursuit of regime change | <p>— <i>The key Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, remain committed to supporting the Syrian opposition, even though a regime collapse is not their current goal, with the exception of Qatar. The regime believes that if the Gulf states stop supporting the rebels, it will be easier to crush the rebellion.</i></p> <p>— <i>These states' priorities have changed over the past five years. Saudi Arabia, for example, is currently fearful of a rebel win, given that Islamist and jihadist groups dominate. The UAE has taken the backseat in support for the opposition, mostly focused on the Southern Front closely cooperating with Jordan and other countries. For the regime, these changes vindicate its policy in fighting the rebellion against its rule, and the Gulf role, along with Turkey's, will continue to be the focus of Damascus.</i></p> | X | | X | | |
| Resisting the acceptance of Gulf-friendly Islamists | <p>— <i>The regime views its struggle with Islamist movements as a zero-sum game. Any compromise given to Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, will undermine the regime's edifice in its entirety. Despite suggestion the regime can accept opposition integration in a future power-share deal, it views Islamism in existential terms, something that the regime's popular base also agree on, broadly. This is due to historical hostilities with the Muslim Brotherhood but also</i></p> | x | | X | | x |

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| | <p><i>because the regime and its supporters see any compromise as a slippery slope that will ultimately lead to the revival of the challenge it is facing now. The regime's top echelon, including Bashar al-Assad, sees the Gulf states as a source of this push to strengthen Islamism in Syria.</i></p> <p><i>— Even in the event of warming relations, the regime sees interest in maintain an ideological distance with the Gulf states, whether in terms of their worldview vis-a-vis American role in the region or in terms of Islamic movements.</i></p> | | | | | |
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Islamist and Jihadist rebels' Strategic Interests (Threats and Opportunities) regarding the Gulf region

Actor: Islamist and jihadist rebels

| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | NATIONAL SECURITY/POPULATION SAFETY | INT'L/INTERGROUP PRESTIGE | DOMESTIC POLITICS/REGIME SECURITY/CONSTITUENT SUPPORT | ECONOMIC SURVIVAL/PROSPERITY | IDENTITY/IDEOLOGY |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Political support | <p><i>— With the exception of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the rebels recognize the Gulf state's importance as a buffer between the regime and its backers, and Western countries that may consider abandoning the opposition. Through diplomatic and commercial links, the Gulf states emerged as key guarantors of opposition security on an internal level. Ahrar Al Sham's dependence on Qatar has made it amiable to political compromises when necessary, although such compromises are mostly posturing rather than an expression of real ideological realignment. The Muslim Brotherhood is also extremely interested in maintaining close ties to the Gulf states, especially Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.</i></p> <p><i>— Jabhat Fateh al-Sham is deeply suspicious of all the Gulf states, but it has also sought to avoid stoking their fears about its future plans. It has maintained links by proxy, mainly through Ahrar al-Sham, with Qatar, and is cautious about the close ties between Ahrar al-Sham and Doha. In principle, however, JFS is open to the idea</i></p> | | X | X | x | x |

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| | <i>of political engagement similar to the Taliban's political engagement through its offices in Qatar and Beijing. It, for example, agreed in principle to participate in a political bureau during discussions for unity with jihadist and Islamist groups, primarily Ahrar al-Sham, but it insisted that the office would be "in compliance with sharia precepts". This is according to a serving high-ranking official of JFS.</i> | | | | | |
| Financial support | <p>— The majority of rebel forces, including Islamist and jihadists, view funds coming from the Gulf, mostly from private donors or indirectly to battles against the regime through nationalist forces, to be essential. For Islamists, support from Qatar and Kuwait maintains their ability to dominate and have the upper hand on the ground, even if they dislike occasional pressure from donors.</p> <p>— JFS sees reliance on government or semi-government funds to be a time bomb, as this increases the prospect of infiltration and espionage. Its strategy, increasingly explicitly expressed over the past few months, is to make their allies on the ground suspicious of foreign funding. JFS members often blame Ahrar al-Sham's reluctance to merge with it on foreign support.</p> <p>– The push in the Gulf for Ahrar al-Sham to push Jabhat al-Nusra, before it became JFS, to delink itself from Al Qaeda was partly to allow regional countries to provide support to JFS or to shield their proxies from being associated with Al Qaeda</p> | x | x | X | x | |

Diane L. Maye, ERAU

Achieving U.S.-led Coalition Aims in Iraq

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Background – Disparate Aims

The absence of a sitting government in Baghdad for the majority of 2010 gave rise to social instability, insurgent attacks, economic uncertainty, and created a massive power vacuum in Iraq's outlying Sunni Arab provinces. In the beginning of his second administration, Prime Minister Maliki promised American policy makers he would develop a power-sharing arrangement that would bring the Sunnis back to the political table. Once the U.S. left the country, threats to Prime Minister Maliki's power base from within Iraq came from disenfranchised Sunnis with popular appeal, resurgent Ba'ath party politicians, and internal disputes with other Shi'ia political players.

To counter the internal threats, the Prime Minister appealed to long-standing Shi'ia militias to quell uprisings and eliminate emergent Sunni political players. Maliki also integrated Shi'ia paramilitary units and militias into the Iraqi Security Forces ahead of Sunni *Sahwa* groups, then cut the funding for the Sunni Sons of Iraq, leaving tens of thousands of military-aged Sunni Arab males without work. Maliki strictly enforced Iraq's Justice and Accountability (de-Ba'athification) Law and Article 4 of Iraq's antiterrorism law, which imprisoned individuals accused of terrorist activity without a timeline for due process. In doing so, Maliki aggravated large portions of the Sunni Arab population. To maintain civil order, the most organized Sunni 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, revolutionary militants and rogue elements of the Al Qaeda network.

The other major hurdle facing Baghdad's politicians after the withdrawal of U.S. forces was the threat posed by neighboring countries: namely Iran and Syria. After years of enduring the chaotic politicking of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath party, many Middle Eastern policy makers welcomed a more tractable Iraqi government, with political and economic outcomes benefiting groups that had been marginalized under Saddam Hussein. Policymakers and elites across the Middle East saw an opportunity to penetrate Iraqi decision-making. Iraq's powerful neighbor to the east, quickly filled the void left by the U.S. military and policy makers. Iranian officials quickly seized upon the opportunity to work with the longstanding Shi'ia militias by providing military and financial support. **Iran pushed a soft power strategy:** non-oil industry trade as well as economic support to Shi'ia organizations and political parties.

The main problem facing the West is that a weak Iraq is likely to aggravate the balance of political power in the region. For instance, Turkey will have considerable influence in a northern Kurdish state, which is likely to instigate the ethno-separatist Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and rival political groups. The Shi'ia in southern Iraq will bend to Iranian interests, which in turn puts enormous pressure on the government on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Without being able to maintain strict control of 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 and will achieve their aims as they obtain more and more political and military power. **Therefore, it is in the interest of the U.S. and coalition forces to deny jihadist groups and malevolent regional stakeholders this ability. The U.S. and coalition forces achieve their aims by promoting a stable and strong Iraqi state: a government that has a monopoly on the use of violence, territorial sovereignty, and legitimate political control over its population.**

Alignment and Divergence

Iraq's central government has a legitimacy problem: the Sunni Arabs of Iraq do not have an abundance of mature political alternatives to the Islamic State. For instance, the *Sahwa* movement of 2006 – 2008 quickly disintegrated after U.S. forces left the country, and most emergent Sunni political players have been tied to Ba'ath party loyalists or accused of supporting terrorist activity. In addition, Prime Minister Maliki's administration actively eliminated Sunni political rivals by threatening the lives of Sunni politicians, marginalizing the Sunni Sons of Iraq, and forcing prominent Sunni Arabs into political exile. While some political concessions were made, much of Iraq's Sunni Arab population, especially those in the western provinces, remained alienated from Baghdad politics.

In 2015, there was a split between Sunni Arab tribes, some of which had been aligned with the U.S. and Baghdad's objectives, but many of which switched allegiances and joined the Islamic State. This split was largely because the Sunni Arab tribes in the western provinces were caught between swearing allegiance to the Islamic State, or supporting a government in Baghdad that ignored or rebuffed their

political advances. Therefore, some Sunni tribal leaders decided the Islamic State was a more viable and organized alternative than the Iraqi central government. As the Islamic State gained more power and the central government failed to offer protection, some Sunnis were left with no choice but to adhere to the demands of the Islamic State.

Denying Adversaries and Creating Win-Sets

Western powers routinely use the advantages of superior airpower, battlefield intelligence, and precision strikes to target terrorist organizations. Oftentimes, however, terrorist organizations are more like a hydra, and quickly regenerate a new head after an attack. **An important element of denying regrowth is to use targeting in conjunction with a broader movement to engage the population against the terrorist network.**

To create political stability in Iraq, the interests of all the major parties involved in the conflict must overlap in a way that creates a viable win-set. For instance, when the U.S. and the Iraqis were negotiating the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) in 2009, they were the two major parties involved in Iraq's security: Iraq and the United States. With the incursion of Iranian forces into Iraq since 2014, as well the vast flux of refugees fleeing the region, there are many more parties that have a vested interest in Iraq's security, including Russia, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Iran, the GCC, Lebanon and the European Union. Likewise, the domestic considerations and support for U.S. intervention has changed. From the Iraqi perspective, domestically they seek to reclaim the territories lost to the Islamic State, however, the Baghdad government is dealing with political pressure from Iran and Syria as well as an influx of foreign fighters from across the world. The challenge for the U.S.-led coalition is to develop a viable political alternative to the Islamic State for Iraq's Sunni population without upsetting the considerations of the other parties involved in the conflict.

To understand the importance of offering a Sunni Arab-based political alternative to the Islamic State in Iraq's western provinces, an important lesson can be learned from the Sunni Awakening of 2006 - 2008. The movement capitalized on growing cleavage in the Sunni political spectrum: Sunnis that supported Al Qaeda versus Sunnis that did not support the organization. Likewise, the importance of charismatic leadership as a source of legitimate authority was seen during the Sunni Awakening, but perhaps under-appreciated by coalition forces that were likely more accustomed to legal-rational and traditional sources of authority. The rapid rise a charismatic leader is a common theme in Middle Eastern politics.

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. **To deny the actions of nefarious organizations, the U.S. and coalition forces should reject Iran's involvement in Iraqi affairs, promote strong, yet dispersed, self-governance, and actively work to secure the nation's borders.**

Eugene Rumer, Carnegie Endowment

DESCRIPTION NATIONAL SECURITY/ POPULATION SAFETY INT'L/ INTERGROUP PRESTIGE DOMESTIC POLITICS/ REGIME SECURITY/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT ECONOMIC SURVIVAL/ PROSPERITY IDENTITY/ IDEOLOGY Assert great power status The middle east is the key global hotspot and Russia has to be involved with a seat at the table when the fate of the region is decided. It has to be counted as a full member of the global politburo.

Standing up to the United States and constraining its ability to operate freely is enhancing the stature of Putin's Russia on the global stage as an equal of the United States. x Boost domestic legitimacy Great

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

Elie Tenebaum, USIP

France Strategic Interests (Threats and Opportunities) regarding Regional Conflict

Actor: France

| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | NATIONAL SECURITY / POPULATION SAFETY | INT'L/ INTERGROUP PRESTIGE | DOMESTIC POLITICS/ REGIME SECURITY/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT | ECONOMIC SURVIVAL/ PROSPERITY | IDENTITY / IDEOLOGY |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Limit instability throughout the Middle East | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Middle East's geographic proximity to France makes the region's stability an absolute priority for France's future security - France has been heavily present in the region for centuries and will undoubtedly remain involved in the foreseeable future | X | | | X | |
| Mobilize a large coalition to help stabilize the region | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - France does not have the power to change regional dynamics alone: France needs to build partnerships and act within a coalition - The United States' commitment to the region's security is critical and will remain a prerequisite for any substantial military endeavor | X | X | | | |
| Contain international jihadism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destroying Jihadist sanctuaries: especially in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen - Controlling the flow of returning Foreign Fighters: especially those returning to Europe, and France's southern neighbors (North Africa) | X | | X | | |
| Limit the flow of refugees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting a more efficient EU external border control - Avoiding the potential negative impact refugee flows may have on the country's economy, security and domestic politics | X | | X | X | X |
| Promote the establishment of a stable and non- | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ending the civil war without returning to the status quo ante (That Bashar al-Assad remain in power is not an option) - Limiting the influence of radical factions over the future government | X | | | X | |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| hostile state in Syria | | | | | | |
| Promote a cohesive and representative government in Iraq | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restoring the Iraqi government's full control over its territory - Helping Baghdad regain some degree of legitimacy amongst both Sunnis and Shias - Preserving autonomy for the Kurdish Regional Government | X | | | X | |
| Avoid further destabilization in Lebanon | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helping any Lebanese representative government maintain control over its territory - Limiting Hezbollah's influence over the government - Honoring century-long ties with Lebanon in cultural and religious fields | X | X | | | X |
| Move Iran towards a greater opening and a more constructive foreign policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enforcing the JCPOA and preventing Tehran's to acquire an operational nuclear deterrence capability - Developing business opportunities for French companies in Iran - Limiting the influence of the regime's hardliners within the government - Preventing the escalation of tensions with Gulf monarchies | X | X | | X | |
| Strengthening strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting further business partnerships (arms sales, foreign investments) while being cautious of not giving Gulf Monarchies too much clout in France's key economic sectors - Limiting the exportation of radical Islam (Salafi Islam, Muslim brotherhood) towards Europe and especially France - Avoiding greater tensions between Gulf monarchies and Iran - Securing peaceful regimes' successions | X | X | | X | X |
| Keep on promoting the Two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preserving a sustainable security environment for Israel - Promoting the establishment of a stable and non-hostile Palestinian state with limited influence coming from Hamas - Avoiding the emergence of new jihadist groups in the Gaza Strip | | X | X | | X |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Make sure Turkey remains a stable and reliable ally</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Countering Erdogan’s regime’s authoritarian evolution</i> - <i>Securing the EU-Turkish agreement regarding Syrian refugees</i> - <i>Making sure Turkey remains a reliable NATO member</i> | X | | | X | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|

Tim Thomas, Foreign Military Studies Office

RUSSIA’S NEW NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY:

A LOOK AT NOUNS, VERBS, CONCERNS, AND WARNINGS

January 2016

Place of Publication: Unknown, target of opportunity

Synopsis: Through the publication of the National Security Strategy (NSS), Russia has demonstrated a mixture of some realism (the discussion of the economy lists real problems, among other issues) alongside excuses for their current situation (such as failing to admit or take into consideration the effect of their actions as being responsible for new threats appearing on the border). Russia wants a return to great power status, and the Kremlin sees energy resources and military power as two of the most important paths to glory, along with developing more creative and innovative theorists according to the document. The NSS covers all of these issues. Putin added that in the fall Russia will publish a strategy on science and technology issues as well, since they are crucial for a state to maintain its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The sum total of measures covered in the NSS (information control, military modernization, energy security, S&T advances, etc.) can also be read as the Putin entourage’s method of guaranteeing regime survival. The regime wants the population to focus on what it is doing for it, not what it has done to it. The idea is to offer the population the international prestige, power projection capabilities, and return to a respected status that it has sought over the past two decades.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

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Introduction

This analysis of Russia's new *National Security Strategy* examines two issues. The first is the use of words in the document as a way to decipher objectives and goals of the *Strategy* and, by implication, the aims of Russia's national security apparatus. Verbs such as creates, shapes, defines, focuses, blames, and worries and nouns like interests, priorities, stability, threats, goals, and struggles dot the strategy, and include both international and domestic issues. These types of terms are highlighted in bold in the discussion below for emphasis only (it helps speed the reading and comprehension of a policy paper). The second issue examined is the concerns expressed in the document and the responses in the month after the *NSS's* publication that members of Russia's Security Council offered. This latter component is highlighted in the section titled "Follow-up to the *NSS*." Here Russian experts expressed the desire of Russia for better relations with NATO and the US, as well as a list of the economic and national security threats to Russia.

When a statement in the strategy appears off base from a Western perspective of what has transpired, brackets follow the statement with a short counter explanation of events or, on occasion, a description of what has been omitted from the Russian contention to make it more persuasive. As an example, while Russia states it wants to ensure strategic stability, the phrase is followed by this type of reference: [in Ukraine, Russian actions have done the opposite, exacerbating and weakening strategic stability]. What follows then is a different type of analysis than is usually performed, such as simply comparing what is new or repeated from past strategies.

What should be followed closely?

Nowhere in the document is the term strategy actually defined, so its definition is left to the discretion of the reader. However, the document itself was defined as "the basic strategic planning document defining the Russian Federation's national interests and strategic national priorities, objectives, tasks, and measures in the sphere of domestic and foreign policy aimed at strengthening the Russian Federation's national security and ensuring the country's sustainable development in the long term."³⁷ It consolidates the efforts of the organs of state power, and it is the basis for the shaping and implementation of state policy. Nor do the Russians mention the term hybrid, which basically follows the

³⁷ "The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy," *President of Russia* website, 31 December 2015. See Appendix One for terms defined in the text. All items referred to in this article (until the section "Follow-Up to the *NSS*") are from this document.

train of thought that only Westerners think Russia is applying hybrid methods. Of the terms indirect, asymmetric, and nonmilitary, which the Russians use to describe their military theory and actions, the document only used the terms indirect and nonmilitary, offering each only once.

However, other terms were used quite often. National, state, security, and some form of the word develop (past tense, gerund, etc.) were each used over 100 times. Some form of the term economy was used 97 times, organ 79 times, formation 54 times, and military 52 times. Some form of create (ing, ed, tion, etc.) and implement were used 37 times each, information 36 times, stability 35 times, threat and strategy 24 times each, power and culture 23 times each, law 22 times, some form of equal, moral, and values 14 times each, and priority 13 times.

There were two items of special interest. The *Strategy* used the term struggle on two occasions, but the sentences containing the word may be some of the most important in the document. Struggle indicates an active confrontation among various factors for control, where east meets west, and is an area that the West should consider to remain as a point of contention. There is a struggle underway, the *Strategy* notes, for resources, access to markets, and control over transportation arteries. There is also a struggle for influence in the international arena, which includes the use of political, financial-economic, and information instruments. A second item of special interest is the section on “indicators for evaluating the state of national security,” factors that will purportedly allow Russian security officials to know if the *Strategy* is being fulfilled.

The Russian Federation’s objective is defined in the document as the attempt to acquire as many equal partners as possible in various parts of the world. Goals include national defense goals, which are defined as the creation of conditions to develop and ensure military security. Goals are achieved by implementing military policy through strategic deterrence, preventing armed conflict, improving military organizations and forms and methods for armed force deployments, and increasing mobilization readiness according to the document. Strategic deterrence is the result of the interrelated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, information, and other measures, such as maintaining the capacity for nuclear deterrence. Strategic interests and priorities, values, and future partners are highlighted as well as numerous threats to national security.

The National Security Strategy

The document **defines** national interests, priorities, objectives (which the strategy says is to acquire as many **equal** partners as possible in various parts of the world), tasks, and measures to strengthen national security and ensure long-term development. It **consists** of a domestic legal basis that intends to consolidate the efforts of organs of state power. It **aims to create** favorable internal and external conditions for realizing national interests and strategic national priorities (this is perhaps the overarching goal of the *Strategy*). It is the basis for **shaping** and implementing policy, and is **based** on the interconnection between national security and the country’s socioeconomic development.

Main concepts are: protect the individual, society, and the state against internal and external threats. National security includes the country’s defense and all types of security (state, public, information, environmental, economic, transportation, energy, and individual security). Russia wants to

protect the **rights** of compatriots abroad (this was discussed twice in the *NSS*) and resolve and settle international problems and ensure strategic stability [in Ukraine, they have done the opposite, exacerbating problems]. The rising generation is being fed values that **shapes** a proper attitude toward Russia's history [whose version of history is being used? The history Putin had rewritten?].

The US and its allies are trying to **contain** Russia via political, economic, military and information pressure. In the meantime there is a **struggle** underway for resources, access to markets, and control over transportation arteries. There is also a **struggle** for influence in the international arena, which includes the use of political, financial-economic, and information instruments [struggles are the areas in which Russia will focus its attention]. Russia, on the other hand, is offering its **leadership** in exploiting Arctic resources [by militarizing the Arctic]. The principles of **equal and indivisible security** (there were four mentions of the equal security concept) are not being observed [this Soviet era term, equal security, has now returned to the lexicon. It envisions equal security as, for example, the placement of weaponry in Cuba to offset proposed missiles in Poland. If both sides are threatened with deployments, then equal security exists according to this line of thought. Equal security deters through a balance of threats directed at each side.].

Russia **worries** about the **militarization and arms-race** processes developing in regions adjacent to Russia. NATO's buildup is also threatening Russian national security [Russia caused the buildup—it wasn't there before Ukraine and Crimea. NATO's expansion, however, played a role in Russia's decision-making process.]. **Stability** opportunities are **shrinking** due to US missile defense systems that are **implementing** the "global strike" concept, and **deploying** strategic nonnuclear precision weapons systems and weapons that could be deployed in space. The US has used a persistent **block approach** in international relations with the EU and NATO [no mention is made of Russia's block approach, such as the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or BRICS]. The West has tried to **counter integration** processes and has **created** seats of tension in the Eurasian region [Russia created even more instability and tries to shift blame. Intervention in Ukraine made the Baltic countries feel that they could be next on Russia's intervention list.].

Russia **blames** others for overthrowing legitimate political regimes and provoking instability [Russia offered fixed elections in Crimea; Russian elections are suspect as not being representative of the people but of the one's in power, who worry over what successors might do, which is Putin's problem]. Russia writes that **migration** flows demonstrate the non-viability of regional security systems [however, migrants are a small aspect of a regional security system and an occurrence that just took place. More to the point, immigrants go to places where they feel they have chances for employment and a decent life, and few went to Russia as a result]. Some **countries aspire** to information and communication technologies to achieve geopolitical objectives, sometimes unlawfully, by manipulating public awareness and falsifying history [no one has manipulated the media recently more than Russia has. It selectively eliminated important historical facts from its rendering of reality and created its own new objective reality, such as Putin's refusal to admit applying pressure on Ukrainian President Yanukovich to side with Russia and not the EU.]. **Stability** is **weakened** by financial, trade, investment, and technological policy to resolve geopolitical tasks [Russian overreliance on oil has weakened its stability at home]. Russia is

focusing efforts on strengthening its internal unit [instead of focusing on why it appears to be so threatening to others].

The document lists the following **strategic interests**: strengthening the country's defense, national accord, and ensuring the inviolability of the RF constitutional order [except when Putin changes it for him to remain as President]; raising living standards; preserving and developing culture and moral values; increasing economic competitiveness; and consolidating the Russian Federation's (RF's) status as a leading world power. **Strategic national priorities** include: national defense, state, and public security; economic growth; science, technology, and education; healthcare and culture; ecology; and strategic stability and **equal** strategic partnership. National defense goals are to create conditions for development and ensure military security. **Goals** are achieved by implementing military policy through **strategic deterrence**, preventing armed conflict, improving military organization and forms and methods for armed force deployment, and increasing mobilization readiness. **Strategic deterrence** is the result of the interrelated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, information, and other measures, such as maintaining the capacity for nuclear deterrence. **Military organization** is to be improved through identifying existing and potential military risks and threats [and it is influenced by the impact of Western conspiracy theories often dreamed up for domestic consumption in Russia]. The **nature** of modern war is studied [no mention of hybrid war is offered]. National defense is based on **rational sufficiency** and effectiveness, to include responses that use **nonmilitary** methods and means, peacekeeping and **diplomatic mechanisms**, military-technical cooperation and **arms control and legal instruments**.

The *NSS* states that some countries aspire to utilize informational and communication technologies to achieve their geopolitical objectives, including by manipulating public awareness and falsifying history [in Ukraine, these methods were used extensively by Russia's media]. **Threats to state and public security** are foreign state intelligence services, the activities of terrorist and extremist organizations, radical public associations (nongovernmental organizations) that incite **color revolutions** (there was only one mention of color revolutions, expected more mentions), criminal organizations, information and communication technologies that disseminate the ideology of fascism, criminal offenses, corruption and national disasters. An increase in the effectiveness of oversight bodies is desired, as well as eradicating conditions and causes of corruption [is Russia's political order the most corrupt?]. The system for **identifying and analyzing threats** to the information sphere is being improved [which could include limiting the type of information Russian citizens receive]; **protecting** citizens from extremist, foreign special services, and propaganda structures is being increased; and technical support for law enforcement agencies is improving [better System of Operational Investigative Measures or SORM equipment, all aimed at domestic deterrence, that is, ensuring the population they are being cared for while systematically watching their every move on the Internet.]. "**Quality of life**" strategic objectives include **developing** human potential, satisfying material, social, and spiritual needs, and reducing social and property inequality.

Economic threats to Russia include **eleven points of concern**: low competitiveness; dependence on external economic circumstances; the lagging development of future technologies; lack of protection for the financial system against foreign capital speculation; information infrastructure vulnerabilities; imbalances in the national budget system and the deterioration of the state's raw-materials base;

reduction in the extraction of strategically important minerals; labor shortages; corruption and criminalization; and restrictive economic measures imposed on the RF. **Provisions must be made** for ensuring stability of the macroeconomic situation; increasing state management's efficiency; strengthening the financial system; ensuring a balance in the budget system; increasing the attractiveness of Russian jurisdiction; reducing critical dependence on foreign technologies; developing high-tech sectors and the defense industry complex; creating strategic reserves of mineral and raw-material resources; forming a single transport space; widening the use of state-private partnership instruments, such as in the Arctic; stimulating the development of small and medium-sized business; reducing informal employment; ensuring the balance of interests of the indigenous population and migrant workers; and developing more international business contacts and attracting foreign technologies [this is the opposite of what was said earlier, where the strategy states that Russia needs to implement import substitution and reduce critical dependence on foreign technologies].

In the **science and technology** sphere it is important to develop scientific potential; develop a national innovation system; form a system of basic and applied scientific research; develop promising high technologies (genetic engineering, robotic engineering, biological, information, communications, cognitive technologies, and nanotechnologies); ensure Russia's leading positions in the spheres of basic math, physics, chemistry, biology, technical sciences, and humanitarian and social sciences; and enhance education with traditional Russian spiritual-moral and cultural-historical values. One threat to national security in the sphere of protecting citizen's health is to limit the availability of psychoactive and psychotropic substances for illegal consumption. However, Russia believes there is the threat of bioweapons appearing on its borders, with the *NSS* stating that "the network of **US military-biological laboratories** on the territory of states adjacent to Russia is being expanded." This issue was mentioned twice, and shows Russia's concerns over what they deem to be bio-planning between NATO and other nations.

Traditional Russian spiritual and moral values include the priority of the spiritual over the material, the protection of human life and rights and freedoms, and other factors (family, service to the homeland, etc.). **Threats** to national security include the erosion of these traditional spiritual and moral values, a propaganda of permissiveness and violence, racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance, attempts to falsify Russian and world history, and **encroachments upon cultural objects** [can the destruction of a statue in Poland be construed as a national security threat?]. Strengthening the sphere of culture is aided by taking measures to **protect** Russian society against an external expansion of ideologies, values, and destructive information and psychological impacts on Russia; the implementation of control in the information sphere; and the prevention of the spread of extremist products, propaganda of violence, and racial, religious, and interethnic intolerance. **Creating a state order for Internet resources** and other information outlets is required.

Foreign policy relies on international law and the principles of **equality** and noninterference in a states' internal affairs. Long-term steady development to ensure strategic stability includes freeing the world of nuclear weapons, strengthening universal reliable and **equal security**, and other factors that influence global strategic stability. **Strategic cooperation with the People's Republic of China** is a key factor in maintaining global and regional stability, and **India** is playing an important role. Of real

importance is that, after accusing the US of several infractions, the RF states it is interested in a full-fledged partnership with the US on the “basis of coincident interests.” This involves economics, arms control measures, the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, cooperating in the fight against terrorism, and settling regional conflicts. Also of interest is developing **equal** and mutually “**beneficial international cooperation in the Arctic.**”

Strategic stability for the RF is preserved under the following circumstances: preserving the stability of the system of international law; honoring international treaties in arms limitation; preparing for a reduction of nuclear potentials; contributing to the strengthening of regional stability through participating in the reduction and limitation of conventional armed forces; considering peacekeeping as a way to settle armed conflicts; contributing to the formation of an international information security system [which the West rejects as an attempt to control information on the part of the RF and China]; and participating in UN activities to alleviate disasters. The RF wants to develop relations with NATO based on **equality** in order to strengthen security in the Euro-Atlantic region. The RF finds it unacceptable for NATO’s increased activity toward Russia’s borders and the building of a missile-defense system.

The *Strategy* is **executed** on a planned basis and makes comprehensive use of political, organizational, socioeconomic, legal, information, military, special, and other actions developed as part of strategic planning. With regard to information, the following was highlighted:

The information basis for implementing this *Strategy* is provided by the federal strategic planning information system, which incorporates the information resources of organs of state power and local self-government, and also by the systems of distributed situation centers and state scientific organizations. In implementing this *Strategy*, particular attention shall be paid to ensuring information security in light of strategic national priorities. The RF Security Council has a coordinating role in the information and information-analytical support for the implementation of this **Strategy** and also in its amendment once every six years...

Indicators for evaluating the state of national security are the citizens’ degree of satisfaction with the protection of their rights and freedoms; the proportion of modern models of arms and military and special equipment; life expectancy; per capita GDP; decile coefficient (ratio of income to the most and least prosperous ten per cent of the population); inflation; unemployment; proportion of expenditure of the GDP on science, technology, and education; proportion of expenditure of the GDP on culture; and the proportion of territory of the RF not conforming to environmental standards.

Follow-Up to the NSS

After the *Strategy* was published, commentary on the document continued from both domestic and foreign sources. The Security Council in particular rolled out a host of deputies to discuss the *Strategy*, and each official seemed to have a specific aspect of the NSS to highlight. This section is broken into three parts from various sources: those directly associated with the Putin regime, editorials (signed and unsigned), and commentary from foreign nations.

Official figures:

12 January, Security Council Deputy Secretary Vladimir Nazarov: he noted that Russia's list of **national interests** had expanded to include strengthening the country's defense, desiring national accord and the unity of society, enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy, and protecting the culture and traditional and ethical values of Russian society. The peaceful and socioeconomic development of Russia, he noted, depends on favorable external conditions, domestic stability, and public accord. The *Strategy's* provisions are mandatory for all state and local self-government bodies. Emphasis is also placed on the development of interaction between the state and civil society's institutes. The *Strategy* will be **fulfilled through monitoring of the main indicators of national security**.³⁸

13 January, Security Council Deputy Secretary Mikhail Popov: he stated that Russia will only **use force as a last resort**. Russia's foreign policy does not want confrontation and a new arms race. Strategic deterrence is achieved through Russia's nuclear potential and AF combat preparedness; and through the prevention of conflicts via a package of interlinked political, military, military-technical, and other measures that aim to prevent the use of force against Russia. The **NSS has been harmonized with the new military doctrine** and it stresses mobilization readiness.³⁹

14 January, Foreign Ministry official Maria Zakharova: **Russia is ready for relations with NATO** on the basis of **equal rights** for strengthening universal security in Europe and the Atlantic. The alliance must take account Russia's lawful interests and respect the norms of international law. The *Strategy* does, she notes, list factors where NATO's activities may be detrimental to Russian national interests (increasing NATO's forceful potential and obtaining a role in breaching international law, expanding the alliance, more military activities, and moving military infrastructures closer to Russia). The alliance is increasing its military presence in the east, conducting drills on Russia's borders, deploying troops and armor, creating advanced command post units, reinforcing patrols in the Baltic Sea, maintaining their presence in the Black Sea, and deploying Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense systems in Romania and Poland. Russia is just responding to attempts to change the existing balance of forces in Europe, she noted.⁴⁰

18 January, Security Council Deputy Secretary Yevgeny Lukyanov: Washington is reinforcing unions and associations oriented towards them and are pursuing policies to destabilize regimes disliked by the US. Still **Russia is ready to partner with the US** as long as the US does not conduct a dialogue from a position of force. Russia intends to maintain its deterrent potential guaranteeing Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while giving priority attention to disarmament issues and observing the non-proliferation regime.⁴¹ The *NSS* shows Russia's commitment to an open and rational foreign policy promoting international law and respect for people and their cultures, traditions, and interests. The strategic partnership includes China and India. The Arctic merits special attention. Economic and information pressure is being exerted on Russia due to its independent foreign policy. Russia does not use

³⁸ *Interfax*, 12 January 2016.

³⁹ *Interfax*, 13 January 2016.

⁴⁰ *Interfax* (in English), 14 January 2016.

⁴¹ *Interfax* (in English), 18 January 2016.

Cold War terminology, categorize countries as good and bad, or declare individual states or regions to be enemies.⁴²

19 January, comment from Sergei Vakhrukov, the aide to the Secretary of the Security Council: key **strategic economic threats** are Russia's low competitiveness, lingering resource export developments and the current high dependence on the foreign trade environment and raw material exports, lags in cutting-edge technologies, national budgetary system imbalances, insufficient resources for lending, and the vulnerability of the national financial system. **Key tasks** are eradicating economic imbalances, reducing differentiations in disparities in social and economic developments, mitigating the level of exposure to external negative factors, participating in international economic cooperation, and obtaining higher effectiveness in the state's regulation in economic areas. **To accomplish these tasks** the industrial and technological base and national innovation system will be enhanced, economic sectors modernized, investment appeal nurtured, financial systems improved, and the business environment consolidated. **Strategic goals** are to develop the country's national economy, ensure economic security, create the conditions to facilitate personality development, transition the economy to a new technological level, make Russia a leader in terms of GDP, and withstand the impact of internal and external threats. **Energy security** includes sustaining domestic consumption of energy resources, growing energy efficiency, and increasing the competitive power of domestic resources and supply systems. With regard to a **citizen's quality of life**, decreasing social inequality, ensuring food supplies, improving access to good housing, high-quality goods and services, and modern education and healthcare, and creating more effective jobs were all stressed. Finally, **food security** was stressed, to include system regulations, sanitary and safety control measures, broadening access to sales markets, and other issues.⁴³

20 January, comment from Alexander Grebenkin, an Assistant Secretary of the Russian Security Council: **main threats to national security** are the intelligence gathering of foreign security services, terrorism, extremism, criminal organizations and groups, radical public associations, natural calamities, and the deteriorating technical condition of infrastructures. Information and communication technologies that distribute the propaganda of fascism, extremism, and separatism are threats. It is necessary to maintain the political and social stability of society. The *NSS* underlined the need for interaction among security and law enforcement agencies and civilian society, as well as building confidence in the judiciary.⁴⁴

21 January, President Putin: it is necessary to place a strategy of **scientific and technological** development on a par with the *NSS*, he noted. The strategy must be ready by the autumn, since it is "the key factor of sovereignty and security of a state."⁴⁵

Foreign Opinions

6 January, Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, Oleksandr Turchynov: the *NSS* carries threats to Ukraine, since it notes that an **anti-constitutional coup** took place and that the conflict

⁴² *Government of the Russian Federation*, 18 January 2016.

⁴³ *Interfax* (in English), 19 January 2016.

⁴⁴ *Interfax* (in English), 20 January 2016.

⁴⁵ *Interfax* (in English), 21 January 2016.

in eastern Ukraine **was created by the West** and the US. Countering Russian aggression remains the key to Ukraine's national security priority. The *Strategy* is "full of empty slogans and is advertising the grandeur of Russia."⁴⁶

6 January, Chinese PhD student Cui Heng: the *NSS* identifies NATO as a potential threat for the first time and stresses cooperation with the Asia-Pacific countries (mentioning China first). The *Strategy* is assertive, an active approach. The *NSS* is cooperative and not confrontational; even though the leadership considers that the country faces confrontation with some world actors. To cope with confrontations military modernization must be sped up. Diplomatic suppression and economic sanctions due to the Ukraine crisis have destabilized Russia's domestic security situation.⁴⁷

18 January, Chinese *Xinhua* press: Russia has upgraded its *NSS* taking into account how the US has worsened the international situation. The article cites the views of Lukyanov (noted above). The article does not list a Chinese opinion on the *NSS*.⁴⁸

Editorials:

4 January, *Sputnik* in English: Western media are quick to point out that **NATO and the US are threats to Russia but ignore the fact that Russia states it is also willing to cooperate with them** on a full-fledged partnership basis if it is mutually beneficial. Russia's new found strength has caused the US and its allies to initiate counteractions and attempt to maintain their dominant position in the world. The US deployment of weapon systems has decreased the maintenance of global and regional stability. The US is expanding its network of military-biological labs in countries neighboring Russia. US President Obama, on the other hand, has not suggested a way for cooperation with Russia, according to the report.⁴⁹

12 January, in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*: Putin said the **biggest mistake in the past 25 years was that Russia did not declare its national interests**. Main aims of the *NSS* are to strengthen defense and national unity, increase the population's living standards and the economy's competitiveness, and consolidate Russia's status as one of the leading world powers. The *NSS* is needed, since the security situation has changed and new threats have emerged. **More than 20 sections cover strategic stability** and Russia's mutual relations with the outside world; 17 sections cover increased defense capabilities and state security; 12 sections cover the economy; 7 cover culture, 5 each cover increasing citizens living standards and healthcare, and 4 each cover the environment, science, and education. Priority is given to cooperation with BRICS, RIC, APEC, G20, and the SCO. The CIS and China, along with India, also garnered special recognition as important cooperative partners. Ukraine is listed as a main threat and the US and EU are blamed for supporting an anti-constitutional *coup d'état* [Putin's role in trying to persuade Yanukovich to side with Russia is not mentioned]. NATO and the EU are accused of not being able to ensure Europe's security [none of the countries associated with these organizations wants Russia to ensure their security],

⁴⁶ *Interfax-Ukraine* (in Russian), 6 January 2016.

⁴⁷ Cui Heng, "Russia Assertive Facing Threat from West," *Global Times Online* (in English), 6 January 2016.

⁴⁸ *Xinhua* (in English), 18 January 2016.

⁴⁹ No author listed, "Western Media Alarmed US Becomes Threat to Russia, but Fail to Read Deeper," *Sputnik* (in English), 4 January 2016.

and criticism is leveled against both the expansion of the missile defense system and the network of biological weapon laboratories near Russia's orders. While the documents tone is more militarily aggressive and Russia's foreign policy is deemed to be independent, the *NSS* still shows that "Moscow does not intend to turn its back on a 'full partnership' with Washington."⁵⁰

Conclusions

The security environment that the document projects is holistic, taking in culture, values, economics, science, national interests, health, education, and a host of other issues. The overall focus is on the well-documented desire to maintain strategic stability and the Russian penchant to control propaganda and enhance regime survival. Overall, many of the issues raised in the *NSS* were discussed piecemeal over the past two years. The *NSS* is just the first place they have all been brought together. Many points of the *NSS* were repeats from the 2009 *NSS*.

The *NSS* presents concern over the state of international relations between Russia and the West, while relations with the East are listed with more enthusiasm for their continued cooperative ventures. Still the document offers openings for potential areas of cooperation with both NATO and the US. It is not known if Russia's offer of some conciliation is designed to find a way to reduce the sanctions that were imposed on the nation after its acquisition of Crimea and intervention into Eastern Ukraine; or if this is a sincere offer to change behavior. It is clear that those speaking after the documents release underlined this point of potential cooperation repeatedly but gave no indication of the rationale behind it.

Domestically there is concern over the potential impact that economic and national security threats present to Russia. Suggested ways to get out of the current morass are listed. There is also a list of indicators to allow people to evaluate the current state of national security in Russia and thus whether it is making progress in its desire to protect national security. The *NSS* appears to be seen by the Kremlin as a roadmap that outlines the important aspects for shaping domestic and international policy as well as the interaction between national security and socioeconomic affairs.

It is apparent that not everyone is happy with the document, most likely due to the current shape of the economy. For example, a report in *Vedomosti Online (Business Online)*, indicating concern in that community) on 20 January noted that "practically all of Russia's top officials (except maybe for the President) have admitted that the economy is in a severe crisis." Further, the article notes that "the authors fail to notice that the economy is closed off and shrunken (including as a result of the policy of 'protection of the country's interests'), by cutting itself off from world trade, finances, and technological completion."⁵¹

To help ensure economic stability in the coming years, a series of areas are considered "off limits" to foreign governments, such as Russia's national interests and stakes in specific geopolitical property (in particular, the Arctic). These warnings are made quite clear in the document. It is also off limits to allow

⁵⁰ "Russia Recognizes Itself as Country Surrounded by Enemies—Moscow Takes Its Most Anti-Western Turn in 20 Years," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 12 January 2016.

⁵¹ Pavel Aptekar and Andrey Sinitsy, "Sacred Security Strategy: Special Services Refine Document That is Increasingly Disconnected from Reality," *Vedomosti Online (Business Online)*, 20 January 2016.

intrusions into Russia's domestic propaganda apparatus as well, since the impact of foreign information and communication systems on the population may threaten regime survival in the Kremlin's view. The document places blame on nongovernmental organizations and individuals for upending stability in Russia as well. State-owned TV and other media outlets, assisted by FSB control of the Internet, are ways to ensure information security.

Through the publication of the *NSS*, Russia has demonstrated a mixture of some realism (the discussion of the economy lists real problems, among other issues) alongside excuses for their current situation (failing to admit or take into consideration the effect of their actions as being responsible for new threats appearing on the border). Russia wants a return to great power status, and the Kremlin sees energy resources and military power as two of the most important paths to glory, along with developing more creative and innovative theorists. While the *NSS* is an important document, Putin's January announcement on science and technology issues may be even more important. He stated that a strategy on S&T issues is crucial for a state to maintain its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and one will be ready in the fall. International prestige and power projection capabilities come from a good S&T strategy that offers high-tech methods to counter threats from within and without. The sum total of information control, military modernization, energy security, and S&T advances is can also be read as the Putin entourage's method of guaranteeing regime survival. The regime wants the population to focus on what it is doing for it, not what it has done to it.

APPENDIX ONE The current Strategy makes use of the following main concepts:

-- The Russian Federation's national security (hereinafter national security) -- the state of protection of the individual, society, and the state against internal and external threats in the process of which the exercise of the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens of the Russian Federation (hereinafter citizens), a decent quality of life and standard of living for them, sovereignty, independence, state and territorial integrity, and sustainable socioeconomic development of the Russian Federation are ensured. National security includes the country's defense and all types of security envisioned by the Russian Federation Constitution and Russian Federation legislation -- primarily state, public, informational, environmental, economic, transportation, and energy security and individual security;

-- The Russian Federation's national interests (hereinafter national interests) -- objectively significant requirements of the individual, society, and the state with regard to ensuring their protection and sustainable development;

-- Threats to national security -- the set of conditions and factors creating a direct or indirect possibility of harm to national interests;

-- The safeguarding of national security -- the implementation by organs of state power and organs of local self-government in conjunction with institutions of civil society of political, military, organizational, socioeconomic, informational, legal, and other measures aimed at countering threats to national security and satisfying national interests;

-- The Russian Federation's strategic national priorities (hereinafter strategic national priorities) -
- the most important areas of the safeguarding of national security;

-- The system for safeguarding national security -- the set of organs of state power and organs of local self-government carrying out the implementation of state policy in the sphere of safeguarding national security and the instruments at their disposal.

Introduction

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

Why did Russia take these preparatory steps and then intervene in this particular conflict at a time when Kremlin leaders were heavily focused on Eastern Ukraine and potential problems in the Baltic? The rationale appeared simple: first, and foremost, to support the Bashar Al-Assad regime, which had lost control of, according to some Russian accounts, up to 70 percent of Syrian territory to the Islamic State (IS) in September 2015.⁵² Second, Russia noted with alarm that its southern belly was again exposed to the return of extremists who had fought on the side of IS against the Syrian government and were now bringing back to Russia both their ideology and lessons learned from fighting there. After quieting the near decade long struggle inside Russia in Chechnya, which is very near the region of conflict, Russia's leaders did not want a new threat recreated there or spread to other parts of the country. Both points appeared to have spearheaded the Kremlin's decision-making and influenced its resolve to intervene.

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

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

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

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

⁵² Yuriy Gavrillov, "Syria: Russian Thunder. The Commander of the Russian Federation's Troop Grouping in Syria Has Given His First Interview to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 24 March 2016.

(with new weapons) as the military continues to implement reforms and reequip the force after years of neglect.

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

The focus on testing new equipment was prioritized not only under Syria's battlefield conditions but also in exercises. Of interest was that nonstandard (atypical) decisions were emphasized, as there were no scripted solutions. Gerasimov added that as military art develops, defensive operations must be active, since the boundary between defense and the offense is becoming increasingly blurred. Commanders must be able to foresee how to incorporate preventive offensive operations in certain sectors.⁵³ Finally, regarding missiles and mobility, it was noted that S-400, Kalibr, and Bastion systems were fired, and the Strelets reconnaissance and target attack system was exercised along with air, rail, river, and sea operations.⁵⁴

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

⁵³ See for example, Aleksandr Tikhomnov, "In the Southwest Sector," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 16 September 2016; and Oleg Falichev, "The Long Arm of the Bastion: Why the Strategic Command Staff Exercise Kavkaz-2016 Elicited Heightened Activity of Foreign Intelligence Services," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online*, 21-27 September 2016.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Actor: Jabhat Fateh al Sham

| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | NATIONAL SECURITY / POPULATION SAFETY | INT'L/ INTERGROUP PRESTIGE | DOMESTIC POLITICS/ REGIME SECURITY/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT | ECONOMIC SURVIVAL/ PROSPERITY | IDENTITY / IDEOLOGY |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Maintenance of Territorial gains in Central Syria | <i>Since the emergence of Jabhat al Nusra now rebranded as Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS) one of the core principles was an integrated approach to expansion (based on direction from Al-Qaeda). In this regard JFS has attempted to gain the support of communities while slowly (after several missteps) implementing their version of Salafi islam. To this extent JFS has become key to some of the major gains that have been accomplished by opposition groups in Idlib, northern Latakia, Aleppo and Hama. It should be noted that the success of this integration, including the coalition known as Jaysh al Fateh, may have been one of the key reasons for Russian intervention in the region. In the fall of 2015 it was widely observed that Syrian Army losses were mounting quickly. That JFS has continued to maintain ground despite Russian airstrikes only deepens their perceived value as an opposition amplifier in the region.</i> | X | x | X | | |
| Strengthening the Expansion of Salafi Jihadist movement in Syria. | <i>The efforts of the “moderate” opposition in tempering Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS) have acted as checks and balances to JFS’ application of strict sharia law. There are several instances of opposition groups and communities clashing with JFS as a push back against their attempts for dominance. This has forced JFS to continually test</i> | | X | X | | x |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| | <p><i>the waters before proceeding or backing down where they appeared to be losing support. This is in fact part of a larger strategy started by AQ to embed itself in communities. It has also however resulted in JFS taking in more extremist elements as they came into conflict with moderate groups. Perhaps the most concerning example being the acceptance of Jund al-Aqsa (an ISIS sympathetic group) into JFS in early October 2016. Based on these most recent actions JFS is likely to continue to be at odds with larger groups like Ahrar al Sham and Jaysh al-Islam, both of whom are both attempting to present as the “moderate” islamist alternative.</i></p> | | | | | |
| Rebranding | <p><i>In August 2016 Jabhat al Nusra cut its “official ties” with Al-Qaeda most likely with the goal of avoiding increasing pressure and targeting by Russia and the US. According to the group it intended to remove “external direction” from AQ and continue its focus on opposing the Syrian government. It is also thought that by breaking away it will put JFS in a position to absorb other groups that previously didn’t want to come under the AQ umbrella. While it has changed in name JFS is likely to have retained many of its long term goals including the creation of an Islamic Emirate within Syria.</i></p> | | x | | | x |

Actor: Ahrar al-Sham

| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | NATIONAL SECURITY / POPULATION SAFETY | INT’L/ INTERGROUP PRESTIGE | DOMESTIC POLITICS/ REGIME SECURITY/ CONSTITUENT SUPPORT | ECONOMIC SURVIVAL/ PROSPERITY | IDENTITY / IDEOLOGY |
|----------|-------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| | | | | | | |

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

Author Biographies

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.

Bernard Carreau



Bernard Carreau is the Deputy Director of the Center for Complex Operations (CCO) at the National Defense University. He established and currently supervises a lessons learned program focusing on the operational and strategic effectiveness of the military and interagency teams in overseas contingency operations. He has led numerous collection and analysis teams to Afghanistan and Iraq. Mr. Carreau is the author or supervisor of recent reports related to the strategic effectiveness of special operations forces, stability operations, transitional public security, civilian stabilization capabilities, and socio-cultural intelligence analysis. He is currently completing a study on behalf of the Joint Staff/J7 on the question of whether the national security decision-making and strategic planning processes were effective in achieving U.S. national objectives in Syria. Mr. Carreau was an advisor to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Washington and Baghdad on private sector development and an advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Trade. He has a Master's degree from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

Justin Gengler

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

Hassan Hassan

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

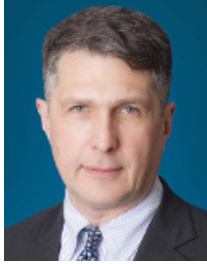
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Dr. Diane Maye is an Assistant Professor of Homeland Security and Global Conflict Studies at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, an affiliated faculty member at George Mason University's Center for Narrative and Conflict 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.



Eugene Rumer

Eugene Rumer is a senior fellow and the director of Carnegie's Russia and Eurasia Program.

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

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

Tim Thomas

Timothy L. Thomas is an analyst at the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He retired from the U.S. Army as a Lieutenant Colonel in the summer of 1993. Mr. Thomas received a B.S. from West Point and an M.A. from the University of Southern California. He was a U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer who specialized in Soviet/Russian studies. His military assignments included serving as the Director of Soviet Studies at the United States Army Russian Institute (USARI) in Garmisch, Germany; as an inspector of Soviet tactical operations under CSCE; and as a Brigade S-2 and company commander in the 82nd Abn Division. Mr. Thomas has done extensive research and publishing in the areas of peacekeeping, information war, psychological operations, low intensity conflict, and political-military affairs. He served as the assistant editor of the journal *European Security* and as an adjunct professor at the U.S. Army's Eurasian Institute; is an adjunct lecturer at the USAF Special Operations School; and was a member of two Russian organizations, the Academy of International Information, and the Academy of Natural Sciences.



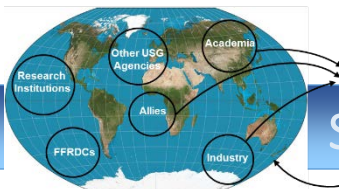
Jeff Weyers

PhD Candidate, **University of Liverpool**

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Jeff Weyers is a decorated police veteran from Ontario, Canada with an academic background in investigative psychology and intelligence studies. He currently lectures in the areas of Terrorism and Open Source Intelligence with Wilfrid Laurier University. He is a regular contributing author to the Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC). Jeff is also a Senior Intelligence Research Analyst with iBRABO, an intelligence research group based in Canada and the UK. With iBRABO Jeff was one of the lead analysts involved in producing daily SOCMINT/OSINT reports on Syria in support of the Access to Justice and Community Security (AJACS) program in 2015. As a result Jeff has developed an intimate understanding of many of the groups and conflict dynamics still ongoing in the region.

He is currently in the final year of his PhD studies with the Tactical Decision Making Research Unit at the University of Liverpool where he is examining extremist social media, monitoring and prevention. He is a recognized expert in terrorist's use of social media and open source intelligence gathering and has assisted governments and intelligence agencies around the world in this regard.



What are near and long term Turkish interests and intentions in Syria and Iraq? What are Turkish interests and intentions with respect to al-Bab?

Contributors: *Dr. Birol Yeşilada (Portland State University); Dr. Benedetta Berti (Institute for National Security Studies, Israel); The Honorable David Gompert (US Naval Academy, Rand)*

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Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Despite policy shifts Turkey’s key interests remain the same

The SME contributors to this SMA Reach-back write-up argue that the recent changes in Turkish security policy (e.g., pursuit of ISIL along with the PKK; relaxing of demands for Assad’s removal; warming relations with Russia, etc.) do not necessarily indicate that Turkey’s key interests and intentions have changed.⁵⁵ Rather, the shifts should be seen as changes in objectives or tactics that are still thoroughly consistent with Turkey’s fundamental and enduring security interests: 1) containing and ultimately eliminating Kurdish or other threats to Turkey’s internal stability; and, 2) foiling Kurdish (or others’) ambitions that threaten the integrity of Turkey’s borders. Former Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence David Gompert (USNA, Rand) explains that recognizing Turkey’s dire concern with territorial integrity goes a long way in clarifying what may at first blush appear to be inconsistent policies regarding Assad, Syria, ISIL and even its “traditional enmity” toward Russia. Gompert expresses the message clearly: “...we can count on the Turks to do whatever it takes to prevent Kurdish states on their southern border.”

Erdogan’s political ambition: a third fundamental interest?

While most SMEs focused on Turkish threat perceptions and the Turkey—Kurd/PKK conflict as a key motivator of Turkey’s actions in Syria and Iraq, Portland State University Turkey scholar Dr. Birol Yesilada argues that Turkey’s security policy and actions cannot be fully understood without including President

⁵⁵ The SME’s arguments mirror those from previous SMA Reach-back reports (e.g., see QL2, updated 10/26/2016). The V7 Reach-back report summary table of Turkey’s key interests relative to the regional conflict is reprinted at the end of this section.

Erdogan’s personal political ambitions and domestic political considerations as critical motivators of state behavior. According to Yesilada, President Erdogan is using operations in Iraq and Syria to demonstrate his government’s strength and ability to provide security to Turks in order to advance his domestic political agenda. Erdogan’s ultimate goal is to gain the backing to change Turkey’s constitution to support establishment of his “Turkish-style Presidency” – a highly centralized, some say oligarchic or dictatorial, Islamist regime. (It is interesting to note that to date, Erdogan’s movements and plans for his “Turkish-style” leadership mirror those Vladimir Putin followed to centralize political power in Russia into his hands.)

Key objectives underlying Turkey’s actions

The SME contributors to this write-up provided a number of truly expert and comprehensive essays on Turkey’s short and longer-term objectives in northern Syria and Iraq. Although not always mentioned in this context, as shown in the summary graphic, each objective has a clear and direct link to the two fundamental security interests (i.e., internal stability and territorial integrity) and/or Erdogan’s domestic political interest.



1) *Defeating Terrorism.* Defeating terrorism against the Turkish state has generally meant the PKK in Turkey and Iraq and PYD/YPG⁵⁶ in Syria, although once ISIL fighters brought the fight into Turkey, Ankara has expanded the focus of its efforts to include the Islamic State. The question of the impact on Turkey’s security policy of Erdogan’s bid ultimately to change Turkey’s Constitution is a compelling and difficult to isolate. However, Professor Yesilada (Portland State) cites polls that show the political benefit Erdogan

⁵⁶ The People’s Protection Units (YPG) is the military arm of the Kurdish Federation of Northern Syria (Rojava). The Democratic Union Party (PYD) is the largest group in the Federation and make up a good percentage of the YPG. To the US and Coalition the YPG have been some of the most effective fighters in northern Syria, have removed ISIL from major areas and are fighting in Raqqa as part of Euphrates Wrath. Turkey however sees the PYD as a terrorist organization given its alliance to the Kurdish Worker’s Party (PKK) in Turkey and Iraq.

gains from these efforts: “91% of Turks support Erdogan’s anti-terror campaign inside the country and 78% support his military intervention in Syria and Iraq (esp. re Mosul) and 88% view his security policies favorably.”

2) Impeding Kurdish political and territorial gain. Containing Kurdish political and territorial gains and obstructing activities that might by design or inadvertently lead to an autonomous Kurdish entity on Turkey’s border, are critical Turkish objectives in northern Syria. Many experts see Turkey’s pursuit of Operation Euphrates Shield as motivated by the desire to carve out a buffer zone in northern Syria and drive a solid wedge between Kurdish-controlled territory to the east and west to thwart emergence of a contiguous Kurdish region in northern Syria, that from its perspective would threaten both Turkey’s internal stability and potentially control over its own territory.

3) Increasing Turkey’s regional role and influence. A number of experts noted Turkey’s push to distance itself from EU and NATO. With respect to its recently thawed relations with Russia a number of the SMEs expect that Turkey will move cautiously in its relations with Russia as it seeks to as Gompert tags it, engage in “diversified outreach” to expand its list of international partners and carve out a more independent regional role for itself. They argue that Turkey has little to gain from upsetting the US to the degree that it loses US backing.

4) Assuring domestic support. Finally, as suggested by the opinion poll results cited above, at present President Erdogan enjoys extremely high public approval for his security policy – especially along Turkey’s border. Continuing to demonstrate the government’s ability to provide security for Turks will be a key facet of Erdogan’s overall popularity and ability to push through his preferred changes to Turkey’s democratic system.

Opening al-Bab: Turkey’s Intentions

Operation Euphrates Shield began with the liberation of Jarabulus in August 2016. In November Turkish forces and allied rebel groups launched the assault to remove ISIL from al-Bab and have been bogged down there since.

Most contributors to this report see Turkey’s mid-range intentions in al-Bab as two-fold: to defeat ISIL and push it away

from the Turkish border, and to drive a pro-Turkey wedge between Kurdish-controlled areas in northern Syria containing the PKK and PYD and strengthening Turkey’s buffer zone in north Syria. A number of the SMEs make the case that one of Turkey’s mid-term objectives in conducting Euphrates Shield is to diminish the prestige the YPG has gained as the US/Coalition’s “go-to” fighters in the area. Specifically, Turkey gains both domestically and internationally if its own Syrian rebel proxies can liberate al-Bab – the last ISIL stronghold in northern Syria -- and perhaps help in Raqqah rather than cede those opportunities to the YPG. Benedetta Berti (Institute for National Security Studies, Israel) suggests that Turkey’s objective here



is to guarantee itself influence regarding the details of any post-conflict resolution arrangements in particular what happens with regards to Syria's Kurdish population.

What next?

News reporters, commentators and the SMA SMEs continue to speculate on Turkey's next move after liberation of al-Bab. Some experts believe that once al-Bab is liberated Turkey-backed rebels will attempt to take the city of Manbij 50 km up the M4 from the YPG forces that helped liberate that city and establish a strong buffer from Jarabulus to al-Bab to Manbij. In fact, in a January 4, speech delivered two months into the battle for al-Bab President Erdogan assured Turks that al-Bab would be retaken from ISIL shortly and after that, that Turkey was "committed to clearing other areas where the terror organizations are nesting, especially Manbij."⁵⁷ However, on 27 January Erdogan appeared to recant, stating that Turkey would "finish the job" in al-Bab, but not necessarily move beyond al-Bab to other areas of Syria.⁵⁸ There is a domestic and a regional concern here: Turkey has taken most of its Euphrates Shield casualties in the fight for al-Bab. Erdogan pronouncement also comes at a time when Syrian government forces are moving toward al-Bab from Aleppo and the southwest. The softening of Erdogan's rhetoric likely reflects Russian influence as the forces of its two allies – themselves long-time adversaries, could come up against each other in al-Bab.⁵⁹ One alternative is posed by Woodrow Wilson Center expert Amberin Zaman⁶⁰ who is cited in news reports as doubtful that Turkish forces or Turkey-backed rebels would move on Manbij in part because of the Coalition Special Forces that he believes remain there following liberation of the city. Instead Zaman suggests that the next move in Turkey's battle against the YPG will be against Afrin which is also in Kurdish-controlled territory, but which is less populated than Manbij or al-Bab and so should prove less difficult to secure.

⁵⁷ President Erdogan speech 4 January 2017; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idUSKBN1400ZT>

⁵⁸ Ozerkan, Fulya. January 27, 2017, "Turkey's Syria offensive stalls at flashpoint town," Your Middle East. http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/news/turkeys-syria-offensive-stalls-at-flashpoint-town_45135

⁵⁹ Some news analysts speculate that the Syrian Army push northeast from Aleppo toward al-Bab is not so much an offensive against ISIL forces in that city as it is the result of Syrian concern about Turkey's designs on al Bab as a key link in establishing its safe zone in northern Syria. See <http://aranews.net/2017/01/syrian-regime-allied-militias-join-battle-for-al-bab-to-impede-turkish-progress/>

⁶⁰ <http://aranews.net/2016/09/turkeys-next-move-syria/>

SME Input

Turkey’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Reprinted from SMA Reach-back Report V7⁶¹

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Turkey | | National | Domestic | Economic | Identity |
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | Int'l/intergr | politics/ regime | survival | ideology |
| | | security/ /prestige | security/ constituent support | / prosperity | |
| Maintain Erdogan, control/ influence government | <p><i>Political opposition to President Erdogan strengthened in light of several factors related to the war in Syria. However Erdogan’s popularity in has risen significantly since the summer 2016 coup attempt. Erdogan is closer to the numbers needed to win a referendum on his long-held ambition: replacing Turkey’s parliamentary system with a presidential system that would as a consequence legally and substantially expand his powers.</i></p> <p><i>Changing demographics due to refugee influx into 5 provinces bordering Syria are shifting the balance of power between ethnic groups and increasing the potential for tension and conflict. It also has economic impact on use of services and dropping of wage rates as refugees who are willing to work at lower wages take especially</i></p> | | | X | |

⁶¹ The V& question was: What are the strategic objectives and motivations of indigenous state and non-state partners in the counter-ISIL fight? It can be downloaded in full from <http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-cell-v7-state-non-state-partners-countering-isil/>

unskilled labor from locals. In the past, voters have not supported the presidential system. Erdogan by changing that in part by linking the referendum to Turkish nationalism and threat perception. "Erdogan has managed to introduce the idea that he is the only guy who can keep the country together, that Erdogan's survival is essentially the survival of the state of Turkey."⁶² He also has made a number of sensational speeches since the coup appealing to nationalist, neo-Ottoman sentiment and reinforcing his tough stance against the PKK.

Stem **Kurdish** *Kurdish battlefield successes against ISIL in Syria* X
separatism; deny *and Iraq are viewed with trepidation by Turkey.*
PKK safe havens *In particular it remains concerned about arming of Kurdish forces in Iraq (Peshmerga) for fear that those weapons would fall into the hands of its arch enemy, the PKK – a designated terrorist organization -- which has also joined the fight against ISIL.*

Success by Iraqi Kurds, who have been able to significantly expand their territory (Bender, 2014), however is not necessarily viewed as a loss given Turkey's close economic ties with the Kurdish Regional Government of Northern Iraq. Since the 1990s, and particularly since 2003, Iraqi Kurds have been relentless in trying to convince the Turkish government that they have no real connection to the Turkish Kurds or the PKK. The KRG quite explicitly conveys that it is not and will not play the nationalist, ethnic card to rile up Turkey's Kurdish population. A 2014 deal between the Kurdistan Regional government and Turkish state energy companies over stakes in the region's oil and gas fields deepened the

⁶² Zia Weiss. "Erdogan pursues his plan for even greater power," Politico, 28 October 2016. <http://unexploredworlds.com/cgiproxy/nph-proxy.pl/010110A/http/www.politico.eu/article/recep-tayyip-erdogan-pursues-his-plan-for-even-greater-power-turkish-president-akp/>

relationship between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds (Dombey, 2013).

Limit regional influence **Iran's** *According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Turkish and Saudi foreign policy perspectives mutually support each other and create synergy" (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Both countries are concerned over Iran's increasing influence in the region and their alliance effectively forms a Sunni bloc. Like Saudi Arabia, Turkey competes with Iran for influence in Iraq and Syria, and like both KSA and Iran, attempts to use the region's ethnic and sectarian fissures to its advantage. Tensions have flared of late about the presence of Turkish troops in Iraq – which is seen as led by an Iran-leaning, Shi'a government that has lost governing legitimacy over years of excluding and targeting Sunni, and alienating the Kurds.⁶³ Turkey does not want Iranian presence on its borders and from which it might direct proxy forces to attack. An analysis in The National Interest, argues that Turkey fears for the safety of the (Sunni) Turkoman population in northern Iraq at the hands of Iran and Shi'a militia operating in these areas.⁶⁴* X X

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

⁶³ Zalmay Khalilzad. "Are Turkey and Iraq Headed for War in Mosul?" The National Interest, 20 October 2016. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/are-turkey-iraq-headed-war-mosul-18130>

⁶⁴ Zalmay Khalilzad. "Are Turkey and Iraq Headed for War in Mosul?" The National Interest, 20 October 2016. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/are-turkey-iraq-headed-war-mosul-18130>

to be seen as the “big brother of the emerging Arab democracies” (Hinnebusch, 2015, p. 16).

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| Enhance Turkey's energy security and trade | <i>Turkey has worked to position itself as energy hub between Europe and Central Asia/ME suppliers (Dombey 2014).</i> | X | X |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|

Turkey's energy needs have risen along with its rapid economic growth. It is reliant on imported crude oil (Iran 26%, Iraq 27%, KSA 10%) and natural gas (Russia 57%, Iran 29%) from countries whose foreign policies are often at odds with those of NATO and the EU. Its supply lines – particularly those running through Iraq have demonstrated vulnerabilities. Still, Turkey's involvement at the center of the region's energy trade – as a “strategic bridge” between the Caucasus and European markets -- is critical to the country's continued stellar growth.⁶⁵

Comments on Turkish interests and intentions in Syria and Iraq

(author name withheld by request)

It seems to me that the Turkish government is anticipating the withdrawal of Da'esh from most of Northern Syria, if not its defeat (i.e. total loss of territory) and is now positioning itself to make sure it has a seat at the table to discuss the post-D'aesh future in the region. I am having doubts that Turkey has a specific long-term plan in the area. Most of Ankara's actions strike me as being defensive and opportunistic: Ankara needs to take action to defend its perceived national interests in Syria and Iraq; and it may take advantage of the situation if it sees it can draw some symbolic gains from the situation.

For Turkey, the main concern in Syria at this point is the expansion of territory held by the PYD (with the YPG and SDF). While Turkey has found ways to work with the KRG in Iraq, the relationship with the PYD, given its ties to the PKK, is much more hostile. As Turkish forces are advancing from Jarabulus to al-Bab, the goal is as much to provide a presence on these territories to exclude the PYD, as it is about fighting Da'esh. Turkey is likely to continue putting pressure on Manbij to free the area from PYD. The avowed

⁶⁵ “Turkey's key strategic energy role in its region is expected to continue,” Daily Sahah, 3 August 2016. <http://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2016/08/03/turkeys-key-strategic-energy-role-in-its-region-is-expected-to-continue>

goal is to contain PYD east of the Euphrates River. I am wondering what that means for the area around Afrin, currently held by the YPG. Fighting ISIS remains a priority, but while continuing to entertain good relations with Sunni groups, including Islamist groups. As for Assad, it will be difficult for President Erdogan to change the rhetoric of demanding his stepping down, but this does not seem to be as pressing of an issue as before. Ankara is probably waiting to see what will happen in Aleppo, and the future of the Russia-US relation regarding Syria.

In Iraq, the KRG and Peshmergas are less a problem for Turkey. On the contrary, Turkey, prior to the Arab Spring, had developed good relationships and is looking forward to a future of good commercial and political relations with the KRG. Rather, Ankara is concerned with Shia militias (in particular Hashd al-Shaabi) and their taking over of territories freed from Da'esh. In particular, Ankara seems ready to step in (again) and play the role of protector of Turkmen territories (such as Tal Afar and Sincar).

“As Turkish forces are advancing from Jarabulus to al-Bab, the goal is as much to provide a presence on these territories to exclude the PYD, as it is about

At this point, I doubt that Turkey plans on a long-term occupation (or even annexation) of territories in Northern Syria and Iraq. However, recently President Erdogan has been making several references to the old concept of Misak-i Milli (National Pact), from the territorial negotiations at the end of World War I. This concept revives the old notion that Turkey, since its creation, was deprived of some of its rightful territories. According to Misak-i Milli, substantial territories in Northern Syria and Iraq should have been Turkish, and these include Aleppo, Mosul, Kirkuk and Erbil.

Accordingly, Ankara can make claims regarding intervention in these areas that will be seen as legitimate by the Turkish population. In any case, Ankara would want to have a say in the future of these territories.

Solving the Turkish Puzzle

David C. Gompert

US Naval Academy, Rand

It is not easy for U.S. policy-makers and commanders to understand what drives Turkey. But it is essential, and it is possible. Confusing as it may be, Turkey's strategy under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as under his predecessors, can be understood largely in terms of Turkish perceptions of threats to the fundamental stability and territorial integrity of the nation. Circumstances change, but the principle does not. This fixed point of reference goes a long way in explaining Turkey's seemingly complex, inconstant, and unpredictable behavior.

Turkish policy and posturing have become increasingly perplexing to American policy-makers grappling with Syria, ISIS, Iraq, Iran, Russia, and of course U.S.-Turkish relations. Toward ISIS, Ankara has vacillated between ambivalence and blunt force. In Syria, Turkey has attacked both ISIS and Kurds fighting ISIS. It favored the removal of the Assad regime until recently acknowledging that the regime must have a role in settling the civil war. Turkey's traditional enmity toward Russia has been superseded by thawing if still wary relations, motivated in part by what is likely a temporary overlap of interests in Syria favoring Assad over his Arab and Kurdish opponents.

"Turkey's nightmare is that military-political outcomes in both Syria and Iraq will yield semi-independent and possibly connected Kurdish states – Lego blocks of a future Kurdish state and supporters of violent

Through it all, Turkey wants the United States to remain its stalwart ally and ultimate protector, even as it accuses Washington of ignoring Turkish interests, especially regarding the Kurds, and of fomenting a coup d'état. NATO remains important for Turkey – as, arguably, Turkey is important for NATO – but the Turks are turning their back on European allies who have spurned them over EU membership. Relations with Israel took a turn for the better, then a turn for the worse, then recently another turn for the better. As for the Kurds, Turkey has reconciled itself to Kurdish autonomy in Iraq (KRG), yet regards those in Syria (YKP) as hostile and has ended its brief détente with those in Turkey itself (PKK).

Such complexity may obscure and yet is based on two pillars of Turkish strategy. One is *diversified outreach*: Turkey's strategy under Erdoğan has been characterized by wide-ranging international activism, in the form of efforts to develop beneficial economic and political relations with all (or most) of its neighbors and in all directions, thus enhancing both Turkish commerce and influence. Turkey's omnidirectional engagement is predicated on the political judgment that it has been wrong to put all its eggs in the West's basket, and goes hand-in-hand with opening up and securing energy for Turkey's economy. Turkey's recent shift toward joining multilateral peace efforts (such as they are) in Syria is consistent with the belief that it deserves and can play an important diplomatic role. Turkey's goals in Syria have not changed, but its principal tools have. In Syria and elsewhere, Turkish interests are served by being on reasonable terms with key actors, e.g., Russia, Iran, and Israel. While Washington sometimes finds Ankara's foreign policy problematic, this only underscores that Turkey's importance and freedom of action have grown since the Cold-War decades of insulation and dependence on the United States.

At the same time, Turkish extroversion, bridge-building, and political diversification tell at most half the strategic story. At its core, Turkey's strategy remains defined by its *perception of threats*. Outreach is a

“Kurdish success against ISIS in Iraq has created new political, military, economic, and geographic conditions that could increase KRG capabilities, leverage, and expectations. If so, and if Turkey regards such a development as potentially threatening ... the days of Turkey-KRG accommodation could come to an end.”

new chapter in the epoch of Turkey assuring internal stability, territorial integrity, and the state's monopoly of force. While Turkey faces a slew of threats, not all are of equal gravity. In particular, ISIS represents an immediate but, Turks believe, limited and manageable threat; though Sunni, the overwhelming majority of Turks, even the most devout, do not identify with Salafism or jihadism. Neither does anti-Shi'ism resonate in Turkey, as it does in other Sunni nations. Iran is not viewed as an unalterable enemy, as it is by the Saudis and others, but more as a difficult neighbor (one of several). Russia is menacing by virtue of its size, its proximity, and Putin's rowdiness, but it poses no current threat. Greco-Turkish disputes and tension are in the background for now. None of these dangers are existential.

Of all the actual, perceived, and potential threats facing Turkey, the one that could imperil its stability and territorial integrity is that presented by the Kurds. Kurdish separatism and desire for

an independent and unified state are viewed uniquely as existentially threatening. More immediately, the existence of Kurdish entities on Turkey's borders can embolden and sustain an insurgency among Turkey's estimated 20-million Kurds.

Turkey's nightmare is that military-political outcomes in both Syria and Iraq will yield semi-independent and possibly connected Kurdish states – Lego blocks of a future Kurdish state and supporters of violent separatism in Turkey. While the United States has supported YKP in order to defeat ISIS in Northern Syria, Turkey is dead-set against a Kurdish entity occupying the border region taken back from ISIS. This is in part because the Turks see strong links between Kurds in Syria (YKP) and those in Turkey (PKK) – consistent with the proposition that Turkish policy can be traced to, and predicted by, whether its own stability and integrity is threatened.

Turkey has managed to have stable, even cooperative relations with the Iraq's Kurds (KRG), partly for access to hydrocarbons and partly because the KRG has not stoked PKK insurgency in Turkey. This could change if the KRG stakes out greater independence and more territory within a rump, post-Caliphate Iraqi state. It is unrealistic to expect the Kurds to cede to Baghdad territory that Peshmerga have liberated, especially if it contains Kurds. Kurdish success against ISIS in Iraq has created new political, military, economic, and geographic conditions that could increase KRG capabilities, leverage, and expectations. If so, and if Turkey regards such a development as potentially threatening to its own stability and territorial integrity, the days of Turkey-KRG accommodation could come to an end.

In sum, because Turkey's stability and territorial integrity are perceived to be at stake, we can count on the Turks to do whatever it takes to prevent Kurdish states on their southern border. Such is Turkey's fear of the creation of a unified Kurdistan and the likely civil war within Turkey that could ensue. Avoiding this is the compass for Turkish policy and behavior.

The ability of the United States to obtain Turkish cooperation vis-à-vis ISIS (or other Sunni extremism), Iranian destabilization in the region, and Russian skullduggery depends on showing consistent sensitivity to Turkey's opposition to Kurdish independence and any forms of Kurdish autonomy and collusion that point in that direction. This will not resolve all US problems with Turkey or prevent others from occurring. Inevitably, the United States and Turkey will be aligned on some matters and at loggerheads on others. Turkey is no longer a client, but an ambitious middle power. However, to the extent Turkey has confidence that the United States can and will act as necessary to prevent Kurdish independence and unification, Turkey is more likely to be in tune with US interests. In the long run, such a US policy can also work to the advantage of Turkish-Kurdish relations and of the well-being of Kurdish minorities where they exist, including in Turkey itself.

Specifically, the United States should, within its limited ability, oppose emergence of a Kurdish entity in Syria, as ISIS is displaced and as a new de facto political map emerges. It should also be alert to signs that the KRG in Iraq, flush from victory over ISIS there, will demand virtual independence, claim more territory, and start supporting the PKK. The United States has a special relationship with the Kurds, and it is therefore uncomfortable for it to frustrate Kurdish ambitions. But it also has a special relationship with Turkey, difficult and complicated as that may be. In the final analysis, US support for Turkey's strategic imperative of preventing the creation of Kurdistan is the surest way of gaining Turkish support for US interests.

Turkish Near and Long-term Intentions in Iraq and Syria

Dr. Benedetta Berti

Institute for National Security Studies, Israel

Turkey's policy preferences when it comes to Syria are fairly clear: the country wants a weak or better yet collapsed Syrian government (along with the eventual demise of Bashar al-Assad); a weakened ISIL that is unable to operate along the Turkish-Syrian border; along with weak Syrian-Kurdish politico-military forces. In terms of priorities, it certainly seems that preventing the rise of a Kurdish continuous, self-governing entity in Syria takes precedence over all other objectives. To achieve this objective, Turkey has militarily positioned itself in the geographical center of this Kurdish enclave, de facto creating a buffer zone. It seems unlikely that Turkey will relinquish this military foothold in Syria for the time being.

In addition, Turkey has intervened militarily to demonstrate its military and political influence and to gain a seat at the table in the 'day after.' The country will presumably use this leverage to further contain Kurdish state-building aspirations. Albeit Turkey has not relinquished its negative assessment of the Assad regime, it does seem to be for the time being preoccupied with other, in its eyes, more urgent matters. What is more, the reality on the ground, shaped largely by Russia, Iran and the Syrian regime, may in the

longer term lead to assuming a more compromising attitude with respect to Assad staying in power in so-called 'useful Syria.' That is unless the Gulf (and chiefly Saudi Arabia) don't dramatically increase their investment in the Syrian opposition so that the balance of power can start re-shifting against the regime.

Turkey's fight against ISIL is a direct response to the group's more aggressive posturing towards Turkey; as well as a way to further increase its footprint and leverage in Syria and to curb the role of Kurdish forces. Turkey's claims with respect to both al-Bab as well as Raqqah should be seen as concrete ways through which Turkey wants to exclude or weaken the role of Kurdish forces and increase its own.

Turkey's moves in Iraq are not radically different: there too Turkey has indicated a desire to take part in anti-ISIL operations; to train/support Turkmen local forces against ISIL and to reduce the need for Kurdish forces on the ground. At the same time, Turkey's political ties with the Iraqi Kurdistan government should be seen as driven by pragmatism, economy and by the possibility to leverage inter-Kurdish rivalry and tensions between Iraq and Syria to weaken the rise of an autonomous Kurdish enclave in Syria and to keep Kurdish forces divided in the region.

Comments on Turkish interests and intentions in Syria and Iraq

Dr. Birol Yesilada

Portland State University

Turkish interests in Syria and Iraq depend on Erdogan's personal ambitions. They can and they have changed during the last three years. Currently, he is using operations in Iraq and Syria to bolster his own position and image in Turkey and achieve the following:

1. To discredit the Kurdish parliamentarians by making them look as if they are supporters of the PKK and YPG. This will enable Erdogan to clear the Grand National Assembly of Kurdish Parliamentarians and call for special elections to fill those seats with his own supporters. He will then have the super majority needed to change the Constitution and establish his "Turkish style" Presidency – nothing short of absolute dictatorship. According to latest public opinion polls, 91% of Turks support Erdogan's anti-terror campaign inside the country and 78% support his military intervention in Syria and Iraq (esp. re Mosul) and 88% view his security policies favorably. His success in Syria and Iraq will determine how much he can achieve on the domestic and foreign policy fronts.

2. To establish himself as the leader of the Sunni Muslims. This has been Erdogan's ambition for quite some time as he built a coalition with Egypt's Mursi and Qatari Emir to provide support for Sunni Arabs fighting the Assad regime. It also paralleled his lashing out against Israel to gain support among the Palestinians. He is now without the support of Egypt but has significant financial backing of Saudi Arabia and to some extent of Qatar. Recent maps of Erdogan's advisors show northern Syria and Iraq (including Mosul) within Turkey's borders and with claims of ancestral lands stolen from the Turks. Such maps do not go well among Turkey's Arab allies but provide for strong nationalist fervor at home. There are sizeable

ethnic Turkish/Turkmen pockets in these areas that look for Turkey's security umbrella against Arabs and Kurds.

3. To move Turkey away from the EU and NATO and join the Shanghai Five Alliance. This is part of a long-term goal of people like Erdogan who are pupils of the late Turkish Islamist politician and Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan (see his book ADIL DUZEN). Erdogan will test the environment and move very carefully as he has done so many times before. He will try to avoid making Washington upset by direct intervention in al-Raqqa right now but will do everything possible to undermine the Kurdish offensive by providing support to anti Kurdish forces – that might even include proving support for other radical Sunni groups who are fighting the Kurdish alliance.

Northern Syria

In northern Syria, Ankara's primary goal is to shape the operation launched on November 6 east of the Euphrates. Erdogan's desire is to end YPG's control of the Kobani and Jazeera cantons. He has full support of the TGS and the Parliament (except Kurds) for this. If Ankara cannot impose a full military presence west of the Euphrates, it will definitely take control of al-Bab from ISIS and Manbij from the YPG and

“It is clear that there is a deal struck between Erdogan and Putin that is going to allow the Turks to hit Syrian Kurds using the Turkish air force in the future – probably in consultation with Moscow.”

create a strong and manageable buffer zone that stretches from Jarablus-Manbij-al-Bab and al-Rai. Some of the Turkish allies within the FSA would prefer marching on Aleppo which Erdogan and TGS oppose at this time. This would not be supported by Erdogan as he has come to the realization that regime change in Syria is not going to happen and he has to live with Assad and has cut a deal with Putin – Putin is likely let Erdogan keep the Jarablus pocket (buffer zone) and Erdogan will not support FSA's march on Aleppo. Putin has ulterior motives in maintaining cordial relations with Erdogan. His long-term goal is to move Turkey away from NATO and make it an ally of Russia through economic ties (gas

exports, construction, tourism) and membership (full or associate) in Shanghai Five. Erdogan has repeatedly asked for membership in this organization. In recent weeks, the Turkish armed forces have massed sizeable number of troops, tanks, artillery, and Special Forces along the Syrian border ready for a massive push into Syria when opportunity permits. These forces include two mechanized infantry brigades, an armored brigade and a commando brigade along the border. The Turks are relying on their 30-mile-range, 155-millimeter howitzers to interdict east of the Euphrates and hit YPG targets. Recently, following a meeting between Turkish intelligence and military chiefs and their Russian counterparts in Moscow, Turks launched air strikes that caused significant loss of life among Kurdish fighters. It is clear that there is a deal struck between Erdogan and Putin that is going to allow the Turks to hit Syrian Kurds using the Turkish air force in the future – probably in consultation with Moscow.

With regard to operations beyond al-Bab, that will depend on how well Erdogan gets along with President-elect Trump's security team. In my opinion, the next logical target for Erdogan beyond al-Bab is the town of Manbij. It is important to note that Manbij is currently controlled by the YPG of SDF who has support of Washington. Note that al-Bab is strategically located between the two Kurdish controlled parts of

Northern Syria (Tel Refat to the West and Manbij to the East). Can Erdogan persuade President-elect Trump to allow the FSA to take over? The short-term scenario is in favor of the Kurds. They will stay in control of Manbij. However, the Turks are also unlikely to pull back from their security zone. The future scenario is more Turkish troops entering this triangle. As soon as there is a shift in US support for the PYG, the Turks and their FSA allies are likely to advance on the PYG to push them east of the Euphrates River. This seems to be their ultimate goal.

Northern Iraq

Erdogan has additional interests in Northern Iraq which conflict with the interests of Turkey allies – particularly the US. He has increased the number of Turkish troops at the Bashiqa base (estimate is around 5,000 troops). He also warned the Iraqi Shiite forces about entering the city of Tal Afar (predominantly a Shiite Turkmen town). Turkish presidency spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said that the Iraqi Prime Minister and the US have pledged that al-Hashed al-Shaabi militia, who are Shiites, would not enter the Turkmen city of Tal Afar but that they seem to have done some nonetheless. Erdogan has massed significant military forces across the border as a show of force. His main ambition, and that of all Turkish political actors, is to crush the PKK once and for all. This is a daunting task and the Turks have not been able to eliminate the PKK for over three decades. PKK is in the process of moving its military HQ from Kandil Mountains in Northern Iraq to newly liberated Sinjar according to Turkish intelligence. If this is so, we can expect the Turks to expand their military operations against the PKK and PKK's allies in Sinjar. That would mean that the Yazidis and regional Kurdish government's Peshmerga forces would potentially end up clashing with the Turks. The Turks are also concerned that PKK's armed wing, the People's Defense Forces (HPG), has been fighting to open a corridor from the Sinjar Mountains to Northern Iraq with YPG doing the same from the Syrian side. These moves boosted the PKK's popularity among the Yazidis. What worries Ankara is that the PKK cannot give up Sinjar and it has always been part of the Yazidis. Wherever PKK goes, it manages to install an anti-Turkish culture among the people and that worries Ankara a great deal.

In addition to Sinjar and PKK, Ankara's interest in Tal Afar presents a serious problem for the US and its allies. Tal Afar has been a concern for Turkey which had said it feared Shia paramilitary forces engaged in combat could carry out any retaliatory measures against Sunni Turkmen residents of the town. On November 20, 2016, Kalin stated that Turkey will not remain silent if the Iraqi government does not honor its commitments to protect the Turkmen population or prevent Shiite militia from entering the town. Turkey's deployment of troops in Nineveh has also triggered a diplomatic war of words with Iraq. While Ankara maintains its presence is merely to train locals in combating ISIS, Baghdad says the deployment and Ankara's concerns over Tal Afar were a pretext for intervention into the country's affairs.

Another reason for Erdogan's posturing is that Turkey does not wish for Iran to have influence in Tal Afar. If Iran were to establish presence here through Iraqi Shiite militias, it would make it easier for Iran to transfer arms through the land route it is seeking to establish from the east to the west of Iraq. This is also seen as one of the reasons behind the "behind the curtain" competition between Iran and Turkey over Tal Afar.

Will Ankara carry out its threat? Chances are small given the fact that the Erdogan government did nothing to prevent the ISIS takeover of Tal Afar or Mosul and, according to some reliable sources in Turkey, aided such radical Islamist groups. As a matter of fact, most Turkmen of the region are Shiites and Erdogan has never seen them as either true Muslims or Turks. His posturing at this time seems to be for domestic political scene in Turkey. He is more likely to strike against PKK than anyone else.

All of these moves by the Turks are within a very well calculated strategy of Erdogan and his closest advisors to maximize public support for him at home. Erdogan will be very cautious in challenging US interests while cleverly taking steps to distance the country first from the EU (and the Europeans have done much to assist him) and then from NATO (in the longer scenario) and finally joining the Russian-Chinese camp.

I should also mention that in successive purges, Erdogan has managed to eliminate military officers who were seen as pro-Kemalists, pro-NATO, and pro-Fethullah Gulen. In their place, he has been promoting officers who are followers of Menzil tariqat (Sunni congregation that is very conservative and Sunni) and Great Asia School of Dogu Perincek (close ally of the Chinese). These purges and appointments support my previous observation that Erdogan's vision for Turkey is one that does not include the Western Alliance – in the distant future.

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. Benedetta Berti

Dr. Benedetta Berti is a fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), a Lecturer at Tel Aviv University, a TED Senior Fellow and a non-resident Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) and at the Modern War Institute, West Point. Her work focuses on human security and civil wars as well as on post-conflict stabilization and peace - building. Dr. Berti is the author of three books, including *Armed Political Organizations. From Conflict to Integration* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013) and her work has been published, among others, in *Foreign Affairs*, *Democratization*, the *Middle East Journal* and *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*.

The Honorable David C. Gompert

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.



Dr. Birol A. Yeşilada

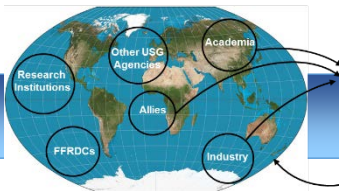
Birol A. Yeşilada is professor of Political Science and International Studies at Portland State University (PSU). He is also holder of the endowed chair in Contemporary Turkish Studies and Director of the Center for Turkish Studies in the Mark O. Hatfield School of Government. He came to PSU in September 1998 from the University of Missouri-Columbia where he was Chair of the Department of Political Science.

Dr. Yeşilada received his B.A. degree in 1977 in Neurobiology from the University of California at Berkeley, his M.A. in Political Science in 1979 from San Francisco State University and his Ph.D. in Political Science in 1984 from the University of Michigan. His current research interests include: Global power transition, World Values Survey (Cyprus), the European Union, political and economic development of Turkey, radical Islam and terrorism, the Cyprus negotiations and international conflict resolution, and politics of economic reform in the emerging markets.

His recent publications include several books, *EU-Turkey Relations in the 21st Century*, *Islamization of Turkey Under the AKP*, *The Emerging European Union*, *Comparative Political Parties and Party Elites*, *The Socioeconomic and Political Transformation of Turkey*, *Agrarian Reform in Reverse: Food Crisis in the Third World*, and over 30 articles and book chapters. He is the former co-editor-in-chief of *International Studies Perspectives* and former Associate editor of *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*.

Dr. Yeşilada has been an invited policy consultant at various Departments of the US government, the Council on Foreign Relations, the U.S. Institute of Peace, the RAND Corporation, Booz Allen Hamilton, the Nathan Associates, Barclays Capital, the World Bank, and is an Academic Associate of the Atlantic Council. He was invited by the White House to take part in a panel study at the RAND Corporation on “Politics and Islam in the New Constitution of Afghanistan” as part of the commission that drafted the new Constitution of that country.

Dr. Yesilada received numerous awards and grants including the Fulbright fellowship and a grant from the Joint Committee on the Middle East of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council. At the University of Missouri, he received a campus-wide William T. Kemper Fellowship in Teaching Excellence in 1996. He is the past-president of the Rotary Club of Tigard, Oregon and president of the Rotary Club of Tigard Foundation, past New Generations Committee Chair of Rotary District 5100, co-chair of District 5100 Peace Conference and is Peacebuilder Clubs Committee Chair for 2012-13.



SMA Reach-back

Question: *What internal factors would influence Iran’s decision to interfere with the free flow of commerce in the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb?*

Contributors: *Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University); Yoel Guzansky (Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University); Belinda Bragg and Sabrina Pagano (NSI); Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute; Jamestown Foundation)*

Editors: *Belinda Bragg and Sabrina Pagano (NSI)*

Executive Summary

Dr. Belinda Bragg and Dr. Sabrina Pagano, NSI

Iran’s Strategic Interests

All of the SMEs either directly or indirectly referenced Iran’s strategic interests, and how these are informed by its overarching goal of regional hegemony. Dr. Belinda Bragg and Dr. Sabrina Pagano from NSI characterize these interests into three categories; prestige, economic; and security, all of which are moderated by domestic political constraints and pressures. Iran’s prestige interests center around ensuring that it does not lose face in its interactions with the US, and can increase its regional influence. Its economic interests focus on increasing Iran’s economic influence and security. Iran’s security interests include reducing threats from the US, Israel, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, reducing the threat from ISIL, and broadcasting strength and challenging US influence and position in the region. Its domestic constraints and pressures include resisting cultural infiltration from the west, delivering economic improvement, and broadcasting strength. Together, these interests, and Iran’s overarching regional hegemony goal (Guzansky; Bragg & Pagano), ultimately shape the strategies that Iran pursues, including its decisions regarding the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb.

Iranian naval capabilities and desire for regional hegemony

Dr. Yoel Guzansky, of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, discusses how Iranian strategic thinking on the sea is no longer limited to the Persian Gulf, but instead extends to intended naval bases in Syria and Yemen, as well as influence in

the Red Sea or even the Atlantic—ultimately “making every effort to demonstrate that its naval power is not limited to the Gulf alone.” Guzansky further indicates that these are more than just aspirational statements; the Iranian Navy has already extended its reach to the Red Sea and Bab el Mandeb, as well as Pakistan, China, and South Africa. These developments are consistent with Bragg and Pagano’s assessment that developing and demonstrating military capability is a key security strategy for Iran, as well as being seen, by hardliners and conservatives in particular, as an integral part of their regional hegemony goal. Guzansky draws a similar conclusion, adding that greater naval power will also increase Iran’s ability to help its regional allies. However, he also notes that “[t]o do so, Iran will need vast resources it doesn’t yet have.”

Guzansky indicates that, historically, Iran has prioritized the development of asymmetric capabilities (including anti-ship missiles, mines, and small vessel swarms), to enable it to better confront the U.S. Navy in the Gulf. Iran can leverage these same capabilities, and others, to interfere with the flow of commerce in the Strait of Hormuz, and to a lesser extent, the Bab el Mandeb.

Internal factors influencing Iranian interference in the Strait or Bab el Mandeb

The contributors identified the following internal factors as potentially influencing Iranian actions in the Strait of Hormuz or Bab el Mandeb:

Iran’s revolutionary doctrine:

- Frames Iran as involved in an existential fight against US imperialism
- Makes it critical for Iran’s leaders, particularly conservatives and hardliners, to demonstrate to the Iranian people that they will not be bullied by the US
- Supports and informs Iran’s goal of regional hegemony

Domestic political competition

- The role of factions—conservative / hardliner; moderate/pragmatist—in the prioritization of Iranian interests and the preferred strategies for achieving these interests
- With an election coming up in May, conservatives have incentive to switch the domestic political focus from cooperation with the US toward confrontation, to both appease their base and put greater pressure on Rouhani

Economic conditions

- Slow pace of improvement following JCPOA leaves moderates such as Rouhani politically vulnerable, and creates the belief that their promised benefits of greater openness and cooperation were unrealistic
- As the salience of economic concerns wanes relative to prestige and security concerns for the Iranian public, there is a greater likelihood that leaders (both conservative and moderate) will employ more bellicose rhetoric with regard to the Strait of Hormuz
- Closing the Straits will have significant short-term negative economic consequences for Iran, and depending on international and US response, may have longer-term consequences for Iran such as the re-imposition of sanctions and loss of trade and foreign investment

- Given Iran’s current economic situation and growing dependence on oil exports, it is unlikely to take action to close the Strait or Bab el Mandeb, as doing so would harm their economic interest further and thus be self-defeating

Popular perception that the US is not living up to terms of JCPOA

- Plays into hardline and conservative narratives emphasizing Western (especially US) hostility and untrustworthiness, giving credence to their own economic strategy, which seeks to limit openness to the West
- Increases the likelihood that the balance between the economic costs of interfering with commerce in either the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb, and the perceived benefit of demonstrating Iranian power and status, may swing in favor of the latter

External factors influencing Iranian interference in the Strait or Bab el Mandeb

The contributors argue that external factors also play a role in Iran’s decision-making with respect to its activities at sea.

Competition with Saudi Arabia

- Saudi Arabia’s opening of naval bases in Djibouti and Eritrea affords it an advantage in the Red Sea area
- Iran may wish to do “more to limit the Saudis by pushing harder on the question of access/use of both straits” (Vatanka)
- Retaliation for Saudi’s restricting Iranian access to the SUMED pipeline and selectively blocking Iranian ships in the Bab el Mandeb, which has stifled Iran’s establishment of trade with Europe
- Iran has potential to weaken Saudi government domestically by disrupting oil revenues and thus creating the conditions for greater internal unrest and instability
- Iran’s support of the Houthis, including provision of supplies to which the Houthis already have access, may actually serve to signal to and threaten Saudi Arabia and demonstrate Iran’s reach

Use of proxies

- The “effective blockade on Yemen,” which Iran’s current naval capabilities cannot challenge, creates a barrier to Iran helping the Houthis
- The Houthis may not be particularly dependent on Iran, given that they already have many of the supplies it provides, and Iran is unlikely to provide additional forms of support
- Ultimately, “I don’t think the Houthis want their tail in the trap of the Iran-Saudi conflict anyways” (Ehteshami)
- Yemen imports 90% of its food, much of this using foreign shipping. Further reduction in security in the Bab el Mandeb would threaten this supply, and therefore is not in the interests of the Houthis.

US actions and rhetoric

- Reinforce the perception that the US acted dishonestly with regard to JCPOA, seeking to thwart Iran’s efforts to increase trade and foreign investment

- Given the current domestic political climate, both conservatives and hardliners, as well as moderates, have greater incentive to frame any US action relative to Iran as threatening and conflictual, rather than cooperative

Iran's strategic calculus with respect to interference in the Strait of Hormuz

Alex Vatanka, an Iran scholar from the Middle East Institute, and Bragg and Pagano of NSI indicate that closing the Strait may in fact work against Iran's own interests, since it is as dependent on oil moving through the Strait as are its rivals. In this way, Iran may gain more value from threatening to close the Strait, which may increase oil prices, than from actually closing the Strait, which is sure to result in retributive actions, most likely from the US. As Vatanka indicates, a continued US presence in the Strait all but guarantees that Iran will use this strategic lever sparingly, if at all. Both Guzansky and Pagano and Bragg suggest that factors enhancing Iran's likelihood of plausible deniability (use of asymmetric methods or proxies), by reducing the expected costs of such action, may, if other interests are met, instead increase the likelihood that Iran will choose to interfere.

Iran's strategic calculus with respect to interference in the Bab el Mandeb

The strategic calculus for Bab el Mandeb may be different, as Bragg and Pagano note. There are two issues to consider with respect to potential Iranian interference in the Bab el Mandeb. These relate to both its capability to interfere and its motivation to do so. At present, Iran's degree of control over the Houthis is unclear, and thus its ability to exact precise control over their activities may be limited. However, if Iran's continued support of the Houthis gains them greater influence, then we can expect that the present Houthi control over Yemen's ports might translate into greater Iranian interference in the Bab el Mandeb, assuming appropriate motivation.

This is where the Iranian calculus for the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el Mandeb may come to differ. If Iran continues to pivot its trade toward greater interaction with China, India, and Southeast Asia, it will become less dependent on commerce in the Bab el Mandeb. Ehteshami also indirectly provides some support for this conclusion, indicating that the Bab el Mandeb represents more of a security rather than economic interest to Iran. As Bragg and Pagano indicate, this trade pivot means that the Bab el Mandeb becomes less strategically important to Iran as a source of economic power, but more strategically useful to Iran as a source of economic and other manipulation of its perceived rivals, such as Saudi Arabia. Moreover, this is accomplished while making Iran less vulnerable to economic and other manipulation from its rivals through selective blocking of its own ships' passage. Iran does not have the same alternatives in the Strait of Hormuz, and cannot decrease its dependence on an open Strait for sea transportation, critical to its economic well-being. In these ways, the strategic calculus in favor of Iranian interference in the Bab el Mandeb, but not the Strait of Hormuz, may come to evolve over time in favor of increasing interference or escalation. For the time being, however, as Guzansky notes, this may be a more distant reality, given some of the present limits of Iran's naval force, including the effective blockade on Yemen that prevents Iran from accessing Yemen's shores.

Despite these challenges, Iran's focus on achieving and maintaining regional hegemony, and its naval and other actions toward this goal, should not be ignored. Iran is increasingly likely to pursue strategies such as new trade partnerships that minimize the harm that its rivals can inflict, as well as those that enable it to increasingly project power, whether through the use of proxies or otherwise. As Guzansky notes, "unless improved Iranian naval capabilities receive a proper response, Iran in the future will be able to threaten crucial shipping lanes, impose naval blockades, and land special forces on distant shores should it deem it necessary."

SME Input

Excerpts of NSI Team Telephone Conversation with Dr. Anoush Ehteshami, 12/12/2016

Allison Astorino-Courtois: We have another question which deals with internal Iranian politics, and it's this: what internal factors would influence Iran's decision to interfere with the free flow of commerce in the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb?

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah, I found that question really interesting, Allison, because to be honest with you, I don't myself see it in the immediate term, let's say, the prospect of Iran interfering with both of those choke points actually. I don't see that serving their national interests.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Both or either?

Anoush Ehteshami: Either of them, yeah. I don't see them doing it for Hormuz or for Bab el Mandeb. I don't think it's in their national interest at all, and I think for the establishment in Tehran, at least that kind of thing is self-defeating. They might poke a missile, in the worst-case scenario, across the Persian Gulf and target shipping probably, and without doubt, focus on the American naval presence and western Coalition there, but interfering with the whole Strait of Hormuz, even though RGC keeps bragging about this, I simply do not see it happening. Even the RGC, it's clear that they don't have the capacity to block it, and it's interesting that the question doesn't pose blocking the Strait of Hormuz but it talks about interfering. That interference is what happened in the 1980s, poking at maritime trade, poking at the US Navy and what have you. You know, given their economy and their, again, growing dependence on all exports, I simply don't see that happening. That is, at one level, suicidal.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, even the Islamic or, I'm sorry, even the Revolutionary Guard, if they feel that they're losing political influence relative to the [central] government or, for some reason, their fortunes are heading downward, would they act on their own to harass shipping? I mean, is there a domestic political impetus for this kind of action?

Anoush Ehteshami: Again, I don't see it. So long as the RGC takes orders from their Leader, and you know, I mean, that's an if that we can talk about, and analysts have a different view of this now about how much influence the leader actually has over the RGC, but if we assume that they still report to him and that the establishment as a whole sees the RGC accountable to their Leader and therefore the National Security Council, if that assumption is correct, I don't myself see a scenario in which they would make a policy decision to disrupt shipping in these strong points. Bab el Mandeb, I would put it actually in the last analysis in different categories. I think the Strait of Hormuz is a national interest issue. Bab el Mandeb is

a bit more open, given that not so much of Iran's trade is to the east and given that it is trying to open up its land routes to get over into Europe. Bab el Mandeb has more of a security rather than economic importance to Iran, and therefore, it's something that they might be prepared to play with, but I don't see them having the resources, Allison, to be honest.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Well, they could certainly harass from the shoreline by, I don't know, giving Houthis some kind of weapons to shoot at passing ships. Is that a possibility? Then they'd have plausible reliability if it's coming from Yemen.

Anoush Ehteshami: Possibly, possibly. But you know they've got SSMs anyways, so it wouldn't be difficult to do that, but I'm not so sure that the Houthis are that dependent on Iran either to be honest. That's a whole different can of worms, but the Houthis are much more of an indigenous force to Yemen than we give them credit for, and in a different configuration, the Houthi-Saudi thing can be managed in a much smaller theater arrangement than what we have now. So, you know, how much say Iran will have in persuading the Houthis to use their weapons in Iran's interest is questionable in terms of what can Iran really do for the Houthis that's more than what they've done so far. You know, there isn't much else that Iran can provide for the Houthis right now, and that stalemate is unlikely to change unless Iran moves the RGC directly into Yemen, but in that scenario, we're actually talking about an open warfare between Iran in Saudi Arabia, really. I don't think we're there yet. I don't think we're anywhere near that to be honest, and I don't think the Houthis want their tail in the trap of the Iran-Saudi conflict anyways.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, they have a limit and no real incentive to expand their mission to helping Iran in...

Anoush Ehteshami: Right now, I don't see it.

Dr. Yoel Guzansky

Hoover Institution, Stanford University and Institute for National Security Studies,

Tel Aviv University

External factors, more than internal ones, influence Iran decision making at sea. However, Iran Strategic thinking on the sea is no^{66t} limited anymore only to the Persian Gulf arena. A few days ago, in a highly unusual statement, Iranian Chief of Staff, Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri remarked that, in the future, Iran may need naval bases in Syria and Yemen. Tasnim, Iran's semi-official news agency, quoted the general as stressing the deterrent potential of such bases or, alternately, floating platforms and Islands bases, "which could be ten times more efficient than nuclear power". Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has striven to establish itself as a leading regional power, and the naval branch is a key component of this

scheme. But this is the first time that a senior Iranian official has publicly referred to the possibility that Iran might build naval bases beyond its own borders.

In the past, Iran has used its fleet to communicate strategic messages and indicate political preferences, and in recent years the Iranian navy has trained itself for action outside the Persian Gulf. In November 2015, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei spoke of the naval arena as the optimal sphere “for powerful confronting enemies” and “effective cooperating with friends,” adding that Iran should consider the advantages inherent in the naval arena for defending the country. Indeed, Iran is making every effort to demonstrate that its naval power is not limited to the Gulf alone. A day after the Iranian chief of staff’s extraordinary remark, the Iranian naval commander announced – not for the first time – Iran’s ambitious intention to have a presence in the Atlantic and, to achieve this, to send warships that would for the first time circumnavigate the African continent.

The statements issued by these senior Iranian officials are reflective of more than simply empty threats. The Iranian Navy is indeed sailing farther afield: Iranian Navy ships have “visited” Pakistan, China, and recently South Africa. Since 2009, Iran’s naval presence has increased in the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb strategic straits. In 2009, Iran has begun to conduct independent operations in the region (claiming to be fighting naval piracy) and, in 2011, even sent—in a first show of strength of its type since the Islamic Revolution—two ships through the Suez Canal en route to Syria.

Since 1979, Iran established its naval doctrine of guerrilla and attrition, with emphasis placed on the ability to disrupt freedom of shipping through the Straits of Hormuz. Accordingly, because of the embargo that was imposed on it, Iran’s naval force construction prioritized asymmetrical capabilities meant to confront the technological advantages of the U.S. Navy in the Gulf: land base anti-ship missiles, underwater mines, and the small vessel swarms. Preference was given to strengthening the naval branch of the Revolutionary Guards over building the regular navy, which remains small and outdated. In 2007, the realms of responsibility of the two navies were split: while the Revolutionary Guards’ navy received overall responsibility for the Gulf arena, the function of the regular navy was reduced to activity beyond Gulf waters.

Because of the weakness of the regular Iranian Navy, most of whose vessels date to the era of the Shah, and the United States’ naval supremacy in the Gulf, Iran preferred to purchase and construct a large number of small, fast vessels (some of which are unmanned) and miniature submarines, and to repurpose civilian ships to military missions. Some of the vessels of the naval branch of the Revolutionary Guards are armed with anti-ship missiles; some have been adapted to lay underwater mines and some are laden with explosives. One of the motivating factors in adopting these methods lies in their plausible deniability and the reasoning that a response to damage using these means will be less painful than it otherwise might be if it is difficult to pin the blame on Iran. Iran’s naval presence in the Gulf has therefore adopted the features of a guerrilla force in every way that matters. The so-called primitive nature of the Iranian tactic – where quantity outweighs quality – will continue to pose a challenge to the Fifth Fleet of the U.S. Navy.

When it comes to Iranian activity on the high seas, the purpose of the long Iranian Navy voyages is mainly political, aka gunboat diplomacy, with no evidence yet to indicate full operational capabilities. Yemen is an example of the limits of Iran’s naval force, given the latter’s difficulties in helping the Houthi Shiites that Iran supports. The effective blockade on Yemen doesn’t allow Iran access to Yemen’s shores, as

evidenced by the fact that Iranian shipping carrying supplies for the Houthis were forced to turn back after the United States threatened to intercept them, forcing Iran to reroute its smuggling operation through Oman.

Sudan is another example of Iran's difficulties in establishing a grasp on the naval sphere. Khartoum extended aid to Iran, serving as a port of entry for Iranian weapons to the Mediterranean and Africa. In the last two years, Sudan has changed its policy, moved closer to Saudi Arabia, and closed its ports to the Iranian Navy, making it difficult for Iran to smuggle arms to Hamas and to Hezbollah. Furthermore, in the regional battle under way between Iran, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE, on the other, the latter have gained an advantage and seized hold of the Red Sea arena with the opening of their naval bases in Djibouti and Eritrea.

Despite these difficulties, the development of Iran's conception of the sea as a critical arena of action for Iran's national security is particularly worthy of attention. Iran's plans, should they come to fruition, will give Iran – in addition to the ability to project military might far from its shores – the ability to help its regional allies more than it's been able to do in the past. Unless improved Iranian naval capabilities receive a proper response, Iran in the future will be able to threaten crucial shipping lanes, impose naval blockades, and land special forces on distant shores should it deem it necessary.

Iran sees itself as the regional hegemon, and its two naval branches are meant to support this impression as it continues to develop and improve its available methods and means of warfare. To do so, Iran will need vast resources it doesn't yet have. Until it does, Iran is using other means against its enemies. For example, it provides its proxies in the region with land base anti-missiles and other arms to impede their activity at sea. Only recently the Houthis fired several shore-to-sea missiles at U.S. and Emirati warships imposing the naval blockade on Yemen.

Iran's naval challenge will require Israelis and Arabs alike to develop better infrastructures to facilitate naval activity in the Red Sea (for Israel, rapid transport of naval platforms from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea). Alongside the potential threat of greater Iranian naval activity in the Middle East (it should be mentioned that Iran depends on Egypt's goodwill in providing passage through the Suez Canal), it could also present considerable intelligence and operational opportunities.

Israel is particularly interested in Red Sea activity, both to deter Iranian activity in that arena and to serve, when necessary, as a shipping route to and from Iran. In recent years, Israel has given prominence to the passage of its missile ships through the Suez Canal heading south to the Red Sea, to signal to Iran that Israel views the Red Sea as its own backyard. Increased Iranian naval activity in the Red Sea resulted in 2009 in several Arab nations announcing the establishment of "an Arab naval task force in the Red Sea." While this initiative was never realized, the exposure of Iran's intentions now can lead to increased cooperation between Israel and many in the Arab world also seeking to curb Iran's negative influence, this time at sea.

Response

Alex Vatanka

Middle East Institute

Iran is as dependent on Hormuz as anyone else. To close it becomes only a viable option for them if they are the only state deprived of using it. It is not on the cards at the moment so not really debated as such in Tehran. If the hardliners in Tehran gain more momentum and can push some of their pet projects then one can see a scenario of Iran doing more to limit the Saudis by pushing harder on the question of access/use of both straits but I suspect this can only happen when the US/West leaves the region to its own devices, which is again not on the cards. With Iran, its always about calculated risk-taking even by the hardliners. No one in Tehran is suicidal.

Response

Dr. Belinda Bragg and Dr. Sabrina Pagano

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Our analysis⁶⁷ of Iran's potential actions in the Strait of Hormuz starts from the assumption that actors in the international environment act to protect and forward their interests. Most broadly, we categorize actor interests as either security (preservation of the state and military security), economic (economic prosperity and development), or prestige (international influence and standing) interests. These interests generate economic, social, and international prestige objectives for actors, which inform their foreign policy and responses to specific issues that arise in regional relations.

For state actors, domestic constraints and pressures can intervene between interests and foreign policy objectives, potentially changing the nature of that objective, its relative salience, or both. In the case of Iran, there is significant variation in how political factions respond to these domestic factors as a function of their base of popular support and policy positions. Conservatives, such as Khamenei, draw legitimacy and political support from their religious authority, and from their role as protectors of the principles of the Iranian Revolution. Moderates, such as Rouhani, draw support and legitimacy primarily from their ability to improve domestic economic conditions and relations with the West.

This interest-based approach contends that the potential of an issue to create conflict or cooperation is a function of how the interests of actors align. In this context, it follows that Iran is likely to step up the aggressiveness of its activity in the Strait of Hormuz or Bab el Mandeb as a direct function of its interests being violated, or being perceived as violated. Determining how Iran defines its interests, and threats to those interests, therefore provides us with the context that can help identify the activities and conditions—both domestic and international—that may trigger such as response. The salience and valence of interests at stake in an issue, and the associated domestic political implications, help to illuminate how Iran may respond to a fluid regional situation. A profile of Iran's key interests and variations in approach to these between moderates and conservatives and hardliners is provided in Appendix A.

⁶⁷ Please note: we have provided in-text citations only where our work directly references the opinions of specific experts or specific data and statistics. Our full reference list, organized by interest topics, is provided at the end of this report.

The Strait of Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb as potential levers for Iran's interests

In the sustained pursuit of its regional hegemony goal, Iran has a key strategic lever in the Strait of Hormuz, which controls access to one fifth of the world's oil supply (Energy Information Administration, 2015), and one third of oil traded by sea (Robbins, 2016). While only one quarter the volume of oil passes through the Bab el Mandeb, it comprises part of the shortest trade routes between Europe, North Africa, India, and East Asia. Closure of the Bab el Mandeb would interfere with tankers from the Persian Gulf reaching the Suez Canal or SUMED Pipeline, instead forcing them to reroute around the southern tip of Africa. The Bab el Mandeb thus is also critical for international trade.⁶⁸ The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) indicates that the impact of the Bab el Mandeb chokepoint goes beyond energy, to include not only the cost and security issues noted above for every cargo ship passing through the Suez Canal, but also the security of U.S. and other combat ships.

Range of actions available to Iran

Iran has several possible options it can consider with respect to the Strait of Hormuz. These include outright closure, damage to infrastructure or commercial shipping, harassment or diversion of commercial shipping, continued provocation and harassment of US naval vessels, continued threats of closure, or backing down/ceasing threats.

Unlike the Strait of Hormuz, Iran does not have direct control over the Bab el Mandeb. However, it potentially can exert influence through its ties to and support of the Houthi rebels operating in Yemen, who control a majority of ports along Yemen's Red Sea coast, thereby yielding access and control over the Bab el Mandeb. Despite this support, however, the Iranians may not have tight control over Houthi actions. As Zimmerman (2016) indicates: While the Iranians characterize the Houthis as part of their "Axis of Resistance," the Houthis remain somewhat ambivalent, despite their acceptance of support from Iran—likely to avoid prolonging existing conflict with Saudi Arabia and partners. As such, unlike other proxies such as Hezbollah, some authors argue that Yemen is not truly an Iranian proxy. The evolution of the situation in Yemen and between Iran and the Houthis will determine whether Iran can exploit Houthi control of the ports to effectively shut down the Bab el Mandeb to oil and other traffic.

If Iran were successful in gaining Houthis' cooperation for disrupting shipping in the Bab el Mandeb, they would have several options, similar to those in the Strait of Hormuz, including harassment or diversion of commercial shipping and damage to infrastructure or commercial shipping, as well as provocation and harassment of US naval vessels. Such actions have occurred in the Bab el Mandeb in recent months,⁶⁹ although the Houthis have not claimed responsibility for all instances. One point to consider regarding the likelihood of Houthi support is Yemen's dependence on shipping. Yemen imports 90% of its food, much

⁶⁸ Closure or other interference with the flow of commerce and other traffic through the Bab el Mandeb would be detrimental across multiple dimensions for other regional and international actors. First, doing so would increase both time and cost for shipping. Moreover, the threat of closure would increase perceived risk in the area, thereby increasing the price of insurance for ships choosing to continue regional operation (Potheary, 2016). *Additional potential costs include those related to close-protection deployments on-board, and compensating employees for working under conditions of heightened risk, which may in turn open up maritime logistics operators to legal consequences in the case of substantial damage or loss of life on a civilian vessel* (Potheary, 2016).

⁶⁹ Most recently, the Houthis launched cruise missiles at the *USS Mason* in multiple confirmed attacks that ostensibly were in retaliation for U.S. actions, including support of the Saudi-led coalition whose goal it was to expel the Houthis from the capital. While the extent of Iran's role is still being determined, Iran's ongoing rivalry both with the U.S. and with Saudi Arabia would provide a clear motive for supporting these attacks (Toumaj, 2016).

of this using foreign shipping. Further reduction in security in the Bab el Mandeb would threaten this supply, and aid agencies have warned that Aden faces a potential humanitarian crisis. This suggests that cooperating with the Iranians to interfere with the free flow of commerce in the Bab el Mandeb may run counter to the Houthis' interests by undermining their support among the Yemeni population.

Though Iran's current degree of power with respect to the Bab el Mandeb is less than that for the Strait of Hormuz given its direct control of the latter, there may be some strategic benefits to Iran interfering in the Bab el Mandeb versus the Strait of Hormuz, were Iran to gain tighter control through their Houthi counterparts. These include a lower likelihood of direct and aggressive retribution (e.g., against the Iranian military) from the U.S., which would have a harder time justifying such action given Iran's plausible deniability. As such, the perceived cost of such interference would be lower.

Implications for Iranian interests

Prestige and security interests

Iran frames security of the Persian Gulf and the Strait as a priority, connecting it to their focus on **countering external threats to security and sovereignty**. Both historically and in recent months, however, Iran has threatened to close the Strait in the face of a perceived increase in threat from the US and its allies, which also aligns with their prestige interest in **broadcasting strength and challenging the US regional position**. Many of the statements regarding closing the Strait from IRGC commanders reference Iran's military capabilities in the Gulf and its ability and willingness to confront US naval presence. Khamenei and, more recently Rouhani, also reflect this view in their comments regarding US presence in the Gulf.

The Persian Gulf coast and much of the coasts of the Sea of Oman belong to this powerful Iranian nation, therefore we have to be present in this region, [stage] maneuvers and show off our power...when we hesitate and refrain from showing off the principles and elements of our power to the enemy or if we are scared, the enemy will grow brazen.

Demonstrating military capability and **broadcasting strength** are strategies that, for conservatives and hardliners in particular, are also integrally linked to Iran's perception of how it will reach its goal of regional hegemony. These strategies help strengthen Iran's positioning as the logical alternative source of power and support for Arab groups and states that distrust the US and Gulf States. Threatening closure of the Strait is therefore a means of both signaling displeasure at the actions of the US, and emphasizing Iran's potential as a regional power. It is less clear, however, that escalation would strengthen this signal. In fact, depending on the scope and nature of the US and international response, such an escalation could undermine Iran's security and prestige interests, as such actions will likely result in significant damage to Iran's military capabilities and infrastructure. As such, escalation is unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term, thus creating the inevitability of defeat and subsequent loss of face.

The security of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz is among the main priorities of the Republic of Iran and this security should be durable so that all countries of the region can protect and defend their interests and those of the region. Any further impairing of this security will threaten the national interests of the regional states.

— Ramin Mehman-Parast, Foreign Ministry Spokesman, July 19, 2012

Similar to its interference in the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's potential control over and restriction of traffic (or as indicated, the threats of such) in the Bab el Mandeb serves its

overarching goal of achieving regional hegemony. The strategic elements working to enable the regional hegemony goal and its associated prestige interest include **broadcasting strength**, both to the U.S. and to Saudi Arabia. Iran may similarly be motivated to **broadcast strength** through interference in the Bab el Mandeb, as a form of retaliatory action against Saudi Arabia for interfering with its economic outcomes by restricting access to the SUMED pipeline and selectively blocking Iranian ships, thereby stifling Iran's establishment of trade with Europe. The difference for Iran's security and prestige interests in acting in the Strait of Hormuz versus the Bab el Mandeb may in some ways be a function of the target of the message it seeks to send, both domestically and internationally. Actions in the Strait of Hormuz would appear more consistent with a focus on **pushing back against US/Western pressure**, whereas acting in the Bab el Mandeb could signal an emphasis on **reducing the external threat from Saudi Arabia**.

Though Iran's interest in the Bab el Mandeb is likely to be characterized as an expression of regional power politics, its stand against Sunni Saudi Arabia through its support for the Shia Houthis also furthers its strategy of **supporting and protecting Shia populations and culture** in the region. Further, the tighter Iran's grasp over the Bab el Mandeb, the more that it can increase its **regional political influence**, through threats or actions intended to manipulate oil tanker and other traffic in the area. Achieving control over the Bab el Mandeb would represent a significant gain in Iran's footprint in the region, as well as a major loss for Saudi Arabia, thus aiding Iran's goal of regional hegemony.

Economic interests

Another means by which Iranian leaders, in particular reformists and moderates, seek to increase Iran's regional influence is by **delivering economic improvement** and opening Iran to increased trade and investment. Any action that threatens commerce in the Strait of Hormuz is likely to trigger a re-imposition of sanctions by the US and possibly other states, jeopardizing the gains Iran is just beginning to see from the implementation of JCPOA. Previously, when Iran threatened to close the Straits, it faced significantly different consequences to its economic interests, as it was already under sanctions and real or perceived threats to the global oil supply generally increase prices. However, the oil market is currently much tighter, and has already recently weathered significant risks such as ISIL's control in Iraq, the war in Yemen, and upheaval in Venezuela and Libya without showing much effect.

Balancing this, however, would be Iran's security interest in reducing the threat from Saudi Arabia. After years of low oil prices, Saudi Arabia's economy is less able to absorb temporary decreases in revenue from oil exports. The Saudi government's ability to mitigate popular pressure for political reform through economic spending is therefore also constrained. By disrupting Saudi oil exports, even temporarily, through interference in either the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb, Iran may see the potential to **reduce the external threat** it perceives from Saudi Arabia, and thereby weaken a key rival to its regional hegemony goal, by creating the conditions for greater internal unrest and instability there.

Additionally, as Iran continues to pivot toward a trade strategy increasingly focused on trade with China and India, thereby bypassing use of the Bab el Mandeb, its ability to interfere there while minimizing impact to its own economy and remaining resilient also increases. This trade pivot also minimizes the potential harm that Saudi Arabia can exert upon Iran through its selective blocking of Iranian ships. In this way, the Bab el Mandeb becomes less strategically important to Iran as a source of economic power but

more strategically useful to Iran as a source of economic and other manipulation of its perceived rivals. Once again, the perceived cost of interference in the Bab el Mandeb would be reduced, yielding a more favorable cost-benefit ratio that focuses on harming its regional competitor, Saudi Arabia.

Overall our interests-based assessment suggests that, at this point in time, the potential economic cost of any action to disrupt commerce in the Strait of Hormuz is much higher for Iran than it has been in the past, and it is unclear how significant the benefit (through a potential increase in the global price of oil) would be. Iran's pivot toward increasing trade with China and India, however, may lead them to view acting, via proxy, in the Bab el Mandeb as less detrimental to their ability to deliver economic improvement than acting in the Strait, therefore making it a preferred option. Nonetheless, though the motivation might be there, the capability to interfere in the Bab el Mandeb may not—while the converse holds true for the Strait of Hormuz.

Interfering with commerce in the Strait of Hormuz or Bab el Mandeb: Implications for Iran's interests

- *As a demonstration of Iran's willingness and ability to confront US power, actions to close either the Strait or the Bab el Mandeb could be seen as a means of enhancing Iran's prestige among regional actors, embodying their aspirations for regional influence. However, in the case of the Strait, much of this can be achieved, with significantly less risk, through continuing to simply threaten rather than act to disrupt free flow of commerce.*
- *Any interference of commerce in the Strait risks Iran losing much, if not all, of the economic gains and opportunities it has made with the implementation of JCPOA. This loss in turn would have negative consequences for both its prestige and economic interests.*
- *If Iran is successful in pivoting its trade away from Europe and toward India and China, the economic cost it would incur from disruption to shipping in the Bab el Mandeb would decrease both absolutely and relative to its rival Saudi Arabia. However, Iran's capability here is contingent on the continued, and even heightened, influence on and cooperation of the Houthis.*
- *Actions in the Strait of Hormuz would appear more consistent with a focus on pushing back against US/Western pressure, whereas acting in the Bab el Mandeb could signal an emphasis on reducing the external threat from Saudi Arabia.*

Domestic political constraints and motivations

Our interests-based assessment identified three key strategies that Iran's leaders use to maintain domestic political support and control: broadcasting strength and challenging the US position in the region; delivering economic improvement; and resisting cultural infiltration by the West. While these strategies are common among all political factions, conservatives and moderates define and prioritize these strategies differently. Consequently, there is a significant interplay in the balance of political power between conservatives and moderates, and the approach Iran takes to its foreign policy.

Broadcasting strength and challenging the US position in the region

As discussed above, broadcasting strength is a strategy that serves Iran's security and prestige interests, particularly for conservatives and hardliners. However, it is also influential domestically. "[R]ejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it," and achieving regional hegemony are enshrined in Iran's constitution (Article 152). Any popular perception that Iran's leadership, in

particular the Ayatollah or his clerics, is failing in this respect can severely undermine their domestic legitimacy and support. Conversely, for conservatives and hardliners, appealing to well-established narratives demonizing the US, and emphasizing Iran's willingness and strength to confront US regional influence, is a powerful tool for rallying support among conservative and also rural Iranians who hold consistent views.

As the international landscape continues to change and actors such as Donald Trump, supporting a more aggressive posture with respect to Iran, come into power in the United States, the gap between these two factions is likely to narrow. Both conservatives and moderates will have incentive to move toward more adversarial rhetoric and actions in an attempt to retain domestic political support in response to an increase in perceived external threat from the US.

Iran's upcoming election further increases both factions' sensitivity to short-term popular opinion. Recent opinion polls conducted in Iran by the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland found that more than 70% of Iranians polled are not confident that the US will live up to its obligations under JCPOA, and a similar percentage view the US government negatively. This suggests that, particularly in an election year, there is political motivation for moderates such as Rouhani to employ the strategy of broadcasting strength and challenging the US more than they have in the past. The Persian Gulf has often served as a venue for Iran's leaders and the IRGC to demonstrate their commitment to broadcasting strength and challenging the US. It has a symbolic and aspirational dimension for the Iranian population that the Bab el Mandeb lacks. This increases the salience of the Strait both as a strategic bargaining tool and a means to create a rally effect domestically.

Delivering economic improvement

Popular disillusionment, occasioned by the failure of JCPOA to deliver the economic benefits many believed were promised, places moderates such as Rouhani in a much more politically vulnerable position than they were after the 2016 elections. A perceived or actual failure of the nuclear deal will have dire consequences for re-election for Rouhani given that he staked his political capital on its achievement and its projected economic benefits for Iran. This issue has become more critical for Rouhani following a recent congressional vote to extend unilateral sanctions against Iran, which has been interpreted by many Iranians as a signal that the nuclear deal has failed. This development adds greater salience and credibility to the long-standing conservative and hardliner position that the US cannot be trusted and seeks only to destroy Iran.

The domestic economic situation, in combination with the current political climate, both domestically and internationally, will exert pressure on the moderates to become more aggressive in their approach, to appease both the public and the conservatives. This likely movement by the moderates away from openness and cooperation, portended to result in significant economic gains, does have the perceived benefit domestically of garnering public and conservative support based in decreasing the risk to western cultural infiltration. For example, there has in recent months been a shift in Rouhani's rhetoric, changing from emphasizing cooperation and win-win solutions (Rouhani, 2013) to emphasizing that Iran will not allow an abrogation of the nuclear deal, and that doing so would result in consequences (Erdbrink, 2016). Recent opinion polls conducted in Iran by the Center for International and Security Studies at the

University of Maryland support the assessment that economic factors and the fate of JCPOA are likely to affect Rouhani's political support more than that of his rivals. A June 2015 poll found that, if expectations of economic improvement following the nuclear deal were not fulfilled, disappointment would be higher among Rouhani's supporters than among conservative Iranians (Gallagher & Mohseni, 2015). A 2016 poll in turn found that, although Rouhani's approval ratings were high, there were significant negative trends. "While immediately after the signing of the nuclear deal 61 percent said they had a very favorable opinion of Rouhani, today only 38 percent express such feelings...In contrast, favorability ratings of most of Rouhani's potential opponents in Iran's June 2017 presidential elections have been improving (Mohseni, Gallagher, & Ramsay, 2016).

Popular disillusionment with the economic outcome of the nuclear deal reinforces perceptions that the US acted dishonestly, seeking to thwart Iran's efforts to increase trade and foreign investment. This plays into hardline and conservative narratives emphasizing Western (especially US) hostility and untrustworthiness, and gives credence to conservatives' own economic strategy, which seeks to limit openness to the West. In such a political environment, it is possible that the balance between the economic costs of interfering with commerce in either the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb, and the perceived benefit of demonstrating Iranian power and status, may swing in favor of the latter. Furthermore, if US actions or policies continue to limit foreign trade and investment in Iran, the threat of re-imposition of sanctions against Iranian oil exports is less likely to be effective.

*Interfering with commerce in the Strait of Hormuz or Bab el Mandeb:
Domestic political considerations*

- *Iran's revolutionary doctrine (that it is leading an existential fight against the forces of US imperialism) makes it critical for Iran's leaders, conservatives and hardliners in particular, to demonstrate to the Iranian people that they will not be bullied by the US.*
- *The domestic political climate in Iran, influenced by the slow pace of economic improvement following JCPOA, leaves moderates such as Rouhani politically vulnerable, increasing the likelihood they will move toward the more bellicose rhetoric of the conservatives in order to regain credibility.*

Bottom Line

At the moment, the balance of interests does not favor Iran acting in either the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb. However, moving forward, changes that Iran is making to decrease its economic vulnerabilities could in turn decrease the cost of acting in the Bab el Mandeb. Furthermore, its increasing naval capability makes this more viable, and reduces Iranian reliance on help from the Houthis, which is potentially unreliable.

Conversely, if Iran faces new sanctions or fails to see economic improvement from JCPOA, more aggressive behavior in the Strait may come to be seen as critical to maintaining their prestige interests and domestic legitimacy. Additionally, the economic implications of such actions would be lessened if the increase in trade and foreign investment expected after JCPOA does not materialize.

The more the US is seen as unreliable or untrustworthy, and the more the nuclear deal appears at risk, the more viable the conservative position of resistance to the West seems, and the better a rhetoric of belligerence will play to the Iranian domestic audience. As such, we would expect to also see a shift in the

moderates' rhetoric away from openness and cooperation toward greater protection against external threats, as well as more aggressive and proactive demonstration of power and capability. Ultimately, this situation would produce a more unified Iranian political leadership and public, one oriented more toward the conservative viewpoint and thus less likely to engage in cooperation with the West and more likely to see the US as an immediate threat to Iranian interests.

The worst-case scenario would be one in which Iran feels backed into a corner; its only remaining choice to move from threat to action in order to save face and attempt to preserve its interests in the service of its overarching goal of regional hegemony. Doing so could create an escalatory situation, in which both Iran and the US are positioned to take actions that ultimately will be to the cost and detriment of both sides in the longer-term given the creation of greater instability and uncertainty in the region overall. Though Iran's plays are at present limited, their options for using the Bab el Mandeb as a strategic lever may improve over time. Actions in the Strait of Hormuz may also be prompted if the domestic and regional benefits come to outweigh the costs of US and other retaliatory action.

Given political changes in the US following the recent elections, and the shifting position of more moderate leaders as well as the public's priorities within Iran, it is clear that the current situation is one characterized by uncertainty and risk. In light of the dynamics discussed here and the inherent instability introduced by this uncertainty, we may expect to see Iran take a more aggressive stance, employing all of its levers of influence moving forward.

Appendix A: Iran's national interest profile

Iran has as an overarching goal, codified in its Constitution, as well as in its 20-Year Prospective Document (Vision 2025), of achieving and maintaining regional hegemony. Conservatives and moderates share this goal, although there is variation in their preferred strategy for achieving it that has implications for how they frame and define Iran's interests more broadly. This regional hegemony goal is informed by Iran's worldview; its revolutionary ideology (Islamic Resistance), the belief that it is leading an existential fight against the forces of US imperialism and religious extremism, and its desire to be seen as the guardian of Islamic, and increasingly Shiite, values.

Iran's actions to protect and further its interests are best understood through the lens of its regional hegemony goal. This overarching goal and the worldview that underpins it, appear to drive and subsume

Implications of Iran's national interests and worldview

- *Iran's sense of threat and vulnerability leads it to engage in efforts to shape its own sphere of influence through actions that the US views as aggressive but Iran views as defensive.*
- *Conservatives consistently use narratives that demonize the US, framing it as the enemy of Iran. Any appearance that Iranian cooperation is not fully recognized and reciprocated will therefore be perceived as proof of the inherent danger, and futility, of trusting the US.*
- *The domestic political climate in Iran, influenced by the slow pace of economic improvement following JCPOA, leaves moderates such as Rouhani politically vulnerable, increasing the likelihood that they will move toward the more bellicose rhetoric of the conservatives in order to regain credibility.*
- *Blanket and public condemnation of Iranian policy and actions, and actions by the US such as the recent Senate vote to continue sanctions, are likely to be interpreted as evidence of US desire to dominate Iran and obstruct Iran's normalization of economic relations with other states.*

many of Iran’s economic, prestige, and security interests. Iran’s prestige interests center around ensuring that it does not lose face in its interactions with the US, or power in its ability to influence regional events or actors. Its economic interests focus on defending and developing Iranian economic assets, expanding regional and Western trade ties, regaining its pre-sanctions oil market, and increasing its receipt of foreign investments. Iran’s security interests include reducing threats from the US, Israel, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, reducing the threat from ISIL, and broadcasting strength and challenging US influence and position in the region, as well as within Iran’s borders.

Variation in how Conservatives and Moderates perceive and pursue Iran’s interests

Both conservatives (including actors such as the Supreme Leader, Khamenei, and the IRGC) and moderates (including actors such as President Rouhani) appear to share the goal of achieving regional hegemony for Iran. There is also some consistency in their definitions of key prestige, economic, and security interests. However, as shown in Table 1 below, there is considerable variation in the prioritization of these interests and even more in preferred strategies for achieving these interests.

Table 1: Comparison of Conservative and Moderates’ preferred strategies for achieving interests

| KEY INTERESTS & PREFERRED STRATEGY RANKINGS | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Interest | Cons | Mod | Conservatives | Moderates |
| PRESTIGE | Equal first | Equal first | Broadcast strength / challenge US position in the region | Increase Iranian regional political influence |
| | | | Support / protect Shia populations & culture | Increase engagement with the international community |
| | | | Develop and demonstrate military capability | Support / protect Shia populations & culture |
| | | | | |
| ECONOMIC | Third | Equal first | Resistance economics | Expand regional and European trade ties |
| | | | Defend and develop economic assets | Regain pre-sanctions oil markets |
| | | | Regain pre-sanctions oil market | Increase foreign investment |
| | | | | |
| SECURITY | | Second | Reduce external threats, in particular from US, Israel, KSA | Reduce external threats, in particular from US, Israel, KSA |

| | | | | |
|----------|-------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| | Equal first | | Push back against US/Western pressure | Stand up to US/Western pressure |
| | | | Develop and demonstrate military capability | Develop and demonstrate military capability |
| | | | | |
| DOMESTIC | Second | Third | Resist cultural infiltration of west | Deliver economic improvement through greater openness |
| | | | Broadcast strength / challenge US position in the region | Broadcast strength / challenge US position in the region |
| | | | Deliver economic improvement through resistance economics | Resist cultural infiltration of west |

Green = Conservatives and Moderates differ in strategy or ranking of strategies

As Table 1 shows, Rouhani and the moderates tend to favor a strategy that emphasizes the pursuit and sustainment of economic growth and prosperity, aided by opening investment and trade ties with Western actors, including the United States. In contrast, Khamenei and the IRGC place an emphasis on confrontation and the demonstration of strength, along with resistance to Western influences. These two factions do not operate in a vacuum however, but instead share some dependencies on one another. Rouhani, for example, ultimately requires the approval of the more powerful Khamenei on many policy areas, especially foreign policy, while conservatives recognize that economic improvement, even under their resistance economy policy will require some degree of openness. However, as indicated in the narrative above, the moderate and conservative stance may be converging given current international events, toward a more aggressive and less open stance to the US in particular.

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Author Biographies



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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.



Dr. Anoush Ehteshami

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

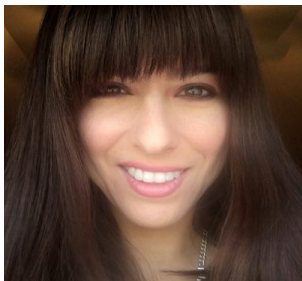
In addition to having published 21 books and monographs, he also has over 90 articles in learned journals and edited volumes to his name. His current research revolves around five over-arching themes:

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

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

Dr. Yoel Guzansky

Yoel Guzansky is a visiting fellow at Hoover Institution, Stanford University. He is also 2016-2017 Fulbright Scholar and a 2016-2017 Israel Institute post-doc Fellow. Dr. Guzansky is a research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University. Before he joined INSS, he was in charge of strategic issues at Israel's National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Office, coordinating work on the Iranian nuclear challenge. He served under four National Security Advisers and three Prime Ministers. Dr. Guzansky completed training offered by the US State Department; the US Department of Energy; the Israeli Foreign Ministry and the Israel Atomic Energy Commission. He specializes in issues of Gulf security and Middle East strategic issues. He is the author of the recently published books "The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East" (Palgrave, 2015), "The Arab World on the Road to State Failure" (INSS, 2016) and "Between Resilience and Revolution: The Stability of the Gulf Monarchies" (INSS, 2016).



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.



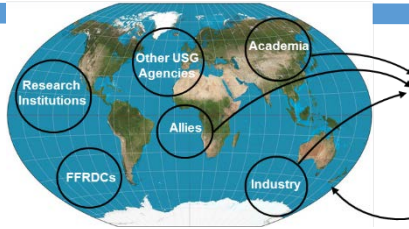
Alex Vatanka

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.*"

SMA Reach-back Report



What major economic, political and security (military) activities does KSA and Iran currently conduct in Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to gain influence? What are KSA and Iran's ultimate goals behind these activities? What motivates KSA and Iran towards these goals? What future activities might KSA and Iran conduct in Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen?

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Editor: Patricia DeGennaro, TRADOC G-2/G-27

SME Contribution

KSA/IRAN Lens

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Summary

The geopolitical landscape in this region is vast and complex. History, lands, family, culture and economic resources are closely intertwined. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran in particular are opposing influencers in these neighboring countries and populations. KSA sees itself as the Sunni protector and the legitimate rulers of the Arabian Peninsula while Iran takes the position of Shite protector. Religion is often used to veil outright economic and military operations by both countries quite often through group proxies. Both Iran and KSA have vast oil and gas resources with extreme and autocratic rulers that work tirelessly to shape, influence and dominate the region thereby ensuring primacy, longevity and wealth.

There are distinct differences between the nations. Iran' has a rich history from the time of the Persian Empire while the Saud family came from a waring tribe in the desert cleverly undermining Western colonizers who aligned with its rival ruling family. Both countries have a population with high literacy, but minimal freedoms, Iran's being a more progressive population with a larger middle class.

To date, each government continues to try project influence internationally, regionally, and locally through statecraft and, sometimes lethally, through proxy actors within and between states. Below are SMA contributions that identify ways in which KSA and Iran influence Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria in the cognitive, economic, political and security realms. Each has a dedicated narrative giving reason to justify influence although, it is important to note that the receiving countries and non-state actors are not so easily manipulated. Although they may not have similar political powers, they are by no means without their own abilities and interests.

| | | YEMEN | BAHRAIN | LEBANON | IRAQ | SYRIA |
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| KSA Influence | Narrative | Iran is responsible for the instability in Yemen and providing Houthi anti-government rebels with significant military support by training, financing and supplying arms. | The Shia population is being supported by Iran so it can overtake Bahrain's monarchy and contribute to tension, terrorism and insecurity. | Iran is supporting Hezbollah to ensure the fall of the Sunni regimes and create a Shia ruling arch. | Iran supports terrorism and is trying to influence and destabilize Iraq for its own influence in the Gulf and Middle East region. | Assad is a threat to the KSA due to its relationship with Iran who is actively seeking to control Damascus. |
| | Economic | In the 1970s and 1980s, every family had at least one male relative working in Saudi Arabia. Estimates put the number of Yemeni migrants working in the Gulf in | KSA is connected directly to Bahrain by bridge. The GCC as a whole have an economic cooperation agreement, but the level of cooperation in security matters increases annually. | Lebanon is a direct benefactor of KSA international aid. There are rumors that deceased Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri had direct family ties with Prince Bandar bin Sultan, former Saudi | Iraq is a main transit point for smugglers and illicit businessmen to transport goods from and to the south/southwestern areas of Saudi Arabia. Iraqis often complain about the accessibility Saudis have to the boarder and | KSA offered to help the Assad regime stay in power if it moved permanently away from Iran. Syria rejected the offer. |

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| | | <p>the 1980s at up to 1.8 million (in 2011 Yemen had a population of 24.8 million).</p> <p>Remittances from those who work in KSA drive Yemen's consumer market. Now, however, Yemen's economy is in shambles. Foreign financing has dried up due to the current Saudi offensive, KSA has expelled many Yemeni workers and other can no longer travel north for work lessening</p> | <p>The decrease in the oil money has facilitated an increase in tensions across the country. Furthermore, the steady decline of resources has meant that the Al Khalifa family are increasingly reliant upon Saudi Arabia for financial support.</p> <p>Saudi Arabia also possesses strong ties with Bahrain, stemming in part from the Al Khalifa's tribal roots in Saudi Arabia, and from</p> | <p>Ambassador to the US.</p> <p>Many Saudis have residential real estate ownership in Beirut and extensive economic investment.</p> <p>Beirut is another location used to escape the strict rules the monarchy continues to impose on persons, goods and services. Lebanon is a central banking hub for many GCC.⁷⁰</p> | <p>the ease at which they cross.</p> | |
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| | | <p>economic influence in the country.</p> <p>In what is purported to be a KSA instigation, the exiled President moved its central bank to Aden directly undermining the rebels and putting the majority of Yemen's population - 26 million - which is concentrated in the north.</p> | <p>economic ties, facilitated by the sale of oil.</p> | | | |
| | Political | <p>KSA is a central actor in Yemeni political arena. They currently back the exiled Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his forces.</p> | <p>Al Saud have recently sought to lay their own claim to Bahrain in the guise of a formal union between the two states, entitled the GCC-Arabian Union.</p> | <p>KSA accused Hezbollah of "terror and incitements" in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Uses social media to depict Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, at nothing but</p> | <p>The current Iraq government is touting the wins of Hezbollah and the Popular Mobilization Units against Daesh while KSA wants them coined as terrorists. The Iraqi FM said, "those accusing them of terrorism</p> | <p>The Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdom says President Assad cannot be part of a solution to the conflict and must hand over power to a transitional administration or be</p> |

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| | | <p>KSA was an avid supporter of the former Saleh government until Saleh began backing Houthi groups to help him return to power.</p> <p>KSA has provided the Hadi government with financial and other business investment to ensure stability of the country. KSA does not want a failed state or any Yemenis, especially the Houthi's to flee into the country. Qatar often vies for</p> | <p>Saudi Arabian support for the Al Khalifa includes bankrolling items on Bahrain's national budget, while also paying for King Hamad's Boeing 747-400.20.</p> <p>In addition to financial and ideological support, ties between the Al Saud and the Al Khalifa have been solidified by the marriage of a daughter of King Abdullah to a son of King Hamad.</p> | <p>an Iranian stooge. Nasrallah in turn accused Al Saud of interfering in Lebanese domestic policies.</p> | <p>are the terrorists" causing a larger rift between the two.</p> <p>Both parties maintain ties but they are frayed. The Iraqis feel that KSA's support or lack thereof is solely sectarian while Iraqis want an end to hostilities despite sectarian debates.</p> <p>Many Iraqi's also see KSA as supporting Daesh so they have little appetite for KSA shenanigans.</p> <p>At present, Iraq is concerned with its own stability and does not want to get caught up in the KSA-Iran power struggle. Some Iraqis have voiced opposition to the KSA embassy reopening.</p> | <p>removed by force.</p> <p>Riyadh is a major provider of military and financial assistance to several rebel groups, including those with Islamist ideologies, and has called for a no-fly zone to be imposed to protect civilians from bombardment by Syrian government forces.</p> <p>Saudi leaders were angered by the Obama administration's decision not to intervene militarily in Syria after a 2013 chemical attack blamed on</p> |
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| | | <p>Yemeni influence in the same manner.</p> <p>There are some Houthi's who live in the KSA near the Yemeni border. KSA fears these groups will revolt against the royal family often blaming Shi'ite Sunni divisions.</p> <p>Due to the current KSA/Houthi fighting other groups like the socialist southern secession party, HIRAK, supported by the former PM (and southerner) Haidar abu Bakr al-Attas</p> | <p>Bahrain's importance to Saudi Arabia stems from shared ethnic bonds between the Monarchies and fear that the Shite of Bahrain and the Shia of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia will unite leading to an empowered Shite community in the Gulf.</p> <p>The Saudis show no restraint in deploying troops to Bahrain to quell the Shite of Bahrain from gaining more democratic power.</p> <p>While in Bahrain, Saudi</p> | | | <p>Mr. Assad's forces.</p> <p>They later agreed to take part in the US-led coalition air campaign against IS, concerned by the group's advances and its popularity among a minority of Saudis.</p> <p>Relations are severed between Syria and KSA. KSA supports the ouster of the Assad regime mainly because of Iran's influence on the regime. In addition KSA parties have traditionally supported financially and military radical Sunni groups in the</p> |
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| | | <p>are gaining support for either a change in the government or a return to the 1990 border divisions. Attas formerly ruled Southern Yemen and joined Saleh after the unification as Prime Minister. Today, he is advocating for a return to a divided Yemen faulting the Islamist (AQAP) support from North Yemen for the current demise of the country.</p> | <p>security forces participated in attacks in opposition Shite headquarter s, demolished unlicensed Shite religious structures and, according to Shite clerics, allegedly destroyed at least 38 mosques.</p> <p>KSA puts extensive pressure on the Al-Khalifa family so they do not pursue further democratic policies for fear of Shia political gains. Both families fear for their own survival and lack of legitimacy</p> | | | <p>region many of which are fighting against or to overthrow the Assad regime.</p> |
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| | | | among populations. | | | |
| | Security | <p>KSA supplies the Abadi backed Yemeni Army with funds and weapons. It also exchanges monies with other countries to provide Yemen with ground soldiers to fight the most vulnerable positions in Yemen.</p> <p>KSA provided monies to Sudan to lure a 10,000 soldier force from South Sudan. In turn, South Sudan shifted its regional alliances from long-</p> | <p>KSA is closely linked to the Bahraini monarchy. They support Bahrain militarily when necessary.</p> <p>After a local demonstrati on against the monarch grew, KSA sent troops in 2011 to crush it.</p> <p>Construction of the causeway was dramatically increased after the revolution of 1979. Despite the belief that the road's purpose was to increase economic</p> | <p>March 2, 2016 KSA did away with \$4 billion military grants to Lebanon for policies not aligned with the KSA</p> | <p>KSA does little to protect Iraqi security. In fact it often fails to enforce border crossing restriction between the countries and has provided no support for Iraq security or sovereignty during their years of struggle against ISIL and Turkish continued intervention.</p> | <p>An unstable Syria is a risk for the KSA given that Daesh is not supportive of the monarchy's legitimacy. However, KSA is more concerned about Iran having continued influence. This in itself makes KSA fearful and insecure.</p> <p>KSA is purchasing billions of dollars of weapons from the US due to these fears (\$9.3 Billion a 50% increase in 2015), it continues offensive operations in Yemen and continues to</p> |

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| | | <p>term Iranian ally to KSA for that economic support.</p> <p>Mauritania agreed to deploy 500 troops to Yemen, the week after Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Al-Ayesh's visit to Mauritania. The visit of the Saudi minister was followed by a letter from Egyptian President Sisi to boost cooperation between the two countries, as well as by a visit by UAE Foreign Minister Al Nahyan. Both UAE and Egypt are in the center of the</p> | <p>ties, it appears that its development was to engender easier access in case of trouble for the Al Khalifa.</p> | | | <p>discuss the possession of nuclear capabilities none of which improves security in the region. It is already in discussions with neighboring Jordan to develop a "peaceful" nuclear program.</p> |
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| | | <p>Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.</p> <p>Despite interests in Yemeni stability, KSA has been waging an air campaign against Houthi rebels leaving over 10,000 killed or wounded. Hospitals, civilian weddings and other targets have gained wide spread condemnation from international rights groups and the UN. In essence, KSA is a large factor as to why the State has basically failed, people are starving, and internal</p> | | | | |
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| | | strive widening. Further, it has not paid Yemeni military fighters in eighteen months so many are leaving the fight weakening the internal state of affairs. | | | | |
| | | YEMEN | BAHRAIN | LEBANON | IRAQ | SYRIA |
| Iran Influence | Narrative | Iran is the defender of the Shi'ite population who are marginalized at the hands of the Gulf monarchies and governments in the Middle East and governments in Southwest Asa. Iran is supportive of democracy and | Bahrain was a part of Iran's territory until 46 years ago and Iran continues to have sovereignty over Bahrain the fortieth province of Iran despite its illegal stated independence in 1970. | Iran supports the democratic principles in Lebanon and is Hezbollah's benefactor to protect the country against Israeli aggression. | Iran and Iraq must build regional stability and create a good environment for both to economically flourish. Iran views KSA as an over jealous monarchy defaming a country set on democracy and stability. (Note: Iran will say that it has never invaded nor has it attacked a country in the region. This is true. Iranian influence is | Syria must remain a sovereign democratic country and Bashar Al-Assad is the legitimate elected leader. |

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| | | democratically elected leaders. | | | through Statecraft using its military, thus far, as a scare tactic fearing that others will not think it can protect itself. | |
| | Economic | <p>Trade between the two countries is minimal as compared to 2005 when Iran exported \$7.7 billion to Yemen.</p> <p>Yemeni exports to Iran totaled about \$130,000 in goods.</p> <p>The two have spoken about better relations and Iran's participation in helping Yemen to improve its infrastructure. Much of</p> | <p>Although bilateral exchanges have increased significantly over the past several years, economic interaction remains relatively minor – a report in 2011 estimated trade between the two Gulf states to total \$5 billion annually.</p> <p>The two countries began negotiations over Iranian natural gas</p> | <p>Trade between Lebanon and Iran is minimal. It is mostly in the energy sector and amount to approximately \$150 million a year.</p> <p>The government's plan to cooperate on energy and gas was halted due to sanctions and the stagnant government in Lebanon.</p> <p>In 2010, the Lebanese Central Bank Governor required that</p> | <p>Iran and Iraq trade some \$12 billion in goods and plan on doubling this number in the near future.</p> <p>Trade consists mostly of non-oil related items. Exports include food, construction materials, and vehicles among other items.</p> <p>Daesh has opened up more markets for Iran trade and smuggling because the group forced the routes between Turkey and Iraq to be blocked or closed, so Iranian</p> | <p>Iranian-Syrian trade only amounted to about one-third of Washington's commercial exchanges with Damascus.</p> <p>One area where the two cooperated was tourism. Iranians constituted approximately 20 percent of all tourists to Syria. Most are pilgrims, who visit Shiite religious shrines that hold no religious importance to Alawis.</p> |

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| | | <p>these discussions halted when the Yemen government accused Iran of arming the Houthi rebels.</p> <p>Many economic struggles internal to Yemen seem to be related to disputes between KSA and Qatar, Iran has minimal economic influence in the emirate.</p> | <p>exports to Bahrain in 2008. According to the preliminary agreement signed in 2008, Bahrain would eventually import on the order of 1.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas from Iran per day via an underwater pipeline. The two sides would also expand energy sector investment, with Bahrain providing a \$4 billion investment for the partial development of Iran's South Pars gas field and Iran taking part in Bahrain's</p> | <p>banks abide by UN, US, and EU sanctions.</p> <p>News of the JCPOA triggered immediate planning for banking to rebuild ties with Tehran.</p> | <p>imports filled the gap.</p> <p>Since Iraqis also believed KSA is supporting Daesh, Iranian goods replaced KSA imports as well.</p> <p>Increased trade from Iran, caused protests and requests to put protectionist measures on imports that are hurting Iraqi companies.</p> <p>In response, Iraq stopped imports of cement although the deemed difficult to enforce due to porous borders. Few Iranian companies are impacted by this law.</p> | <p>Much of the tourism has stopped due to the extensive dangers from the ongoing internal/Daesh conflict.</p> |
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| | | | <p>petrochemical and refining industries, however, Bahrain suspended the deal in 2011 as a result of increasing diplomatic tensions.</p> | | | |
| | Political | <p>Iran's interest in Yemen lies in a poorly governed boarder with KSA. The border has ancient smuggling routes that would give Iran easier access to influence KSA. It also serves as an easy access point to AQAP, a KSA fear, but helpful to Iran to create instability.</p> | <p>Despite the occasional discovery of domestic plots with confirmed or suspected links to Tehran, Arabic-speaking Saudi and Bahraini Shiites have generally expressed cautious, even wary, attitudes towards their Persian-speaking Iranian counterparts.</p> | <p>In 2011, Hezbollah became a member of the Lebanese government gaining the Prime Minister seat in accordance with the constitution (the PM is constitutionally a Shia).</p> <p>During that time the country grew closer to Iran primarily in security and the energy sector.</p> | <p>Despite the Iraq-Iran war, Iran has an intertwined relationship with Iraq. Both peoples and economies are closely ties.</p> <p>Iran often used Iraqi porous borders to skirt sanctions. The influence from Iran has now become stronger since power returned predominantly to Shia hands. Further during the war, many Iraqis fled to Iran where they were welcomed. Some remain, others</p> | <p>Regional Shia power Iran is believed to be spending billions of dollars a year to prop up President Assad and his Alawite-dominated government, providing military advisers and subsidized weapons, as well as lines of credit and oil transfers.</p> <p>Mr. Assad is Iran's closest Arab ally and Syria is the main transit</p> |

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| | | <p>The previous rule of the Saleh family relied on the economic support from KSA to survive. This in addition to approximately 2 million Yemenis in KSA sending remittances of \$1.4 billion makes KSA much more influential.</p> <p>The KSA bombardment of the Houthi tribes provided an opening for Iran to identify areas to influence. These tribes however are a different Shia sect than Iranians (Iranians are the Twelver</p> | <p>Iranian coreligionists across the Gulf discriminate against Bahraini Shi'ite population (about 75%) who they consider Arab not Persian.</p> <p>The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB) has links to Iran in ideology, leadership, media support, logistics and military training however the primary goals of the group are independent from Iran and ties appear to me limited.</p> | <p>They are closely aligned on their views toward Israel in support of a Palestinian state.</p> <p>Lebanon's security interests in the South where Israeli incursions happen frequently and Israel continues to occupy Lebanese Shaba Farms (primarily a water issue), is also a point of contention giving Hezbollah leverage for continuing the relationship.</p> <p>Lebanon stood up for Iran's peaceful</p> | <p>have family members that remain in Iraq. Those who have returned have strong economic and social ties with their neighbor.</p> <p>Iran has a Kurdish population that shares ties through community, familial, and economic borders allowing it to influence and shape players and partners in Iraq.</p> <p>Iraqi Shia clerics also have strong relationships however the Iraqis have no interest in using Iran for anything else than leveraging their wants and needs.</p> <p>Iraqis overall see Iran as a party that is meddling</p> | <p>point for Iranian weapons shipments to the Lebanese Shia Islamist movement, Hezbollah.</p> <p>Iran is also believed to have been influential in Hezbollah's decision to send fighters to western Syria to assist pro-Assad forces.</p> <p>Militiamen from Iran and Iraq who say they are protecting Shia holy sites are also fighting alongside Syrian troops.</p> <p>Iran has proposed a peaceful transition in Syria that would</p> |
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| | | <p>Shia Sect) and they are suspicious of Iranian intentions.</p> <p>Iranian Influence has now become a Yemeni concern mostly due to the fall of the Yemeni political structure in 2011.</p> <p>Iran seems to be viewing the situation as a means to pressure the Saudis to tread lightly in Iraq and Syria or risk a concerted effort to further undermine them in Yemen.</p> <p>With the onset of</p> | <p>The true goal of the IFLB is independence and democracy for Bahrain.</p> <p>Iran does have close ties with one particular Shia cleric in Bahrain, Sheikh Isa Ahmad Qassem leader of Wafaq.</p> <p>After the Bahraini government put down Shite protesters many Shite clerics wrote to Iran's Khamenei for help. However, Tehran's apparent ineptitude to help was a negative</p> | <p>nuclear program and abstained from imposing more sanctions as long as they could and moved swiftly to retract anything in place when the nuclear agreement was announced.</p> <p>Internally most Lebanese fear a Shia rule and view Iran suspiciously however, many caveat that because Iran and Hezbollah were seen as maintaining security and protecting the sovereignty of Lebanon, especially from Israel.</p> | <p>in the affairs of a sovereign Iraq. There are cultural, linguistic and secular tensions between countries.</p> | <p>culminate in free, multi-party elections. It was involved in peace talks over Syria's future for the first time when world powers met in Vienna.</p> <p>The Shia roots Syria shares with Iran are minimal. Iranians seem to view the Syrian Alawi sect as much like they view Bahrainis.</p> |
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| | | <p>war, the Iranians have supported the Houthis with small weapons, but not much more. It is difficult to verify reports how many and what weapons are coming from Iran.</p> <p>The Yemeni state has always been weak however, its strength lie in a wide network of tribal loyalties that were able to guarantee security and stability. Now the Yemeni state has collapsed. Tribal structures have been</p> | <p>impact on the Shia population.</p> <p>The recent Bassiouni Report detailing Iran's involvement in Bahrain minimal, however it affirms the persecution by the Bahraini government on the Shite majority.</p> | <p>Hezbollah's support for Syria is also seen as a positive for many Lebanese since they are assisting in border security.</p> <p>A new President. Michel Aoun, elected on 31 October 2017, had an immediate visit from the FM of Iran.</p> | |
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| | | <p>destroyed and Yemen is awash in chaos and bloodshed, as well as sectarian strife, which is only been fueled by the bombings.</p> <p>The result, tribal norms are no longer strong, and they cannot guarantee social peace or order.</p> | | | | |
| | Security | <p>Iran is trafficking weapons to Yemen like most countries in the Gulf.</p> <p>Yemen itself is awash with weapons. Iranians, and others, are just adding to the</p> | <p>There is involvement of Iran and Saudi Arabia in a form of proxy conflict on Bahraini soil. Iran maintains that security in the Gulf should be the collective responsibility</p> | <p>Iran has been fostering the relationship with Lebanese Shia groups since the Iranian revolution. In 1982, Khomeini began offering financial support and military training</p> | <p>Iran is directly invested in the security of Iraq as an alleged protector of the Shia, but more realistically as a stabilizer in the Middle East.</p> <p>Iran does not want to relive the Iran-Iraq war and is invested in a stable secure Iraq that does not put</p> | <p>Iran is dispatching senior military figures and pressing its Lebanese client Hezbollah to send fighters to help defend the Syrian government.</p> |

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| | | <p>stockpile of small arms. Ammunitions however are being destroyed by the Saudi bombardment of ammunition centers.</p> <p>While KSA spends its time on unproductive assault in Yemen, Iran is bolstering its ballistic missile program and next generation intermediate range missile program with its militia becoming more active on the Saudi-Iraqi border.</p> | <p>y of the GCC states.</p> | <p>support to help the Lebanese defend itself during the Israeli invasion.</p> <p>Hezbollah, now officially part of the Lebanese government, and Iran have a relationship akin to the one between Israel and the United States - the patron supports, but cannot control the actions of the sponsored entity. The wild card here is that KSA also has great financial influence on the Lebanese government and covert and non-covert economic</p> | <p>Iranian sovereignty at risk. Further as a reliant trade partners, influence for not only security, but economic stability, is key.</p> | <p>Iran provides Syria with much-needed petroleum products and extends a hefty line of credit to the regime. Iran and Syria built a defensive alliance based on mutual adversaries and fears. Iran needs Syria to maintain its ties to Hezbollah and avoid isolation in the region. If Iran had an alternative to Assad, they would most likely agree to unseat him. However they will not agree to a new government that is close to KSA.</p> |
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| | | | | and political ties with Israel. | | |
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SME Contribution

KSA Economic Games

David Mazaheri and Larry Jeddelloh

Recent Federal Treasury custodial paper holdings declined upwards of ~\$27B. The reason seems to center on foreign central banks that sold nearly \$343B worth of US Treasuries. In July 2016, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and China began selling their US Treasury notes in an unprecedented rate. Sales, followed by other international central banks, come on the eve of various opaque pronouncements by the Fed to increase interest rates in December directly benefiting the bond market.

Not long after and for the first time, Saudi Arabia began issuing \$15B worth of bonds in the international markets offering 5, 10, and 30 year bonds with a benchmark yield of 110 to 200 basis points over the US treasuries at any given point. Analysts believe that Saudi Arabia is looking for liquidity and hedging their position in respect to the U.S. market. This could be due to: (a) their domestic situation; (b) their approach to continuous/shift in the U.S. foreign policy towards KSA and the region; or (c), most likely a combination of domestic and international influences.

China, being more of a strategic seller, is seen to be starting a diversification program which will be ongoing and focus on owning tangible assets rather than paper. China will continue to hold whole companies and invest in energy and financial institutions primarily in Brazil, Venezuela, Canada and across Europe, but will increase its investment in the form of technologies and other ventures. Selling holdings is most likely driven by fears of deflation ending, the falling dollar and a changing United States fiscal and monetary policy. Long rates may be headed to 2-2.2% (10 year bond) and are predicted to be bought by Japan and other regional banks.

KSA, on the other hand, is a structural seller and that is likely to show as it begins to diversify the economy. The bond sales are more likely focused on developing a post-oil economy and making better use of the capital they have accumulate due to bond issuance. U.S. Treasuries are not in that mix in the same size they were for the past 40-45 years.

KSA's DIME Calculus

The movement away from the U.S. treasuries signals a geopolitical realignment for the Kingdom away from the U.S.

The history of KSA purchasing treasuries from the U.S. dates back to 1974. After the Yom Kippur war, Arab states significantly increased the price of oil in response to U.S. assistance to Israel. Inflation soared and U.S. economy went into recession. President Nixon sent William Simon and Gerry Parsky, the Secretary of

Treasury and Deputy Secretary respectively, to Jeddah to persuade the Saudis to spend their newfound petro-dollars in the U.S. while standardizing oil prices. The U.S. agreed to purchase the majority of its oil from the KSA and provide them with military aid and equipment. In response, KSA would spend most of their petrodollars on U.S. Treasury purchases. King Faisal Al Saud reported wanted the deal kept secret for fear of a populous response to KSA dealing with the U.S. so soon after its Israeli alignment. The deal commenced.⁷¹

A movement from U.S. treasuries has implications beyond finance or economic factors alone

KSA began offering bonds not to exceed \$10B to \$15B in value. However, analysts show that many bond and mutual fund managers have offered to buy them in excess of \$50B or nearly five times the quantitative value offered. Analysts believe these managers are betting that KSA will be stable and prosperous for the next 30 years in order to be able to pay the coupon payments which are 200 basis points over US treasury notes. The market, therefore, is betting on Saudi Arabia in the long run as the prevailing regional power showing signs that there is little confidence in Iran despite the JCPOA.

Conclusion

- KSA is working to align itself regionally and internationally as opposed to relying heavily on a single ally which up until now has been the U.S. KSA is essentially diversifying relationships through economic differentiation.
- Following this trend of economic re-positioning, KSA will also have to revisit its military regional alliances. Their reliance on Pakistan for manpower support failed to pay dividends in Yemen when the Pakistanis outright refused to send support. As a result, the Saudi's are likely to look for new allies -- preferably ones with nuclear capabilities and other rapid response solutions.
- As KSA courts new partners and allies, they will also look closer at their so called Islamic alliances even though they may be of concern considering the ideological base they possess. One might expect to see Saudi "investments" in countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Jordan as well as Indonesia and India.
- KSA will continue to strengthen its influence in the GCC in order to create a safety buffer against Iran.
- Some new investment and partners that KSA may target are emerging economies most notably India, Indonesia, South Africa, Kyrgyzstan and other former Soviet states where they can exploit their Islamic brethren.

⁷¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/02/11/oil-for-security-fueled-close-ties/fdf1f123-214f-41b3-a53c-a5e687c648e7/> <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v36/d362>; and also, Caution-<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v36/d356>

- At the upcoming International Defense Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) in February of 2017, located in the UAE, expect to see KSA pivot from U.S. spending to EU/Asian/Russian/Chinese made products and services as part of their movement against the U.S. dollar.
- The Kingdom sees liquidity as an important factor for its future focus especially now that Iran can compete by increasing their economic stronghold post the JCPOA lifting of the sanctions.
- KSA is banking on raising mounds of cash so the kingdom can continue to outspend Iran on all element of statecraft in the region.
- For KSA, they will use the cash from note sales to wait out the crisis in the oil prices whereas Iran and Russia may not be able to withstand a long-term price decrease.
- Finally, these actions can continue to influence ISIL necessary thereby checking Iranian interests in the region.

SME Contribution

KSA Influence at the Tribal level in Iraq, Syria and Yemen

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Summary: This approach provides a sample of the mechanisms through which influence (economic, political and military/security) can be spread, viewed as relationships on the ground between KSA leadership and tribal leaders in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. The tribal relationships and power structures continue to play a major role in the latter countries. It is through strong leaders in high positions within these social networks that resources, decisions, and the disposition of population groups can be influenced. For example, in Syria, tribal leaders are playing a role in mediating small local ceasefires.

The pattern of influence across the geography, particularly in Syria and Iraq, shows that KSA is supporting multiple sides to the conflicts. KSA is supporting anti-ISIS leaders in Iraq and a Pro-ISIS/Anti-Government leaders in Syria. KSA is using all mechanisms (political, economic, and military) to influence. This warrants further investigation and analysis to determine the larger strategy. Is pattern of influence related to domestic security near KSA's own borders or in relation to proxy-territory/influence of Iran? In Yemen, there is evidence of pro-government military support for tribal leaders. Paired with geopolitical analyses, this approach illustrates how influence is occurring and offers insight into how and where it could be affected by teams acting on the ground.

Method: Our team looked at several Prominent Individuals in our Human Geography data. This data forms the socio-cultural foundation or network for each country. All data is geospatially enabled. It consists of: family groups associated to clans, sub-tribes, tribes, sub-federations, and federations— a series of relationships that can be navigated from the macro trans-regional level to the granular neighborhood or village level. Additional foundational attribute data includes religion, language, and ethnicity. For each country, culturally specific types of Prominent Individuals are associated to this socio-cultural network.

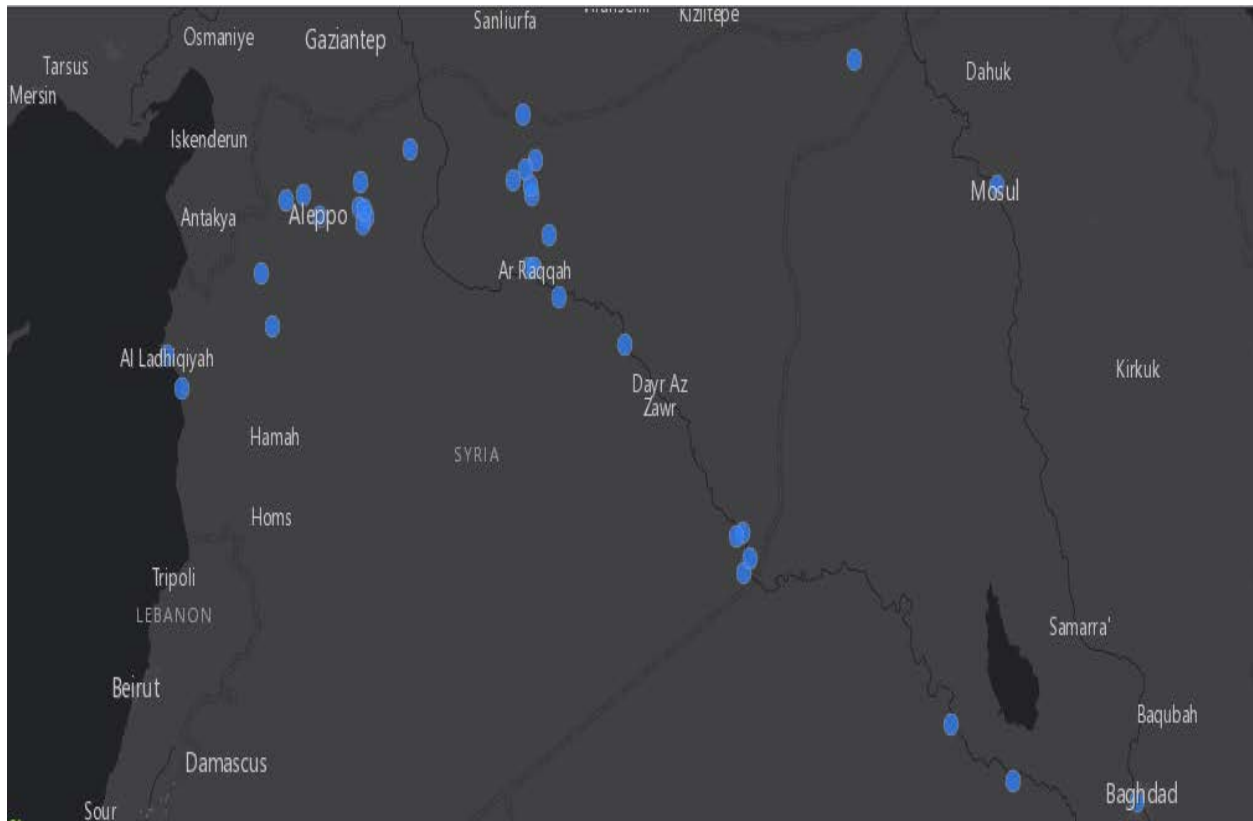
They are given quantitative levels of influence weights that can be used in analytics. From previous opensource research, we have assigned political allegiance (i.e. pro/anti-government, pro/anti-ISIS).

For this reachback question, we performed further opensource research and determined these particular tribal figures had ties to KSA that were either political, economic, or military. Because these figures are highly prominent in their respective tribes, we investigated the extent to which their political allegiances and KSA influence was shared by other members of the tribe. In other words, what was the extent of their influence throughout the tribal footprint? To test this, we looked at cities in the footprint with high numbers of related groups (family groups, clans, tribe members), and performed opensource research to determine the disposition of those populations in terms of views expressed or reported online. The research was performed by native Arabic linguists from the region.

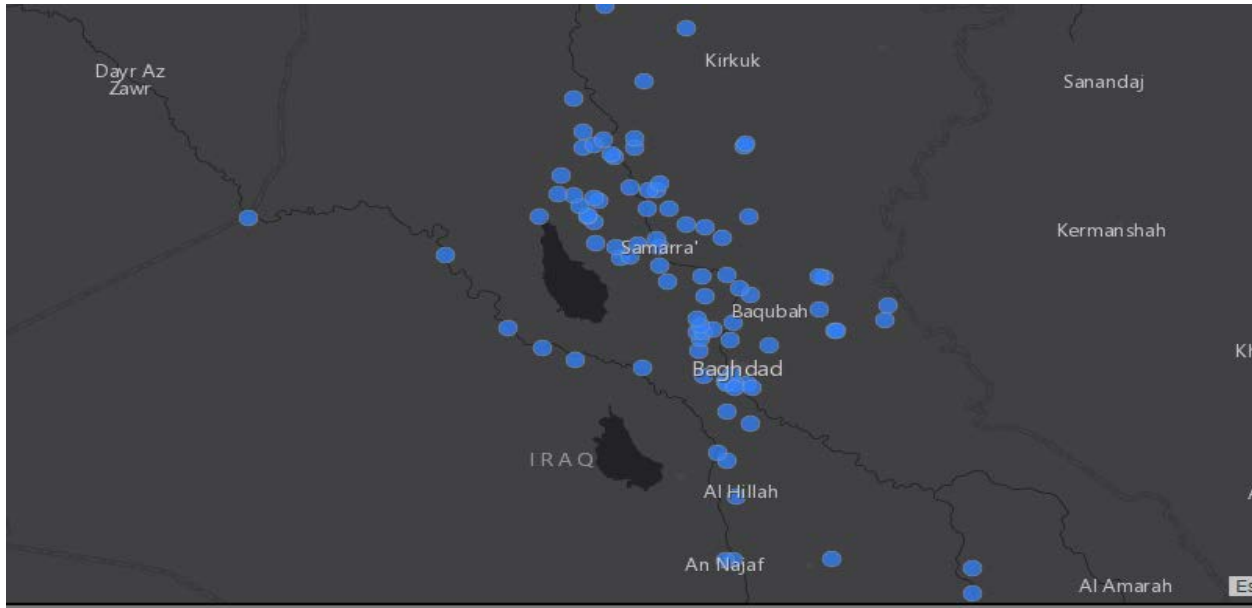
Results: Provided as a table and (2) sample geospatial representations of the tribal footprint with associated allegiances/influence to visualize the varied locations where influence is being exerted and for what side of the conflict.

KSA supported tribal leaders in region with their tribal network map samples:

1. Albu Shaban (tribe): *Ash Shaykh 'Abd al Karīm ar Rākān*, a Sheikh from As Sabkah subtribe holding Saudi citizenship and residing in KSA is Pro-ISIS/ Anti-Syrian Government, in Ar Raqqa (in particular).



2. Albu Hamdan (tribe): 'Abd as Salām al Ḥamdānī, leading tribal figure, is Anti- Isis and receiving military support/influence from KSA and Jordan.



Zana Gulmohamad

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What major economic, political and security (military) activities does KSA and Iran currently conduct in Iraq to gain influence? What are KSA and Iran's ultimate goals behind these activities? What motivates KSA and Iran towards these goals? What future activities might KSA and Iran conduct in Iraq?

Iran has the most multilayer and multilevel activities in Iraq compared to any neighbouring state in Iraq. This includes security (military), and economy (e.g. trade, energy cooperation "oil and gas", investment, contributing to building infrastructure, tourism: mainly religious "From Iran to Najaf and Karbala" and non-religious).

Iraq shares its longest border with Iran: 1,458 kilometers. Iran's facilitators in Iraq play a major role to increase its clout and activities in Iraq. The facilitators can be considered allies, clients and proxies; many of them are Iran's old friends during Saddam's regime. A number of them received shelter and or support or were created by the Iranian regime. The Iranian regime is continuing in their on-going enterprise or project for creating and proliferating Shia militias in Iraq. Supporting and funding those Shia armed non-state actors is one of the strategic Iranian goals in Iraq. The most powerful Shia militias in Iraq alongside other Iraqi Shia militias follow Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei's orders and edicts and believe in Wilayat al-Fagih. There are other, newly created, Iraqi Shia militias which adhere to Ali Al-Sistani Iraqi based highest marji'ah (religious reference) in Iraq. Others follow Muqtada al-Sadr and other Shia religious and political key figures. The author named and categorised the competing Iraqi Shia militias under the

Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) according to their sponsors and loyalties in his article published in 2016 and demonstrated the power competition between them.⁷² Iraqi Shia militias particularly those who are allied with Iran have been increasingly having a degree of influence on Iraqi decision making.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has almost non-economic investments in Iraq. This reflects the on-going deterioration of the relationship between Iraq and the KSA for more than three decades. For example, according to Iraqi former Ambassador⁷³ to the KSA in 2014 Dr Ghanim Alwan al-Jumaili the Ar'ar border crossing point between Iraq and the KSA have been closed since 1991. It used to be a trade route.⁷⁴ There are stalled plans to utilize these ground crossing points. Although Iraq and KSA share a 1,000-kilometer/621-mile border, according to al-Jumaili (2014) the trade between Iraq and the KSA is via Jordan, Kuwait. It is not direct and usually the KSA exports to Iraq.⁷⁵ Therefore, the KSA does not have direct economic influence on Iraq besides the fact that both are major OPEC members. The KSA has several humanitarian NGOs such as the International Islamic Relief Organization of Saudi Arabia (IIROSA) operating⁷⁶ in Iraq including Iraqi Kurdistan. There are allegations that some of these NGOs have provided inconsistent financial support to some Iraqi and Kurdish Islamic parties.⁷⁷ There is no military cooperation between both countries.

Successive Iraqi Shia-led governments, particularly during former PM Nouri al-Maliki, have on multiple occasions accused the KSA of interference in Iraq particularly causing internal security dilemmas by supporting Arab Sunni insurgents and radical Islamic jihadists.⁷⁸ There are reports⁷⁹ which indicate that unidentified wealthy Saudis have funded the insurgents and radical armed groups in Iraq and elsewhere. Officially the KSA does not have an influence on Iraqi political dynamics but it has relationships and ties with a number of Iraqi Arab Sunni politicians and some Arab tribal leaders whose tribes have tribal kinship and tribal extensions from both sides between KSA and Iraq. The KSA has been inconsistently providing tribes with support including funding. The KSA have formally raised concerns about the rise of the Shia militias and Iraqi Shia political parties and elites in Iraq.

In respect to the Iraqi Kurds and Iranian influence, due to the geopolitics where Iran as a powerful regional actor has a border with Iraqi Kurdistan, and its historical relationships where Iran sheltered many of the Kurdish opposition during Saddam's regime, there is a friendly relationship between both sides. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) has a closer tie as the latter has limited regional and geopolitical alternatives. The author would argue that Iran does not dictate the decision making of the KRG nor both

⁷²Zana Gulmohamad (2016) 'Iraq's Shia militias: helping or hindering the fight against Islamic State?' Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor, Volume 14, Issue 9. Available from: <https://jamestown.org/program/iraqs-shia-militias-helping-or-hindering-the-fight-against-islamic-state/#.V0QsEWPmt-U>

⁷³ From 2015 until today the new Iraqi Ambassador to the KSA has been Rushdi al-Ani.

⁷⁴ Ghanim Alwan al-Jumaili (2016) 'The horizon of the relationship between the kingdom and Iraq'. Al-Riyadh. Available from: <http://www.alriyadh.com/993366>

⁷⁵ Ghanim Alwan al-Jumaili (2016) 'The horizon of the relationship between the kingdom and Iraq'. Al-Riyadh. Available from: <http://www.alriyadh.com/993366>

⁷⁶ Egatha (2016) 'External relations of IIROSA'. Available from: http://www.egatha.org/eportal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12&Itemid=4

⁷⁷ Author interview with Kurdish security official, November 16, 2016.

⁷⁸ Reuters (2014) 'Iraq PM Maliki says Saudi, Qatar openly funding violence in Anbar' March 9. Available from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-saudi-qatar-idUSBREA2806S20140309>

⁷⁹ Human Rights Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (2014) 'Report on the protection of civilian in the non-international armed conflict in Iraq: 5 June-5 July 2014'. Available From: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC%20Report_FINAL_18July2014A.pdf

major political parties the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the PUK. Both parties take Iran into account in their decision making particularly in issues related to Iran as officially and publically they don't want to anger Iran as Iran is able destabilize the Kurdish region.⁸⁰ Iran has helped the Peshmerga forces against Islamic State by providing some ammunition and weapons...etc during the IS attack on Kurdistan Region in 2014, and subsequently the Kurdish officials formally thanked them for their support. Iran has limited influence on Iraqi Kurdistan that would have outcome beneficial for the Iranians. The KSA has a friendly relationship with the KRG, the KDP the PUK and the Kurdistan Islamic Union Party (a Kurdish party smaller than both major ruling Kurdish parties). Clearly the KSA has a closer relationship with Erbil as the KDP is in control of that province and it is where the KSA consulate is based.

Iran's ultimate goals are to have influence on Iraqi decision makers and limit US, Turkish, and KSA influence and footholds in Iraq. They aim to weaken contrasting actors (Sunni and other Iranian Kurdish resistance factions in Iraq) in Iraq that are hostile to Iran. They aim to maintain Iraq's fragility or fragmentation but not to the extent of collapse, rather to control Iraq. Although, KSA does not have similar tools like Iran in Iraq that can influence Iraqi political, military and economic dynamics, its ultimate goal is to minimize or if possible end the rise of the Shia power in Iraq as this have been projected as an extension of Iranian leverage in the region. This includes weakening Shia political parties and militias, and strengthening its Arab Sunni allies.

Iran's motivations are driven by the long border between the two countries, and a large Shia population. Influencing or dictating to the Iraqi Kurds would deliver a buffer zone for an Iranian Kurdish revolt against Tehran. For Iran, Iraq is another critical corridor to the Arab world, which has significant resources, population and natural resources "oil and gas". For the KSA, the rise of the Shia in Iraq is not only perceived as a regional threat, they view it as posing a national security threat as they have a considerable Shia minority and there are continued but limited Shia resistance inside KSA against the monarchy.

Iran will continue or even increase its activities in Iraq as fighting Islamic State has paved the way for increasing Iranian and Iraqi cooperation on many levels including military, security and intelligence. KSA would increase its support for Iraqi Arab Sunnis or even to the Iraqi Kurds in Erbil to balance and push the domination of the Shia in Iraq.

Iran has a number diplomatic representations with substantial diplomatic staff and officers two consulates in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, several in southern Iraq (consulates in Karbala, Najaf and Basra) its embassy is in the capital in Baghdad. Saudi has an embassy in Baghdad and a consulate in Erbil opened in 2016.⁸¹ However, the KSA's first Ambassador (Thamer al-Sabhan) to Iraq since 1990 left the country at the request of his removal from the Iraqi government after diplomatic tensions and his discontent pronouncements regarding the Shia militias. The Iraqi government has seen this as interference in Iraqi internal affairs.⁸²

⁸⁰ Author conducted dozens of interviews in 2015 and 2016 in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan for his research. Interviewees, including Dr. Khasraw Gul Mohammed the Deputy Advisor to the Kurdistan Region Security Council, expressed relatively similar views.

⁸¹ Rudaw (2016) 'Saudi Arabia opens Erbil consulate'. Available from: <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/230220168>

⁸² Daily Star (2016) 'Saudi replaces Iraq envoy who riled Shia militias'. Available from: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2016/Oct-16/376646-saudi-arabia-reassigns-ambassador-to-iraq-after-controversy.ashx>

On a diplomatic level, Iraqi Saudi relationships have persistently deteriorated while Iraqi and Iranian relationships have advanced significantly since 2003 until today. In conclusion Iran has, by far, more influence in Iraq than KSA as it has the tools, knows the mechanisms and its allies and partners in Iraq are the most powerful actors in the country.

Author Biographies



Patricia (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. In 2013, she was accepted into the US Department of State Franklin Fellows program 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.

During her tenure, she has also consulted with the Asia Foundation, Director of National Intelligence Office, Department of Homeland Security, The Conference Board, World Bank, Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee chaired by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, and several organizations that support the Middle East Peace Process. She also spent four years in Albania as a Small and Medium Enterprise volunteer with the Peace Corps and, later, as a contractor with US Agency for International Development. Regionally, DeGennaro continues to focus on the Balkans, the Middle East and South Asia where she travels often.

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.

DeGennaro 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.



Larry Jeddelloh

Larry Jeddelloh is the Editor of *The Institutional Strategist*, and Founder of TIS Group in Minneapolis. He is an experienced investment management professional with over 36 years in the business. Mr. Jeddelloh founded TIS Group in 1995. Previously, Mr. Jeddelloh held the position of Chief Investment Officer of Resource Capital Advisers, with responsibilities for \$1 billion in assets. Prior to joining Resource, he was with the Union Bank of Switzerland in Zürich, where he was a Vice-Director and the Chief Investment Strategist in the Institutional Global Asset Management Group. In the 1980s, he was Director of Equity Research at the Leuthold Group, a well-known institutional research firm in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for seven years. He was also a partner of Leuthold and Anderson Investment Management Counseling and Weeden & Company, an institutional brokerage firm. Mr. Jeddelloh earned his Bachelor of Science in Finance and a Masters of Business Administration degree from University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has taught courses in investments and corporate finance at the University of Minnesota, the University of Northwestern (MN, formerly Northwestern College), and Augsburg College. Mr. Jeddelloh is a member of Chatham House, home of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. His work has been noted and used in various publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, *Forbes*, *Money Magazine*, *Your Money*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Barron's*, and *Global Finance*.

David Mazaheri

David Mazaheri is the Managing Partner of Intellaine, LP; a U.S. based global asset management firm with a focus on finance, global security, and AI technology with subsidiaries in Africa and Europe. He is also the Founder and Co-Managing Partner of Nova Orbis Capital Markets, a dual Switzerland– Luxembourg-based hedge fund overseeing three main funds: Global Equity Fund, which is sub-managed by Rockefeller Financials; Global Multi-Asset Fund, which is sub-managed by Guggenheim Partners; and Stanton Capital Fund, a high yield U.S. agency bond investment fund. He also serves as the Non-Executive Director of Acrevis Bank AG, a St. Gallen, Switzerland-based bank.

David leads the global commodities trading operations of Intellaine Mauritius – Intellaine’s global hub of physical settlement consolidation – on metals, energy, and derivative markets. He has observer status on the board of Höegh LNG – the Norway-based global leader in LNG shipping and floating terminals.

David served on the National Security Council; was a staffer for the Iraq Study Group; and served as a Congressional Fellow. He has a dual major in electrical engineering and international affairs from the George Washington University.

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Gwyneth Sutherlin

Dr. Sutherlin is the Director of Human Geography and Analytics Research at Geographic Services, Inc. She provides analytic expertise in socio-cultural dynamics, geospatial technology, cognitive linguistics, and emerging conflict. She is uniquely qualified to provide analysis on complex risk environments drawing from 10+ years of project and field experience. Her publications including ‘digital battlefield’ and ‘lines in the cybersand’ have emerged on the cutting edge for multilingual data modelling for security contexts. Always with an eye toward innovation, she applies Human Geography research to improving collection/analysis granularity, security (targeting), cyber security (software development), and geospatial communications intelligence (GEOINT and COMINT). Before completing a Ph.D. with fieldwork in East Africa, her expertise facilitating intercultural dialogue garnered UN recognition, in particular, in the MENA and Sub-Saharan regions of Africa.



Mr. Zana Gulmohamad

Mr. Zana Gulmohamad. In February 2013 I began my PhD at the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield, UK. My research title is: "Iraq's foreign policy post-2003". I am a Research Fellow at the American University of Kurdistan. I have an MA in Global Affairs and Diplomacy from the University of Buckingham, UK, and a BA in Political Science from the University of Sulaymaniyah - Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I worked for six years (2005-2011) in the Kurdistan Region Security Council - Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

I had substantial responsibilities as executive manager and a security analyst in matters related to security, intelligence, data analysis, security technology, foreign relations (receiving delegations and official trips abroad) and teaching staff. My capabilities have built up over years of training and interaction with security and intelligence corporations, governments and their security and intelligence services. They include states such as the US, the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

My articles have been published by journals and think tanks such as Jamestown Foundation "Terrorism Monitor", The National, Open Democracy, E-International Relations, Global Security Studies, Your Middle East, The New Arab, and Middle East online. I have presented conference papers in the UK, the US and the Middle East. Please go to my website to view the links to my articles www.zanagul.com

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SMA Reach-back

What are the indicators of changes in Russian strategic interests in Syria?

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Russia's strategic interests in Syria are fairly stable

Timothy Thomas, a Russia expert from the Foreign Military Studies Office and former US Army Foreign Area Officer (FAO) believes that a fair articulation of Russia's long-term strategic interests is right where they should be: in the country's 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS).⁸³ The only "changes" that Thomas expects will be the result of the "gradual accomplishment" of several interests. First among these is strengthening Russian national defense, which in Syria has meant Russian forces taking the opportunity to test new weapons systems and command procedures while working to keep ISIL and Islamic extremists from Russia's southern borders. Second, Thomas reports that "consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading world power" in a multipolar international system has been accomplished by Russian actions in Syria and Ukraine "in the eyes of many nations."

What could change? How Russia prioritizes its interests

Thomas points to optimistic versus pessimistic Russian views on how the recent US election will impact US policy in Syria. Optimistically, some feel that the election of Donald Trump may diminish the US security threat, offer Russia new opportunities in the region, and thus allow Russia to prioritize other interests than it has been. This logic is based in the belief that the new US Administration will be willing to tolerate Assad in order to work in concert with Russia to defeat terrorist threat from ISIL and other groups. Russians taking a more pessimistic view however argue that forging a US-Russia partnership in the region will not be as simple as a change of Administration.

⁸³ Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team constructed a matrix of Russian strategic interests considering input from Timothy Thomas (Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth) and Eugene Rumer (Carnegie Endowment) that was previously reported in SMA Reachback V7. It is reprinted in the SME Input section below for convenience.

What might signal a change?

Dr. Tricia Degennaro (Threat Tec, LLCI -TRADOC G27) believes that “the key to understanding signals for change include Russian rhetoric and key troop maneuvers. The Russian President’s messaging is the signal to change.” Dr. Larry Kuznar (Indiana-Purdue; NSI) reports empirical analysis of President Putin’s language use and whether Putin’s language patterns might be used as indicators of Russian change of strategy in Syria. Dr. Kuznar uncovers a “blip” then “brag” pattern in Putin’s public discourse that may be used as an indicator. Specifically, Kuznar finds that prior to a major event (like invading Ukraine) Putin begins mentioning a few key *emotional themes* (e.g., pride, protection, unity, strength and Russian superiority) and *political themes* (e.g., Russian security, Russia’s adversaries, Russian energy), a “blip,” then goes silent presumably during the planning and execution phase. Once the activity or goal is complete however, Kuznar finds that “Putin is characteristically tight-lipped about his interests and intentions, but tends to brag after he achieves a victory.” He habitually “relaxes his restraint and releases a rhetorical flourish of concerns and emotional language”, i.e., some major bragging.

In short, Dr. Kuznar (Indiana-Purdue) finds an empirical basis to suggest that specific linguistic themes such as *pride*, *Russian superiority* and *France*⁸⁴) as well as more general emotional and political themes “may serve as early indicators and warnings of Putin’s intent.” Currently Putin’s mention of pragmatic themes in relation to Russian energy resources and his recent concern with Turkey, and emotive themes, such as the threat of Nazism, may serve as indicators of his activities if his past patterns are retained. And as such, “may have direct implications for his intentions in Syria.”

Contributors: Dr. Larry Kuznar (NSI; Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne); Timothy Thomas (Foreign Military Studies Office, TRADOC); Dr. Tricia Degennaro (Threat Tec, LLCI -TRADOC G27); Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI team (NSI).

Editor: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)

⁸⁴ France, Germany and UK come up in Putin’s discourse as perceived adversaries in “gray zone” activities such as various operations in Ukraine.

SME Input

Russia's Changing Strategic Interests in Syria

Timothy Thomas

Foreign Military Studies Office, TRADOC

I believe that to look at Russia's strategic interests one needs to start by referencing the *National Security Strategy (NSS)* that appeared on 31 December 2015.⁸⁵ Here long-term national strategic interests are stated in Section III of the document. The **bold** areas of the section below appear to me to be the strategic interests that Russia has accomplished thus far, and the rationale as to how or why is noted in brackets at the end of the section. Overall, it appears that the only "changes" in Russia's strategic interests in Syria are the gradual accomplishment of several strategic interests proposed in the *NSS*:

"Overall, it appears that the only "changes" in Russia's strategic interests in Syria are the gradual accomplishment of several strategic interests proposed in the *NSS*..."

- **strengthening the country's defense**, ensuring the inviolability of the Russian Federation's constitutional order, sovereignty, independence, and **national and territorial integrity**;
[Russia has been able to test numerous weapons and conduct lessons learned regarding deployments, mobilization potential, and especially aerospace and naval capabilities; Russia continues to try and keep ISIL out of Russia's soft underbelly in the North Caucasus and preserve its territorial integrity.]

- **strengthening national accord**, political and social stability, developing democratic institutions, and **refining the mechanisms for cooperation between the state and civil society**;
[National accord remains strong for continued Russian actions in Syria as witnessed by Putin's strong following, and the military's National Defense Management Center was exercised accordingly during Kavkaz-2016, where the military was provided control over civilian entities during the exercises scenario, which is a scenario that will take place if a state of emergency is declared in Russia's Southern District, for example, if ISIL gains a foothold there]

- raising living standards, improving the population's health, and ensuring the country's stable demographic development;
- **preserving and developing** culture and **traditional Russian spiritual and moral values**;

⁸⁵ The following analysis is based on Russian unclassified news sources.

[Russia's traditional support of Syrian President Assad and its traditional and long-standing Middle East policy remain intact, along with well scripted geopolitical moves in the area supporting Iranian and Hezbollah capabilities; Assad stated that Russia was asked to participate due to their morals, meaning that Russia is there to destroy terrorism, not because they want something in exchange]

- increasing the competitiveness of the national economy;
- **consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading world power**, whose actions are aimed at maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world.⁸⁶

[Russian actions in Syria and Ukraine, in the eyes of many nations, has enabled it to reclaim most of its old glory as a military power and threat with which nations must contend, as witnessed by worries all over Europe as to what Russia might do next]

The *NSS* also notes that strategic national priorities include: national defense, state, and public security; economic growth; science, technology, and education; healthcare and culture; ecology; and strategic stability and equal strategic partnership. It is the former and latter that appear to have special significance for Russia's leaders, while those in between the first and last entries are more general in nature.⁸⁷

Potential Change

One potential significant change in Russia's strategic interests appears to be connected to the result of President-elect Donald Trump's emergence as the next president of the United States. Konstantin Kosachev, the head of the Upper House committee for international relations, feels that instead of supporting an opposition group intent on overthrowing President Assad, the US will now join Russia in an attempt to eliminate the terrorist threat from Syria.⁸⁸

*"There are no impenetrable barriers in the way of this. It is very important for us to understand that the United States' strategic interests regarding Syria are about to change, because until now their priority was not in suppressing terrorism, but in displacing the country's government. Such changes are in line with Donald Trump's electoral rhetoric."*⁸⁹

Boris Dolgov of the Russian Orientalism Institute's Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, believes that, while changes in the US approach to the Syrian crisis are possible, the US continues to support several armed groups at present, so building a US-Russian partnership won't be quick or easy. The US State Department, for example, will only allow Russia to join the US-led coalition if Moscow withdraws support for President Assad.⁹⁰ However, Russian reasoning appears to be that they would change their strategic interest from

⁸⁶ Moscow *President of Russia* website 31 Dec 15, Russian Federation Presidential Edict 683 approving appended text of "The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy."

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Moscow *RT Online* (in English), 21 Nov 16.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

competing with the US and attempting to contain it to cooperating with it. This would fulfill the strategic interest of “maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world.

The gist of a November 2016 discussion is that long-term strategic interests have been replaced by short-term and tactical interests by Russia’s leaders. Political analysts hold fundamentally opposing views on what has been successfully achieved over the past four years. Thus, Aleksey Mukhin, the general director of the Center for Political Information, links the country’s main success over the four years to a reset of the system for military modernization⁹¹ -- which is in line with the strategic interest of strengthening defense. Mukhin thinks the Russian Federation has “entered the ranks of the countries that take and will take geopolitical decisions.” He says “the attempt to tear the country’s economy to shreds has led to its strengthening.” India, the countries of Latin America, and some Middle Eastern regimes have started to be seriously considered as Russia’s allies: “and of course Europe, which is turning towards Russia. America’s attempts to impede this process are only intensifying it.” Mukhin’s thinking is that Russia’s strategic interests are gradually expanding and developing mutually beneficial partnerships.

“Russia’s strategic interests in Syria are changing. The war against ISIL, which originally resulted in serious political and military strengthening of the Syrian regime, is giving way to diplomatic priorities.”

Political analyst Nikolay Petrov in turn notes that “all the positive things that the experts note are short-term and perishable.” In his opinion, when the Russian Federation reunited with Crimea in 2014 “long-term and strategic interests were forgotten for the sake of short-term tactical

interests.” It is another issue how successful the regime was in achieving these interests, however, the expert stresses, “there is no doubt that strategically we have not only lost heavily but, having obtained a short-term tactical gain, we are paying for it – more and more as time goes on: in a way we are in an impasse, from which we can only find an exit.”

A March 2016 discussion noted that ceasefires usually result in the intensification of peace talks, as the sides look for compromises over the question of defining the list of terrorist organizations on the territory of Syria.

Russia’s strategic priorities in Syria are changing. The war against ISIL, which originally resulted in serious political and military strengthening of the Syrian regime, is giving way to diplomatic priorities. The reaching of an accord with the United States was perceived as a major diplomatic success for Russia and the United States. Even though fragile, this is a new experience of cooperation with Washington under conditions of a geopolitical crisis. The truce will be extremely difficult to ensure, as Russia and the United States do not control all the participants in the hostilities. Under such conditions the armistice agreement for all intents and purposes turns out to be an attempt by the United States and its allies to make Russia

⁹¹ Velimir Razuvayev: "Vladimir Putin Exaggerated Promises -- Results of Third Presidential Four-Year Term Look Ambiguous," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online* in Russian 15 Mar 2016.

ease up on the bombing. Moscow is reckoning on converting military victories into diplomatic dividends. If there are none, however, the military operation may be resumed with its former intensity.⁹²

Recent headlines indicate the strategic interests being exercised are in line with the NSS focus that a strategic interest is **strengthening the country's defense**: Putin orders indefinite deployment of Russia's air group to Syria; Russia's aerospace force will have immunity; there is no military solution to Syria; new stage of the operation involves the use of air assets and cruise missiles based on ships (first time an aircraft carrier was involved in military operations); using commercial satellite images instead of just military imagery from intelligence satellites; military helicopters are using new tactics against hostile air defense.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova discussed Russia's strategic interests in a 17 October 2016 press interview:

Question: The West has accused Moscow of pursuing malicious goals in Syria. What are Russia's strategic interests in a Syrian settlement?

Maria Zakharova: To answer your question, I would have to deliver a long lecture on Russia and its role in the Syrian conflict. What do we want in Syria? Although we have talked about this today, I will answer your question, trying to be as concise as possible.

First, our goals in Syria and our views on the developments related to a settlement in Syria can be found in UN Security Council and ISSG documents, as well as the agreements reached by Moscow and Washington on September 9 this year. If you want to know exactly what Moscow wants from a settlement in Syria, you should read these documents that provide an unambiguous answer. Speaking globally, we want a settlement. We believe this is possible if the developments are steered along the two tracks that were outlined in early 2016: a political dialogue (even if indirect at first, but with a view to making it direct) between the Syrian Government (Damascus) and a broad opposition group, not just a single group of people who claim to be a broad opposition bloc. We are talking about a comprehensive opposition group, including both internal and external opposition, those who have taken the side of Damascus in this global conflict, and those who demand that Bashar al-Assad step down. The entire range of opposition should come together for talks or dialogue, or however you want to describe it.

A second vital aspect is the fight against terrorists, who continue to receive encouraging signals from some Western and regional countries that their cause is right and they will celebrate victory soon. Unfortunately, this is a road in the opposite direction, away from what we have agreed upon and put on paper. The encouragement of terrorists or moderates ultimately makes them part of terrorist organizations, which is absolutely contrary to Russia's global approach. We believe that a Syrian settlement should include the above elements. As we have said more than once, the result we are after

⁹² Tatyana Stanovaya, leader of Analytical Department of Center for Political Technologies: "Fragile Truce," *Politkom.ru* in Russian 29 Feb 2016.

is a free, sovereign, democratic, multi-confessional, secular, united and integral state with democratic institutions. [end]

While not directly related to Syria, a 14 October 2016 article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* noted the importance of maintaining Russia's national and territorial integrity: Armenia is just as much a strategic ally of Russia as Azerbaijan is of Turkey. Yerevan wishes to obtain the same unequivocal support from Moscow as Baku receives from Ankara on the Karabakh issue. But it does not have this support, and is unlikely to get it. Things are more complicated for Russia than for Turkey. Russia has declared the South Caucasus a zone of its strategic interests. And consequently, of its responsibility as well. Any attempt by it to resolve the conflict in favor of one of the sides would entail the loss of the other side as an ally. Relations with one of the region's entities -- Georgia -- have been spoiled, and no prospects of improvement are in sight. The loss of Azerbaijan or of Armenia would probably put paid to Moscow's Transcaucasus ambitions.

Russia's Changing Strategic Interests in Syria

Dr. Patricia Degennaro
Threat Tec, LLCI -TRADOC G27

Russia has an extensive history with the Syrian regime. Diplomatic relations began in 1944 and they have not faltered. Russia has provided military support for the Syrian army since the relationship started. As conflicts and instability plagued the region, the ties between the two countries strengthened. Tartus, Syria, home to the Russian Mediterranean Black Sea naval fleet was established under then-President Hafez Al-Assad in 1971 allowing Russia to finally have a stable presence in the Middle East.

“The key to understanding signals for change include Russian rhetoric and key troop maneuvers. The Russian President’s messaging is the signal to change.”

Russia is Syria’s main supplier of weapons. They have forgiven past Syrian debt and after the civil war continue invest in positioning Russian military more broadly across

Syrian nation. To date, there is a Russian airbase in Latakia, Hmeimin, and Palmyra, extensive joint Russian signal intelligence posts across Syria and other technologically advanced weapons have been brought in during the current conflict. Additionally, there are naval assets in the Mediterranean and Caspian seas.

Russia demonstrated its capabilities to support deployed forces in its Syria operations. While admittedly projecting a small footprint into a permissive air environment, Russia’s ability to deploy quickly and immediately conduct continuous operations introduces a significant strategic capability. Intervention there has been swift and multi-faceted. As Western powers tried to halt weapons support for Assad,

Russia upped the ante. Russia repositioned naval forces, developed stronger military relationships with various governments, took charge of the chemical weapons disposal, built new operational basis and sent its Kuznetsov aircraft carrier to further demonstrate naval power. Putin established basing rights in Cyprus, held the first-ever joint naval drills with Egypt, renewed military sales with Algeria, used Iran's Hamedan airbase to conduct strikes in Syria and continues to strengthen its ties with Turkey.

Analysis

"The Russian Army is never as strong as it describes itself, but never as weak as it seems from the outside" -Dmitri Trenin & Aleksei Malashenko, *Russia's Restless Frontier*

Russia's military operations thus far have been in support of the Syrian regime. It is unlikely that Russia will 'take over' land in Syria other than in support of the regime. The Russian nation does not exist in the way that Britain and France exist. It is a complex, multi-national state, and as result is fundamentally insecure with many areas that could be potential flashpoints in the future. There are few, if any, political or bureaucratic constraints in using Russian diplomatic, information, military and economic power and it uses all of them in concert. The main fear lies with the US or other countries interfering in its sovereign interests.

While the US invested time, personnel and resources in Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia streamlined its force structure. Tactical units benefited from significant training which focused on one aspect of the fight. Technological capabilities were improved and adaptability and rapidity of response improved.

The key to understanding signals for change include Russian rhetoric and key troop maneuvers. The Russian President's messaging is the signal to change. There are many other moving parts to shape, influence, and maneuver in the Syria theater. Russia is cooperating with Iran, Hezbollah, and in many instances, Turkey. It would prove beneficial to map this network of players to identify key movement points.

Russia will continue to shape the information environment through narratives that reinforce the power and successes to be those of the Assad government. Their information campaign is key. In essence, actions, and Putin's language, speak louder than words. Due to the complexities of theater, Russia is unlikely to escalate the conflict. The Syria regime and its partners are benefiting from the Western effort to weakening ISIS. It enables them to gain ground and face a less lethal guerrilla and insurgent component. Russia is unlikely to escalate unless it is directly targeted by an opposing actor. Thus far the situation has remained one of communication between large state actors and the understanding by all parties that escalation for now lies under the concept of "escalate to deescalate. This may change if there was a direct intentional attack on Russian assets.

To reiterate, Russian information operations is a key to identifying potential Russian moves. It informs intention, maneuvers, escalation and de-escalation throughout this conflict. Finally, it is highly doubtful that Russia will back down from its current posture and/or ever retreat from the region without a major fight.

Indicators of Changes in Russian Strategic Interests: Thematic Analysis of Putin's Discourse

Dr. Lawrence A. Kuznar,
NSI, Inc. and Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne

Abstract and Summary Findings

Analysis of Putin's use of language prior to and during gray zone activities in Crimea and East Ukraine provide insight into language shifts that may indicate that he is engaging in gray zone activities in Syria.

The primary findings include:

- 1. Putin is more restrained in his language than most Western leaders, making indicators of his intent rare.*
- 2. The rarity of these indicators increases the ability to detect them as statistical "blips" in his language use; a thing that rarely appears is noticeable when it occurs.*
- 3. When Putin mentions key emotive issues (a "blip"), he is disciplined in subsequently silencing himself during apparent planning and execution phases.*
- 4. However, once his goal is achieved, he relaxes his restraint and releases a rhetorical flourish of concerns and emotional language (a "brag").*
- 5. After a rhetorical flourish, Putin again restrains his discourse when planning and executing operations to achieve his next strategic goal.*
- 6. The blip patterns that may be detected are manifest in **emotional themes** such as Pride, Protection, Unity, Strength and Russian Superiority, and **political themes** such as Russian Security, mentioning adversaries, Russian energy and the Ceasefire.*
- 7. Putin exhibits a sustained and increasing apparent concern with Russian energy resources and the threat of Nazism, consistent with earlier studies.*
- 8. Putin is demonstrating an increasing concern with Turkey, which may have direct implications for his intentions in Syria.*

Introduction

This report describes systematic patterns in Vladimir Putin's use of language that may aid analysts in identifying his interests and intentions, and more important, in anticipating his future course of action. The findings of this report are based on an analysis of approximately three years of Putin's speeches (2012 – 2015) that encompass "gray zone" activities and overt military actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine (Donbass), and that bleed into Russia's intervention in Syria.

In previous studies, Putin demonstrated less emotion and more restraint in his use of language than other Eurasian and Western leaders (Kuznar & Yager, 2016). This makes identification of leading indicators of his intent difficult on the one hand, since he gives so little up. However, the rarity with which he demonstrates his intentions through his use of language also makes the rare occasions in which he does

so all the more noticeable, since there is a lack of “noise” surrounding these rare signals. Noticing these uncommon “blips” on his discursive screen requires sustained, careful analysis of his use of language, and a strong baseline against which statistically significant indicators can be identified. The work upon which this study is based is an attempt to provide such a baseline and to identify indicators and warnings of Putin’s intent in the Gray Zone.

The following sections provide detailed empirical evidence for the primary findings listed in the Abstract. It is important to recognize that the specifics (e.g. the specific themes that were statistically important) of these preliminary results are not so important as the general trends they exemplify. It is useful to recognize that some specific themes (*Pride, Superiority, France*) may serve as early indicators and warnings of Putin’s GZ intent, but similar themes (emotional, political, adversaries) should be recognized as potential early indicators as well.

Methods

This analysis is based on a systematic identification of themes and rhetorical devices in Putin’s language use that identify issues of concern to him, his intentions, and how strongly he feels about them. His linguistic behavior has been monitored over three conflicts (Estonian cyber attack of 2007, Annexation of Crimea 2014, intervention in E Ukraine 2014).

Themes are entities that can be named (nouns, concepts, actions).⁹³ Some themes are relatively neutral in sentiment, such as Trade and Political Process. Others carry additional emotional impact, such as Victimization, Pride, and Strength. **Rhetorical Devices** are ways of using language (Repetition, Metaphor, Pejoratives, Sarcasm) that amplify the impact of themes. The basic metric used in this report is theme/rhetorical device density, which is the # times a theme occurs per words in a speech. This metric normalizes theme/rhetorical device metrics per document, allowing comparisons across any analytical dimension, and placing the relevant importance of a theme in appropriate context in relation to other themes.⁹⁴

Data

Nineteen speeches delivered by Putin from 2005 to 2015 constituted the source data for this analysis (Table 1). Each speech was coded (themes/rhetorical devices and their associated language identified) by at least two coders.

⁹³ Themes will be capitalized and italicized in the text, to differentiate them from their more generic uses. Also, when appropriate, definitions of the themes will be provided in footnotes.

⁹⁴ It is easy to focus on a single theme mentioned by a speaker, but density is a more accurate representation of a theme’s importance beyond the simple fact that a speaker mentioned it.

Table 1. Corpus of Putin Speeches

| Case_Study | Document_Name | Date | Word_Count |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Estonia | 2005.05.10_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_04 | 5/10/05 | 326 |
| Estonia | 2005.05.23_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_01 | 5/23/05 | 36 |
| Estonia | 2007.10.11_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_02 | 10/11/07 | 92 |
| Estonia | 2012_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_03 | 1/1/2012 | 30 |
| Crimea | 2013.12.12_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_03 | 12/12/13 | 9358 |
| Crimea | 2013.12.31_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_05 | 12/31/13 | 596 |
| Crimea | 2014.01.28_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_07 | 1/28/14 | 1767 |
| Crimea | 2014.02.04_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_06 | 2/4/14 | 847 |
| Crimea | 2014.03.18_Putin Govt_Vladimir Putin_01 | 3/18/14 | 5246 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_02 | 6/6/14 | 1780 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_03 | 8/15/14 | 794 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_04 | 8/27/14 | 1135 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_05 | 9/3/14 | 757 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_06 | 9/12/14 | 1992 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_08 | 11/16/14 | 3227 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_10 | 12/6/14 | 655 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_12 | 2/17/15 | 3165 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_13 | 3/20/15 | 936 |
| Ukraine | Vladmir Putin_14 | 4/8/15 | 2088 |

A codebook of 254 themes and rhetorical devices covered events, politics, places, actions, cultural values and rhetorical devices. The final database comprised a total of 2062 coded segments of text that

represented these themes and rhetorical devices. Theme densities were calculated for each document, and the variations of these densities through time were used to identify trends and possible indicators and warnings (I&W) concerning Putin's intentions and likely future actions. Only those trends that were statistically significant at the .05 level are reported here.

Russian GZ Aggression: Crimea – Ukraine – Syria

Crimea was officially annexed on 18 March 2014. In April of 2014 combatants lacking insignia were present in Eastern Ukraine. Crimea appears to have been a precursor to Ukraine, and therefore data preceding both incidents are used in this analysis. Speeches by Putin were analyzed up to 4 months preceding the annexation of Crimea in order to search for indicators and warnings of the impending annexation. The analysis of the rebellion in E Ukraine is complicated by the fact that it occurred a month after the annexation of Crimea, not providing a period of relative quiet before during which indicators might emerge. Therefore, the period prior to and including the annexation of Crimea will have to constitute the preceding period to the rebellion in E Ukraine.

Discursive Indicators & Warnings: Crimea Alone

Putin is uncharacteristically logical and unemotional in his use of language compared to other Western world leaders (Kuznar & Yager, 2016). However, he still reveals issues of importance, and occasionally reveals his hand. This appears in two primary ways when analyzing the Crimean annexation alone: the Brag and the Blip and Brag.

The Brag

Putin is characteristically tight-lipped about his interests and intentions, but tends to brag after he achieves a victory. This pattern offers nothing in terms of predictive analytics, but may reveal other aspects of his personality, such as a need for attention and approval.

Bragging behavior was manifest with **political themes** such as *borders*, Ukrainian politician *Petro Poroshenko*, *irregular troops*, and the *UK*. Interestingly, Putin used the rhetorical device of making a *veiled threat* after the annexation took place, but not before.

The Blip and Brag

In a few cases, Putin showed his hand by mentioning interests and intentions slightly, but in a statistically discernable manner in advance of GZ activity. However, as GZ activities were underway, he stopped mentioning these concerns in a disciplined manner, but once again released a flourish of rhetoric about them once his end was achieved. Because Putin shows his hand in these cases, mentions of hot-button items show up as statistical blips, but then go away. These blips provide evidence that there is an increased probability that Putin is planning or undertaking GZ activity.

In some cases, the Blip and Bragg was manifest in **emotional themes** such as claims of *superiority* and the issue of *separatism*. For instance, in a speech delivered on 28 January 2014, Putin asserted Russian energy superiority in relation to its adversaries.

“We know what we are doing, and how. We have enormous resources. We are prepared to work constructively. Indeed, people have been discussing this throughout all previous months” (28 January 2014).

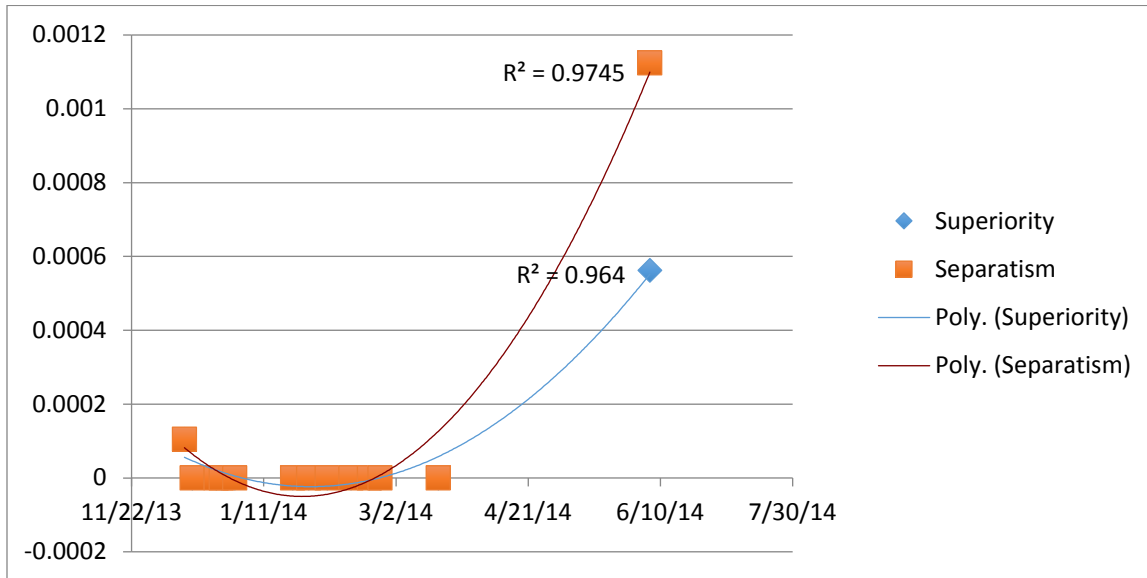


Figure 1. Crimea Case: Blip and Bragg of Emotional Themes

In other cases, Putin mentions adversaries such *France* and *Germany*.

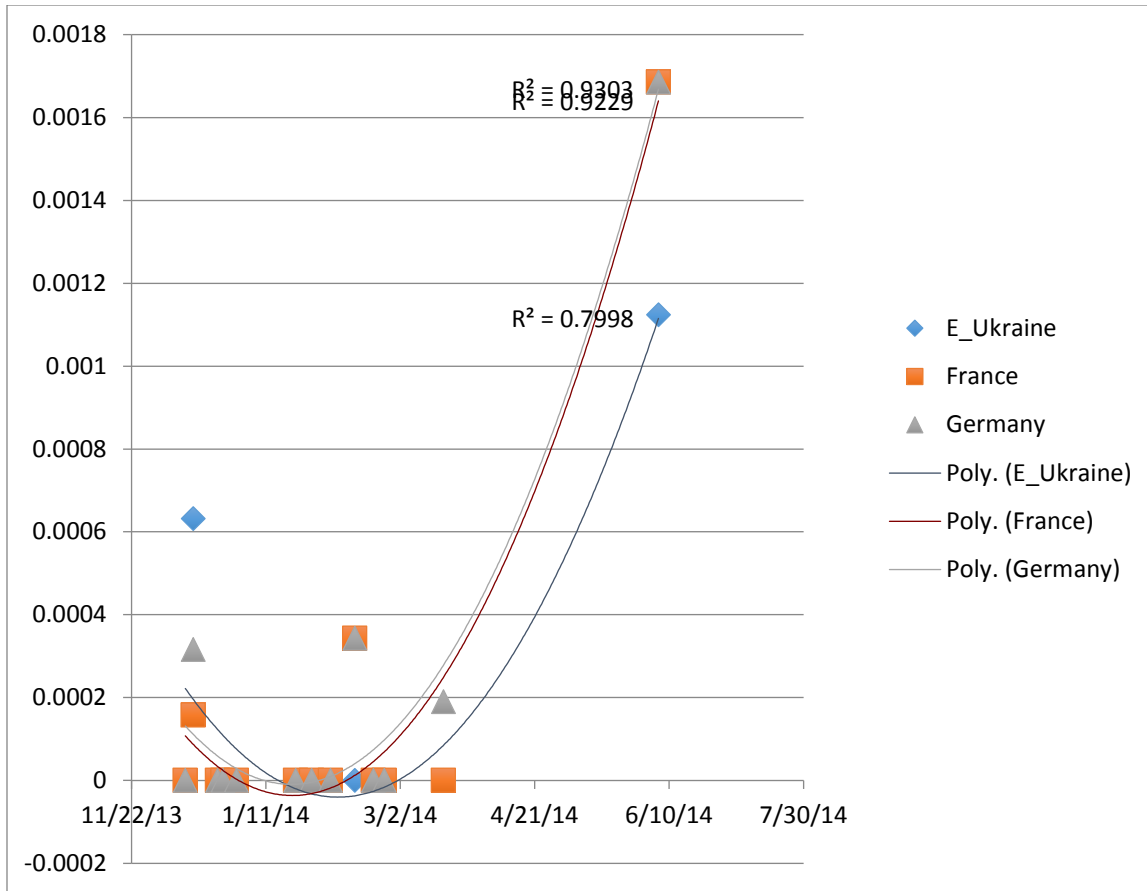


Figure 2. Crimea Case: Blip and Bragg of Adversaries

Statistical blips are also manifest with pragmatic concerns such as *Energy* and *Ceasefire*.

“I think the Ukrainian leadership must show goodwill – or, if you will, demonstrate government wisdom. This [counter-terrorism] operation must be stopped immediately, a ceasefire must be declared immediately. This is the only way to create the conditions for negotiations. There is no other way!” (Putin 6 June 2014)

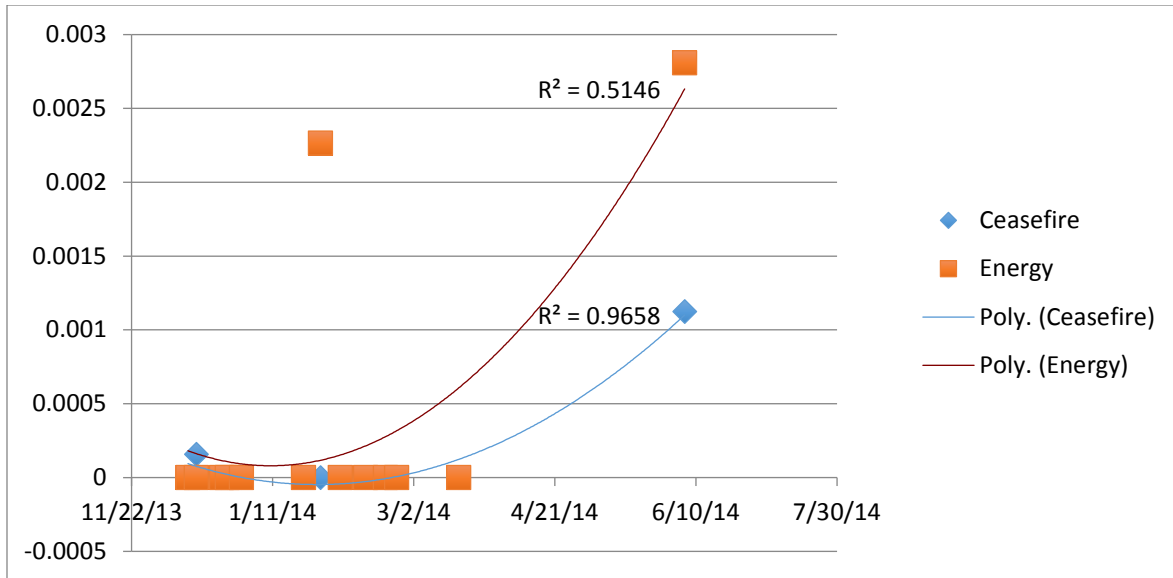


Figure 3. Crimea Case: Blip and Bragg of Pragmatic Concerns

Rhetorical Devices and Emotionality

Putin demonstrated an initial absence of emotional language that peaked as he approached victory and either increased or leveled off afterward. The increasing use of rhetorical devices to amplify his message may provide an indicator that Putin is nearing significant action. This pattern was observed in the case of *counterarguments*, *use of examples* and *intensifiers*.⁹⁵

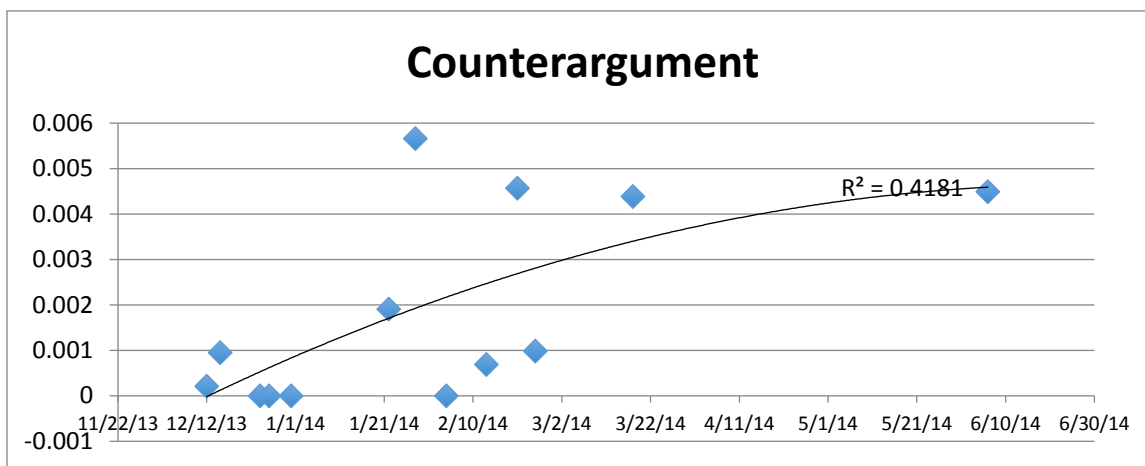


Figure 4. Crimea Case: Increasing Use of Counterargument

⁹⁵ Counterargument is presentation of one's argument and contrasting it point for point with an opposing view; Example is the use of specific current or historical examples to make one's point; Intensifiers involve the use of adjectives such as "very," "great," and "often" to emphasize a point.

“Moreover, the Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent – a precedent our western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country’s central authorities.” (Putin 18 March, 2014)

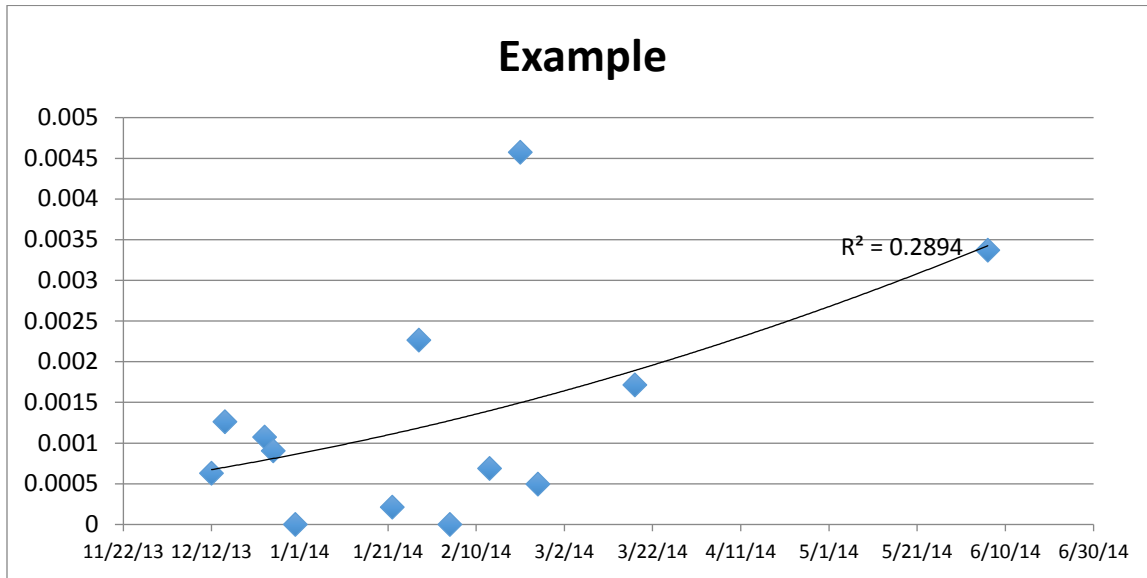


Figure 5. Crimea Case: Increasing Use of Examples

“We have seen in recent years how attempts to impose a presumably more progressive model of development on other countries in reality led to regress, barbarity and massive bloodshed. This happened in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa. These dramatic events took place in Syria.” (Putin 12 December 2013 on the futility of Western attempts to impose democracy).

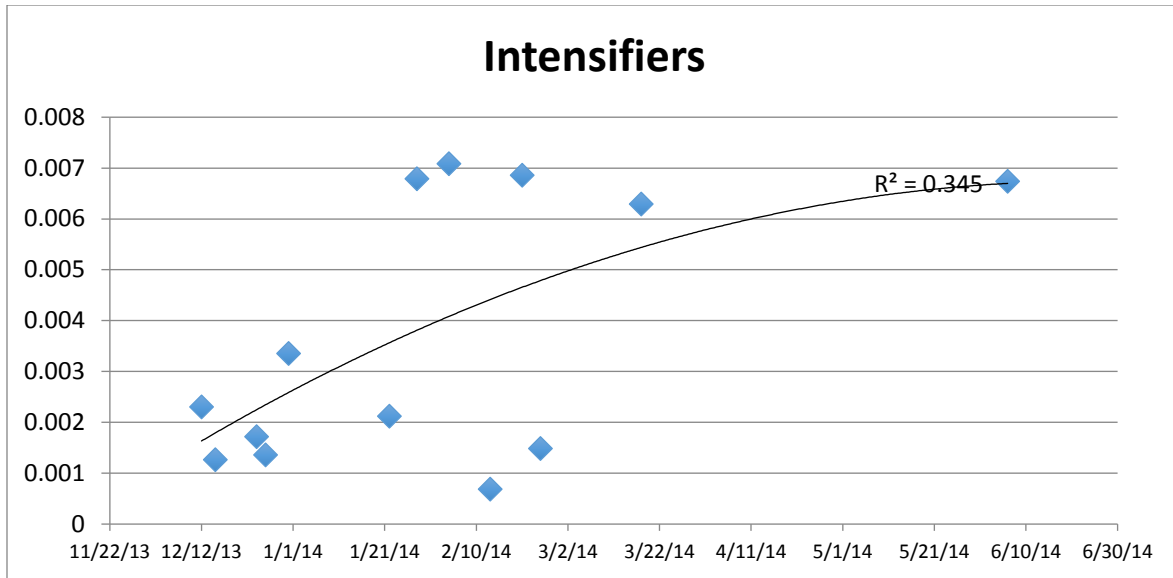


Figure 6. Crimea Case: Increasing Use of Intensifiers

“Colleagues, let me turn to a *very* important subject with *profound* implications” (Putin 12 December 2013). [emphasis added]

Discursive GZ Indicators: Eastern Ukraine

If there was any lead-time in which to identify early I&W to overt GZ activities in E Ukraine, then the period leading up to the annexation of Crimea necessarily meets the requirement. Therefore, the period leading to the annexation of Crimea will be incorporated into the analysis of GZ activities in E Ukraine.

The Blip

In some cases, Putin statistically and dramatically diminishes, but does not eliminate, his rhetorical flourish after the annexation of Crimea. This is manifest in **emotive themes** such as *protect*, *strength*, and *equality rights*.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ *Protect* is a reference to the need to protect one’s interests and people; *strength* is reference to one’s own strength; *equality rights* is reference to rights the speaker is asserting.

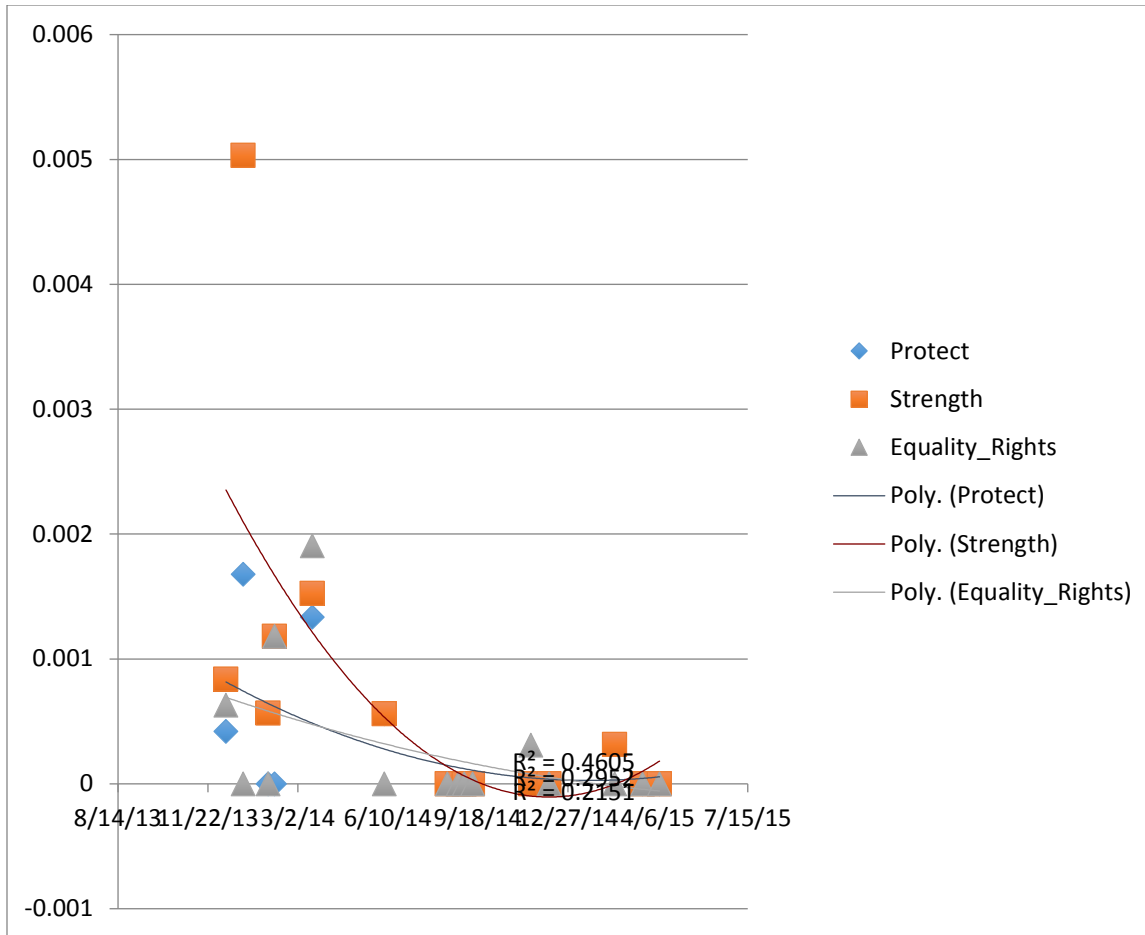


Figure 7. Ukrainian Case: Emotive Themes

“And we know that more and more people in the world support our approach of protecting traditional values, which have been a spiritual and moral foundation of our civilization and every nation” (Putin 12 December 2013).

“It is at historic turning points such as these that a nation demonstrates its maturity and strength of spirit. The Russian people showed this maturity and strength through their united support for their compatriots” (Putin 18 March, 2014).

This pattern is also demonstrated with **rhetorical devices** such as *example*.

Blip and Radio Silence

In some cases, Putin completely eliminates his rhetorical flourish after the annexation of Crimea and goes radio silent on some themes as the preparations and execution of the E Ukrainian rebellion are underway. This is manifest in **emotive themes** such as *pride*, *self-defense*, and *unity*.⁹⁷

“Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride” (Putin 18 March, 2014).

“Are we ready to consistently defend our national interests, or will we forever give in, retreat to who knows where” (Putin 18 March, 2014)?

“These emotions and aspirations strengthen our unity. Being together is the only way for us to be strong, to make sure Russia keeps developing, and to make all our plans and ideas come true” (Putin 31 December 2013).

⁹⁷ Pride is any expression of pride, often national in nature; Self-Defense is expression of the need for self-defense of one’s country or group; Unity refers to the need for unity within one’s group.

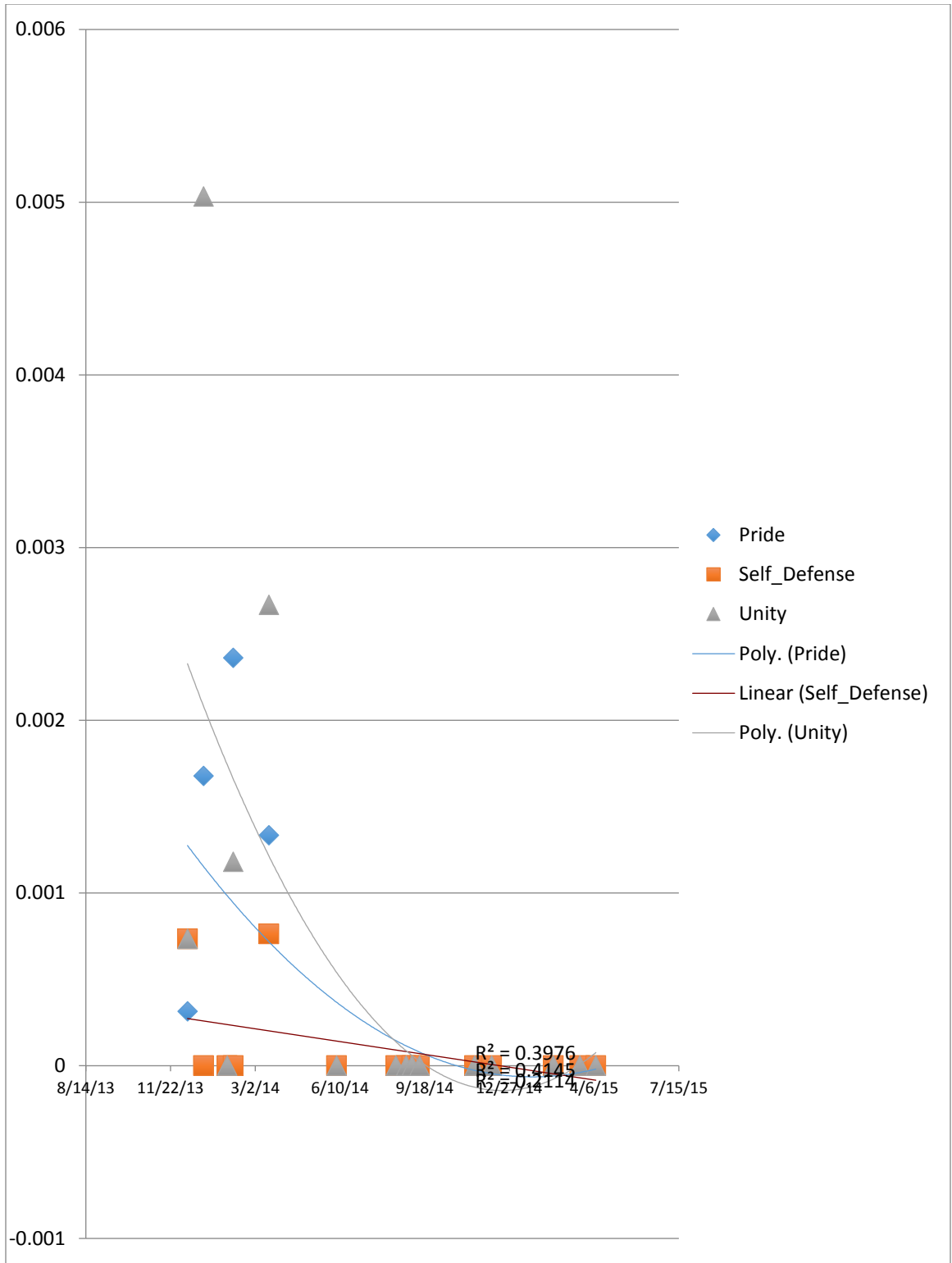


Figure 8. Ukrainian Case: Emotive Themes that Go Silent

It is also manifest in **political themes** such as *security*, and *democracy*.⁹⁸

“Thanks to our military doctrine, and to the advanced weapons that are already being supplied to the Armed Forces, we are fully capable of ensuring Russia’s security” (Putin 12 December 2013).

“What do people here in Russia think? Here, like in any democratic country, people have different points of view, but I want to make the point that the absolute majority of our people clearly do support what is happening” (Putin 18 March 2014).

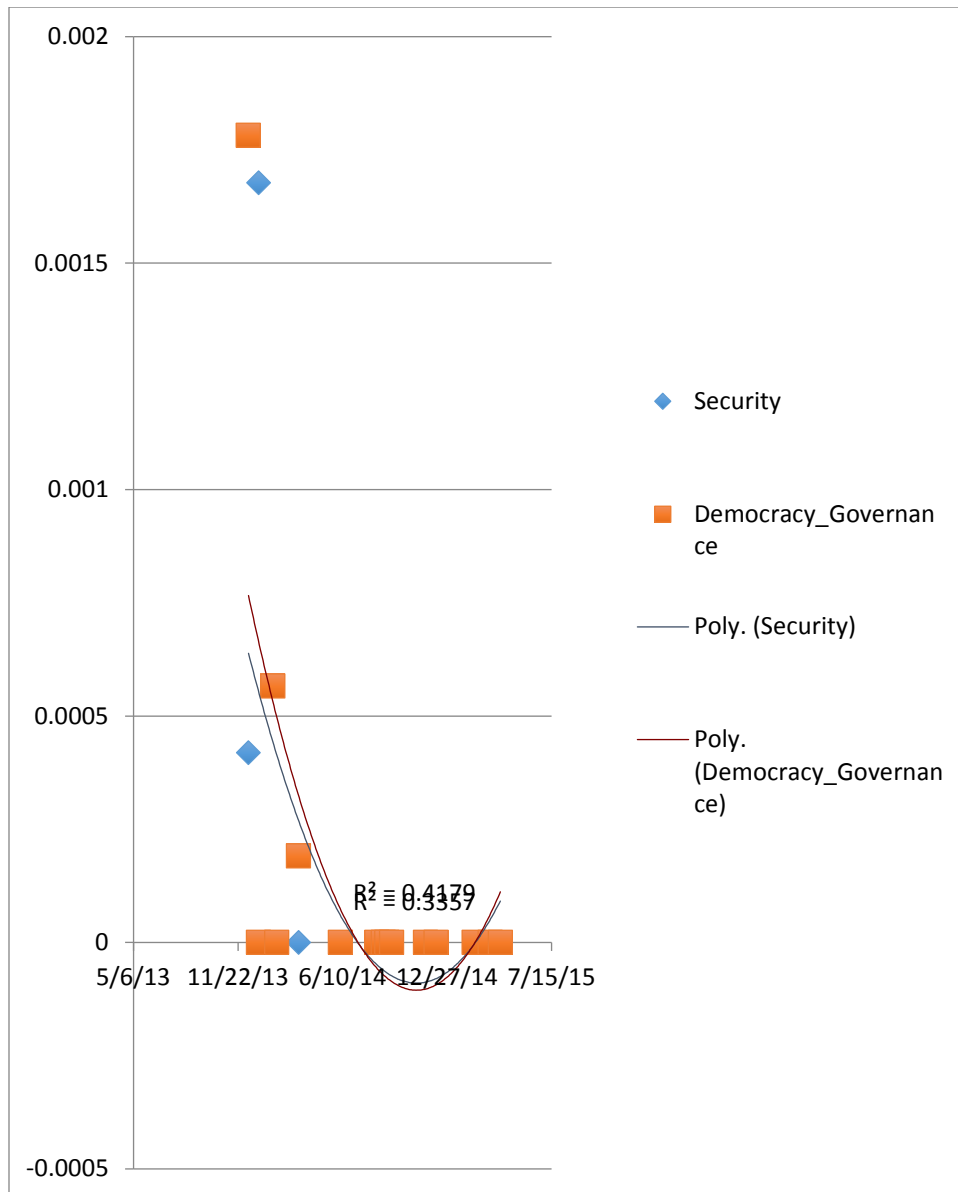


Figure 9. Ukrainian Case: Political Themes

⁹⁸ Security is reference to the speaker’s national security; Democracy is reference to democracy, which in Putin’s case is usually critical.

The Blip and Brag

As yet, Putin has not increased his use of political or emotional themes in relation to events in Ukraine. This may be because his aims are not yet achieved. However, in evidence that he may be becoming more comfortable with his success in E Ukraine, some **rhetorical devices**, including *figurative_language*, *intimacy*, *kinship*⁹⁹ are beginning to increase.

“But as Nikolai Berdyaev said, the meaning of conservatism is not to prevent moving forward and upward, but to prevent moving backwards and downward, into chaotic darkness, back to the primitive state” (Putin 12 December 2013).

“Dear friends, we have gathered here today in connection with an issue that is of vital, historic significance to all of us” (Putin 18 March 2014).

“Kiev is the mother of Russian cities. Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other” (Putin 18 March 2014).

Increasing Interest

In only three cases does Putin indicate increasing concern with issues through a sustained increase in his mention of certain themes. These patterns do not provide indicators of future action, but they underscore what appear to be enduring and increasingly important issues in his decision calculus. Putin indicates a sustained and escalating concern with economic concerns, especially *Russia’s oil and gas* industry. This is consistent with the findings of several researchers regarding Putin’s core geo-political interests (Bragg, 2016). One **emotional theme**, *Nazism*, appears to be of increasing concern to Putin, consistent with earlier findings (Kuznar & Yager, 2016). Finally, Putin is expressing increasing interest with *Turkey*, months after the downing of the Russian fighter by Turkish air defenses.

⁹⁹ *Figurative_Language* is the use of metaphor, metonym, symbolic language and allusion; *Intimacy* is expression of social closeness (e.g. my friends, excessive use of “we” and “our”); *Kinship* is the use of kin terms (brothers and sisters, my children) to express social closeness.

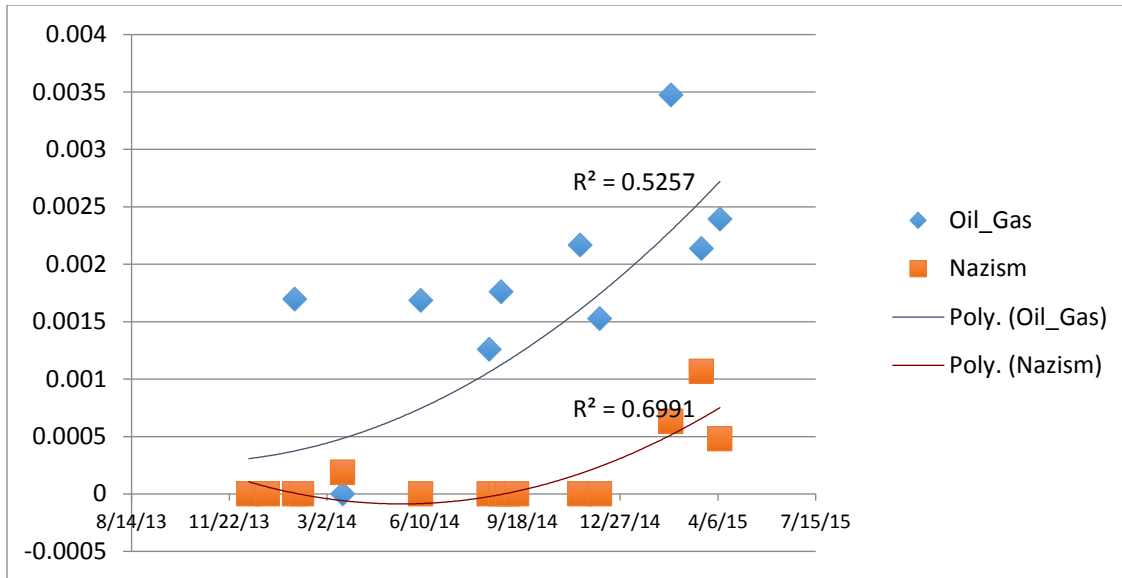


Figure 10. Ukrainian Case: Sustained and Increasing Concerns

“My second point concerns lowering energy prices” (Putin 28 January 2014).

“However, those who stood behind the latest events in Ukraine had a different agenda: they were preparing yet another government takeover; they wanted to seize power and would stop short of nothing. They resorted to terror, murder and riots. Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites executed this coup. They continue to set the tone in Ukraine to this day (Putin 18 March 2014).

Russia and Turkey have very many – I’d like to stress this – coinciding regional interests. Moreover, a number of regional problems cannot be solved unless Turkey joins in to help address them. This is why we are highly interested in promoting our relations, and we will do just that” (Putin 18 December 2014).

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Kuznar, L. A., & Yager, M. (2016). *Identification of Security Issues and Their Importance to Russia, Its Near-abroad and NATO Allies: A Thematic Analysis of Leadership Speeches*. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Periodic Publication, OSD/ASD (R&E)/RSD/RRTO, Arlington, Virginia.

Russia's Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

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

| | | INTEREST TYPE | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| INTEREST | DESCRIPTION | National/ | Int'l/ | Domestic | Economic | Identity/ |
| | | security/ | prestige/ | politics/ | survival/ | ideology |
| | | population | support | regime | prosperity | |
| Russia | | | | | | |
| Enhance international/regional influence at detriment to US | <p>Since coming to power in 2000, President Putin has been committed to restoring Russia's global status as a world power. As Russia's closest ally in the region Syria is "key to Putin's calculus" as he seeks to position Russia as a counterweight to Western influence in the Middle East (Borshchevskaya, 2013).</p> <p>Putin's extension of military support to the Assad regime directly challenged the US-led Coalition to defeat ISIL and Assad by building an alternative coalition against ISIL. In July 2015, Russian and Iranian ministers held a series of meetings, arriving at a "common position" on Syria and in September, the Iraqi military announced it had reached an intelligence sharing agreement with Russia, Iran and Syria in the fight against ISIL.</p> <p>Like Assad, Putin has argued that it was the West's wrong-headed backing of the Syrian rebels not Assad's actions that escalated the violence (Putin, 2013) and led to the crisis in Syria (S. Dagher, 2015; Roth, 2015). From the Russian</p> | X | X | X | | |

perspective, if the moderate Syrian opposition continues to erode, the US will have no choice but to moderate its own position on removing Assad. In this case, Russia will be well positioned to use its influence with Assad to gain diplomatic concessions from the West over Ukraine sanctions.

Access to Mediterranean; retain port, airfield intel post *to The Assad regime has been Russia’s closest ally in the Middle East for more than 40 years.¹⁰⁰ In 2013 President Putin made expansion of Russian naval power one of the “chief priorities” of his third term. This was followed a week later by announcement of the biggest Russian naval exercise in the Mediterranean which was seen by some as early indication that Russia did not intend to step away from Assad (Borshchevskaya, 2013). In September 2015 Russia began building a forward air base at Latakia, the port city where Russia maintains a small naval base. Safeguarding the Assad regime preserves Russian naval access to its only port in the Mediterranean where US and NATO forces have important bases and operations (Humud, Woehrel, Mix, & Blanchard, 2015).*

Stymie spread of extremism into central states; weaken/defeat Chechen and other extremist fighters *Broader geopolitical interests aside, the Russian leadership has a strong interest in Asian counterterrorism operations and fears that the fall of the Assad regime will bring radical Islamists to power in Syria, destabilize the region and potentially affect the stability of Russia’s southern regions. In short, the Russian position is that supporting Assad is essential if ISIL and other terror groups in the region are to be defeated (Tharoor, 2015).*

¹⁰⁰ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia accounted for 78% of Syria's weapons purchases between 2007 and 2012. Between 2009 and 2013 Russian companies invested more than \$20 billion in Syria

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

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| Demonstrate Russia still has the power to act as a global player | <i>Related to Russia’s interest in extending its global influence, is its interest in <u>demonstrating</u> its “rebuilt” strength and capabilities. There are a number of objectives associated with this. First, testing Russia’s new weapons and command and control capabilities (of the new National Defense Control Center in Moscow) affords the military a real-life training opportunity. Second, it sends a clear deterrence message to the US about Russia’s resolve to recover its place in the world and shows off the military’s “professional competency” that as Timothy Thomas notes, “was lacking in Georgia.”</i> | X | X |
| Avoid popular ire at economic downturn; sons dying abroad | <i>While stirring up nationalist sentiment – particularly aimed at the damage American aggression does to Russian interests – helps bump up Russian opinion of Putin, the balance of his support rests on the perception that the regime has recharged Russia’s economy and international stature.¹⁰¹</i> | X | X |

Russian shows of new military weapons and the effectiveness of the Russian military also play well at home in Russia. Timothy Thomas notes that “with the situation in Ukraine at a stalemate, and

¹⁰¹ Thomas Sherlock, “Putin’s Public Opinion Challenge,” *The National Interest*, 21 August 2014. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/putins-public-opinion-challenge-11113>.

the economic effects of continuing low oil prices and economic sanctions felt across Russia, direct intervention in Syria offered Putin the opportunity to both distract domestic attention and ... from an increasingly unpopular conflict against brother Slavs in Ukraine; and reassure the population that the Kremlin is directing its attention toward the emerging threat to the south of the nation."

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. Patricia 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.



Dr. Larry Kuznar

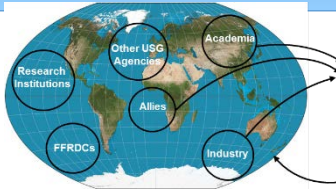
Dr. Kuznar is Chief Cultural Sciences Officer at NSI, and a professor of anthropology at Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne, IN. His background is in discourse analysis, decision theory, and mathematical and computational modeling. He has supported many SMA projects, as well as work for AFRL, the Army Corps of Engineers, and NSI's commercial customers. His discourse work has been used to provide anticipatory insights into violent non-state actors such as ISIL and the Taliban, and state actors as varied as Iran, Pakistan, India and North Korea. He also contributed to NSI's computational modeling of social conflict. Dr. Kuznar's published work can be found in journals such as *American Anthropologist*, *Political Studies*, *Current Anthropology*, *Evolution and Human Behavior* and *Social Science Computer Review*.



Timothy L. Thomas

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

SMA Reach-back



What are the aims and objectives of the Shia Militia Groups following the effective military defeat of Da'esh?

Contributors: Ambassador Robert S. Ford (former US Ambassador to Syria, Middle East Institute); Dr. Randa Slim, (Middle East Institute); Dr. Elie Abouaoun (US Institute of Peace); Dr. Harith Hasan al-Qarawee (Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University); Omar Al-Shahery (Carnegie Mellon); Dr. Scott Atran (ARTIS); Dr. Monqith Dagher (IIACSS); Mr. Zana Gulmohamad, Univ of Sheffield, Dr. Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University, UK); Dr. Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron); Dr. Renad Mansour (Chatham House, UK); Sarhang Hamasaheed (US Institute of Peace); Dr. Diane Maye (Embry Riddle University); Alireza Nader (RAND); Dr. Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies); Steffany Trofino (TRADOC); Christine van den Toorn (American University of Iraq, Sulaimani); Dr. Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute).

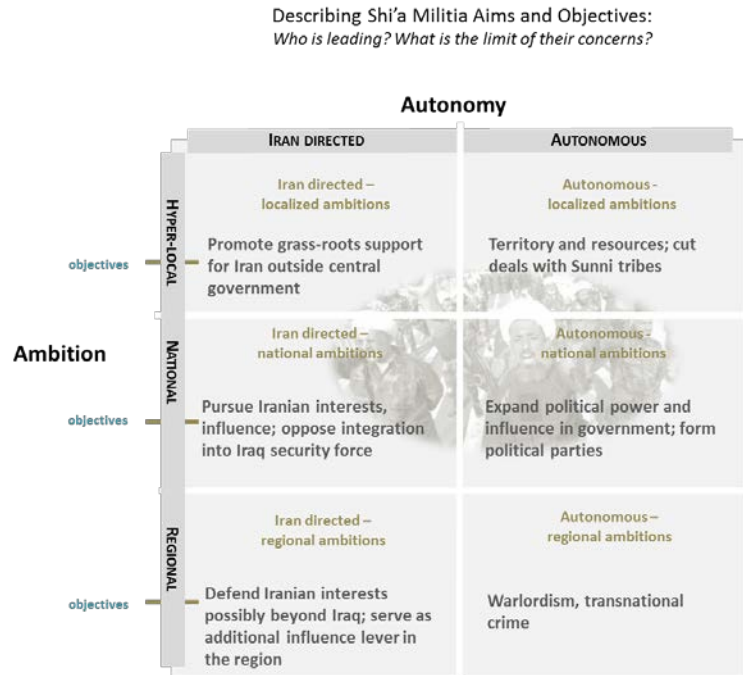
Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Characterizing “the” Shi’a Militias

Referring to the Shi’a Militias as a unitary or homogenous entity masks the reality that what are now dozens of groups in Iraq were established at different times for different reasons, and thus with different allegiances and goals.¹⁰² Dr. Daniel Serwer at Hopkins SAIS puts it succinctly, “Not all ‘Shi’a groups’ are created equal.”

An actor’s defining characteristics have a significant impact on the objectives it pursues. The contributors highlight two we might use to differentiate many Shi’a militia groups in their aims, objectives and post-ISIS actions. These are: extent to which the group is and owes allegiance to Iran; and 2) the span of its concerns and interests. How groups rate on these two factors will tell us a lot about what we should expect of them following the effective defeat of ISIS (see graphic).



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Autonomy. Contributors to this Quick Look tended to differ on where the balance of control over the Shi’a militias rests. Some see the Shi’a PMF groups as primarily under the control of Iran, and thus motivated or directed largely by Iranian interests (i.e., they have very little autonomy.) If this is the case, knowing the interests of the leaders of these groups will tell us little about their actions). Other experts view the militias as more autonomous and self-directed albeit with interests in common with Iran in which case their interests are relevant to understanding their objectives. In reality, there are groups that swear allegiance to the Supreme Leader in Iran, those that follow Ayatollah al Sistani, and still other groups that respond only to their commanders. In an interview with the SMA Reachback team, Dr. Anoush Ehteshami a well-known Iran scholar from Durham University (UK) points out that Iran has “shamelessly” worked with groups it controls as well as those that it does not because it sees each variety as a “node of influence” into Iraqi society. As in previous Reachback Quick Looks¹⁰³, a number of the SMEs note that Iran is best

¹⁰² Dr.’s Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron) and Monqith Dagher (IIACSS) very helpfully identify three reasons Shi’a militia groups formed – only one of which has to do with ISIS: 1) in response to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq; 2) as armed wings of Shi’a political parties; and 3) following Ayatollah Sistani’s fatwa to combat ISIS.

¹⁰³ This point is discussed in more depth in a previous SMA Reachback report: LR2 which is available from the SMA office. The question for that report was: *What will be Iran’s strategic calculus regarding Iraq and the region post-ISIS? How will JCPOA impact the calculus? What opportunities exist for the US/Coalition to shape the environment favorable to our interests?*

served by taking a low-key approach in Iraq. Ehteshami argues that ultimately Iran has little interest in appearing to control the Shi'a militias: "the last thing that they want is to be seen as a frontline against Daesh" as this would reinforce the Sunni versus Shi'a sectarian, Saudi-Iranian rivalry undercurrents of the conflict against ISIS. In fact he argues that Iran prefers to work with the militias rather than the central government – which is susceptible to political pressure that Iran cannot control in order to "maintain grass root presence and influence ... of the vast areas of Iraq which are now Shia dominated."

Ambition. A second factor that distinguishes some militia groups is the span of their key objectives and ambition. In discussing militia objectives, some SMEs referenced groups with highly localized interests, for example groups that were established more recently and primarily for the purpose of protecting family or neighborhood. Others mentioned (generally pro-Iran) groups with cross-border ambitions. However, the major part of the discussion of militia objectives centered on more-established and powerful groups with national-level concerns.

Key Objectives

Most experts mentioned one or all of the following as key objectives of the Shi'a militia, at present and in post-ISIS Iraq. Importantly, many indicate that activities in pursuit of these objectives are occurring now – the militias have not waited for the military defeat of ISIS.

- **Controlling territory and resources**

For groups with very localized concerns this objective may take the form of securing the bounds of an area, or access to water in order to protect family members or neighborhoods. For groups with broader ambitions, American University of Iraq Professor Christine van den Toorn argues that controlling territory and resources is a means to these militias' larger political goals. As in the past, this may entail occupying or conducting ethnic cleansing of areas of economic, religious and political significance (e.g., Samarra, Tel Afar, former Sunni areas of Salahuldeen Province near Balad.) Here too Anoush Ehteshami suggests that different militia groups have different allegiances and motives: some are "keen to come flying a Shia flag into Sunni heartlands and are determined to take control of those areas." A number of authors indicate that a specific project of Iran-backed militias possibly with cross-border ambitions would be to secure Shi'a groups' passage between Iraq and Syria (van den Toorn suspects this would be north or south of Sinjar adding that Kurds would prefer that the route "go to the south, through Baaj/ southern Sinjar and not through Rabiaa, which they want to claim.")

- **Consolidating political power and influence**

Anoush Ehteshami believes that the Shi'a militia groups are keen to gain as much "control of government as possible, as quickly as possible." These groups are actually new to Iraqi politics and realize that once the war is over their influence and role in the political order may end. Many of the experts identified the primary objective of militia groups with broader local or national ambitions as increasing their independence from, and power relative to Iraqi state forces. Christine van den Toorn relates an interesting way that some Shi'a militias are working to expand their influence: by forging alliances with "good Sunnis" or "obedient Sunnis." In fact, she reports that the deals now being made between some Sunni leaders and Shia militia/PMF are in essence "laying the foundation

of warlordism” in Iraq and potentially cross-nationally. Many experts singled out the law legalizing the militias as making it “a shadow state force” or an Iraq version of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (RGC) - a clear victory for those seeking to institutionalize the political wealth, and likely economic wealth of the militias.

Dr. Harith Hasan al-Qarawee of Brandeis University agrees that the primary goal of the militia groups with national or cross-national ambitions is to gain political influence in Iraq in order to: “to improve their chances in the power equation and have a sustained access to state patronage.” As a result, he anticipates that they will continue to work to weaken the professional, non-sectarian elements of the Iraqi Security Forces, and would accept reintegration into the Iraqi military only if it affords them the same or greater opportunity to influence the Iraqi state than what they currently possess. Finally, a number of the experts including Dr. Randa Slim of the Middle East Institute, mention that an RGC-like, parallel security structure in Iraq will also serve Iran as a second “franchisee” along with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and allow export of “military skillsets/expertise/knowhow, which can be shared with fellow Shia groups in the Gulf region.”

- **Eliminating internal opposition from Sunni and Kurds**

Omar Al-Shahery, a former deputy director in the Iraqi Defense Ministry, along with a number of other SME contributors believe that after the Sunni Arabs are “taken out of the equation” the Kurds are the militias’ “next target.” Dr. Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins SAIS) expects that Shi’a forces will remain in provinces that border Kurdistan, if not at the behest of Iran, then certainly in line with Iran’s interest in avoiding an expanded and independent Kurdistan in Iraq. Al Shahery (Carnegie Mellon) points to this as the impetus for militias pushing the Peshmerga out of Tuzkumato south of Kirkuk. Similarly, Shi’a concern with Saudi support reaching Sunni groups opposed to the expansion of Shi’a influence in Iraq was motivation for occupying Nukhaib (south Anbar) and cutting Sunni forces off from a conduit to aid. Finally, Al-Shahery raises the possibility that the ultimate goal of the most ambitious militia groups is in fact to form an “integrated strike force” that can operate cross-nationally. This is evidenced he argues, by the centralization of the command structure of the forces operating in Syria.

What to Expect after Mosul

The following are some of the experts’ expectations about what to expect from the Shi’a militias in the short to mid-term. See the author’s complete submission in SME input for justification and reasoning.

Following ISIS defeat in Iraq ...

- **Re-positioning.** Iran will encourage some militia forces to relocate to Syria to help defend the regime. However, Iran also will make sure that the “Shia militias which have been mobilized, are going to stay mobilized” as a “pillar of Iran’s own influence in Iraq” (Dr. Anoush Ehteshami, Durham University, UK)
- **Inter and intra- sectarian conflict.** The PMFs will play a “very destabilizing” role in Iraq if not disbanded or successfully integrated into a non-sectarian force. The present set-up will result in renewed Sunni-Shia tensions, Sunni extremism (Dr. Monqith Dagher, IIACSS and Dr. Karl

Kaltenthaler, University of Akron); Shi'a-Shi'a violence (Dr. Sarhang Hamasaeed, USIP); and/or violent conflict with the Kurds (Dr. Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins SAIS; Omar Al-Shahery, Carnegie Mellon)

- **New political actors.** Select militia commanders will leave the PMF to run for political office, accept ministerial posts (Dr. Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins SAIS) and/or “major political players in Baghdad” will attempt to place them in important positions in the police or Iraqi security force positions. (Dr. Diane Maye, Embry-Riddle)

SME Input

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

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

“Those Shia Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) financed previously by Iran and now financed by the Iraqi Government mostly will follow orders from Iran. This may well mean they remain deployed in Ninewah and Anbar, and that they also deploy in eastern Syria. The deployment of large numbers of foreign armed men in these communities will unavoidably generate competition with local communities in Ninewah and Anbar, whether over business rights and fees or equal justice before the law, or local political decision-making. These kinds of problems aggravated the politics of Mosul prior to June 2014, for example, and it is far from clear that Baghdad has learned lessons. Witness Tikrit now – who rules it, really?”

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Christine van den Toorn, Director of the Institute of Regional and International Studies, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

While many Hashd will go home (the “Hashd” Hashd) Shia militias will seek to translate their battlefield victories into sustained political power through territorial control and control of access to resources. They will do this through allying with “good Sunnis” or obedient Sunnis – there are already deals being made between Sunni leaders and Shia militias/ PMF currently. While you could say that some of these create some stability, they are laying the foundation of warlordism, mafia style division of territory. Sunnis are saying – which militia can I ally with, and through this form my own Sunni militia, to carve out my piece of territory (and do well in the next elections). So to combat, prevent this (... as is happening in Rabiaa and other places) there need to be political framework and actors and facilitators to move in after to challenge this development.

“they are laying the foundation of warlordism, mafia style division of territory.”

On a national level, while there is a debate, there seems to be more consensus that the new law legalizing the Hashd will make it a shadow state force, an IRGC in Iraq, that will answer at least in part to Iran. ... There are of course many reports of Asaib Ahl al Haq or Kataib Hezbollah members in federal police uniforms as happened in 2006, 2007, etc., and the commanders of the Hashd – Al Ameri and Al Mohandis are notoriously close to / loyal to Iran. The Hashd will at the very least have to be carefully vetted and

combed through to determine who is eligible for “integration.” One more specific goal is the road to Syria. The Hashd/ Baghdad/ Iran want to make sure they secure a road – north or south of Sinjar – to Syria. The KDP would prefer it go to the south, through Baaj/ southern Sinjar and not through Rabiaa, which they want to claim.

Comment on Objectives of Shi’a Militia Groups in Iraq

Omar Al-Shahery
Carnegie Mellon University

There are two types of objectives for the Shia Militias, short term tactical objectives and long term strategic objectives.

Tactical objectives

- Occupying and ethnically cleansing certain areas have economic significance. The objective is to use these areas to generate additional funding for the religious institutions that sponsor these militias and is to ensure these militias’ sustainability. Examples:
 - a. Samarrah: The Shrine and the religious tourism revenue that it generates.
 - b. Tel Afar town (west of Mosul), which is at very close proximity to the Ein Zala oil fields.
- Expansion: Members of the Shia Militia have already moved in (with their families) to former Sunni areas in Salahuldeen Province (near Balad) after a policy of scorched earth during and after the conflict with Da’esh.

“Da’esh, if anything, has been a blessing for the leadership of these militias. The Iraqi government and parliament have granted these militias legislative immunity, government salaries, and further have declared them part of the country’s security forces, legitimizing their existence, all in the name of fighting Da’esh.”

that

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Strategic objectives

- Replicate the Iranian model and ensuring its pervasiveness and permanence. The incredibly large numbers of these militias guarantee their influence on almost every community in the predominantly Shia areas. It would become almost impossible to depose the sponsoring religious parties and jurisprudence through any sort of elections in the future. This model of parallel authority and power resembles the IRGC in Iran and the Iranian Basij, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi Militia in Yemen and so on.
- Build an ever-expanding cluster of countries that redefines our perception of government. This cluster will not practice distinct and independent territorial sovereignty in the classical sense but rather act as an incubating environment for a single religious authority.
- Eliminate any internal opposition socially, economically and politically. Da’esh, if anything, has been a blessing for the leadership of these militias. The Iraqi government and parliament have granted these militias legislative immunity, government salaries, and further have declared them

part of the country's security forces, legitimizing their existence, all in the name of fighting Da'esh. To ensure this objective, these militias have:

- a. Occupied strategic areas like Nukhaib in southern Anbar province, cutting off Sunnis from Saudi Arabia
 - b. Pushed the Peshmurga out of Tuz Kurmato, an important town south of Kirkuk near the Kurdish oil fields, and within striking distance of the Kurds, which are going to be their next target after Sunnis are taken out of the equation.
- If one must make an educated guess, the leaders of these militias seek to form an integrated striking force that can operate across several nations, including Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lebanon. The sign of such a force being assembled is the change in command structure in the forces fighting in Syria. Earlier, these militias used to operate under separate chains of command, but that all changed, and now members of different militias operate under a unified command and control system.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Dr. Randa Slim
Middle East Institute

[Militia group objectives are to] 1. Consolidate Shia rule over Iraq, including maintaining hardline positions vis-a-vis Sunni reintegration into state structures; 2. Establish a parallel military structure akin to the IRGC model; 3. This parallel structure will also serve as a second Iranian Arab franchisee akin to Hezbollah in Lebanon. They will have military skillsets/ expertise/knowhow, which can be shared with fellow Shia groups in the Gulf region; 4. Some will be heading to Syria post-Mosul to participate in the liberation of all of Syria per Assad's wishes; 5. Some will want to go home provided there are economic incentives. UNDP has been asked by Baghdad government to work on a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program for the PMUs. Sistani's office is interested in seeing a good number of these PMU rank and file go back home and get reintegrated in society.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Elie Abouaoun

US Institute of Peace

“... the Shia Militia Groups are now supported to become a State-recognized body that competes with the Iraqi Armed Forces and ensures strong Iranian leverage over Iraqi politics. The model is quite similar to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (Iran), Hezbollah (Lebanon) or the National Defense Army (Syria) that exist and operate under the umbrella of a hollow and submissive state structure.”

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Alireza Nader

RAND

The various Iraqi Shia militias may have different agendas, but it does appear that key groups backed by Iran may want to create organizations that parallel the Basij and the Revolutionary Guards in Iran.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Dr. Scott Atran

ARTIS

One of the aims of Shia militia groups is to manipulate parliament and maximize power within the government. And their next war may be with the Kurds over disputed areas in both Kirkuk and Mosul (exploiting KDP-PUK rivalries as best they can). They will coordinate with Iran's Quds force in Iraq, and the PMU bill was a step in this direction.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Harith Hasan al-Qarawee

Fellow-Crown Center for Middle East Studies Brandeis University

The ultimate goal of those groups is to improve their chances in the power equation and have a sustained access to state patronage. In this respect, they will accept reintegration in the formal military structure only to the extent they can use this to influence the state from within. They will seek to weaken the professional and non-partisan elements of the army, so they become the indispensable force on which the state will rely. Given that the Iraqi army is not yet a credible force, their role remains necessary provided that the Prime Minister will be given enough support to control those militias, and marginalize the most pro-Iranian elements. For that to happen, he will also need the support of the grand Shi'a cleric, Sistani, who said in several occasions that parallel security organ is detrimental for the state and its ability to stabilize the country.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Steffany Troffino, TRADOC

Iraq remains a country in transition as multiple variables contribute to the country's deteriorating security environment. Informal power streams, ethno-sectarian political agendas, proxy influences, and perceptions of ethno-sectarian disenfranchisement prevalent throughout the country are but a few contributing factors polarizing the country. Couple these factors with endemic Iranian influence, which has capitalized on Iraq's weakened conditions and the strategic outlook for the United States' ability to remain influential throughout the country, diminishes. As the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continues its military offenses inside Iraq, the need for the Iraqi central government to augment the country's security forces has significantly increased. In an attempt to bolster its military ranks – on November 26, 2016 the Shi'a majority Iraqi government formally legitimized Shi'a militias as part of Iraqi forces by a majority parliamentary vote of 208 out of a 327 members.

Militias formed to protect Tribes

In an attempt to understand Iraq's current security environment, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of informal power-streams throughout the country's vast tribal communities and most important - the Iranian influence throughout these tribal communities. As Iraqi security forces remain engaged in offenses against ISIL, most notably in key strategic cities, Iraq's rural communities became increasingly more isolated and vulnerable. As a consequence, tribal communities formed several militias as a means to protect tribal community members while Iraq's security forces remained pre-engaged in larger ISIL offenses.

While militias were forming in the rural communities of Iraq, Iran sought to capitalize on the opportunity to support newly established militias and use these new groups to their advantage. Iran supplied weapons and financial support to several newly developed Shi'a militias in an effort to maintain advantage over militia activity.¹⁰⁴ When the time came for these newer militias to unify under a larger, more well-established militia organization, Iran was able to exert its influence within this unification process.

"The three most powerful militias within Iraq's PMFs -- Asaib Ahl al Haq, Hezbollah Brigades and Badr Brigades maintain well-established links with Iranian senior leadership, most notably Iranian Quds Force Commander, Qassem Soleimani."

With the Iraqi Parliament vote in November 2016, some fifty Iraqi Shi'a militias unified under an umbrella known as the Hashd Shaabi umbrella (Arabic for the People's Mobilization Forces or PMF).¹⁰⁵ Key militia organizations within the PMFs pre-date ISIL's 2014 military advancements inside Iraq. The three most powerful militias within Iraq's PMFs -- Asaib Ahl al Haq, Hezbollah Brigades and Badr Brigades maintain well-established links with Iranian senior leadership, most notably Iranian Quds Force Commander, Qassem Soleimani.¹⁰⁶

On May 23rd 2016, Soleimani was identified in a picture reportedly taken in a meeting on then pending operations in Fallujah.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, observed in the same picture were Akram al Kaabi, a Shia militia leader; and Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, who leads Hezbollah Brigades, specifically, Hata'ib Hezbollah.¹⁰⁸ Both individuals are designated US terrorists.¹⁰⁹ Multiple sightings of Soleimani working with Iranian backed militias in Iraq have surfaced, including support to Shi'a militias in Tikrit, Samarra (al Baghdadi's birthplace), Jurf al Sakhar, and Fallujah. Iraq's PMF's objectives align along an Iranian agenda, which seeks to influence, and exert proxy control over Iraq's central government. Recently al-Jazaeery, one of the commanders within the PMF who commands the Saraya Khorasani militia stated, "We want to be a third power in Iraq, alongside the army and police. "Why can't the Hashd be like the Revolutionary Guard in Iran?"¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Mansour (2015), "From Militia to State Force: the Transformation of al-Hashd al-Shaabi," 16 November 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Roggio (2016), "Iraqi militia leader wants to model PMF after Iran's Revolutionary Guard," The Long War Journal. 22 March 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Roggio (2016), "Iraqi militia leader wants to model PMF after Iran's Revolutionary Guard," The Long War Journal. 22 March 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Weiss (2016), Iranian Quds Force Leader Reportedly in Fallujah, Threat Matrix, The Long War Journal, 23 May 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Weiss (2016), Iranian Quds Force Leader Reportedly in Fallujah, Threat Matrix, The Long War Journal, 23 May 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Weiss (2016), Iranian Quds Force Leader Reportedly in Fallujah, Threat Matrix, The Long War Journal, 23 May 2016.

¹¹⁰ Roggio (2016), "Iraqi militia leader wants to model PMF after Iran's Revolutionary Guard," The Long War Journal. 22 March 2016.

Implications

The United States is at a crossroad with support to Iraq's Security Forces. It is a risk averse gain scenario reminiscent of support to the Free Syrian Army. The risk is the greater support we render, the greater the likelihood we are inadvertently supporting a more powerful Iranian influence within the country. The gain, the more support we render, the greater the likelihood Iraq's security forces will be able to control and ultimately defeat ISIL's advances. With as invasive and intrinsic as Iran's influence has grown within Iraq, it may very well be beneficial for the United States to withhold support in an effort to allow Iran to expend its resources. By Iran expending its resources, the United States may be in a position to observe how Russia augments this Iranian expense.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Karl Kaltenthaler, University of Akron/Case Western Reserve University

and

Munqith Dagher, IIACSS

"The most powerful commanders among the PMFs are Hadi al Amiri, Abu Madhi al Muhandis, and Qais Khazali."

The Shia Militia Groups of Iraq, of which there are dozens, are part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs), an organization that was established in mid-2014 in the face of Da'esh military victories throughout the Sunni heartland of Iraq. The direct impetus to create the PMFs umbrella organization was (Shia) Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's fatwa to defend Iraq from the onslaught of Da'esh in 2014.

There are now some 40 different militias in the PMFs that have 100,000-120,000 fighters. The vast majority of the militias and the fighters are Shia Iraqis with some Sunnis, Turkmen, Yazidis, and Christians in relatively small numbers. While the PMFs are nominally under the control of the Iraqi government and are paid by it, the PMFs are largely autonomous fighting forces, with little centralized control. The fighters of the militias mostly follow the orders of their militia commanders. The most powerful commanders among the PMFs are Hadi al Amiri, Abu Madhi al Muhandis, and Qais Khazali.

The Shia militias have different origins. Some of them have existed since the period following the US invasion in 2003 and fought against Coalition forces. Others are the armed wings of Shia political parties. Finally, there are the more recently formed militias, which were created following al-Sistani's fatwa. These most recent groups follow the Prime Minister's orders more than the others, are the least ideological, but also the weakest militarily and politically. Most of their members joined because of the fatwa and the desire to protect Shia shrines and/or for a salary because they were unemployed. The groups that are most powerful and ambitious in terms of trying to shape Iraq's political future are the two earlier forms of groups. They seek to play a very large role in Iraq's political future.

There is a serious power struggle within the PMFs between the more-Iraqi-oriented forces, such as Muktada al Sadr's Al Mahdi army and Iranian-backed militias and political parties. The Al Mahdi army

fighters only follow the commands of al Sadr and no one else. The most prominent Shia militias are the Badr Organization, Hezbollah, Al Abbas Brigade, and Asaib Ahl al Haq Brigades which, are all backed by Iran (particularly the Quds force) and look to Iran's supreme leader for orders. They are not under the control of the Iraqi government. These groups dominate the PMFs on the ground, creating a real challenge for the Iraqi government in terms of having control over what is happening in the country.

“There is a serious power struggle within the PMFs between the more-Iraqi-oriented forces, such as Muktada al Sadr’s Al Mahdi army and Iranian-backed militias and political parties ... [and] The most prominent Shia militias are the Badr Organization, Hezbollah, Al Abbas Brigade, and Asaib Ahl al Haq Brigades which, are all backed by Iran (particularly the Quds force.)

The aims and objectives of the Shia PMFs differ to an extent based on their origins and how close they are to Iran. It is clear that almost none of them are desirous of disbanding. They all see a role for themselves in a post-Da’esh Iraq.

There are two trends of thinking among the Shia PMFs about what their future should be. One trend is turn the PMFs into the Iraqi equivalent of the Iranian IRGC. This position has been most forcefully stated by Hamed al Jazaery, commander of the al Khorasani Brigade. This is a position that is strongly supported by Iran as it is seen as best way to maintain Shia dominance and a pro-Iran power base in Iraq.

The second trend in thinking is to turn the PMFs into an Iraqi National Guard. What this would mean is largely determined by an Iraqi’s sectarian orientation. The Shia PMFs that support this option see this more as a re-naming of the existing PMFs structure and it would remain a Shia-dominated force. This

force could include Sunnis and others but it would maintain its current Shia numerical and command dominance. Non-Shia Iraqis would like to see the National Guard become a truly integrated organization that would bury sectarian identity in its bid to help keep Iraq secure.

Sunni Iraqis, on the whole, have deep distrust of the PMFs. The Sunni militias that are in the PMFs are small and weak and are typically the creature of a Sunni parliamentarian who is close to the Shia militias. These parliamentarians are paid handsomely for creating a militia that gives the veneer of real Sunni participation in the PMFs. Survey after survey of Iraqis undertaken by IIACSS has shown that upwards of 80% of Iraqi Sunnis distrust the PMFs. Shias, on the other hand, have the mirror opposite view of the PMFs. Shias largely trust the PMFs and believe they have done positive things for Iraq since 2014.

The PMFs stand to play a very destabilizing role in Iraq following the effective military defeat of Da’esh. In the best scenario, the fighters would be integrated into a non-sectarian National Guard. That way they could continue to be paid and could keep their sense of honor. Leaving them as they are now will almost certainly renew Sunni-Shia tensions and help re-establish Sunni extremism in the country.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Zana Gulmohamad, University of Sheffield

Their goal will be to further consolidate their footprint in Iraqi polity, especially in the political, military, and economic structure, and be able to increase their projection of power beyond Iraq's borders. The pro-Iranian Iraqi Shia militia zealous groups have ambitions both regionally and beyond Iraq's borders in regard to supporting the Shia groups and population across the Middle East. They share ideological (Wilayat al-Faqih) and revolutionary beliefs (they follow Iranian supreme leader Grand Ayatollah Khamenei and they consider themselves part of the extension of the Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolution).

Their rise has been augmented by the initiative of the establishment of the PMF (an umbrella for dozens of majority Shia (but not limited to as they include some Sunni, Christian, Yazidi, Turkmen) militias that are not united in their political interests and loyalties. They include pro-Iranian militias that are the most powerful and the largest, pro-Sistani close to the PM, and pro-al-Sadr militias) by former Iraqi PM Nouri al-Maliki and the fatwa Jihad al-Kafai of Iraq's highest Shia reference Ali al-Sistani (He adopts the quietest doctrine where religious leaders do not rule the states in contrast to the Iranian doctrine.). Recently the Shia militias have been fortified by their successes in pushing back the Islamic State from Baghdad and other Iraqi territories and then by the parliament, which passed a law on 26th of November for the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to be a permanent security and military body.

The law passed by the majority of the Iraqi Members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives (ICR) was backed by the Shia representatives al-Itlaf al-Watani al-Iraqi (National Iraqi Alliance) with opposition by mainly Sunni Arab political forces in the ICR known as Tahaluf al-Quwa al-Iraqiya and key figures Ahmad al-Msari, Thafer al-A'ani and Usama al-Nujaifi as well as most of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) members in the ICR. Although, there is no national consensus between the Iraqis about the continuation and legalization of the PMF as a military organization, the majority voted for this law.

The law has secured the future of many Iraqi Shia militias. The law constitutes for example: Article 1, the PMF is part of the Iraqi Security Forces and directly related to the General Commander of Iraqi Security Forces, who is the PM. Article 2/1 the PMF is independent and part of the ISF and linked to the PM, This article provides legitimacy for the Shia militias including those moderate and extremists, as well as the right for the government to provide them with further equipment and financial support for its organs and members as part of Iraqi defense system without domestic opposition. Therefore, this will sustain their presence in the long-term. Article 5 of this law indicates that all the members in the PMF have to cut their links and ties with political parties and entities. This will be only theoretical and on paper as the majority will have ties with their political entities and those who have links with Iran will persist. Aws al-Khafaji, the leader of an Iraqi Shia militia Abu Fadel al-Abas that is operative in Syria, said in December 2016 in a TV interview with an Iraqi channel, "The new parliament passed a law that cannot force the major Shia armed forces such as Saraya al-Salam, A'saib Ahl al-Haq and their leaders to follow the government and the head of the PMF's orders. Only a small fraction of their forces that are integrated with the PMF will obey the government's and the PMF's orders". His statement is a clear indication that the law is only to embolden and legalize their presence not to make them a body that adheres to the state's orders.

After defeating IS all the Shia militias believe their duties are to continue to fight Salafi jihadist groups and other related Sunni radical forms that will persist after defeating IS in Iraq or even beyond its sovereign borders. For example, there is clear involvement of pro-Iranian Iraqi Shia militias in Syria and their key engagement in the latest battle of Aleppo alongside Syrian Army. Additionally, they cooperate with the Lebanese Hezbollah and have ties with Houthis in Yemen and the Shia resistance in Bahrain.

The Shia militias will be emboldened by the next Iraqi elections as the political entities that the militias are linked and affiliated to as well as a number of their key figures will enter politics to have more authority and a political say. The author expects them to have a considerable achievement in the elections (provincial and national), as they are increasingly popular among Shias.

There are plenty of similarities between the PMF and the Iranian Basij Resistance Force, which is a volunteer paramilitary organization under the IRGC. Despite the fact that in the PMF there are Sunni militias such as Hashd al-A'shari and small groups of Christian and Yazidi militias, the divided Shia militias and their leaders are dominating its trajectory and policies. Post-2003 the Shia militias' members have infiltrated Iraqi security, military and clandestine organizations because the Shia-led government have consented and turned a blind eye. The recent developments are consolidating their achievements and further developing towards their goals.

Shi'ia Militia Groups (Hash'd al Shaabi)

Diane L. Maye, Ph.D.
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

To counter internal threats, former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki appealed to long-standing Shi'ia militias to quell uprisings and eliminate emergent Sunni political players. Maliki also integrated Shi'ia paramilitary units and militias into the Iraqi Security Forces ahead of Sunni *Sahwa* groups, then cut the funding for the Sunni Sons of Iraq, leaving tens of thousands of military-aged Sunni Arab males without work. Furthermore, Maliki strictly enforced Iraq's Justice and Accountability (de-Ba'athification) Law and Article 4 of Iraq's antiterrorism law, which imprisoned individuals accused of terrorist activity without a timeline for due process. In doing so, Maliki aggravated large portions of the Sunni Arab population. While the Hash'd al Shaabi have had enormous successes in some parts of Iraq, past grievances prevent many Sunnis from trusting the militias. It is highly likely that after the liberation of Mosul and the 2017 elections, major political players in Baghdad will attempt to reward elements of the Hash'd al Shaabi with positions in law enforcement or the official Iraqi security apparatus (under the guise of 'civil' control). It will be important for coalition forces to foresee this political move and prevent such an action from taking place.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Sarhang Hamasaeed, USIP

These groups would seek political (some already have members of parliament) and economic viability and possibly expansion in similar ways of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). They have already moved in that direction, and with the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) passing the PMF law late November, they would exist parallel to the military, receive funds and training from the government, and be protected from any civilian prosecution.

Some of their elements may go to Syria to join the fight, alongside those Iraqi Shias who are already there. The PMF is already a Shia tool for protecting the Shia, and some of its elements/units have committed violations against Sunni communities. The PMF could also become an instrument of political and armed competition – even causing violence – in Shia-Shia dynamics.

All politics and regional roles aside, given the collapse of the Iraqi Army in the face of Da'esh, the Shia population would likely want to hold on to the PMF as a protecting force. Iran would be interested in preserving the PMF as a proxy tool that is easier to use inside and outside Iraq as they have done with the Lebanese Hezbollah.

The PMF and the Kurdish Peshmerga have confronted each other and fighting broke out a number of times. The PMF may be more interested in taking on the Peshmerga in the disputed areas between Baghdad and Erbil. Confrontations are most likely in mixed population areas of Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salahaddin. The PMF could become one of the tools for Iran and the Shia hawks to use against the Kurds. Former Prime Maliki tried to use the army, but they were not as loyal and responsive.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

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

Not all "Shia militia groups" are created equal. They are in general popular with the Shia population, but some are more beholden to Iran than others (especially Badr, Asa'ib al Haq and Kata'ib Hizbollah), and some are more beholden to Ayatollah Sistani. They will remain an important component of Iraq's security forces for the foreseeable future, preferably in as a reserve force. They are also likely to gain political and economic ambition as the war against Daesh ends. Some commanders may well leave the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs) to become candidates for parliament (as the new law requires) as well as ministerial and other official posts. Some PMFs will also go into business, possibly as private security companies and/or organized crime syndicates.

Iran will want its militia surrogates to gain geographic as well as political weight once Mosul is taken. I would expect them to seek to remain in Ninewa, Saladin, and Diyala, which are contiguous with Iraqi Kurdistan. Iran wants to prevent the independence of Kurdistan and limit its geographic boundaries if it occurs.

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Renaud Mansour

There are many sides to the PMU. Most of the fighters will either disband (as they're volunteers) or seek employment in an emerging state security apparatus. However, the more powerful groups, such as the League of the Righteousness, Kataib Hezbollah, and perhaps even Badr, may want to be part of a more autonomy PMU institution (see the law that was passed a few weeks ago).

Comment on Objectives of Shi'a Militia Groups in Iraq

Bilal Wahab

Washington Institute

Shia militia groups fighting Da'esh, collectively called Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), are now by law integral to Iraq's security apparatus. Hence, they are legal entities that receive funding from the national budget. It is evident, however, that their loyalties are to their militia leaders rather than to the state. Iran will continue to play a leading role in their sustainability, evolution and growth.

The immediate goal of PMFs is to capitalize on their military victories and translate them into political power. That is, they will morph into political parties and run for office in the upcoming elections. Given their momentum, Shia parties and media offer their support and deference to PMFs, and exalt their achievements. The evolution of militias into political parties will further militarize the Shia communities. So far, parties have had a militia. After Da'esh, militias will form political platforms. Such militarization will only strengthen the role and influence of Iran in Iraqi politics, given Iran's leverage and command of the PMFs.

Excerpts of NSI Team Telephone Conversation with Dr. Anoush Ehteshami, 12/12/2016¹¹¹

Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University, UK): ... Iran is now really aware of the negative blowback in the rest of the region for its presence in Iraq, in Syria, and in Lebanon with Hezbollah. The last thing I think they want right now is, with Daesh thrown out of Iraq, for Iran to be the new bogey occupying Iraq. That provides the Saudis and the rest of the Sunni Coalition a real grand card to mobilize the Sunnis in Iraq against Iran, to get Turkey on their side finally, and again, Iran does not want to play that bogey man post-Daesh in Iraq. The only way it can avoid that is to have the Coalition continue to underwrite national security over Iraq. ...

... For the RGC, they simply are in no position to be involved against Daesh in Iraq, partly because they don't want to rile Daesh any more than they have to. The last thing that they want is to be seen as a frontline against Daesh in any shape or form because that would just crystalize this Sunni-Shia dimension to the level that Iran would then have to be seen as a defender of the Shia agenda because the Sunnis certainly will not rally around Tehran in any kind of anti-Daesh coalition. So, the RGC is fully aware that they can't really, for practical and ideological and pragmatic reasons, manage a post-Daesh Iraq by

¹¹¹ Full transcript available on request to the SMA office.

themselves, and they're not going to go away. The Shia militias, which have been mobilized, are going to stay mobilized, partly because they're an important element, a pillar of Iran's own influence in Iraq now. Iran ... is not that keen on the Iraqi government either and is much more committed to working with the Shia militias to maintain grass root presence and influence, dare I say control, of the vast areas of Iraq which are now Shia dominated. So, it wants to work below that radar level rather than at the grand state level, and so, maintaining a lower profile is always the RGC's preference in these situations. This also suits the Leader because it can always give him closeable deniability as well.

[Iran] would love the Coalition to stabilize Iraq all the way to the borders, if possible, of Syria but not force or push an agenda that would disarm the militias, for example. They would see that as a direct challenge to their authority in Iraq. So, it's a combination, if you'd like, of political issues and security issues. So long as it's the Iraqi government that makes the requests of the Coalition, I think Iranians would be finding it very difficult to challenge it, in public at least; it may do it in private with the Iraqis, but not in public. Beyond that, I can't see the Iraqi government also stepping too much out of line against Iran's interests because they recognize that Iran is going to make a lot of trouble for them in Iraq if they felt miffed by whatever Iraq does with the Coalition.

Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI): Right, okay. So, thank you, and this actually is a very similar question that we got, which is what are the aims and objectives of the Shia militia group following the defective military defeat of Daesh?

Anoush Ehteshami: I think their agenda is somewhat similar to Al Sadr's agenda in, say 2004 post-fall of Baghdad, and that was to get as much control of government as possible, as quickly as possible. Al Sadr was, for all his faults, representative of a national voice and a very credible pedigree from this other tradition. These militias have little long roots in Iraqi political order, and so they realize once the war is over, they will lose their present Daesh in a sense, and they will need to find other ones. That would be, I think, to find a niche in internal security from which they could then begin to collect rent and from which they can begin to build their political base. I think in both of those instances, Iran is not going to be unsupportive of them. So, I see this Coalition...some of the Mohandis ... I think some of them are there for the money, for the fight, and for ideology and may very well go back there to the farms and what have you, but there will be others who will have tasted power will see this as an opportunity to consolidate, to build, to develop, and to enrich.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Do you know, or can you tell at this point which particular groups those might be or who they may be led by?

Anoush Ehteshami: I can't on the top of my head, I have information on it that I can communicate to you later, because there are hot spots. Some of them don't like fighting in some places, and they don't do it. They stay back, or they go in for a clean-up job, and there are others that are much more keen to come flying a Shia flag into Sunni heartlands and are determined to take control of those areas. Iran has shamelessly worked with all of this range of groups itself because it sees them as nodes of influence in the broader part of Iraqi society and community. I don't think it would be for Iranians to decide how many of them stay how many of them go. Some of them, of course, once Iraq is free of the Daesh menace, will be encouraged to move into Syria to shore up Assad. I think Iran will be very directive in pushing some of these guys westward into Syria, and again, I think this is fluid. It will depend on how the battle for Mosul

unravels and what post-Daesh fighting is left to do there. I don't think the Iraqi government is going to have much say or control over these guys. They obviously are alongside the Iraqi military units, but I don't think in terms of the chain of command, once they get in a battle situation, they'll necessarily be closely following the Iraqi government's tactic. I think they seem to be doing some of their own stuff. Some of it is very ugly as you know, some of it is kind of in keeping with the direction of travel as far as the Coalition and the Iraqi government are concerned.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: ... in Iraq, you have the different groups and parties, and the Shia militia, it's just too fluid you'd think to categorize in terms of any of the groups.

Anoush Ehteshami: I think [Shi'a Militia is] a shorthand, what we view as a Shia militia. I think, you know, some of them break down into neighborhoods or families even of individuals who get involved, and others are the ones who have spent time in Iran in the 1980s and grew up there and are not involved in the militias. It really is a very mixed bag of individuals who have come from many parts of Iraq, and some of them I suspect would just want to go back to where they came from once the call for liberation and this subsides and there isn't a battle to fight any longer in Iraq itself.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: It seems to me that there is a danger to using this shorthand.

Anoush Ehteshami: I agree with you. I think it is because some of these folks are in there for different reasons, even though normatively it might appear that they're all for the liberation of Iraq, for the Iraqi sovereignty, and the defeat of Daesh. I think they have somewhat different objectives in the last analysis, and post-Mosul liberation is when we'll begin to see this crystalize. I'm not saying that they're all under Iran's control. I think, again, post-Mosul liberation we'll see how much influence Iran has over these guys, but if there are those that want to carry on with a military campaign, I think it will be the Iraqi government which would encourage Iran to shift these guys into Syria because the government doesn't want to have a battle-hardened bunch of men carrying weapons driving back to Baghdad. ...

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. Elie Abouaoun



Dr. Elie Abouaoun is currently the director of the Middle East & North Africa Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace. He has served as director of Middle East Programs and senior program officer since 2013. Prior to that, he held the position of executive director at the Arab Human Rights Fund.

His previous positions include acting country director and program manager for the Danish Refugee Council in Iraq, as well as program coordinator for Ockenden International-Iraq and director of external relations for the Lebanese NGO arcenciel.

Dr. Abouaoun has served as a senior trainer and consultant for various international organizations since 1996 including for the Council of Europe since 2000. In 2001 he was appointed a member of the Reference Group established by the Directorate of Education-Council of Europe to supervise the drafting of COMPASS, a manual for human rights education. He further supervised the adaptation and the translation of COMPASS into Arabic, and its subsequent diffusion in the Arab region in 2003.

He is a visiting lecturer at Notre Dame University-Lebanon and Saint Joseph University-Lebanon on the subjects of human rights, civil society, advocacy and citizenship, and regularly contributes to publications throughout the MENA and the US. Dr. Abouaoun also serves on the Board of Directors of several organizations in the MENA region.

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.

Omar Al-Shahery

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

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

Dr. Scott Atran, ARTIS

Scott Atran received his B.A. and Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia University (and an M.A. in social relations from Johns Hopkins). He is tenured as Research Director in Anthropology at France's National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), Institut Jean Nicod – Ecole Normale Supérieure, in Paris. He is a founding fellow of the Centre for Resolution of Intractable Conflict, Harris Manchester College, and Department of Politics and International Relations and School of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford. Scott also holds positions as Research Professor of Public Policy and Psychology, University of Michigan; and he is Director of Research, ARTIS Research.

Previously, Scott was assistant to Dr. Margaret Mead at the American Museum of Natural History; Coordinator "Animal and Human Communication Program," Royaumont Center for a Science of Man, Paris (Jacques Monod, Dir.); member of the Conseil Scientifique, Laboratoire d'Ethnobiologie-Biogéographie, Museum National D'Histoire Naturelle, Paris; Visiting Lecturer, Dept. Social Anthropology, Cambridge Univ.; Chargé de Conférence, Collège International de Philosophie; member of the Centre de Recherche en Epistémologie Appliquée, Ecole Polytechnique, Paris; Visiting Prof., Truman Institute, Hebrew Univ., Jerusalem; Leverhulme Distinguished Visiting Prof. of Anthropology, Univ. of London-Goldsmiths.; Presidential Scholar, John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Scott has experimented extensively on the ways scientists and ordinary people categorize and reason about nature, on the cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion, and on the limits of rational choice in political and cultural conflict. He has repeatedly briefed NATO, HMG and members of the U.S. Congress and the National Security Council staff at the White House on the Devoted Actor versus the Rational Actor in Managing World Conflict, on the Comparative Anatomy and Evolution of Global Network Terrorism, and on Pathways to and from Violent Extremism. He has addressed the United Nations Security Council on problems of youth and violent extremism and currently serves in advisory capacity to the Security Council and Secretary General on combatting terrorism and on ways to implement UN Resolution 2250 to engage and empower youth in the promotion of peace. He has been engaged in conflict negotiations in the Middle East, and in the establishment of indigenously managed forest reserves for Native American peoples.

Scott is a recurrent contributor to *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Foreign Policy*, as well as to professional journals such as *Science*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. His publications include *Cognitive Foundations of Natural History: Towards an Anthropology of Science* (Cambridge Univ. Press), *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford Univ. Press), *The Native Mind and the Cultural Construction of Nature* (MIT Press, with Doug Medin), and *Talking to the Enemy: Violent Extremism, Sacred Values, and What It Means to Be Human* (Penguin). His work and life have been spotlighted around the world on television and radio and in the popular and scientific press, including feature and cover stories of the *New York Times Magazine*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Nature* and *Science News*.



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.



Dr. Anoush Ehteshami

Professor Anoush Ehteshami is the Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Chair in International Relations and Director of the HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Programme in International Relations, Regional Politics and Security. He is Joint Director of the RCUK-funded centre of excellence, the Durham-Edinburgh-Manchester Universities' Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW), whose research focus since 2012 has been on the 'Arab World in Transition'. He was the University's Dean of Internationalisation, 2009-2011 and was the founding Head of the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University (2004-9). He has been a Fellow of the World Economic Forum, and was elected in 2011 as a member of the WEF's foremost body, the Global Agenda Councils. He was Vice-President and Chair of Council of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) 2000-2003. He has collaborative

links with many international organizations, including the German-based Bertelsmann Foundation, the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, and the Gulf Research Centre, and has acted as Advisor and consultant to the International Crisis Group, and has been Governing Board Member of the International Dialogues Foundation in The Hague.

In addition to having published 21 books and monographs, he also has over 90 articles in learned journals and edited volumes to his name.

His current research revolves around five over-arching themes:

The Asian balance of power in the post-Cold War era.

The 'Asianization' of the Middle East and the wider international system.

Foreign and security policies of Middle East states since the end of the Cold War.

The impact of globalization on the Middle East.

Good governance, democratization efforts, in the Middle East.

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



Robert S Ford

Robert S Ford is currently a Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington where he writes about developments in the Levant and North Africa. Mr. Ford in 2014 retired from the U.S. Foreign Service after serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Syria from 2011 to 2014. In this role Mr. Ford was the State Department lead on Syria, proposing and implementing policy and developing common strategies with European and Middle Eastern allies to try to resolve the Syria conflict. Prior to this, Mr. Ford was the Deputy U.S. Ambassador to Iraq from 2008 to 2010, and also served from 2006 until 2008 as the U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, where he boosted bilateral education and rule of law cooperation. Ford served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bahrain from 2001 until 2004, and Political Counselor to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad from 2004 until 2006 during the tumultuous establishment of the new, permanent Iraqi government. In 2014 he received the Secretary's Service Award, the U.S. State Department's highest honor. He also received in April 2012 from the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston the annual Profile in Courage Award for his stout defense of human rights in Syria. He has appeared on CNN, PBS, Fox, MSNBC, NPR, the BBC and Arabic news networks as well as in the *New York Times* and *Foreign Policy*.

Education

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



Mr. Zana Gulmohamad. In February 2013 I began my PhD at the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield, UK. My research title is: "Iraq's foreign policy post-2003". I am a Research Fellow at the American University of Kurdistan. I have an MA in Global Affairs and Diplomacy from the University of Buckingham, UK, and a BA in Political Science from the University of Sulymania - Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I worked for six years (2005-2011) in the Kurdistan Region Security Council - Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

I had substantial responsibilities as executive manager and a security analyst in matters related to security, intelligence, data analysis, security technology, foreign relations (receiving delegations and official trips abroad) and teaching staff. My capabilities have built up over years of training and interaction with security and intelligence corporations, governments and their security and intelligence services. They include states such as the US, the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

My articles have been published by journals and think tanks such as Jamestown Foundation "Terrorism Monitor", The National, Open Democracy, E-International Relations, Global Security Studies, Your Middle East, The New Arab, and Middle East online. I have presented conference papers in the UK, the US and the Middle East. Please go to my website to view the links to my articles www.zanagul.com

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Dr. Karl Kaltenthaler

Karl Kaltenthaler is Professor of Political Science at the University of Akron and Case Western Reserve University. His research and teaching focuses on security policy, political violence, political psychology, public opinion and political behavior, violent Islamist extremism, terrorism, and counterterrorism. He has worked on multiple research studies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Syria, Tajikistan, and the United States. He is currently researching the radicalization and recruitment process into Islamist violent extremism in different environments as well as ways to counter this process (Countering Violent Extremism). His work has resulted in academic publications and presentations as well as analytic reports and briefings for the U.S. government. He has consulted for the FBI, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Intelligence Community and the U.S. military. His research has been published in three books, multiple book chapters, as well as articles in *International Studies Quarterly*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, as well as other several other journals.



Sarhang Hamasaeed

Sarhang Hamasaeed is a senior program officer for the Middle-East and North Africa Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). He joined USIP in February 2011 and works on program management, organizational development, and monitoring and evaluation. His areas of focus include political and policy analysis, conflict analysis, dialogue processes, reconciliation and post-conflict stabilization, and ethnic and religious minorities. He writes, gives media interviews to international media, and is featured on events and briefings on Iraq, Syria, and the Middle East. He provided analysis to NPR, Voice of America, Al-Jazeera America, Fox News Al-Hurra TV, Radio Sawa, Kurdistan TV, Kurdsat TV, Rudaw, Al-Iraqiya TV, NRT TV, Skynews Arabia, the Washington Times, PBS, and CCTV. He is a member on the Task Force on the Future of Iraq, and was member of the Rebuilding Societies Working Group under the Middle East Strategy Taskforce, both initiatives by the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. He regularly gives a lecture at the Foreign Service Institute on ISIL and Challenges to Governance in Iraq.

Hamasaeed has more than 15 years of strategy, management, and monitoring and evaluation experience in governmental, nongovernmental, private sector, and media organizations.

As a deputy director general at the Council of Ministers of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (2008-2009), Hamasaeed managed strategic government modernization initiatives through information technology with the goal of helping improve governance and service delivery. As a program manager for the Research Triangle Institute International (2003-2004), he managed civic engagement and local democratic governance programs in Iraq. Hamasaeed has worked as a planning and relations manager at Kurdistan Save the Children (1997-2002). Hamasaeed has also worked for the Los Angeles Times and other international media organizations.

He holds a Master's degree in International Development Policy from Duke University (2007) and is a Fulbright alumnus.



Dr. Renad Mansour

Since 2008, Renad has held research and teaching positions focusing on issues of comparative politics and international relations in the Middle East. His research at Chatham House explores the situation of Iraq in transition and the dilemmas posed by state-building. Prior to joining Chatham House, Renad was an El-Erian fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Centre, where he examined Iraq, Iran and Kurdish affairs. Renad is also a research fellow at the Cambridge Security Initiative based at Cambridge University and from 2013, he held positions as lecturer of International Studies and supervisor at the faculty of politics, also at Cambridge University. Renad has been a senior research fellow at the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies in Beirut since 2011 and was adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government Civil Society Ministry between 2008 and 2010. He received his PhD from Pembroke College, Cambridge.



Dr. Diane L. Maye

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

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

Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III,

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

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



Alireza Nader

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

Nader's other RAND publications include *Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry*; *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran*; *Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy*; *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*.

Prior to joining RAND, Nader served as a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses. He is a native speaker of Farsi. Nader received his M.A. in international affairs from The George Washington University.

Dr. Daniel Serwer

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

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

As a minister-counselor at the U.S. Department of State, Serwer directed the European office of intelligence and research and served as U.S. special envoy and coordinator for the Bosnian Federation, mediating between Croats and Muslims and negotiating the first agreement reached at the Dayton peace talks. From 1990 to 1993, he was deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Rome, leading a major diplomatic mission through the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War.

Serwer holds a Ph.D. and M.A. from Princeton University, an M.S. from the University of Chicago, and a B.A. from Haverford College. He speaks Italian, French and Portuguese, as well as beginning Arabic.



Dr. Randa Slim

Randa Slim is Director of the Track II Dialogues initiative at The Middle East Institute and an adjunct research fellow at the New America Foundation. 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, 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 co-founded in 2007 the Arab Network for the Study of Democracy, a group of academics and civil society activists from eight Arab countries. She is a member of the advisory committee of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's Peacebuilding program and a member of the board of the Project on Middle East Democracy. The author of several studies, book chapters, and articles on conflict management, post-conflict peacebuilding, and Middle East politics, she is completing a book manuscript about Hezbollah.

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



Steffany A. Trofino

Steffany 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. She has recently completed a yearlong country assessment on Iraq.

Christine van den Toorn

Christine van den Toorn is the Director of IRIS. She has over 10 years of academic and professional experience in the Middle East, 6 of which have been spent in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). She has conducted fieldwork all over the KRI, with a particular focus on disputed territories in Ninewa, Diyala and Salahddin, and has published articles and reports in leading publications like Iraq Oil Report, Inside Iraqi Politics, Daily Beast and Niqash as well as delivered talks on her research. Ms. van den Toorn has also conducted baseline reports and social impact assessments for international oil companies operating in the KRI and disputed territories, working with teams of student researchers from AUIS. She served in the United States Peace Corps in Morocco and holds an MA in Middle East History from the University of Virginia, and taught the subject at AUIS for 4 years. Ms. van den Toorn speaks Arabic, which she studied at Middlebury College, Georgetown University, the University of Damascus in Syria and the French Institute for Near East Studies in Damascus.

Dr. Bilal Wahab

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

SMA Reach-back



What are the critical elements of a continued Coalition presence, following the effective military defeat of Da'esh [in Iraq] that Iran may view as beneficial?

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

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

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

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

However, simply recognizing the ideal versus the real is not sufficient to address the question posed. When the question is essentially what determines the limits of Iran’s tolerance for Coalition activities in Iraq. Context matters. This is because Iran’s perception of political and security threat perception is not based solely on the actions of the West/US, but is the result of (at least) three additional contextual

factors: 1) the immediacy of the threat from ISIS or Sunni extremism; 2) the intensity of regional conflict, particularly with Saudi Arabia, Iran's closest major rival; and, 3) as discussed in SMA Reachback LR2 three-way domestic political maneuvering between Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Rouhani government. This should not be discounted as a key factor in Iran's tolerance for Coalition presence in the region. The Context can push the fulcrum point such that Coalition activities tolerable under one set of circumstances are not acceptable under others.

Iran's Concerns in Iraq

The contributors to SMA Reachback LR2¹¹² identified the following enduring strategic interests that should be expected to feature in almost any Iranian calculus in the near to mid-term. Relevant to this question these are: 1) expanding Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, and the region to defeat threats from a pro-US Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Israel and the US; and 2) eliminating the existential threat to Iran and the region's Shi'a from Sunni extremism.

The Ideal

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

In Reality

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

¹¹² The LR2 question was: *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?* The report is available from the SMA office.

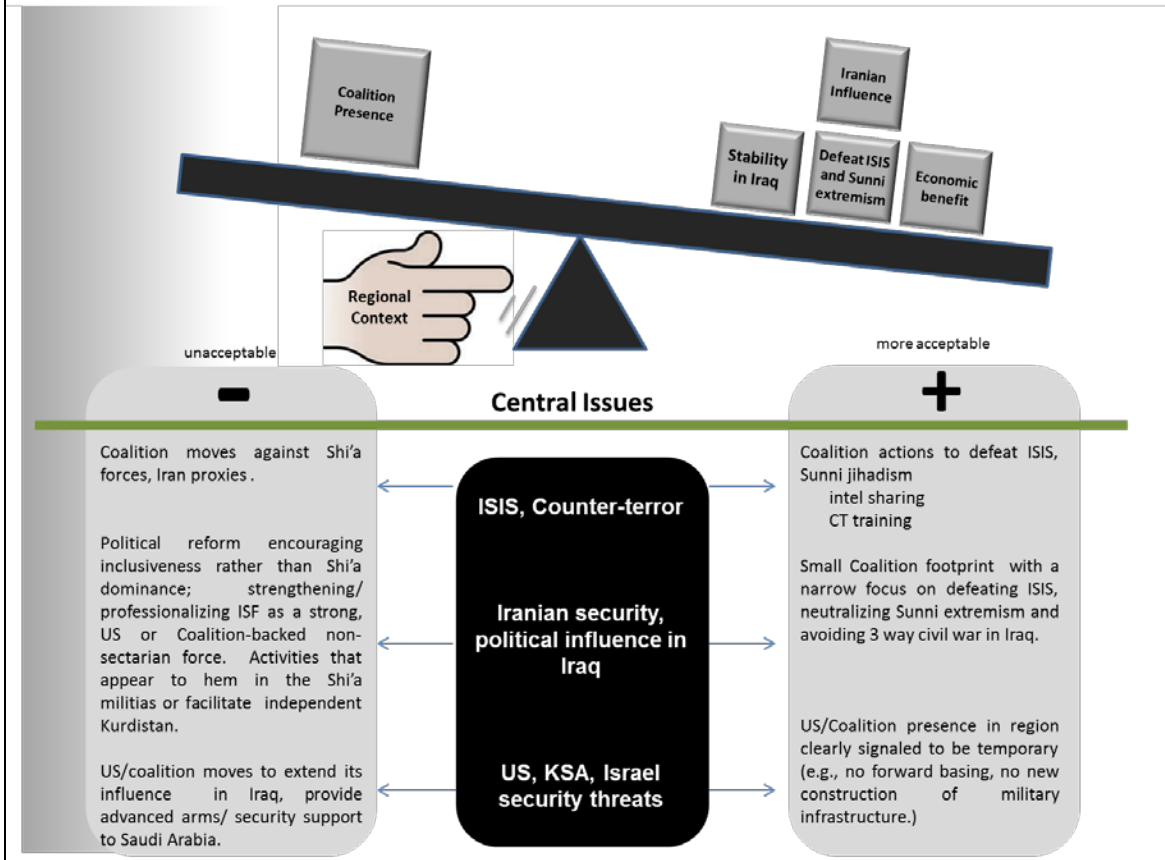
other interests (e.g., regional influence) become more prominent. The critical question is where the fulcrum point rests, in other words, where is the tipping point at which Coalition presence in Iraq becomes intolerable enough to stimulate Iranian action.

In a nutshell, Iran is most likely to find Coalition elements acceptable if they allow Iran to simultaneously 1) eliminate what it sees as an existential security threat from ISIS and Sunni extremism, and 2) expand its influence in Iraq and the region which is a pillar of its national security approach. Any Coalition element that fails on one of these is unlikely to be tolerated. Put another way, Coalition elements that defeat ISIS but derail Iran's influence in Iraq will not likely be seen as beneficial. Likewise, as multiple experts point out, Iran is aware that it cannot stabilize Iraq on its own regardless of how much influence it has there.

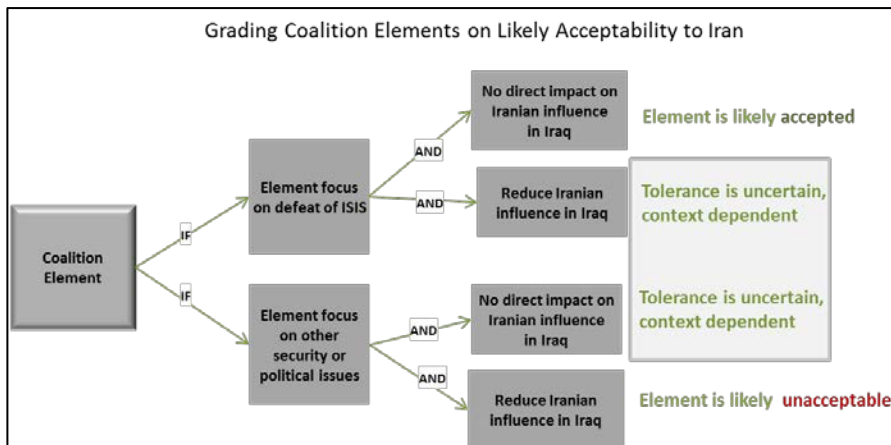
Summary

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

More and Less Acceptable Coalition Activities, at present and following ISIS defeat



Grading Coalition Elements on Likely Acceptability to Iran



SME Input

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

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

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

Diffused Regional Hegemony

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

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

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

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

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Omar Al-Shahery, Carnegie Mellon University

There are several political and operational advantages to Iran from the continuous presence of US forces in Iraq. However, it is important to note here that such benefits might not necessarily outweigh the disadvantages from the Iranian point of view; keeping that admonition in mind, here are a few:

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

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

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Alex Vatanka, Middle East Institute

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

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

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

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

¹¹³ Full transcript available on request to the SMA office.

much rather have the Coalition's presence than post-Daesh destruction, [they] withdraw and hand Iraq over -- as the Sunnis see it -- on a golden platter to Tehran.

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

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

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

Anoush Ehteshami: In many ways, to extend the Coalition's presence in what Iran regards to be its spheres of influence in and around the holy sites, the triangle of Najaf, Karbala and Hillah and also in the south round the Basra area where, unfortunately, Iraq desperately needs a Coalition to stabilize the energy sitting down there that is going to fly in the face of Iranian influence in that part of Iraq. The southern regions are now dominated by Iranian businesses and security offices and so on. So, the Coalition would seem to have two roles that Iran would not find sufficiently threatening. One is the security of the central government, the green zone, that they can't do nor do they want to be seen doing; and secondly, to pacify the Sunni triangle, that they don't want to be doing. The rest of it [Iran] would like to be allowed to get on with it, make sure that the ... sides are protected. They would love the Coalition to stabilize Iraq all the way to the borders, if possible, of Syria but not force or push an agenda that would disarm the militias, for example. They would see that as a direct challenge to their authority in Iraq. So, it's a combination, if

you'd like, of political issues and security issues. **So long as it's the Iraqi government that makes the requests of the Coalition, I think Iranians would be finding it very difficult to challenge it, in public at least;** it may do it in private with the Iraqis, but not in public. Beyond that, I can't see the Iraqi government also stepping too much out of line against Iran's interests because they recognize that Iran is going to make a lot of trouble for them in Iraq if they felt miffed by whatever Iraq does with the Coalition. ...

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

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

Allison Astorino-Courtois: This is the Iraqi government?

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah. ...

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

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah, no I get it. I think you're right. I think the second half is real interesting, actually. Yeah, and it is the 'how do' bit which I found interesting as well, Allison. I agree with you. You know, when you look at things like public opinion surveys and young, student-level correspondence -- blogs, and tweets what have you -- it's interesting that there is considerable support for the Coalition's effort to contain extremism, to combat Daesh. I think it's now very clear that that exists. What is also clear, ironically, is that the Syrian effort is woefully inadequate and therefore opportunistic. I don't think the Sunni community understands the constraints the US/Coalition has had to work [with] in Syria, and I don't think they even care to understand it because of our own propaganda about freedom, about human rights, about how bad Assad is and so on. They said all of that is posturing against what the Coalition has really done, right, and then they say well, they're only after their own interests, you know defending their own patch and sending in their own allies and are not really interested in the big picture of combatting, defeating, fighting extremism, and this narrative, it's the same narrative, Allison. It's both... "look at what the Coalition is doing, great", and "look what they're not doing. They're only doing it because it is in their own interest. If extremism serves their interest, they will even tolerate or even support extremism." So, it is really, really convoluted, and given that, these guys continue to thrive on conspiracy theories. They would not really believe anything that comes from the West and from a post-2016 US. They're going to have even less confidence in what comes out of the US. ... That's going to come into play, I'm afraid. Yeah, so that's going to affect their mentality of -- here I'm focusing on the Sunni communities in particular -- the Coalition's position on all of the Syrian problems, like Aleppo, like Raqqa, like Mosul and the rest of it.

You know, in some ways, some of them actually see target bombing, drone bombing as cynical rather than as lowering collateral damage.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: How so?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anoush Ehteshami: In my view, I think they're becoming oriental. I think they are deoxidizing, if you'd like, and again, this is partly Europe's fault who has dragged membership along the grass like a carrot for possibly half a century, Allison, and they're rightly asking, “Well, you know, when are we going to eat the bloody carrot?” Given the relationship between NATO and Russia, it must be remembered Turkey sits

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

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

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

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

Anoush Ehteshami: Yeah, I agree. Yeah.

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

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

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay?

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

Allison Astorino-Courtois: How does it do that?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anoush Ehteshami: My pleasure, Allison.

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

Anoush Ehteshami: I love you for this question, Allison, because I can plug my new book now. I have a new book that will be out January/February time called *Iran, Stuck in Transition*. I haven't wrapped up publishing yet, and it's available as an eBook, paperback also, and it's looking at everything, domestic, political economy, interrelations, security, and future prospects what have you, and my central argument in the international relations chapter of the book is that for all our perceptions of Iran marching towards this, if you'd like, the dawn of their hegemony for each of the areas that it has a presence, influence, and voice in, it's actually, at a strategic level, questionable and weak. Take Syria, for example. Iran was in support of the Assads from 1980 onwards, Allison. Right? The Iranian military has been in Syria since the 1990s because that's going to serve as a conduit for contact with Hezbollah and presence in Lebanon, and yet, when uprisings happen, half of Syria falls away, and it's only the Russians that can rescue Assad's crown, not Iran. Yet, over 1,000 Iranians have lost lives fighting in Syria, and if you believe figures, upward of 10 billion dollars a year have been sunk into Syrian war, money that Iran can ill afford. Where is hegemony in that? Let's assume that this pro-Assad coalition manages to recover all of Syria for Assad. long did it take Vietnam to recover from their American withdrawal after the withdrawal of 1975, Allison? This is the Syria that Iran is going to inherit. Where is the strength in that? Let's take Iraq as another example. For all of Iran's influence, presence, cultural affinity, empathy, and so on, when the chips down, where does Iraq go, the United States? So, you know, where is Iran's hegemony in Iraq when the

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

tell it, “Don't tell us what to do, thank you very much. We'll mobilize your Kurds against you”? When the Iraqi government comes to Washington asking for support to train its troops and not the Iranian RGC, where is hegemony in that? Where is hegemony in Yemen when all you have are ethnic groups, which are really fighting their own domestic battles, Allison? You know, the Houthis are not fighting to liberate Yemen against Saudi Arabia. Their goals are far more parochial than we give Iran credit for in that regard. Where is hegemony in Yemen? Where is hegemony in Bahrain when the leaders of the Al-Wefaq party phone to Iran publicly and say, “Do not speak in our name”? Where is this Shia present when the majority of the population in Azerbaijan who are Shia have absolutely no empathy with the Iranian system of government there? Where is Iran's voice in Afghanistan when it's the Coalition and the Pakistani government and now with the Russians, thank you very much, trying to cut a deal to stabilize Afghanistan? Where is this giant neighbor influencing the geo-politics in Afghanistan? You know, I don't see it. The only place where they have a role is in Lebanon, and that is thanks to Hezbollah, but the more that Hezbollah is indigenized, the less influence Iran has...

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Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Alireza Nader, RAND

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

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Sarhang Hamasaeed, USIP

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

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Renad Mansour, Chatham House, UK

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

Comments on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Diane Maye, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

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

If U.S. forces quickly disengage from Iraq after the liberation of Mosul and the defeat of Daesh, Iranian policymakers are highly likely to capitalize on the opportunity to provide aid, assistance, and economic support. Yet, Iranian interference will aggravate Iraq's Sunni population, who generally perceive Iranian actions as nefarious and misleading. To maintain stability after Daesh is defeated, U.S. policy makers and coalition forces should reject Iran's involvement in Iraqi affairs, promote strong, yet dispersed, self-governance, provide streamlined avenues for foreign direct investment, and actively work to secure Iraq's borders.

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

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

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

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

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

Some believe that the U.S. in particular should play a mediating role in promoting Sunni/Shia reconciliation, either officially or through unofficial "Track 2" channels. This would require a special envoy or high-ranking embassy official to be charged with helping the Sunnis form a political platform and getting

Tehran to allow the Iraqi government to engage in a U.S.-sponsored process. It would also require freezing the Kurdistan independence issue.

Comment on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Christine van den Toorn, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

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

Comments on Iran Perspective of Coalition Presence

Dr. Bilal Wahab, Washington Institute

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

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

Author Biographies



Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

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

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

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

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



Ambassador Robert S Ford

Robert S Ford is currently a Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington where he writes about developments in the Levant and North Africa. Mr. Ford in 2014 retired from the U.S. Foreign Service after serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Syria from 2011 to 2014. In this role Mr. Ford was the State Department lead on Syria, proposing and implementing policy and developing common strategies with European and Middle Eastern allies to try to resolve the Syria conflict. Prior to this, Mr. Ford was the Deputy U.S. Ambassador to Iraq from 2008 to 2010, and also served from 2006 until 2008 as the U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, where he boosted bilateral education and rule of law cooperation. Ford served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bahrain from 2001 until 2004, and Political Counselor to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad from 2004 until 2006 during the tumultuous establishment of the new, permanent Iraqi government. In 2014 he received the Secretary's Service Award, the U.S. State Department's highest honor. He also received in April 2012 from the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston the annual Profile in Courage Award for his stout defense of human rights in Syria. He has appeared on CNN, PBS, Fox, MSNBC, NPR, the BBC and Arabic news networks as well as in the *New York Times* and *Foreign Policy*.

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Sarhang Hamasaeed

Sarhang Hamasaeed is a senior program officer for the Middle-East and North Africa Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). He joined USIP in February 2011 and works on program management, organizational development, and monitoring and evaluation. His areas of focus include political and policy analysis, conflict analysis, dialogue processes, reconciliation and post-conflict stabilization, and ethnic and religious minorities. He writes, gives media interviews to international media, and is featured on events and briefings on Iraq, Syria, and the Middle East. He provided analysis to NPR, Voice of America, Al-Jazeera America, Fox News Al-Hurra TV, Radio Sawa, Kurdistan TV, Kurdsat TV, Rudaw, Al-Iraqiya TV, NRT TV, Skynews Arabia, the Washington Times, PBS, and CCTV. He is a member on the Task Force on the Future of Iraq, and was member of the Rebuilding Societies Working Group under the Middle East Strategy Taskforce, both initiatives by the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. He regularly gives a lecture at the Foreign Service Institute on ISIL and Challenges to Governance in Iraq.

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



Dr. Renad Mansour

Since 2008, Renad has held research and teaching positions focusing on issues of comparative politics and international relations in the Middle East. His research at Chatham House explores the situation of Iraq in transition and the dilemmas posed by state-building. Prior to joining Chatham House, Renad was an El-Erian fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Centre, where he examined Iraq, Iran and Kurdish affairs. Renad is also a research fellow at the Cambridge Security Initiative based at Cambridge University and from 2013, he held positions as lecturer of International Studies and supervisor at the faculty of politics, also at Cambridge University. Renad has been a senior research fellow at the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies in Beirut since 2011 and was adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government Civil Society Ministry between 2008 and 2010. He received his PhD from Pembroke College, Cambridge.



Dr. Diane L. Maye

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

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

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

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

articles in *InterAgency Journal*, *Special Warfare*, *Foreign Policy Journal*, and the peer-reviewed *Special Operations Journal*. He is currently participating in SOCOM SMAs on Intellectual Motivators of Insurgency and a Russian ICONS simulation.



Alireza Nader

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

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

Dr. Daniel Serwer

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

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

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

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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

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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.*"

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



Dr. Anoush Ehteshami

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

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

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

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