

SMA Reach-back Report

Extent of Iran's Ability to Influence Iraqi Elections

Question (R5.3): *How much influence can Iran wield in the next Iraqi election?*

Contributors

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Executive Summary

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Overview of Electoral System

Iraq is a parliamentary democracy and, as the April 2018 elections approach, political jockeying for votes and influence has already begun. Iraq has a unicameral house called the Council of Representatives (COR). As in other parliamentary systems, members of the ruling party or coalition choose the prime minister. So regional and domestic actors seeking to influence the election of a particular candidate for prime minister must start by ensuring its preferred political party or parties win enough seats to be in the majority.

Overview of Key Players and Parties

For **Iran**, its most important regional security priority is maintaining political influence in Iraq and Syria, according to Dr. Paul Rogers of Bradford University. Therefore, ensuring that a pro-Iranian government emerges from the April 2018 parliamentary elections is a critical interest for the country. According to Dr. Gawdat Bahgat of National Defense University and Dr. Anoush Ehteshami of Durham University, Iran does not view the conflicts in Syria and Iraq as foreign wars. It will not accept a Sunni dominated government in either country. Furthermore, Iran cannot tolerate a US-friendly government in Baghdad.

Iran wants to reorder politics in Iraq to remove the American military presence, according to Dr. Munqith Dagher of IIACS, an Iraqi polling firm, and Dr. Karl Kaltenthaler of University of Akron and Case Western University. Iran used to tolerate US military presence in Iraq, but now that Iran believes it can defeat the remainder of ISIS forces, it has begun to see US presence in the country as a threat to Iran's

security. US military presence is also a hindrance to its goal of securing a supply and influence route through Iraq and Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon, according to Professor Zana Gulmohamad of University of Sheffield. Some refer to this poetically as the Shia Full Moon, according to Dr. Diane Maye of Embry Riddle Aeronautical University.

While Iran's interest in the outcome of the election is clear, experts disagree about the extent to which Iran would take direct action to ensure a pro-Iranian outcome. One school of thought contends that Iran will do everything in its power to ensure a pro-Iran government emerges (Dagher, Kaltenthaler). Experts point to evidence of this interference in Iranian exhortation to ensure that Shia political factions remain united (Gulmohamad). Furthermore, Drs. Dagher and Kaltenthaler suggest that Iran is behind a strategy to undermine Abadi's power by accusing his allies of corruption.

The other school of thought suggests that Iran will not directly or overtly interfere in the elections as long as they are satisfied that their interests remain protected (Rogers). The political environment already skews towards the continued, if not increased, influence Iran enjoys in Iraq. An anonymous contributor from TRADOC's Global Cultural Knowledge Network suggests that Iran is playing a long game. It is unlikely to directly influence the election, but it will continue to pursue establishing a Hezbollah-like strategy in Iraq using Iranian-backed Hashd al-Shaabi (or Political Mobilization Units – PMUs).

Iran has a clear preference for the next prime minister. Within the leading Dawa party, there are two factions: the secular/nationalists lead by current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and the Iranian-backed hardliners lead by former Primer Minister Nouri al-Maliki (Dagher, Kaltenthaler, Maye, TRADOC). Iran is strongly backing al-Maliki and his associated hardline candidates in the upcoming election (Dagher, Kaltenthaler, TRADOC). Maliki is a natural ally of the PMUs who are increasingly registering as political parties and presenting candidates in local elections (Dagher, Kaltenthaler, Rogers, Serwer). While Iranian-backed political parties are building momentum, Abadi is drawing on the support of a number Iraqis uncomfortable with the extent of Iranian influence in Iraq (Dagher, Kaltenthaler). Additionally, Iraq's Arab national identity remains strong, and support for Abadi's more secular, nationalistic style of leadership is growing among Sunni and Kurdish populations (Abdulla, Dagher, Kaltenthaler).

Potential Outcomes & Futures

It goes without saying that Iraq has a very fluid landscape due to the maneuvering of new political entities and the changing security environment; therefore, it is difficult to forecast the results of or the degree of influence Iran will have in the outcome of the election, Drs. Dagher and Kaltenthaler note in their contribution. Furthermore, given that Iraq has a parliamentary system, much of the negotiations to determine which parties will comprise the ruling coalition and who will be prime minister will take place after the election. Perhaps the three most important actors are Abadi, Maliki, and the Sadrist party with Abadi or Maliki most likely to emerge as the prime minister (Dagher, Kaltenthaler).

Army TRADOC's Athena Simulation team conducted a futures analysis to examine the relationship between existing political blocs and the Iraqi population. They assessed the ability of various political coalitions to successfully form a government and to gauge the level of influence of foreign state actors on various political parties. While the study looked at seven potential electoral outcomes, one interesting thread was that Iran was only able to sway the election results by about 20% in some scenarios. This is a significant, but not deterministic, level of influence. Because Iran cannot outright determine the outcome of the election, minor parties such as the Sadrist Movement could become "king makers" (Liebl, Maye, TRADOC). The Sadrist party—a Shia nationalist party with an expansive

following—has had shifting alliances in the past (Maye). However, lately it has been building bridges to Sunni Arab and Kurdish populations to push back against Iranian influence (Dagher, Gulmohamad, Kaltenthaler, Maye). The Hakim party—the National Wisdom Movement—could also play a role in shifting the election towards one faction of the Dawa party or the other (Dagher, Gulmohamad, Kaltenthaler, Maye, TRADOC).

Implications for the US

Ultimately, there is little the United States Government can do to influence the outcome of the election except to continue support Prime Minister Abadi, according to Dr. Daniel Serwer at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. The United States' best bet for continued influence in Iraq is the re-election of Abadi, who wants to balance US and Iranian influence in the country (Dagher, Kaltenthaler). The most serious challenge to USG interests would be the selection of Maliki as prime minister (Dagher, Kaltenthaler). Maliki would likely push hard for the removal of US military forces in the country and further empower PMUs (Dagher, Kaltenthaler). This could enflame Sunni and Kurdish tensions, risking the stability and reconstruction of the country (Dagher, Gulmohamad, Kaltenthaler).

The biggest concern, which Dr. Rogers describes as “one of the worst negative outcomes of the war since 2003,” is the rising influence of PMUs on the government in Baghdad. These Iranian-backed militias have become an essential part of the Iraqi armed forces and their move to create political parties and seek seats in the COR enhances Iran's grip on the government. With whatever limited influence the USG has, it should encourage Baghdad to restrict armed militias from participating as political parties, according to Perry Cammack at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (see also Rogers, Serwer).

Expert Contributions

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This contribution was written in response to R5 #2 and R5 #4, but is included here because it pertains to the Iraqi parliamentary election as well.

R5 #2. What are the risks associated with the security situation in Syria/Iraq outpacing diplomatic progress and policy in the region? What should be done about it?

R5 #4. How should United States foreign policy evolve in the region post-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria? What are the dynamics in the region and what will be the implications of this for the USG?

Response:

For both questions, I will address the Iraq portion, as it seems interrelated.

A true Middle East expert would know that there is no certainty when it comes to predicting the course of event in the region. I often like to remind myself of this aspect when asked about matters related to Iraq and the region. However, there are current events and indicators at play that suggest several scenarios, none of which could be guaranteed.

First, we would be misled if we thought that defeating ISIS militarily in Iraq, would in fact completely eradicate the ideology of groups like ISIS and al-Qaida from those their strongholds. There will always remain a small number of core believers that will try to regroup and recharge by capitalizing on the Iraqi government's weaknesses, corruption, and dysfunctionality. However, a nationwide poll carried out by al-Mustakilla for Research Group back in April 2017 in Iraq, shows that for the first time since 2003, "Sunni Arab public opinion in Iraq is very positive about the political situation in the country, while the Shiite Arab view of politics has grown more negative."¹ 51 percent of Sunni Arabs believed the country is headed in the right direction, while only 36 percent of Shi'a shared the same views. What does this mean and how will it affect the upcoming elections and the Iraqi scene in general? Most of this positive Sunni sentiment could be attributed to the way the Iraqi Forces, particularly, Iraqi Special Forces ISOF and Counter-Terrorism Services ICTS (the "Golden Division"), fought against ISIS in Mosul and other provinces. Moreover, the way ISOF evacuated civilians, offered them aid, food, and medical assistance, while ISIS held them as human shields, left a very positive impression among those civilians. After all, those ISOF officers and soldiers are Iraqis, regardless of their ethnic or sectarian background, a sentiment widely reflected among Iraqis, particularly Sunnis on social media and other communication platforms. Video clips from Mosul showing kids with their families being liberated from ISIS, running

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/14/iraqi-sunnis-are-impressed-by-the-defeat-of-isis-heres-what-that-could-mean/?utm_term=.eb7bbc087b5a

towards ISOF officers to hug them and ask for their uniform badges and flags,² all of which are indicators of this striking positive shift among Sunnis towards the Iraqi forces and the government in general. What does this mean for the near future in Iraq? It means Sunni Arabs in Iraq, for the first time since 2003, feel the sense of inclusion, despite the hardship they endured living under brutal ISIS's control. After years of Sunni boycotts and rejections to join the Iraqi forces, we are witnessing a surge among young Sunni men who want to join the armed forces. Commanding general of Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service, Gen. Talib al-Kinani,³ in an interview with the U.S. based al-Hurra TV said that the ICTS had opened the door for young men to join the service, as the need was for 1000 new recruits only, but ICTS had received 300k applications of young men from all over Iraq to join their ranks. Among those are many Sunnis who saw a role model in the ISOF/ICTS that on one hand ferociously fought ISIS door to door in the old city of Mosul, and on the other hand evacuated civilians and provided humanitarian assistance. Another indicator, from the local level demonstrating the emerging positive view towards the ISOF and its celebrity-like officers, was reflected in the artwork of local young artists that were displayed in several of the recent local festivals.⁴ In the "First Reading Festival in Mosul"⁵ that took place in eastern Mosul,⁶ countless paintings of famous officers that led the offense against ISIS were displayed to the public. Among them were Gen. Abdul Wahab al-Saaidi,⁷ known to be a very humble officer, and who is loved by people of Mosul and Iraqis in general.^{8 9} The man is known to be of a Shi'a background, but that did not affect his status among local Mosulis. Same goes for Col. Haidar al-Obaidi, another ISOF officer praised and loved by the public in these liberated provinces.

Also, this positive shift in Sunni Arab sentiment will undoubtedly be reflected in the upcoming elections in Iraq in 2018. With a more active role and larger participation, the actual size and voices of Sunni population in Iraq will be reflected in the election's outcome, allowing for a more dynamic representation in the government.

Meanwhile, the negative sentiment expressed by the Shi'a reflects the majority's dissatisfaction towards the government's performance and its endemic corruption. The average Iraqi Shi'a is in fact suffering lack of services and is living in poverty. Most young Shi'a men left their daily jobs and joined the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) following the fatwa of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to fight ISIS. Whether they were ideologically motivated, already in uniform, or sincerely responding to the call of their homeland facing the danger that is ISIS, black signs mourning those young men killed in the fight against ISIS have been piling in Shi'a-majority provinces. In fact, the largest cemetery in the world, Wadi al-Salam, in the holy city of Najaf, has been receiving tens if not hundreds of coffins carrying the bodies of those young Shi'a men killed in the battlefield since 2014. Pictures of those killed, also known as martyrs

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75ZyFbr4CII>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BUH094KoA>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-jxNjJlcC8>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/mosul.festival.for.reading/>

⁶ http://www.huffpostarabi.com/hares-elabasy/-13261_b17942380.html?ncid=engmodushpimg00000003

⁷ <http://www.qoraish.com/qoraish/2017/01/%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3/>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tlj6gDA7Ayc>

⁹ <http://www.almadapaper.net/ar/news/534789/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%A5%D9%84>

by Iraqis, are hung on the poles of street lamps, large billboard and on buildings; and the families of those killed among the PMF often receive no compensation. Although there is no actual fighting in Shi'a-majority provinces, the burden, depression, and exhaustion of this war is clearly felt in these provinces.

It is safe to say that both Shi'a and Sunni Arabs bore the brunt of the ISIS-phase in Iraq and the price was too high for both. People realize that Iraqi politicians are behind what happened; however, if the Iraqi political scene will not offer new faces, then people will either boycott the upcoming elections or just surrender to vote for the same faces. With that being said, more and more Iraqi politicians are representing themselves as secular, non-religious and technocratic individuals. A way of rebranding themselves. One thing that can be noted is that both Shi'a and Sunni Arabs are satisfied with PM Ibadī's policies, charisma, and diplomatic maneuvering. Although the man falls under the prominent Shi'a religious Da'awa party, so far he has distanced himself from his party's objectives and has acted as a professional, secular, and skilled statesman. His openness to Iraq's Arab neighbors such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Jordan offered him greater legitimacy and respect among both Sunni Arabs and non-ideological Shi'a Arabs. They both view him as a man who has led Iraq to victory against ISIS, following former PM al-Malaiki's disastrous policies that led to ISIS occupation of one third of Iraq.

The Kurdish referendum and its outcome, and whether there will be a Kurdish state separate from Iraq has been a topic of recent wrangling between Iraqi politicians, which had regional and international powers involved. Despite the fact that an independent Kurdistan state could lead to possible conflict particularly on the disputed territories, mainly Kirkuk, those who are monitoring the news out of Iraq, can sense a united front among Shi'a and Sunni Arabs on this regard. This is a stance and an accord that hasn't been witnessed in Iraq since the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. This could have the potential of changing the Iraqi political scene drastically, regardless of whether the Kurds decide to proceed with their independence or stay within Iraq. However, there are several Sunni opposition groups, claiming to represent Sunni Arabs, who have announced their willingness and intentions to, not only support a Kurdish state, but to be included within its territories, that is the "Sunni-majority provinces." This is an indicator that Sunni Arabs are not quite united under one front, whether its tribal, political or religious. Since 2003, the Sunni Arab population in Iraq has always lacked a prominent leadership. No one group, political or tribal personality, can in fact claim to represent all Sunnis. Internal divisions within the Sunni front have always been present; between those who are part of the government, groups opposing the political process (inside and outside Iraq), and those who chose to resort to an insurgency-type of resistance. All this left the average Iraqi Sunni hopeless, frustrated, and vulnerable to the agendas of these competing groups, which eventually led to the ISIS occupation of their towns.

Everything seems to be happening in Iraq at once; the defeating of ISIS in its last strongholds, the Kurdish referendum, and Iraq's openness to its Arab regional neighbors and environment. It is safe to assume that Iraq might witness an Arab-Kurdish conflict, although not as serious as many experts are suggesting. On the other hand, there are many opportunities for the central Iraqi government to capitalize on and the world powers that support it. One of which is the Sunni Arabs warming towards the government and their positive sentiment and satisfaction with the way the government is headed. A vital aspect, that can prevent a resurgence of ISIS-like groups who have always capitalized on Sunni's anger, frustration, distrust, and dissatisfaction for years.

The U.S. government should promote a stable end state, by urging Iraq's political elites to reconcile and integrate groups who participated in the fight against ISIS into government's institutions, both Sunni and Shi'a. Let us not forget that the main triggering point that led most Sunni tribal fighters of the

Awakening Councils of al-Anbar aka (Sons of Iraq) from 2006, to go back into joining AQI which later became ISIS, was the failed promises made by al-Maliki's regime to integrate them into government institutions and offer them employment. Another opportunity for the U.S. to promote a stable state is by promoting the rebuilding and reconstruction of the destroyed provinces, mainly the Sunni-majority provinces that were once held by ISIS and have witnessed the most fighting and destruction. The Iraqi government has yet to compensate those who lost their homes because of the fighting, and most people are still living in either refugee camps or have gone back to live in the ruins of what used to be their homes. An opportunity for the Iraqi government to gain the trust of the Sunni population is by compensating them and allowing them to return to their homes after clearing these neighborhoods.

The international implications of a faltering U.S. diplomatic process would be incalculable but undoubtedly adverse to U.S. interests. A fully engaged Western diplomatic process backed up by a robust military force -- made clear to all that the will to use it is present -- is absolutely required. A diplomatic void will allow the Russian/Iranian axis to establish a permanent presence in Iraq (think the phase of post U.S. withdrawal from Iraq following 2011), and Syria and exercise considerable influence inimical to US interests in the region. The influence of the Iranian special military units and agents in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq is well documented. Their alliance, overt or otherwise, with Russian ambitions is palpable. Meanwhile Assad's war against ISIS is close to success, and he is beholden to Russia and Iran for his survival. The continuance of his regime will also increase tensions with Israel, some Gulf States, and certain segments of the population in Lebanon. Moreover, the defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq has not totally eliminated the threat, and in fact may make it more amorphous and difficult to combat. The largely Sunni extremist movements from al-Qaeda to ISIS have shown remarkable resilience and ability to rise from the ashes, as we've seen over the years. The huge expanse of desert between Iraq and Syria will continue to provide ample territory, hideouts, and possible strongholds for the extremists to operate and grow if not combatted ideologically, as well as in a vigorous counter-insurgency campaign, carried out over a number of years. Meanwhile, the Turks and Iranians, both with hegemonic ambitions in the region, will be rivals aggravated by the Kurdish push for independence. In short, the current power vacuum in the region will be filled by international and regional powers, none of whom can be considered friends of the U.S.

Gawdat Bahgat & Anoush Ehteshami: Iran's Defense Strategy

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[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

Nicole:

First I'd like to thank everyone for dialing in to the SMA CENTCOM speaker session about Iran's defense strategy. I would like especially to thank Anoush Ehteshami and Gawdat Bahgat for taking the time to present today. Professor Anoush Ehteshami is a Professor of International Relations in the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University. He is also 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, further, Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies (IMEIS) at Durham, one of the oldest and noted centres of excellence in Middle Eastern studies in Europe.

Anoush:

Dr. Gawdat Bahgat is a professor of National Security Affairs at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies. He's an Egyptian born specialist in Middle Eastern policy, particularly in Egypt, Iran, and the Gulf region. His areas of expertise include energy security, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counter terrorism, Arab Israeli conflict, North Africa, and American foreign policy in the Middle East. Now Anoush and Gawdat over to you.

Thank you very much indeed and good morning everyone, it's glad to know that there're callers interested in what Gawdat and I have done. Gawdat and I did a slight arrangement conversation of our own, so we agreed that I would kick off by providing a bit of a background and then Gawdat will bring us up to date with more recent developments and then we open it up hopefully to some fruitful conversations with colleagues across the table. Is that all right?

Nicole:

Sounds great.

Anoush:

Okay, so Iran's defense strategy. I think the starting point is what was happening before the revolution and how has it changed since revolution. Very briefly as you know much of the period 1970s was spent on creating a major conventional force by the Pahlavi regime.

Almost entirely dependent on the West and within the United States for hardware, Iran was purchasing hardware that was not available even to NATO, F14 Tomcat is a good example for that. I think the only other country with access to it at the time was Canada. Into the 1970s the plan of expansion was to continue into the 1980s and it was in the 80s that Iran would have developed by then a nuclear power program had the revolution not happened. There was considerable momentum built into the Irani military systems prior to the revolution. The revolution effectively halted virtually all of that for two reasons.

One was the revolutionary leaders no longer wanted to be a dependent on the West and the Shah had been. Secondly due to the policies and their behavior taking the American diplomats hostage for example, terrorism and such like, the US and the West decided to turn its back on Iran's military. In a sense they froze in time as far as the relationship with the West was concerned from 1979, 1980 onwards. The war started in 1980, September of 1980 and I think that has had a very dramatic impact on Iran's armed forces and on Iran's old defense strategy.

What do I mean by this? There are several ways of analyzing this. The first is that this was Iran's first conventional war in over 200 years. Iran has had skirmishes, had its paratroopers intervening in Oman for example in '74 to save the throne of Sultan Qaboos. Iran has sent some observer missions during the Vietnam War to South East Asia and it had exercised with Turkey and Pakistan and others. Iran Iraq war was the first time that Iran armed forces were actually engaged in anger. Many of their leaders of the military had already been killed or had taken exile and Iran had a very youthful command structure by now leading the war.

The second element was that Iran realized very quickly how expensive war is and how quickly its resources, the materiel get exhausted. They started drawing down all the stockpiles that the Shah's regime had built up but they were not able to replace this as quickly because of sanctions and because of Iran's lack of access to major suppliers in the west. The direct consequence of that was Iran had to cannibalize so much of the hardware that had been accumulated already first and secondly it began to find alternative ways of defensive and offensive posture. Many of the things that Gawdat will talk about have arisen from this particular dilemma that Iran was facing.

The third element of the experience of the 1980s, the war years, was that Iran felt almost completely isolated from the rest of the international community. Remember at the time the Soviet Union was actually back in Iraq, France was back in Iraq in the war, the US and the rest of the NATO was at best agnostic about this. What was actually leaning towards Iraq and Iran couldn't really get their supplies in place and had to find alternative ways of getting the supplies from third countries, and it is there that it begins to develop relationships with North Korea with Syria, with Libya amongst many other countries that

provided Iran with weapons which included of course Brazil and Chile as well.

This solitary lesson begins to shape Iran's defense strategy. Which was (A) not to rely as much on its commissioned forces and it had been. Secondly to invest heavily in a ballistic missile program that it can use offensively but also use it as a core deterrent mechanism. Thirdly to develop a massive military industrial complex at home to service the existing hardware but also for Iran to develop a whole range of new research and new weapon systems. Many of the fruits of which you're now beginning to see come into the surface in terms of the aircraft, submarine development, surface naval weapons as well of course the short range, the medium range, and now we have with the Khorramshahr missile last week what is effectively the longest range of missile that Iran has been able to develop.

The nuclear program went on holiday if you like from 1980 and while Iran's interest in a nuclear program continued behind the scenes it was actually back in 1984 that I can trace, where Iran began to think about revisiting the nuclear program that Shah had put in place. Iran initially talked to Germany who was not interested, France which was not interested and then started to talk to China and Russia as potential technology suppliers for its nuclear program. That took much, much longer to come on line and it was actually... well it was in 1990 and the end of the Iraq War that Iran felt comfortable with pursuing that line because many of you will know Iraq actually bombed the Bushehr power plant during the war, so it was hardly safe or secure for Iran to pursue that during the war years.

In the 2000, that has become the flash point of much of Iran's interactions with the international community. Within Iran itself, the nuclear program sits very comfortably in the spectrum of priorities and they don't put the nuclear program in their defense profile. Nevertheless, the core of the decision making structure is the National Security Council that is presided over by the president but has representatives on it from across the Iranian establishment. The leaders' office has two representatives on it. The defense minister is present, interior is present, where usually Revolutionary Guard leadership is present as well as their regular armed forces the Artesh. All of them in many ways collectively decide the pace and the fate of Iran's defense strategy. These decisions are not taken in isolation, they are not taken only by the leader, and the leader rarely makes the unilateral decisions without consulting the Supreme National Security Council or indeed his advisors who happen to sit on the council.

Beyond the council, you have other vested interests. The parliament is particular example of this, which has a very powerful defense committee that oversees Iran's defense activities. It was that committee that only three weeks ago voted to increase the defense budget of President Rouhani with a particular mandate of investing in Iran's R&D and ballistic missile development. You know this is not North Korea, the decisions are made much more broad based and there is a degree of

public discussions that filters both upwards and downwards in terms of what the priorities should be. I think that's about ten and half... eleven minutes. If I may I will pause there and hand over and I look forward to further comments later.

Bahgat:

Thank you Anoush and I would like also to thank Sam, Nicole, and Sarah and everybody who participated who helped us to put this together. Would like also to make it clear that our research is based on open sources available to everybody. I want to add a few points to what Anoush said, how Iran articulated its defense policy. It is very important to understand how the Iranians think, big part of it in Iran strategic thinking—their strong belief in victimization. There is a perception that the country has been abused by regional and global powers and has been denied what the Iranians believe is its rightful place. Basically that Iran was supposed to be the dominant regional power in the region and has been denied this by global powers from the British Empire to Russia to United States. This is how the Iranians think.

Another important point here also, the Iranians like everybody else, they watch what happens in their neighborhoods and take notes, learn lessons that Iran Iraq War—one big lessons the Iranians learnt that they cannot challenge the much more powerful American military. Another big lesson the Iranians learned from our war with Iraq was how United States was able to destroy Saddam's Hussein's army in very short period of time. Iranians failed each year is communication. The Iranians learnt that they should give the commanders in the field the power to make decisions, basically decentralization of decision making process.

In Iran as we put in our study, there are basically two military establishments, the traditional one that Shah Artesh and the Sepah or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard. Iran is not different from other countries. In Saudi Arabia we have national guards and traditional military, in Iraq it was the same. Basically one army with the responsibility to defend the country from foreign threats and the other army mainly to defend the regime. The main goals of Iran's defense policy is first to protect the country, second to protect its allies, second to prevent any attack of any received aggression and third to project power. The Iranians take great pride of their scientific achievement and they were to know about this. This is why there is over reliable connection between the three pillars we examined: the naval forces, the cyber capability, and the missile.

In the three areas the Iranian basically understand that in traditional war against US and its allies, they would lose. The Iranians learnt when their navy was destroyed by US during the Iran Iraq War at the end of the war when United States protected Kuwait and other Gulf states navies. The Iranians understand they're no match to US. This is why the small boats, they cannot destroy the United States but they make it very hard for United States to pursue its objectives. The same thing about missiles, the Iranians understand they cannot defeat the United States or Saudi Arabia by missiles, but they make the price high. This is why countries would think twice before going to war with Iran. The third

about cyber, Iran has been investing heavily in its cyber capability and Iran probably now is number four or five. The United States is number one, Russia China and Iran is not very far. Basically because cyber gives Iran other countries a great potential; it is much cheaper than conventional weapons, and it can make a lot of harm to the perceived enemy.

To summarize and I believe it's better to spend time and question and answers. I believe strongly that in any military conflict with Iran, United States will win. But it is important to define the concept win. What winning means. I do not believe there is winning at any price. Asymmetric warfare is war of will, it is how to make the perceived enemy pay very high price. The Iranian military strategy has succeeded making any military conflict very expensive, very costly. This is why... again, as far as I know, United States has the military capability to completely destroy Iran. United States has by far the strongest military force of the world, but at what price? This is the big question in my mind and what Iran has now and what Iran is investing in is making such thinking about going to military conflict with Iran very expensive, and they have succeeded. I will stop here and will be glad Anoush and me to take any question. Anoush would you like to add anything to what I said?

Anoush:

No, just on the line the points you've made.

Nicole:

All right, so thank you both. Now it's the time for question and answer portion of the telecon. If you have a question please make sure to state your name and your organization. If you're not asking any question, make sure your phone is still on mute. Do we have any questions for Anoush and Gawdat?

Question:

I wonder if the recent discovery that the Artesh has been involved in Syria if that reflects a new evaluation of the role between the Artesh and the Revolutionary Guards in this asymmetric warfare?

Bahgat:

For sure there is a great deal of coupe of the nation between them. There are two armies, two military establishments but they do not work against each other or in isolation of each other. It is clear that the Revolutionary Guard is better funded, better trained, better armed but also the traditional military has many advantages and it is also... it plays important role in the broad Iranian military strategy. For Syria, the Iranians do not perceive Syria as foreign war. It is Iran's national security, it is part of the Iranian military thinking, military strategy, which is interestingly similar to Israel. It is taking the war outside the country, not waiting till the country is attacked. This is one reason why Iran is involved in Syria in Iraq and Lebanon, to defend the country before the war comes to Iran.

Question:

Thank you.

Anoush:

Also I think the regulars are there because President Rouhani's government does not want to relinquish the Syria policy completely to the Revolution Guard. They actually want the regulars involved with this at the command level as well as, if you like, deployments to ensure that there is a degree of accountability and that the government can be

much more--if it can't pull this off--involved in determining the fate of Iran's involvement with Syria post war. This is a bit for a domestic re-jigging of deployment and priorities in terms of defense presence there.

Nicole:

Okay, do we have any other questions?

Question:

I guess we pretty much know what from the Iranian perspective what the nightmare scenario would be back to when they were facing a Saddam like situation. Obviously they don't want to go back there. Realistically, what are they thinking the Middle East would be like in the next decade or whatever, something more to their liking. I mean are they making realistic assumptions about what they would like the future to be or is this an ever expanding desire to control and kind of keep the conflict that would occur way away from their geographical borders. What's this thinking about the future for the region basically?

Bahgat:

The Iranians believe time is on their side. They believe in recent conflicts, they took the right side of history against Saddam Hussein, and then Arab countries and the United States turned against Saddam Hussein. Again the Taliban in Afghanistan and then they were to follow them, this is the Iranian perception, Foreign Minister Zarif just gave a recent interview and highlighted these points. In the future they believe eventually Arab countries and Western powers will accept their argument. The Iranians are a big winner of the conflict between Qatar and its Arab allies. The Iranians perceive the referendum in Iraq today as efforts by Israel and Saudi Arabia to divide Iraq to weaken Iran. For Iran also, there are many accusations that Iran is trying to intervene in Arab affairs' agenda to control the region.

I believe from realistic point of view, Iran, like any country, is trying to promote its interest in the region and around the world. In this case Iran is not different from any other country. Saudi Arabia is all the same, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, every country in the world tries to promote its perceived national interest. The difference, Iran's concept is that Iran is trying to promote Shiism—ideology is taking back seat in Iranian policy. Like revolutions all over history. In the beginning the Iranians were interested in exporting the revolution. Iran created Shia allies in many countries. In studying Iranian foreign policy and defense policy, it is a combination of ideology and national interest. Very much like American foreign policy: combination of American values and American interest. Gradually, ideology is taking the back seat and national interest are taking the lead. I believe Iran is trying to promote interest, trying to intervene, but everybody else does.

Anoush:

Yeah, I think that's absolutely the case, there are things that they are proactive about and there are things that like most of the countries they are in no better position than to merely react to it. I think if you take a ten year horizon, what was initially wishful thinking, say ten years ago, was that America will run out of steam, United States forces will find the region too troublesome, or that they'll be defeated, and that eventually they'll walk away from it and leave the theatre open for the regional, legitimate powers like Iran to acquire their rightful place. At one level you could argue that actually having waited, things are going their way.

That in many ways the Obama administration made it clear that it was not going to fight the fight of the Middle East and its problems. The Trump's administration is picking its fight very carefully, in some instances playing with fire as well. All they have to do is hold tight, from Iran's perspective, and they will ride away. The problem, however, is that there are too many moving parts in this theatre for Iran to control. That is when you see it behaving in some ways against its own national interest. For instance given that economy the priority, the last thing they want is the high defense budget, and yet that is exactly what they've had to do.

Given that economic development and creating and employment opportunities for the youthful population is an absolute priority for the Rouhani administration. He is having to celebrate alliances with other countries and rushing to defense of the North Koreans or in Syria and so on. There are these contradictions in the regime and it's partly because of this sense that it needs to prove itself to its own people but also through the region. Partly because it is really excited by the opportunity that are presenting themselves in two ways: one is this profound Arab weakness that the Arab world is so badly fragmented that there is space for Iran penetrate and manipulate. Secondly that by keeping itself closer to its Asian allies and that include Russia it will be able to push through an alternative Middle East separate from Americas grip. These things really do drive policy in Iran.

Question:

I guess the question I have, is there a stable situation that we could just be striving for in this region? Could we draw new boundaries and causes the region to become stable or work some other mechanism that would cause it to occur?

Bahgat:

Yeah. I would say the way I see the Middle East now, most Arab countries are going through a new phase, trying to reform their economic systems--the reaction to the Arab spring succession crisis and several gulf estates. The way I see it the modern Arab Middle Eastern countries are much more stable than the heart of the Middle East, the Arab world. Israel with all the reservations on Israeli democracy and the corruption cases against the prime minister. But Israeli is a functional democracy and close ally of the United States and there is a great deal of stability in Israel.

Turkey, despite the attempt failed coupe and how Turkey is moving away from democracy, but Turkey still is a large country with a lot of potential and what happened in two years is short period in a long Turkish history. I would say Turkey is more stable than most Arab countries. Iran, since the revolution, has held regular elections. For sure Iran is not Norway, is not the liberal democracy we would love to see. As Anoush mentioned, it is North Korea, it is Saddam Hussein. It is ruled by consensus, there are different factions. The Majles, the Iranian parliament, has very strong discussion debates about different issues. The president most of the time does not get his way even their Supreme Leader has some challenges. Iran has the largest hydro-carbon reserves in the world. I believe that for stability, as far as United States is

concerned, it is important to work with Israel, Turkey, and Iran. Give our countries the space they need to put their house in order.

Anoush:

I think the region is highly fluid and the fluidity means that alliances are temporary and that it's very difficult to draw any long term or even medium term perspectives on what might happen. While some places might appear stable today, they can very easily be dismantled tomorrow or fined for conditions under which the stability is then severely tested. Referendum today in Iraq Kurdistan today is an example of this. Though this is a symbolic political gesture the outcome we can anticipate as being very strongly in favor of independence. That will in itself have a ripple effect brought across the region and will create unintended consequence of itself. There is no particular group of countries or country holding the line anywhere in the region. That is why it is so volatile and that is why it's so dangerous for outside countries to try and intervene with the best of intentions to protect, to preserve, defend their national interest of their allies, because it is very difficult to draw hard and fast lines in these rather shifting sands that we find in the region. The countries, which have got strong internal structures, are the ones that are standing. They fall into two camps, the ones which have got popular legitimacy and which have got very strong Shia leadership. These are the only ones that are able to behave in way which is beyond their borders.

Question:

I have two questions, one is you've described as I understand Iranian strategy is primarily defensive in nature. One question is, because one person's concept of defense is seen as another person's concept of offence. What would trigger a more aggressive offensive move on the part of Iran? The second question is, what are they learning from the situation in North Korea? Thank you.

Anoush:

You're right, I think there is a fine line between defense and offensive and when you're testing a 2000 kilometer range ballistic missile that can suspiciously look as a very offensive aggressive act particularly if you're sitting in Israel and in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. I entirely, entirely agree with you. From their perspective though, they are showing off the capability that they're actually able to bring mayhem to countries that might threaten them. This is where I think they differ from North Korea. They don't have a death wish; they don't see escalation of a crisis with the United States in their national interest or in the regime's interest. What they would like to do is show off their capability in the hope that they will get a credible diplomatic response and not a military escalation.

What they seem to continuously miscalculate is that so long as the rhetoric is offensive, the rest of the world is now going to need to draw a clear distinction between rhetoric and reality. I think the judgment on that falls very much on the recipients of Iran's message. As you see the European countries are fairly comfortable with continuing to deal with Iran at very high diplomatic levels while Iran is carrying all of these military activities. While United States for its own reasons obviously isn't. Iran is therefore in a position to pick and choose a little bit here.

Again this differs very much from North Korea, which is now almost entirely isolated. I think Iran has never been isolated. Since the nuclear deal of 2015, it is positively integrated regionally and internationally. If you only saw the interactions that Rouhani and Zariff had in New York with other heads of state and foreign ministers, you will understand how engaged the rest of the world is now with Iran. Given what they've achieved so far, they're not on a suicide mission, they don't think that provocation at this stage is in their interest.

Again sitting in Iran if there is a clear revision of strategy in Washington, they're not going to sit on their hands. They want to do things that can influence thinking in Washington and to try and deter Washington from adapting a more aggressive posture towards them. The only way that they think they can do this is by show of their military powers. That is what they seem to be doing at this moment.

Question: Let me follow up real quick, what would you be doing if you were the US to get your desired objective, given what you just said?

Anoush: If the desired objective is not the regime change in Iran, then I would say, use the good offices of European countries to engage in low key dialogues. After all it's been done before, the nuclear deals effect is owed to the dialogue that the Omani established while Ahmadinejad was president for goodness sake. We know it can happen, I would say, use good access to Iran to open a back channel of communication.

Bahgat: If I may add to your points to what Anoush said, the line there between defensive and offensive weapon system is not very clear and what will force Iran to act like any country is there is a threat to regime survival. The Iranians like any other people, like any other countries, they are interested in keeping their regime in power. With this background I believe the Iranians will be very sensitive to and will not accept Sunni dominated government in Iraq or threat to Hezbollah in Lebanon or the defeat, not having access to Hezbollah, friendly government in Syria under Assad or somebody else. This kinds of Iran's redlines and basically the bottom line is the regime survival. For North Korea, as Anoush said, there are many differences between Iran and North Korea, probably just as president Trump's speech in UN and how the leader of North Korea reacted and how President Rouhani reacted. President Rouhani was very guarded in his response. He did not call name, he did not... he was very guarded and I believe there is a big difference between Iran and North Korea.

Another big difference, Iranian economy is much more diversified than North Korean economy. It is much easier to impose effective economic sanctions on North Korea. Talking about sanctions and what the United States needs to do to achieve its goals, I believe sanctions are counterproductive. They will not work; they will empower the hardliners in Iran. It is in the United States' best interest to have Iran integrated in its regional system to have Iranian economy developing strong, expanding middle class. Isolated Iran, poor Iran, stagnated economy in Iran is against stability in Iran's stability in the entire Middle East.

The nuclear deal is very important not to sabotage the nuclear deal. As many leaders at your end, many European leaders made it very clear that a nuclear deal is working. The nuclear deal also has lessons to North Korea. North Korea will watch if United States sabotages the nuclear deal, what is the point about reaching deal with US? The recent conflict with Qatar shows instead of trying to build alliance with Sunni Arab countries against Iran, which is not working, it is important to somehow find a way for Sunni Arab countries, Israel, Turkey, and Iran to work together. I believe it is not in our best interest to take sides in the Shia-Sunni conflict in the Islamic world. Sectarianism does not drive American foreign policy. We do not take sides.

Question:

Okay, my question is just going to take it a little bit more internal with the ever increasing reach of Iran globally nowadays. What have you seen or have you experienced in terms of what's happening with religious and ethnic minorities? Are they being able to access for instance high level positions in government, military as a result of the increased needs now that the reach is grown? What is your view of this?

Answer:

It is a lot easier for ethnic minorities to climb the ladder of positions than it is for religious minorities. Though the regime speaks about pluralism in religion and such like, actually the constitution is very specific about what it allows the minorities, who they are first and what it gives them, and it gives them a certain percentage and therefore certain seats in parliament that is numerically assessed, not universally. Once you do that of course then you're creating a two-tier system where the Shia population is by right a dominant population and not the other religious minorities. You will find then a practice, most of the positions are held by Shia population of Iran. When it comes to ethnic minorities, the country is actually very much better integrated. The boundaries of the ethnic group are less sharp than they were 30-40 years ago, unless geography plays a part in determining of the ethnic boundaries.

For example the Kurdish population given that they are mountainous populations are less visible in several layers of government than say the Turkish population. The Turkish population is large by any measure and they are present up and down the echelons of power, that's one. The other is some of the ethnic groups like the Baluchis for example are so remote from central powers that they tend to keep to themselves by and large. The same also applies to Iran's Arab minority population in Southwest of the country who also tend to keep to themselves. In more recent time though, we've had this convergence if you like of the grievances of those minorities who also happen to be Sunnis being articulated because of wider regional tension. The Arabs and the Baluchis are particular examples of this.

The government of Rouhani is quite sensitive to this. It is trying to address it. But the more that the states gives its population means of articulating their views, the harder it is for Iran to justify discrimination amongst the religious minority. That I think is something that will not go away and regional tensions would probably only deepen that. Ethnic

minorities, pending what happens in Iraq Kurdish, even though they occupy Iran's borderlines are... it seems to me much less politicized than you might expect and are not looking for independence or even autonomy from central government. The only case that seems to apply to is the Kurdish population who have been politicized for generations. And they continue to demand a degree of autonomy. They now have the rights of the language for example and media in Kurdish language but that doesn't give them the political leverage that they want. Central government of Iran is like most of its neighbors and it's terrified of giving up any of the levers of powers that it holds. Clearly they're in a bind in terms of how to accommodate the needs, the interest of the minorities without appearing to be weak at the center.

Bahgat:

I would add, Iran has one of the oldest nation states in the world, has very strong national identity and Iran is probably more sensitive to ethnic minorities. The only Kurdish state ever existed was in Iran 1946 for a very short period of time when Soviet Union supported it and the Iranian reaction to the referendum in Kurdistan today also shows their concern about the Kurdish question. For religious and sectarian minorities, Iran is much more tolerant than most of its Arab neighbors. Iran has the second largest Jewish community in the Middle East after Israel. For sure there are claims of discrimination, but Jewish community in Israel is represented in the Iranian parliament. Christians also enjoy religious freedom or they can practice their religion. Christians and Jews in Iran can drink alcohol; it is legal in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There is a great deal of tolerance towards religious minority in Iran.

Nicole:

Question:

All right, do you have any other questions?

I would like to shift our attention towards the East. I read every once in a while that Iran plays a key role in Chinese thinking about OBOR... this one belt, one road strategy. While we're preoccupied what's happening to the west of Iran Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, all of that, slowly we will wake up and find out that China is playing a very predominant role in Iranian economy and its relationship with Iran and all the countries in between.

Bahgat:

The Iranians perceive the 21st Century is an Asian century and from American European perspective this is not completely accurate. We are still very important player. It is true the Chinese economy has been the first growing economy in the last 20, 30 years or so. In some other countries the perception is Asian powers, especially China, and to a less degree India are on the rise. Already Iran has very close relationship with China and Iran is part of this one belt initiative. Probably from American perspective, I believe we should not see it as zero sum game, it is either China or the West. United States does a lot of trade with China and other countries. The bottom line is Iran kind of gave up on United States. Iran has not given up on Europe. After the nuclear deal Iranian European Cooperation is growing at a high speed. Iran is working very closely with Asian powers China, India, Japan, South Korea and Russia for sure. From American perspective, again, it is not zero sum game and we can work together. Anoush would you like to add anything to it?

Anoush:

Iran started the revolutionary regime with the slogan of neither east nor west in an attempt to carve for itself a third way. In many ways its policies in the 80s and also this desire to put a distance between the country and the west inevitably has pushed it eastwards. The sanctions throughout the 80s and the 90s and 2000s have meant that every time Iran has tried to take a step forward, it has been almost compelled to look eastwards to try and make a headway. These have over time become much more structural in the way that played out.

Had China and East Asia and India not risen so fast economically as they have done, that might have just remained one of the parallel areas that Iran would have worked with. Given what has happened globally and given the rise of East Asia and South Asia as this new potential power houses in case of India certainly. Iran feels again like its landed on its feet. That being West Asia is most important economy gives it by right and natural seat at the high table in Asia and gives it going forward in the 21st century, the future of Asia. They are very much dependent on the development of Asia for their own prosperity. Bahgat has rightly said, Iran will not turn its back on the West if it doesn't have to and it will continue to look to Europe and it would like to look to United States for high-tech engagement. The US would lose Iran by itself not because Iran wants to work it from the United States. All you have to do is look at the European gains in just two years since the nuclear deal, to appreciate the opportunities that are being opened up.

Question:

Thanks very much for this presentation. I think it's extremely important considering that we often don't really talk about Iran and its interest and how we can engage more and I really appreciate the high tech engagement point that you just made. I think that these are areas where we can take advantage after this deal. I think one of the questions I have are two-fold. I will say that I'm not sure that Israel is a stable actor in any part of the Middle East considering it's also supporting the independence of the Kurds but you guys could think about that and... in my perspective at least in studying this for a long time and watching this situation for a long time, it seems to be that Iran in particular and really in the past several years is that Zariff, has been very forthcoming and how they feel, how they're acting, why they're acting in certain ways and they haven't really hid anything. They've talked about why they're testing ballistic missiles. Why they're acting defensively militarily, why they're in Syria. I mean that is just this weekend on Fareed Zachariah was talking about why they're in Syria and why they're supporting Hezbollah, Palestinians etc.. I guess my surprise is that they have been very clear and we've not very understood and from your purview, can you see what's happening in the US administration or US foreign policy decision makers about why this is the case? It seems that Iran is very pragmatic and it's Saudi Arabia and others that seems to be continuously misleading us in the region. I'd appreciate that, thank you.

Bahgat:

Thank you Anoush. Iran has very sophisticated soft power; to some extent I believe it's almost unfair to compare Iran with its Gulf Arab

allies. Iran is one of the oldest, has the civilization and very sophisticated, well educated population and the Iranians are very proud of their culture and it's amazing to follow how Iran tries to get its message out. Iran has many newspapers posted online in English. They're very interested to let the world know how they think, their opinions. Comparing for example with Arab countries, most Arab countries now have one or two English newspapers online. The Iranians has tens. Iranian movie industry is another example of this first power. Iran won the Oscar twice. The Iranians are very sophisticated in getting their message out. Foreign minister Zarif spent a great deal of his time giving interviews to American and European media. Again this is what I refer to the concept of victimization--who are, rightly or wrongly, the perception who are victim and we want the world to know about our case.

Anoush:

I think it's a fair enough question, why does the US see Iran differently compared to the rest of the world and I think there is the kind of historical parallels. Look how long it took for the US to establish relations with its closest neighbor Cuba, for example. Look how long it took for the Unites States to be able to heal the wounds opened during the Vietnam War, another example.

Look how tense relations continue to be between US and Russia, US and China as well. I think these things will take time. There is a particular problem in Washington and that is Congress seems to continue to harbor a very negative perception of Iran. Some Congress men and women who have tried to be more valiant and indeed as you know they've actually travelled there in order to try and break this log jam and they have not managed to do so. So long as that what seems to be ideological hostility in Congress continues, I can't see any way anyone in the white house with all the goodwill in the world who can change the elite mindset in United States.

Then you ask where that needs to be done, probably I think Iran can make some gestures to realign American thinking if you like. You could argue that both Prime Minister Zarif and President Rouhani have tried in their own way of course to do this but they have not been able to reach or get the message across clearly enough for it to make an impact in Washington. Given that they have flown the American flag, they have let the American flag sit beside the Iranian flag. A flag that they have been burning and defacing for years, both very clear signal to me that they are ready to respect American state. Not just this notion of American people. It's a question of, how can then they be encouraged to develop that because there would inevitably be a backlash from Iran's own hardliners against any softening oppositions with the United States. They need a bit of a rope that they can climb out of this hole and that rope seems to be held by Congress in Washington and not by the White House. There is a degree of adjustment therefore that needs to take place there but also on the Iranian side. So long as Iran continues to abuse Israel, it would be very difficult for anybody to speak in its behalf or highly of it in America and get away with it. We have structural

problems on both sides and both seem to become prisoners of their own ideological positions.

Question: One follow up question about the discussions we had earlier on North Korea. Do you guys see collusion with or working with between Iran and North Korea, do you think the two are working together in ballistic missiles and or the nuclear front?

Bahgat: For sure, based on open sources there has been military cooperation especially in the area of missiles between Iran and North Korea. Again our research was based on open sources. I suppose all countries have classified information, but based on open sources I am comfortable saying that there is a great deal of cooperation between North Korea and Iran. How deep is the cooperation, I do not know.

Question: Why are they cooperating?

Anoush: I don't think that it's as easy for them to collude as it is for them to cooperate. Iran has never hidden the fact that it's actually got considerable amount of knowhow from North Korea. That its interest in its missiles seem to shadow each other on so many levels. Also Iran has economic ties with North Korea as well, that the current leader when he was president, established way back in the 1980s and so he's very proud of the connections that he's made with North Korea.

Nicole: All right, well it looks like we've reached the end of our session. I'd like to thank everyone for calling in and I'd like to thank Anoush and Gawdat for giving this fast presentation. Thank you.

Bahgat: Thank you.

Anoush: Thank you very much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

Perry Cammack

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This contribution was written in response to R5 #4, but is included here because it pertains to the Iraqi parliamentary election as well.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the ISIS caliphate in Syria and Iraq, two objectives will be paramount. Preventing the emergence of an ISIS successor capable of waging international jihad, the first and most immediate objective, is achievable through a continued, though limited, U.S. military engagement in both countries. Iranian influence in Iraq and Syria is not, in and of itself, a strategic threat. However, to the extent that such influence is used to support radical non-state actors, threaten regional partners (including Israel), and undermine regional stability, the United States should seek to reduce it through a concerted regional diplomatic effort and strategic patience, while recognizing its severely constrained ability to influence the internal politics in those two countries. Because political circumstances are different in Iraq and Syria, each country will be treated separately.

IRAQ

The immediate goal is to prevent the emergence of ISIS successor groups capable of waging international jihad against the United States or U.S. interests. ISIS remnants will survive the caliphate's physical collapse, and likely evolve toward a decentralized network of semi-autonomous cells. The extent to which ISIS successors threaten U.S. interests will depend significantly on their organization and strategic objectives, and US should tailor its response accordingly. There has been considerable evolution of jihadist objectives. While al-Qaeda prioritized attacks the “far enemy” – the United States – beginning in the 1990s, the Islamic State focused instead on territorial expansion within Iraq and Syria. A decentralized ISIS successor would be more resilient, but would likely have less capacity—and possibly less desire—to execute strategic attacks against Western interests and could possibly prioritize local targets.

While it is not possible to eliminate Iranian influence in Iraq, fears of Iranian domination are overblown. Iraq has a strong interest in maintaining cordial relations with Iran, and under almost any conceivable scenario Iran will exert some influence there. But the sense of Iraqi nationalism is tangible among most Shia politicians. Even the stridently anti-American Muqtada al-Sadr has resisted Iranian influence inside Iraq. Overtime, the more confident Baghdad feels of its physical and political security, the less susceptible it will be to Iranian influence.

The guiding premises for U.S. policy in Iraq should be continued presence and support for Iraqi security institutions. A limited follow-on U.S. military presence can greatly reduce the three most significant threats facing Iraq: a repeat of the 2014 collapse in Mosul against ISIS, a Lebanon scenario in which the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) gradually supplant the army, and the possibility of a Kurdish-Arab military confrontation. However, given the difficult U.S. history in Iraq, this presence should be modest in numbers, public profile, and mission. The PMF will be the biggest threat to Iraq's sovereignty and are the most important vector for Iranian influence. While there are likely to be concerted efforts by Iranian-supported parties to push for an American withdrawal, the circumstances are more favorable to a continuing American presence under PM Abadi in 2017 than they were under PM Maliki in 2011.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Continue U.S. support for the Iraqi army.** Iraq's counterterrorism capacities have atrophied since 2011 and are in particular need of support.
2. **Support increased local autonomy in Mosul and other Sunni majority areas.**
3. **Divide and conquer the Popular Mobilization Forces.** Elements of a comprehensive, Iraqi-led approach might include:
 - Incorporating PMF into local security forces in their areas of origin
 - Implementing a DDR campaign which employs former militia members in large-scale reconstruction or infrastructure projects
 - Reducing the ability of militias to compete in elections unless first disarming
4. **Encourage continued Baghdad-KRG dialogue on Kirkuk, disputed internal boundaries, and federalism,** while recognizing that this is a problem to be managed rather than solved.
5. **Encourage Iraq to increase its regional diplomatic efforts.** Continued Iraqi engagement with Arab states could reduce the alienation of Iraqi Sunnis and possibly make Iraq less susceptible to Iranian interference over time.
6. **Keep the US presence in Iraq out of the public eye.** Overt displays of American influence – either political or military – should be avoided to the extent possible.

SYRIA

The Syrian terrorism threat cannot be eliminated, but it can be reduced through a continued partnership with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Syria will remain fertile ground for jihadi terrorism for the foreseeable future, and the situation in eastern Syria will remain fraught – politically, economically, and otherwise – for the foreseeable future. A political solution to the Syrian civil war would reduce geopolitical tensions and undermine local support for extremist organizations, but does not appear forthcoming. U.S. support for the Kurdish-led SDF creates serious complications in US-Turkish relations and exacerbates Arab-Kurdish tensions. However, the U.S. has at present no practical alternatives to continued partnership with the SDF. A physical, though limited, U.S. presence can reduce the scope for Turkish-Kurdish conflict in Syria and deter, at least in part, regime encroachment in east of the Euphrates.

Iranian influence in Syria will remain significant for the foreseeable future. Economic sanctions – which were instrumental in achieving the JCPOA – are unlikely to have the same impact in Syria and the U.S. will not be able to rally a similar global coalition. Meanwhile, decades of US sanctions against Hezbollah have not fundamentally slowed its military and political ascendancy in Lebanon. Israel is likely to pursue a more aggressive posture against Iran and Hezbollah. To a limited degree, this should be tolerated through close political and security consultation with Israel. However, Israel needs to be urged to take care to avoid war with Hezbollah, which could conceivably lead to armed conflict between the U.S. and Iran, and which would have highly negative consequences for US and the region. Diplomatic engagement with Moscow should highlight the risk that Russia faces in the south in the event of renewed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

Although short-term U.S. options for challenging Iran are limited, it may be possible to somewhat mitigate the impact of Iranian influence, over time. Having consolidated control over much of Western Syria, the Assad regime – which remains secular in orientation – may seek to establish a degree of independence from Iran, as it has already done with Russia. Furthermore, unlike in Lebanon, there are not natural domestic political constituencies for Shia militants in Syria. Iranian and Russian financial

support is unlikely to be adequate for large-scale reconstruction efforts in Syria. The support of international financial institutions, Western and Arab governments will eventually be necessary, giving the US meaningful financial leverage. The U.S. should use this leverage to continue to push for a political settlement for the Syrian civil war.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Maintain relationship with the SDF.** The partnership provides a platform for continued CT operations in eastern Syria.
2. **Work to promote international consensus on Syrian reconstruction.** Although Europe may be keen to begin reconstruction (to reduce flow of refugees), international support of reconstruction should be made conditional on a political settlement and seek to box out Iranian-supported militias, to the extent possible.
3. **Support decentralization to empower local political actors.**
4. **Coordinate closely with Israel.** However, care should be taken to avoid another Israeli conflict with Hezbollah.
5. **Increase engagement with Lebanon.** International pressure against Hezbollah is likely to grow in the coming months, so increased U.S. engagement could reduce the scope for instability or political violence in Lebanon.
6. **Prioritize support for border security and intelligence cooperation in neighboring countries.** There is likely to be a terrorist threat emanating from Syria for some time, so continued efforts to bolster countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq will be required.

Munqith Dagher & Karl Kaltenthaler

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IIACSS

How Much Influence Can Iran Yield in the Next Iraqi Parliamentary Election?

Iran will exert all possible influence to achieve its desired outcome in the crucial Iraqi parliamentary elections in April 2018. Iran seeks to re-order politics in Iraq in order to remove or severely limit an American military presence in the country. Iran also seeks to increase its domination of Iraqi politics to the point where Iraq would become a rump-state of Iran. Iran also aims to achieve a secure land corridor from its borders through Iraq and into Syria and Lebanon so that it can supply Hezbollah and its other allies in those two countries. An American presence in the country limits Iran's ability to achieve its strategic goals in Iraq.

The reason why Iran is changing its strategy from tolerating the US military presence in Iraq and supporting the government of Haider al-Abadi is that with ISIL facing military defeat in Iraq, Iran no longer believes it needs to have the help from the US to defeat ISIL in Iraq and a continued US military presence in the country is a threat to its national security interests. Abadi facilitated the US presence in the country and helped placate Sunni Arabs and Kurds in the battle against ISIL. These things are no longer needed or wanted in the Iranian leadership's current estimation.

Iran seeks to get its allies and surrogates into key positions of power in Iraq, particularly as the prime minister. Iran seeks to replace Abadi with Nouri al-Maliki or one of his surrogates. Maliki is the most powerful pro-Iranian politician in Iraq, and will solidly back Iran's sectarian agenda in the country. Iran is strongly backing Maliki's efforts to replace Abadi. This includes funding to help Maliki's political efforts, particularly patronage hand-outs.

Maliki has used his position in the Iraqi parliament to attack Abadi and his cabinet members. Some cabinet members have had to resign because of corruption allegations and political maneuverings by Maliki's people in parliament. This is Maliki's strategy, endorsed by Iran, to weaken Abadi in the run-up to the April 2018 elections.

Another, important grouping of political surrogates of Iran are the Shi'a Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs). Several of them have registered as political parties and will contest the April 2018 election. While Sunnis view them with deep suspicion, Shi'a Arab Iraqis tend to view the PMFs very favorably and give them quite a bit of credit for defeating ISIL. These PMF/political parties are generally allied with Maliki and are very staunchly pro-Iranian. They are advised, funded, and given political support by the Iranian regime. If they do well in the April 2018 elections, they will lend considerable support to Maliki's attempt to wrest power from Abadi.

But there are limits to Iranian influence efforts in Iraqi politics now. Most Iraqis are very aware that Iran seeks to move into the vacuum left after the defeat of ISIL and the likely American draw-down. Even some important, relatively pro-Iranian members of the Shi'a camp have expressed their unease at this

potential scenario. They are nationalistic enough and have a strong enough Arab identity that that they do not want Iraq to become a rump state to Iran.

Haider al-Abadi falls firmly into this camp. He has attempted to balance the US and Iran throughout his tenure as prime minister and knows that Iran is trying to force a tilt in its favor. While under attack from Maliki and his allies, Abadi is seeing increasing support from Sunnis and some Kurds who see him as a major factor in the military defeat of ISIL in Iraq. They also view Abadi as the best hope of keeping increased Iranian influence in Iraq at bay, given that such influence is viewed as threatening by Sunni Arabs and Kurds in Iraq. In general, Abadi's stature has risen nationwide because of the defeat of ISIL, something for which he gets significant credit. But Abadi must distance himself from Maliki in order to secure the support of those Iraqis who view Iran as a threat. Both men are in the same political party, al Dawa, which Maliki leads, and Abadi has not yet formally declared himself a candidate contending against Maliki and his supporters.

There are other prominent Shi'a politicians who do not want Iran to gain more influence in the country. Moqtada al-Sadr, who is a nationalist Shi'a cleric with an expansive and growing following, is working hard to build bridges to Sunni Arabs and Kurds while, at the same time, not alienating his Shi'a base. He is a bit of a wildcard but will not serve Tehran's agenda well.

Ammar al-Hakim, another prominent Shi'a cleric with a large following, was staunchly pro-Iranian but seems to be distancing himself somewhat from Iran. It is nothing like a break with Tehran, but he is championing Iraqi interests in much the same tone as those who fear Iranian domination after the April 2018 election.

Given all of the new political entities and political maneuvering going on in Iraqi national politics now, it is a very fluid landscape. It is very difficult to forecast the results of the April 2018 parliamentary election at this point. It is even more difficult to forecast the outcome of the inevitable negotiations that will follow that will determine who the next prime minister will be.

Abadi has a good chance to retain his prime minister position, but it is hardly a forgone conclusion given the concerted Iranian effort to unseat him and his continued ties to Maliki. The most important players in the upcoming election will be Abadi, Maliki, and Sadr. Abadi or Maliki (of his surrogate) will most likely emerge from the election process as prime minister.

Who is the prime minister following the April elections has tremendous importance for Iraq and US national security interests. In short, Maliki would be a serious challenge for post-ISIL national reconciliation in Iraq and could inflame Sunni Arab and Kurdish tensions significantly. This could have very destabilizing effects on Iraq. Maliki would also likely push hard to remove US forces from the country, which could also be destabilizing. He could also empower the PMFs in such a way as to drive some Sunnis into the arms of the remnants of ISIL or some new Sunni insurgent group. A continued Abadi government would work on national reconciliation and would likely allow a residual force of US troops to help stabilize the country through training, advising, etc. Thus, the April election is a major event for Iraq's and the region's political trajectory.

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The table below represents responses from four anonymous experts recruited by the Global Cultural Knowledge Network (GCKN) staff.

Iran engages in a hidden occupation of Iraq. It has the potential to determine the shape of Iraqi politics in its favor. In order to curtail Iran's influence, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi must work for a politically-inclusive government that includes sunni Muslims. Those Iraqis who stand for a strong national government must do all they can to prevent Nuri al-Maliki, widely seen as an Iranian puppet, from returning to power

The answer depends on the position of the US government vis-à-vis Iraq and Syria. If there is a semi-autonomous Kurdish state in Syria and Iraq that has tacit US backing and/or if there is a Sunni semi-autonomous region with perceived US support then this will be radically different in terms of US influence than if the US continues to send signals that we are in the two countries only to kill ISIS members and then we are leaving. In this later scenario Iran will have tremendous influence to shape lists and get people to vote. Iraqis do not want overt Iranian hegemony over Iraq any more than the Lebanese want it in Lebanon. However, the influence of Hezbollah has, over time, inured the Lebanese to the reality of proxy Iranian hegemony through Hezbollah. It is expected that this is the desired model for Iraq. This election may not have direct Iranian influence, but Iran is playing a long-game and they are looking out a decade or more. Shia militias and their political leaders will be the Iraqi Hezbollah to develop, over time, an acceptance of Iranian support, money, and control.

Iran is going to have a big role in the Iraqi president election. In my opinion, the new president and prime minister should get the approval of Iran leadership first. It doesn't matter with the election result, Iran wants to dominate Iraq so that Iraq could never endanger it militarily, and to use the country to effectively control a corridor from Tehran to the Mediterranean.

Near total influence. Iraq is a vassal state of Iran. Sounds extreme to say so, but there it is. The PM just thanked the Iranian generals on Arab media for their instrumental role in pushing ISIL out of Mosul.

Zana Gulmohamad
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Around the time of every parliamentary/national Iraqi election, Iran starts to invigorate its agencies and actors to shape Iraqi political parties' coalitions before and after the elections according to Tehran's interests. The forthcoming parliamentary/national election, which is supposed to be in April 2018, determines the shape of the government and the policies for the next four years. The next government will face significant matters including reconciliation and reconstruction of the liberated areas, which were under IS, and importantly the type of relationship between Erbil and Baghdad after the referendum on September 25 2017, and its consequences. In all the interrelated issues including Iraq's election, Baghdad's policies as well as the federal government's rapport with the KRG, Iran has a position and agenda. Therefore Iran begun to project its plan through the visit by Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashmei Shahroudi the Chairman of Iran's Expediency Council and an advisor to Ali Khamenei – Iran's supreme and theological leader. His key purpose was to try to persuade Iraqi Shia political factions to be united and to secure the position of PM for the Shia political faction.¹ This is part of the Iranian policy towards Iraq. Shahroudi met: Iraqi PM Haider al-Abadi; VP Nouri al-Maliki (the leader of the Islamic Dawaa Party); Ammar al-Hakim (former leader and recently split from the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq who has now formed the National Wisdom Movement "*al-Hikmah*"); Qais al-Khazali the leader of the league of the Righteous; and leaders of al-Nujaba movement. The latter two are considered to be Iraqi pro-Iran Shia militias with ties to the Lebanese Hezbollah. However, Shahroudi failed to meet the Shia authorities in Najaf including the highest Marjia al-Sistani in Najaf alongside the four other senior religious references who are associated with al-Sistani as well as Muqtada al-Sadr.² This illustrates the competition between Najaf and Iran's religious authorities. Despite this schism Iran persists in maintaining its influence on Iraqi politics and its ties with its allies and proxies including factions within the PMF. Jamal Jafaar al-Ibrahimi known as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis a prominent leader in the PMF, heads Katiab Hezbollah (KH). He is a pro-Iran figure and militia and the US government designated him as a global terrorist.³ In July 2017 he stated that the PMF will not go away even if the government orders them to dissolve it, this signal is reassurance for Iran that its leverage will be protected by its proxies.⁴ Iraqi pro-Iran militias such as KH, which operates in Iraq and Syria, have repeatedly announced that they will attack US forces in Iraq and they continually spread anti-US propaganda.⁵

Iran continues to preserve its relationships with its allies for maintenance Ammar al-Hakim rejects that the relationship between Iran has deteriorated stating, "Anyone who wishes for the deterioration of our relations with the leader of the Islamic revolution of Iran is delusional ...Iran has the status of a strategic depth for us. And it is not possible to pass over Imam [Supreme Leader Ali] Khamenei's advice and

¹ Niqash (2017) Uneasy alliance: Iran tries to ensure Iraqi leadership remains loyal.

<http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/5737/Iran-Tries-To-Ensure-Iraqi-Leadership-Remains-Loyal.htm>

² Al-Qurtas News (2017) Muqtada al-Sadr refuses to meet Khamenei's envoy

<http://www.alqurtasnews.com/news/253110/alqurtasnews-news/ar>

³ US Department of the Treasury (2009) Press Center: Treasury designates individuals, entity posing threats to stability in Iraq. <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg195.aspx>

⁴ Zaid al-Ali (2017) Can anyone stop Iran from taking over Iraq? New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/opinion/iran-iraq-politics.html>

⁵ Ahmad Majidyar (2017) Iran-backed militia group threatens to attack U.S. troops in Iraq. Middle East Institute.

<https://www.mei.edu/content/io/iran-backed-militia-group-threatens-attack-us-troops-iraq>

guidance that helps us rebuild Iraq".⁶ Although, Shias including PM Haider al-Abadi, Iraq's highest marjia Ali al-Sistani and his senior associates and Muqtada Al-Sadr have gently pushed back against Iranian influence and encouraged relationships with the Arab world, Iran tries to preserve or increase its leverage and interference in Iraq's politics in its favour through its proxies, many of which are allied with Nouri al-Maliki and will enter politics and the forthcoming Iraqi elections. Meanwhile, the author believes that the PM Haider al-Abadi's relationship with Tehran will improve as Iran and Baghdad have similar interests against the KRG. For example, according to the state-run IRNA news agency, Kayvan Kosraw, spokesman for the Iranian Supreme Security Council, was quoted as saying "at the request of the Iraqi federal government, the Iranian airspace has been closed to the KR-I".⁷

Some pro-Iran Shia militias already have seats in the ICR such as Badr Organization (22 seats) and League of the Righteous Asaib Ahl Al-Haq (1 seat). Since the war against IS their popularity in segments of Iraqi Shia communities increased considerably. In recent days the Iraqi federal government forces and the PMF's militias including Iraqi pro-Iran militias such as Badr organization led by Hadi al-Amiri , Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq led by Qais al-Khazali entered the disputed areas for instance in Kirkuk and Khanaqin which were under full control of the Peshmerga. Hashd al-Sha'abi or the PMF have projected their involvement in these operations as victories for their factions shows their supporters that they are pushing back against the KRG ambitious. This development in turn will expand Iran's leverage. The forthcoming elections might increase the number of their seats; other Shia militias might enter the ICR and will shape the Shia factions and militias' role in governance and consequently Iranian influence on Iraq's state structure.

⁶ Ahmad Majidyar (2017) Senior Iraqi Shiite leader says ties with Tehran remain strong. Middle East institute. <https://www.mei.edu/content/io/senior-iraqi-shiite-politician-says-ties-tehran-remain-strong>

⁷ Erika Solomon (2017) Baghdad ramps up pressure on Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/4564c7ea-a132-11e7-b797-b61809486fe2>

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This is an excerpt from an eight-page essay written for R5 #4. It is included here because this passage is relevant to the parliamentary elections.

Before reviewing the situation with the non-Iraqi Kurds, the situation with the Baghdad government needs to be quickly reviewed. The current government, led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, has somewhat distanced itself from the close relationship the previous Prime Minister (Nuri al-Maliki) had with Iran. Parliamentary elections are slated to be held in April 2018, in which the former PM intends to try and reclaim the Prime Minister-ship. This is not something looked forward to by many Iraqis, especially non-Shia Iraqis. In addition, Muqtada al-Sadr, a Shia cleric who enjoys extensive support among poor and/or dispossessed Shia, largely around Baghdad, has threatened to use his influence to boycott the elections and since August 2016 has largely brought the political process to a stand-still in Iraq. This political stand-off has not only increased the already extensive corruption within the Iraqi political system but has crippled the ability to restore destroyed/damaged areas of Iraq as well as the rebuilding of a civil police infrastructure. This has left much of the areas in which fighting occurred dependent on increasingly weary international donors for relief and rebuilding, while security has been given over to PMU/PMFs, mostly Shia and many sponsored and supported by Iran¹. Bottom line, the internal political and security situation in Iraq is not likely to improve for the foreseeable future.

Iran is currently extremely active in both Iraq and Syria, and is a factor in the Kurdish areas. Iran is largely supporting the Damascus regime of Bashir al-Asad, ably assisted by Hezbollah, Russia and Shi'a fellow-travelers formed into PMU/PMFs from such diverse areas as Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen².

¹ The PMUs fall into several categories, a few examples: Hashd al-Sha'abi (Shi'a units nominally under the control of the Iraq Ministry of Interior - Kataib Hezbollah (Iranian supported), Asaib Ahl al-Haq (Iranian supported), Saraya Khurasani (Iranian supported), Ashura Brigades (Sistani sponsored), Al-Risali Brigades (Sistani sponsored), Liwa Ali al-Akbar (Sistani sponsored), Saraya al-Salam (Sadr sponsored), Kataib al-Tayyar al-Risali (formerly Sadrist now Iranian supported)

Hashd al-Asha'ri: Sunni tribal militias nominally under the control of the National Security Agency (MOI); as an example, "The Lions of Ninevah"

There are also minority Hashd units, such as: Iraqi Turkmen Front – in existence since 1995 but not allowed militia units by either Baghdad gov't or, later KRG; Turkey then provided arms and training, militia now ~4,000; Turkmen Brigades (not affiliated with ITF), formed into 16th Bde (almost all Shia), 52nd Bde, 92nd Bde and Bde of Imam Hussein (all Shia) (most supported by KRG)

Yezidi: Sinjar Resistance Unit (YBS, formed in 2007 and supported by Kurds), Protection Force of Edzikhan (HPE, formed in 2015 in response to ISIS attacks (supported by KRG), Edzikhan women's Units (YJE, formed 2015 in response to ISIS attacks, supported by KRG)

Assyrian (Christian): Qaraqosh Protection Committee (formed in 2008, allied with KRG), Ninewah Plains Protection Force (NPU) supported by KRG, Tiger Guards supported by KRG.

² Some examples, not all inclusive and likely dated: Liwa Abu Fadl Al Abbas "Abu Fadl Al Abbas Brigade" is a Syrian Shia militant group that was formed in 2012 to protect the shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab in Damascus; the Brigade consists of 10,000 fighters (of whom 7,000 are Iraqis). The "Dhu Al Fiqar Brigade" is an Iraqi Shia militant group formed in 2013 as a splinter off of Liwa Abu Fadl Al Abbas Fighters; approximately 1,000 Iraqi fighters in and

Iranian security forces are active against the Kurdish groups PJAK (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan, its military arm is the YRK - "East Kurdistan Defense Units) and KDP-I (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, its military arm is the Peshmerga [not KDP/PUK Peshmerga]). Iranian artillery bombardment of PJAK insurgent camps in eastern KRG is a frequent occurrence lately. Iranian control of extensive areas of north and northwestern Iraq is suspected, as the majority of Iraqi PMU/PMFs operating in those regions are Iranian-supported. Iran has worked very hard with its Iraqi proxies to convert those Hashd forces into something akin to the Iranian Basij³, which appears to be close to fruition as those units are increasingly not expected to dissolve and turn security over to reorganized Iraqi MOI police forces (which do not yet exist).

Turkey, a NATO ally, is extremely dissatisfied with the situation in Syria, and less so in Iraq since the Baghdad government forces retook Tal Afar, freezing out Iranian-supported Iraqi PMUs from taking the largely Turkmen-occupied city. In Syria, the creation of the autonomous (at this time) Kurdish political entity called the PYD (the Democratic Union Party whose military arm is the YPG (People's Protection Units), the YPJ (Women's Protection Units) and the affiliated YBS (Sinjar Resistance Units – an associated Yezidi force). The PYD has been named Rojava by the Kurds of Syria, meaning "Western" in Kurmanji Kurdish. The Syrian Kurdish intent is to form a single geographic political entity which will be made ethnically Kurdish (ethnic cleansing and Kurdish homogeneity is considered a necessity for Kurdish independence). Turkey intervened (see invade) in northern Syria in August 2016, initially around Jarabulus in the Euphrates River valley and has since created a Turkish-controlled enclave called the Euphrates Shield. Roughly the size of Delaware, it is occupied by around 6,000 Turkish troops and their local allies⁴, with the entire reason being to prevent the unification of the Kurds of Rojava into a single territorial entity stretching along the entire Turkish/Syrian border. The original Turkish goal of deposing the Bashar al-Asad regime seems to have gone by the way side since 2012. U.S. support to the military forces of the PYD/Rojava infuriates Turkey, and has resulted in diplomatic clashes. Turkish forces within northern Syria are facing Kurdish YPG/YPJ forces (called SDF), with U.S. SOF and USMC personnel supporting the Kurds. Further south, south of Tabqa Dam, SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces⁵) are directly in

around Damascus. Liwa Saada "Saada Brigade" is a Yemeni Shia militant group that belong to the Houthis, they are active around Damascus and its suburbs with number of 750 fighters. The Badr Organization is an Iraqi Shia militant group and a political party with personnel trained to do assassinations, kidnapping as well as urban combat; active in Damascus; they run hospitals and have a strength of approximately 1,500 fighters. The Liwa Fatemiyoun, an IRGC funded, supplied and trained Afghan Hazara unit of possibly 8,000 in strength, one of the forces currently involved in operations around Deir al-Zour.

³ In Iran, the Basij Resistance Force is a volunteer paramilitary organization operating under the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). It is an auxiliary force with many duties, especially internal security, law enforcement, special religious or political events and morals policing. The Basij have branches in virtually every city and town in Iran. The Basij's growing powers have in turn increased the force's political and economic influence and contributed to the militarization of the Iranian regime.

⁴ Such as the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (TFSA), whose elements were reorganized as the Syrian National Army in 30 May 2017. They are composed mostly of Syrian Arab and Turkmen (all Sunni), are part of Operation Euphrates Shield with the stated aim to aid Turkey in creating a "safe zone" in Syria. Their opponents are the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Islamic State and the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). The TFSA also has a law enforcement element, the Free Police. The TFSA is made up of at least 39 "groups" and 10 "allied groups", a few of whom are the Free Idlib Army, the Sultan Murad Division, the Shem Legion, the 51st Brigade and the Manbij Brigade (allied group under Ahrar al-Sham, with both Al Qaeda and Turkish support).

⁵ The Syrian Democratic Forces are largely Kurdish YPG but also included such as the following: Sanadid Force – Sunni Arab coalition which is primarily Shammar tribal militia; the Christian Syriac Military Council, in Syriac

contact with Damascus Regime forces of the SAA, who have embedded Hezbollah and IRGC personnel along with accompanying Russian and Iranian-supported Hashd/PMU forces.

For the sake of brevity, I will conclude this review of the regional dynamics here. U.S. support to the Baghdad government is likely the easiest policy to continue, merely as a matter of access. The political fall-out from the 2018 elections is yet to be assessed, as it is still too far in the future to ascertain. The Kurdish referendum, if successful in declaring independence, will likely plunge the region into further conflict as at least three countries, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, cannot tolerate an independent Kurdish state as it, they fear, will incite those Kurds who live in those respective countries into rebellion and secession. As for the U.S. delving into the Syria abyss, it is a voluntary venture for which this analyst sees no utility, as the size of the U.S. commitment is minimized, supports a minority which cannot hope to unify Syria, and directly spits in the eye of a major NATO ally. In addition, sustainment of U.S. forces in Syria and aid to the Kurdish allies is via the KRG in northern Iraq, which with the impending independence referendum, is a fragile reed indeed. Finally, with the Al Qaeda establishment of Hayat Tahrir al-Shem within the Idlib enclave, a viable competitor to the Islamic State can arguably be said to have arisen.

It is this analyst's opinion that the U.S. has very few positive foreign policy options within the Syria/Iraq region. With the imminent physical removal of the Islamic State as a physical entity, the loss of the single unifying factor for so many disparate elements within and without Syria/Iraq bodes ill for the future and for U.S. foreign policy efforts.

Addendum Post 16 October 2017

Iraq Army forces, led by a brigade of the Golden Division, the 9th Armored Division and elements of the newly formed Al-Abbas Division, bounced from securing the Hawija enclave by 10 October to occupying Kirkuk and surrounding key facilities by the end of 16 October. This unexpected action has completely changed the situation in Iraq. The KRG Peshmerga has truly split along political lines, with the PUK aligned Peshmerga withdrawing from any confrontation with Iraqi government forces, coordinating actions and expecting a political payback (Baghdad payment of PUK civil officials of the KRG). The PUK Peshmerga have also solidified pre-existing links with the IRGC in order to off-set the KDP aligned Peshmerga support by Turkey. The KDP Peshmerga, initially provided some resistance (indirect fire exchanges) before reluctantly withdrawing due to the previously mentioned PUK Peshmerga elements invalidating any viable defensive effort. Additionally, Turkmen PMUs already distrusting of the KDP Peshmerga, all largely declared for Baghdad.

The outcome of the collapse of Kurdish occupation of Kirkuk, the clear division between political factions in the KRG and their associated Peshmerga forces, as well as the sudden halving of oil resources the KRG can exploit and the cessation of U.S. monetary support to the Peshmerga (as of 1 October the U.S. is no longer providing salaries of 36,000 Peshmerga troops); may see the disintegration of the KRG itself. If this occurs, it is likely that the PUK will control Silemani (Sulaymaniyah) and Halabja, while the KDP will control Irbil and Dohuk. The Iraq Army is now the dominate power in Iraq, leaving Prime Minister Abadi the most powerful figure on the Iraqi stage at this time. Turkey appears to welcome this while Iran will

Mawtbo Fulhoyo Suryoyo (MFS), essentially Assyrian Christian militia; the Seljuk Brigade – Syrian Turkmen militia (not to be confused with the anti-ISIS and anti-Kurdish Syrian Turkmen Brigades); and the Jaish al-Thuwar (Army of Revolutionaries) – refused U.S. aid but has always been allied with the PYD. All above forces are part of the “Euphrates Volcano”, a joint rebel/resistance organization in northern Syria which is anti-ISIS but ‘not necessarily’ anti-Damascus, is pro-U.S. but anti-Turkey.

likely work hard to maintain its interests in Iraq via its numerous PMUs, who are now politicized in some ways similar to the Basij in Iran.

The situation is still settling itself out but any prospective Kurdish independence in Iraq seems to be a dead issue now. What will be interesting is to see if Baghdad pursues the 2005 Constitutional requirement (Article 140) of a referendum to see to the disposition of over a million Kurds in Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewah provinces. Slated to be completed no later than 31 December 2007, the KRG has consistently worked to prevent such a referendum. Now with Baghdad in full occupation of those Kurdish areas (or likely soon to be so), will Baghdad now drag its feet? Will the Turkmen and Sunni Arabs of Anbar, each of whom declared a desire for autonomy in the wake of the September 25 Kurdish independence referendum, now settle back into a subordinate relationship with a Shia-dominated Baghdad government?

What becomes of the U.S., its support to the Irbil Kurds and the important logistical connections to U.S. and SDF forces in Syria? Interesting times indeed.

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Full Moon Rising

Despite pressure from its Arab neighbors, Iran is expanding their power and continues to export the Islamic revolution espoused by Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran infiltrates the countries of the Middle East through their Shi'ia populations – offering to build “Hussainiyas” (Shi'ia mosques) and assisting public works. In return, the Iranian networks throughout Iraq and Syria help sustain Tehran while under sanctions. Iran's interference with the internal polices of countries across the Middle East continues to cause political tension and unrest, and nowhere is this more visible than in Iraq. If Iran and Russia continue to seek hegemony in the Middle East, the entire region will continue to see the deterioration of the power held by their governments.

For years, Iran completely controlled Iraq's Dawa party (led by Nouri al Maliki). Over the summer, a rift formed between the more pro-Western Prime Minister Haider al Abadi and the traditionalist Maliki, rupturing Dawa into two sects. Likewise, the Islamic Supreme Council Iraq (ISCI) is undoubtedly pro-Iranian, yet also suffered a split with leader Ammar al-Hakim stepping down to form a “Wisdom” party. The Kurdish Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), formerly led by Jalal Talabani, and now by his wife Hero, is also saturated with Iranian influence. Perhaps most important is the kingmaker in Iraqi politics, Moqtada al Sadr's populist Sadrist movement, which has fluctuated its alliances over the past decade. Over the summer, Sadr expressly distinguished himself from the Iranians, going as far as to visit Saudi Arabia – thereby signaling his willingness to concede to Arab (versus Persian) interests in the region.

The Iraqi central government's recent seizure of Kirkuk is a huge political victory for Haidar al Abadi- and politically he has been given the credit for the operation. The loss of Kirkuk will certainly hurt Mahmoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) as well as Barzani's credibility. Some have suggested he has been asked to step down from office. Likewise, many KDP members are accusing the PUK of collaborating with the Iraqi central government and Iran to retake the city. The clash between the KDP and PUK could erupt into a civil war in Kurdistan; the two factions have fought each other in the past. A clash between the KDP and the PUK is a double-edged sword for Iran. On the one hand, it will weaken Kurdish nationalism and their quest for independence, which is in Iran's interest. Iran is most likely to back the PUK, but could end up backing both sides of the conflict at some point. Because Barzani has been weakened, many Kurdish politicians are going to have a difficult time getting re-elected in the upcoming election cycle. This could mean that the momentum actually shifts towards Iraq's Sunnis, especially with regard to the number of seats in the Iraqi parliament, as many of Iraq's Sunnis stayed loyal to the central government.

Despite the political turmoil in Baghdad, Iraq's Shi'ia are expressing a more assertive role in their quest for political control, and Iran is fueling this fervor. This is clearly evident on the battlefield, where a post-ISIS reality is slowly taking shape. For instance, last May, in a speech to Shi'ia clerics, Qais al-Khazali, the leader of the Iraqi Shi'ia militant group *Asaib Ahl al-Haq* (AAH) vowed to establish what he has termed the “Shi'ia Full Moon,” or “Badr,” which consists of an alliance of Shi'ia militant groups across the Middle East. In addition to in AAH, he suggests the Shi'ia Badr includes Iran's Revolutionary Guard, Lebanese Hezbollah, Houthi rebel forces in Yemen, and “brothers and sisters” in Iraq and Syria.

Despite accusations that his loyalty is to Iran and not the Iraqi central government, it is important to note that Khazali has emerged as one of the most prominent voices from Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The PMF, or *Ha'ashd al Shaabi*, is a state-sanctioned organization of Shi'ia and Sunni paramilitary groups responsible for assisting Iraqi forces in fighting the Islamic State.

Khazali's artful rhetoric sheds the prevailing narrative of a Shi'ia "crescent" in the Middle East and replaces it with one of Shi'ia dominance. The term "Shi'ia crescent" is attributed to the Jordanian King Abdullah II who used the term after the fall of Saddam Hussein to describe an area in the fertile crescent of the Middle East with Iranian-allied areas – namely in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. In his speech Khazali added that this "Full Moon" would precede the emergence of "Sahib al-Zaman" or "time holder," the twelfth Imam from the Shiite religious tradition. The dramatic undertones highlight the historical magnitude of current events for the Shi'ia, yet the new narrative also demonstrates the robust nature of Tehran's political influence through Shi'ia religious institutions.

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This contribution was written in response to R5 #4 but is included here because it pertains to the Iraqi parliamentary election as well.

SMA Reach Back Cell response Q3 *Iranian influence on the Iraqi presidential election*

1. Iraq is one of the two most important regional security issues for Iran along with Syria. The Tehran government therefore sees maintaining maximum influence in Iraq as helping to ensure the enhancement of the Mediterranean/Arabian Sea axis which, in turn, is seen as essential to Iran's security in opposition to the Saudi/US relationship.
2. This latter is seen as the most substantial threat to Iranian security, a situation which has been accentuated by the result of the 2016 US presidential election and takes Tehran back to the declaration of the "axis of evil" by President George W Bush in January 2002 and the subsequent West Point graduation address with its "right to pre-empt" element.
3. While Iran will wish to retain as much influence as possible in Iraq this does **not** mean it will engage in direct and overt interference in the next Iraqi presidential election as long as it is satisfied that the extent of its current influence will be maintained and enhanced. There are three main reasons for this:
 - Too obvious an intervention will tend to damage Iran's standing in the wider international community, not least by affecting its relations with states across southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where evident interfering in state sovereignty will cause concern.
 - It envisages that Saudi Arabia and other western Gulf states will increase their support for extreme post-ISIS Sunni paramilitary movements which will be beyond the ability of the Iraqi state to control without substantial long-term security assistance from Iran.
 - Its existing influence in Baghdad has been substantially increased by the direct and progressive integration of Iranian-backed militias into the Iraqi armed forces.

4. On this last issue, the most significant recent development has been the manner in which the Shi'a Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) now constitutes a core and essential part of the Iraqi armed forces, as evidenced by the integrated joint operation to re-take Tal Afar commencing 20 August.
5. As post-ISIS Sunni militias come to the fore the regular Iraqi Army will be greatly limited in its ability to maintain security because of the decimation of the CTS, especially in the re-taking of Mosul. The PMF are therefore necessary for internal Iraqi security, will likely become more so and will underpin an ever-closer relationship with the Baghdad Government. From a US perspective this is one of the worst of several negative outcomes of the war in Iraq since 2003.
6. In responding to the question "How much influence can Iran wield in the next Iraqi presidential election?", the answer is that it does not need to and will not do so to any significant extent unless circumstances change.

Daniel Serwer

Johns Hopkins University
School of Advanced International Studies

1. How much influence can Iran wield in the next Iraqi presidential election?

A: Lots. The commanders of the Popular Mobilization Forces, some of which are filo-Iran, have political ambitions that will likely be realized in any election held in the next several years. There is precious little we can do about that except try to ensure that Prime Minister Abadi, who is our best bet in Iraq, does reasonably well. If he wants an American training mission to stay in Iraq, we should accommodate him.

TRADOC G-27 Athena Study Team

Data Science, Models and Simulations Operational Environment Laboratory

Summary of Iraqi Elections in 2018

On 30th August 2017, General Joseph Votel, Commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) and the Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) J39 office requested that the TRADOC G-27 Operational Environment Laboratory conduct an Athena simulation to assess the level influence Iran will wield in the next round of Iraqi elections scheduled for April, 2018.

The Iraqi political system consists of a unicameral house, the Council of Representatives (COR), elected via lists competing at the governorate level. Once the COR is in office, the COR chooses the Presidency Council consisting of the President of Iraq and the Council of Ministers. The Presidency Council then has two weeks to choose a Prime Minister. In the event that the Presidency Council cannot agree on a Prime Minister in the legislated time frame, the responsibility for choosing a Prime Minister falls to the COR. Haider al-Abadi is the current Prime Minister of Iraq and is a member of the Dawa Party.

This report provides an initial overview of the conditions and assumptions, insights, and results drawn from Athena simulation runs focused on the scheduled Iraqi elections in April of 2018.

This study used the Athena simulation to model the relationship between existing political blocs and the Iraqi population. Seven Use Case alternatives were modeled to determine the ability of various political coalitions to successfully form a government and to gauge the level of influence of foreign state actors on various political parties.

Conditions and Assumptions

The Athena study team set the following conditions in order to examine the seven Use Cases:

- The simulated study period begins on 01 October 2017 and ends on 01 May 2018. The date for Iraq's elections in April is not set but this time period allows for assessing the affinities of political blocs for one another over a similar time period.
- Elections take place in April 2018 as scheduled.
- There are no significant changes to Iraq's electoral system during the time period simulated in Athena.
- The Kurdish Regional Government remains part of a federalized Iraq; in spite of the Kurds voting in favor of their own state by 92%, the Kurds do not withdraw from the Republic of Iraq.
- The Government of Iraq controls almost the entirety of Iraqi territory during the time period simulated in Athena.
- Hawija and western Anbar remain outside the control of the Government of Iraq.
- ISIL does not cause significant disruption to the Iraqi Elections.
- No Iraqi party competing in the elections will garner more than 30% of the seats in the Council of Representatives; the parties elected to the Council of Representatives will be required to form coalitions in order to impose a governing majority.

The Athena Study Team assumed that many of the political coalitions in the current Iraqi government will win a similar portion of seats in the next Iraqi parliament. This study is not concerned with the exact

number of seats each party will win in the 2018 elections but rather with the effect various political alliances will have on the level of support political parties receive from the Iraqi population.

The study drew from open sources reporting and Subject Matter Expert insights to create most likely coalitions.

Overview of Political Leaders and Blocs

The Dawa Party

The Dawa Party consists of two major factions. At the center of one faction is current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. This faction of the Dawa Party is more favorable to US interests in Iraq. Iran will not support a second term for Abadi.¹ At the center of the other faction is former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. This branch of the Dawa Party is more favorable to Iranian interests in Iraq and has expressed anti-Western (anti-Israel, US, Saudi Arabia) sentiment in recent months.² Iran wants the next Prime Minister to be closer to Maliki and would go so far as to back up the nomination of a candidate from the PMU to lead the next government.³ Qais al-Khazali⁴ and Jamal Jafaar Muhammad Ali Ebrahimi [Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis are vocal in their support of the Maliki branch of the Dawa Party.⁵

The Wisdom Party

Former Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq leader Ammar al-Hakim has formed his own party, the National Wisdom Movement. As the name of the party implies, it is centered on al-Hakim (Hakim means “wise” in Arabic). Al-Hakim met with Brett McGurk on 20 August 2017, previously supported Ayad Allwai, and opposed Nouri al-Maliki.⁶

The Badr Organization

Hadi al-Amiri is the current Secretary General of the Badr Organization and has criticized PM al-Abadi over his reticence to maintain the Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) following the retaking of Mosul.⁷

The Sadrist Movement

Muqtada al-Sadr leads the Sadrist Movement and has been courting regional Arab countries in recent months, including Saudi Arabia⁸ and the UAE.⁹ He has been a vocal critic of the existing election law, saying it is biased against small political parties.¹⁰

Wataniya Party

¹ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/iran-iraq-prime-minister-abadi-khamenei-pmu-shiite-militias.html>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/opinion/iran-iraq-politics.html>

³ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/iran-iraq-prime-minister-abadi-khamenei-pmu-shiite-militias.html>

⁴ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/iraq-mosul-pmu-us-abadi.html#ixzz4rupXqq2i>

⁵ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2017/07/04/PMU-militia-leader-Even-Iraqi-government-cannot-dismantle-us.html>

⁶ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/08/ammam-hakim-supreme-islamic-council-iraq-iran.html>

⁷ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/iraq-mosul-pmu-us-abadi.html>

⁸ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/08/iran-iraq-saudi-arab-sunni-shiite.html>

⁹ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/08/iran-iraq-saudi-arab-sunni-shiite.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/muqtada-al-sadr-threatens-boycott-iraq-elections-170324152533689.html>

The Wataniya Party is a secular nationalist party led by Ayad Allawi, an Iraqi Shia. Wataniya believes Iran wants full control of the Iraqi political system.¹¹

Courses of Action

The Athena Study Team modeled seven Use Cases:

1. All political parties competing against one another. This Use Case was used to examine the strength of political alliances absent any further external pressure on political parties or internal alignments. This Use Case models the current political status quo without any significant changes and serves as a baseline against which to compare other Use Cases.
2. The Dawa party is split into two branches, one led by Abadi and one led by Maliki. The Wisdom Party, Sadrists and Wataniya support the Abadi branch of the Dawa Party; the Badr Party routes its support to the Maliki Branch of the Dawa Party. The US provides some financial support for the Abadi branch of Dawa while Iran provides financial support for the Maliki branch of Dawa.
3. The Dawa party is split into two branches, one led by Abadi and one led by Maliki. The Wisdom Party, Sadrists and Wataniya support the Abadi branch of the Dawa Party; the Badr Party routes its support to the Maliki Branch of the Dawa Party. The US provides some financial support for the Abadi branch of Dawa while Iran provides financial support for the Maliki branch of Dawa and for the Sadrist Movement. The Sadrists defect from the Abadi coalition prior to the April elections.
4. The Dawa party is split into two branches, one led by Abadi and one led by Maliki. The Wisdom Party, Sadrists and Wataniya support the Abadi branch of the Dawa Party; the Badr Party routes its support to the Maliki Branch of the Dawa Party. The US provides some financial support for the Abadi branch of Dawa while Iran provides financial support for the Maliki branch of Dawa and for the Sadrist Movement. The Sadrists defect from the Abadi coalition prior to the April elections. Sadrist Movement joins the Maliki coalition.
5. The Wataniya Party leads a coalition comprised of the Abadi branch of the Dawa Party, the Sadrist Movement, and the Wisdom Party.
6. The Wisdom Party leads a coalition comprised of the Abadi branch of the Dawa Party, the Sadrist Movement, and the Wataniya Party.
7. The Mutahidoon Party (a Sunni Secular Party) leads a coalition comprised of the Abadi branch of the Dawa Party, the Sadrist Movement, the Wisdom Party, and Wataniya.

Results and Insights from Simulation

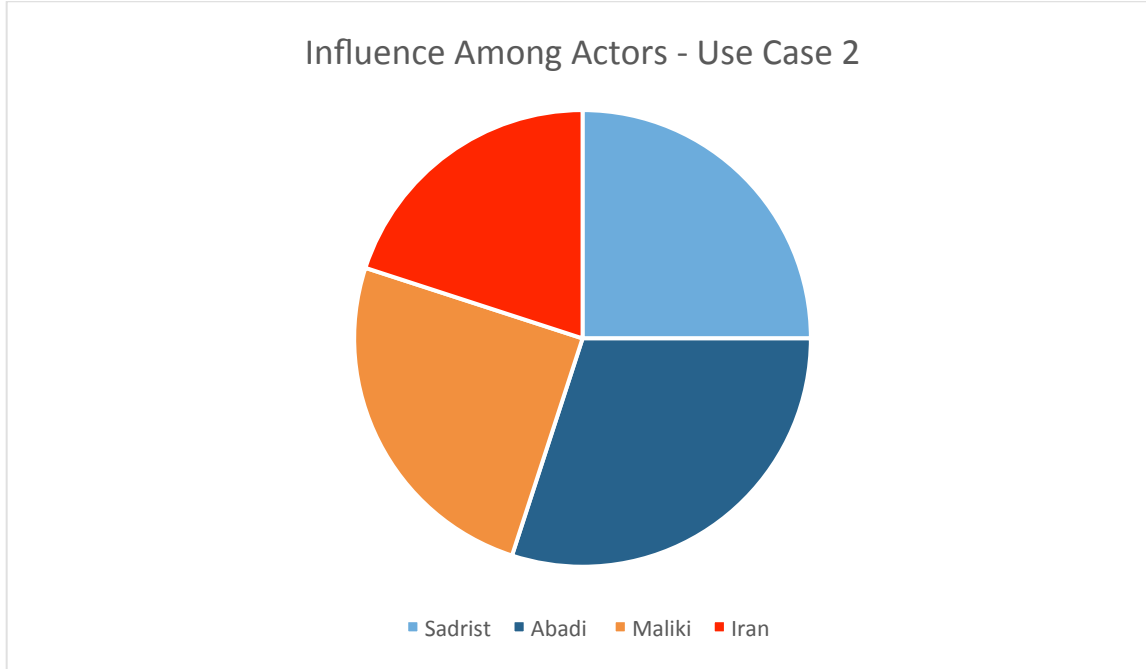
Insight: Source – Use Case 1, 2, 3, and 4

Iran has a consistent level of influence in Iraq, commanding about 20% of the influence in the country. However, Iran's level of influence in Iraq changes relative to the level of influence of various political coalitions in each Use Case. The reason for this change can be attributed to shifts in support by the civilian population for parties. When parties come together in a coalition, they are able to pool resources (financial, social services, etc.) and they benefit from an aggregation of a larger civilian support base.

Insight: Source – Use Case 2

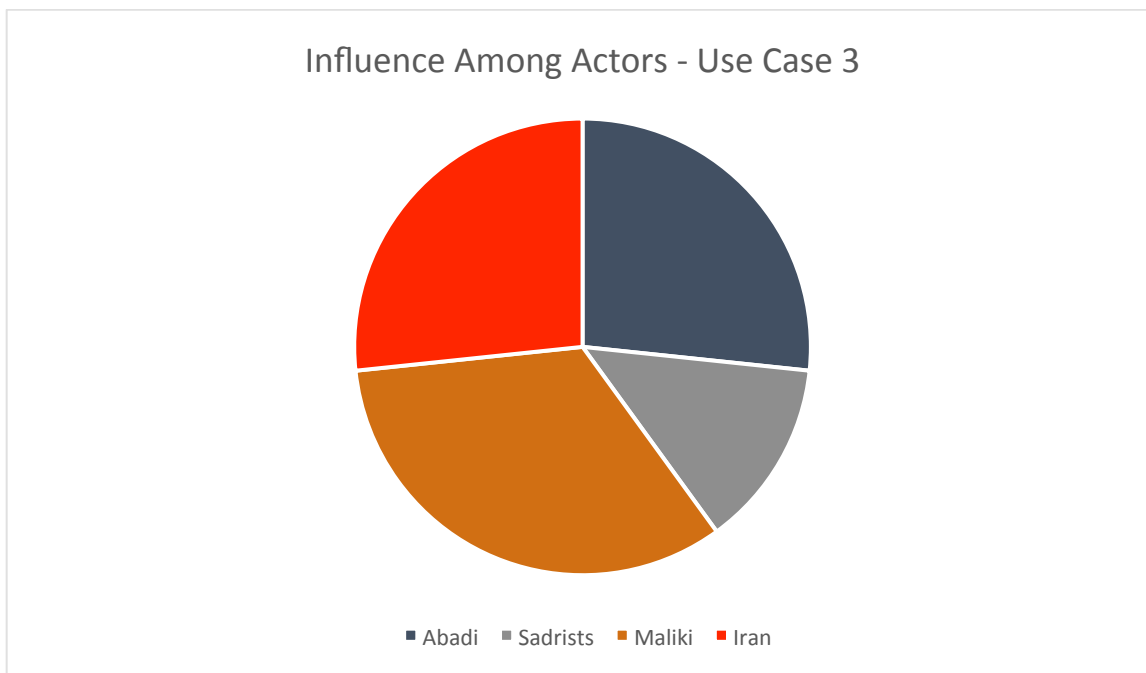
¹¹ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/iran-iraq-prime-minister-abadi-khamenei-pmu-shiite-militias.html>

A coalition led by the Abadi branch of Dawa commands 30% of the influence in Iraq, relative to Iran's 20% and is able to form a governing majority.



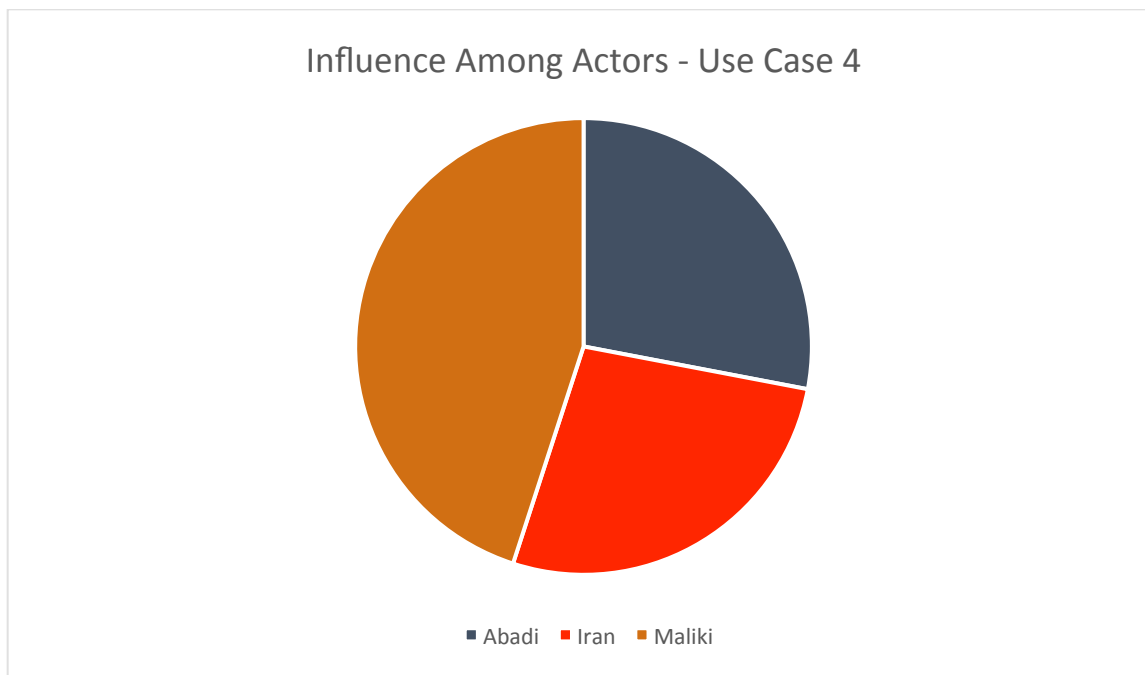
Insight: Source – Use Case 3

Iran has a consistent level of influence in Iraq, commanding about 20% of the influence in the country. If Iran should decide to fund the Sadrist Movement in addition to the Maliki branch of Dawa, then Iran enjoys more influence than the Abadi coalition. In this scenario, neither the Maliki nor the Abadi coalitions are able to form a government. The Sadrist Movement becomes a significant swing vote and plays kingmaker when the time comes to form a government.



Insight: Source – Use Case 4

If the Sadrist Movement defects from the Abadi led coalition to join Maliki, then a Maliki – Sadrist coalition wins a majority of the influence in the country and is able to form a government. In this Use Case, the Sadrist movement is independently joining the Maliki Coalition with no prompting from Iran.



Insight: Use Cases 5, 6, 7

Use Cases 5, 6, and 7 examine the potential for a secular nationalist party or an overtly Sunni party to garner a governing majority in the Council of Representatives. As modeled, no majority was established in any of the Use Cases.

Biographies

Hala Abdulla



Hala Abdulla joined USMC Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL) in September 2010 as the CENTCOM regional researcher and Subject Matter Expert under the Regional Cultural Language Familiarization (RCLF) team. Prior to 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), she worked for al-Arab daily International Newspaper in Baghdad office. Following OIF, she worked for four years as a journalist and cultural advisor with the U.S. Army Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (JPOTF) in Baghdad's Green Zone. Since coming to the United States twelve years ago, she has worked from (2007-2009) as an online Content Manager and team leader for Iraqi/Arab journalists and reporters under a CENTCOM-sponsored Transregional Web Initiative (TRWI), an Iraq-focused website. Hala also worked from (2009-2010) as a Social Media Analyst under USSTRATCOM's 'Foreign Media Analysis' initiative. Hala was born and raised in Baghdad, and is a native Arabic speaker, fluent in five regional dialects. She holds a B.A in English Language and Literature from al-Ma'amun University in Baghdad (1996), and an M.A. in Strategic Communications from American University in Washington D.C. (2013). She authored 'Iraq's Mosul: Battle of Psychological War. Quantico Sentry, June 2014, and Co-authored 'The Struggle for Democracy in Iraq: from the inside looking out,' American Diplomacy, April, 2010.

Gawdat Bahgat



Dr. Gawdat Bahgat is professor of National Security Affairs at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Study. He is an Egyptian-born specialist in Middle Eastern policy, particularly Egypt, Iran, and the Gulf region. His areas of expertise include energy security, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counter-terrorism, Arab-Israeli conflict, North Africa, and American foreign policy in the Middle East.

Bahgat's career blends scholarship with national security practicing. Before joining NESA in December 2009, he taught at different universities. Bahgat published ten books including *Alternative Energy in the Middle East* (2013), *Energy Security* (2011), *International Political Economy* (2010), *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East* (2007), *Israel and the Persian Gulf* (2006), and *American Oil Diplomacy* (2003). Bahgat's articles have appeared in *International Affairs*, *Middle East Journal*, *Middle East Policy*, *Oil and Gas Journal*, and *OPEC Review*, among others. His work has been translated to several foreign languages.

Bahgat served as an advisor to several governments and oil companies. He has more than 25 years of academic, policy and government experience working on Middle Eastern issues. Bahgat has contributed to CNN, BBC, Washington Post and Al-Jazeera. He has spoken at Tufts University, Columbia University, London School of Economics, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Swiss Foreign Ministry, Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul, Qatar University, Kuwait University, Oman Diplomatic Institute, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (Saudi Arabia), Griffith University (Australia), India School of Business (Hyderabad, India), Institute of Military-Aeronautic Sciences (Florence, Italy), University of Viterbo, (Rome, Italy), and Institute for International Political Studies (Milan, Italy).

Perry Cammack



Perry Cammack is a fellow in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he focuses on long-term regional trends and their implications for American foreign policy. Prior to joining Carnegie in August 2015, Cammack worked on issues related to the Middle East as part of the policy planning staff of Secretary of State John Kerry from 2013 to 2015 and as a senior professional staff member for then senator Kerry on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) from 2009 to 2012. From 2003 to 2006, he worked on the SFRC staff of then senator Joseph Biden, Jr.

Cammack has a master's degree in public administration from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and bachelor's degrees in economics and philosophy from the University of Maryland.

He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Institute for Strategic Studies and a part-time adjunct professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University.

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 IACSS 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.

Anoush Ehteshami



Professor Anoush Ehteshami is Professor of International Relations in the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University. He 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, further, Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies (IMEIS) at Durham, one of the oldest and noted centres of excellence in Middle Eastern studies in Europe.

Global Cultural Knowledge Network, TRADOC G2



The Global Cultural Knowledge Network (GCKN) is a part of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command G2. Our mission is to enable a holistic understanding of potential future operational environments (OE) through the collection of expertise and information and the development of products/services to enhance OE understanding at the operational level. GCKN combines the intellectual capacity of military, academic, and industry experts and brings it to the Army's next mission.

Zana Gulmohamad



In February 2013 I began my PhD at the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield, UK, where I am currently teaching. My research title is: "Iraq's foreign policies post-2003". I am a former 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 training staff. My capabilities have built up over years of training and interaction with security 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 CTC Sentinel and the Jamestown Foundation's "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: www.zanagulmohamad.com

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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.

Vernie Liebl

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- Culture and History of South Asia
- Culture and History of Islam

Profile:

Vernie Liebl is an analyst currently sitting as the Middle East Desk Officer in the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL). Mr. Liebl retired from the Marine Corps and has a background in intelligence, specifically focused on the Middle East and South Asia.

Prior to joining CAOCL, Mr. Liebl worked with the Joint Improvised Explosives Device Defeat Organization as a Cultural SME, and before that with Booz Allen Hamilton as a Strategic Islamic Narrative Analyst. He has also published extensively on topics ranging from the Caliphate to Vichy French campaigns in WW2.

Mr. Liebl has a Bachelors degree in political science from University of Oregon, a Masters degree in Islamic History from the University of Utah, and a second Masters degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College (where he graduated with “Highest Distinction” and focused on Islamic Economics).

Diane 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.

Paul Rogers



Paul Rogers is Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University where he has taught courses on international and environmental security, arms control and political violence. He originally took his doctorate in plant sciences at Imperial College, and then lectured there as well as working as a Senior Scientific Officer on a crop research programme in East Africa.

He moved into peace and conflict research 40 years ago through an interest in environmental science and conflict over resources, and his publications include 27 books and over 150 papers. His books include *A War Too Far: Iran, Iraq and the New American Century* (Pluto Press, 2006) and *Global Security and the War on Terror: Elite Power and the Illusion of Control* (Routledge, 2007). A third edition of his book, *Losing Control: Global Security in the 21st Century*, was published in 2010 and his most recent book is *Irregular War: The New Threats from the Margins* (I B Tauris, 2017). His work has been translated into many languages including Catalan, Chinese, Dutch, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Turkish. He was Chair of the British International Studies Association, 2002-04.

Paul Rogers lectures regularly at universities and defence colleges including the Royal College of Defence Studies, is an Honorary Fellow of the UK Joint Service Command and Staff College and has given evidence to several Parliamentary Select Committees. He is a frequent broadcaster on international security issues for the BBC World Service and other international and national networks including the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, US National Public Radio, German Radio, RTV Hong Kong, Monocle 24, Austrian FM4 and Radio France International. He writes a weekly analysis of international security trends for www.opendemocracy.net and is global security consultant to Oxford Research Group.

Paul's work in recent years has largely been on the unexpected outcomes of fighting a "war on terror" but he also continues to pursue a long-term interest in the relationship between socio-economic divisions and environmental constraints, especially climate disruption, as causes of international instability and conflict. He is currently involved in the Network for Social Change's project on "Remote Warfare" which focuses on the implications of using armed drones, Special Forces and privatised military companies in responding to security challenges.

Twitter: @ProfPRogers

Daniel Serwer



Also a scholar at the Middle East Institute, Daniel Serwer is the author of *Righting the Balance* (Potomac Books, November 2013), editor (with David Smock) of *Facilitating Dialogue* (USIP, 2012) and supervised preparation of *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* (USIP, 2009). *Righting the Balance* focuses on how to strengthen the civilian instruments of American foreign policy to match its strong military arm. *Facilitating Dialogue* analyzes specific cases and best practices in getting people to talk to each other in conflict zones. *Guiding Principles* is the leading compilation of best practices for civilians and military in post-war state-building.

As vice president of the Centers of Innovation at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Serwer led teams working on rule of law, peacebuilding, religion, economics, media, technology, security sector governance and gender. He was also vice president for peace and stability operations at USIP, overseeing its peacebuilding work in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Iraq and Sudan and serving as executive director of the Hamilton/Baker Iraq Study Group.

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 is a graduate of Haverford College and earned masters degrees at the University of Chicago and Princeton, where he also did his PhD in history.

TRADOC G-27 Athena Study Team



The Athena Study Team is a part of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command G-27. Athena is a decision support tool designed to increase a commander's understanding of the effect of PMESII-PT variables (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Physical Environment, and Time) on a given area over time.

Athena models DIME-FIL (Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Law Enforcement, all elements of national power) interventions within a PMESII-PT context to enable a user to anticipate second- and third-order effects upon noncombatant groups, force groups, government and non-government actors. The primary outputs of Athena are trend lines that indicate changes in non-combatant populations' mood, the level of volatility and stability within a discrete area, control over an area, and the relationships between civilian groups, force groups, government and non-government actors.