

Question (R4.6): What are the competing national interests of the United States and Iran in the Middle East and what are the options for alleviating United States / Iranian tensions to mutual satisfaction and improved regional stability?

Citation: Astorino-Courtois, A. (Ed.). (2017). *Alleviating US-Iran Tensions*. Arlington, VA: Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) Reach-back Cell. Retrieved from http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-R4.6_Alleviating_US_Iran_Tensions/

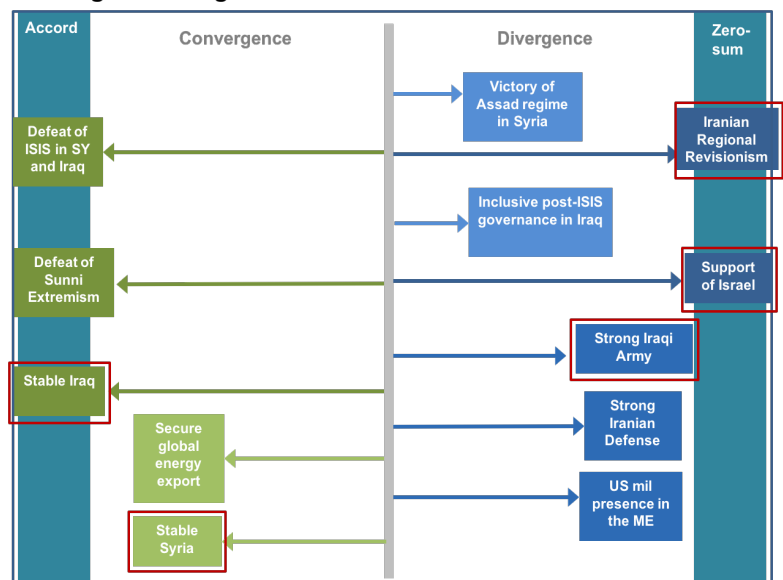
Contributors: Alex Dehgan (*Conservation X Labs*); Mark Luce (*USASOC*); Payam Mohseni (*Harvard University*); Laura Jean Palmer-Moloney (*Visual Teaching Technologies, LLC*); Daniel Serwer (*Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, SAIS*)¹

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The US and Iran have the same types of interests — national security, international influence, economic, and domestic political—at stake in the conflicts surrounding Iraq and Syria. However, the different ways that each country currently defines these interests places them on a continuum that ranges from full accord over select regional issues to complete, zero-sum discord. This is an important point and one very pertinent to the question of alleviating US-Iran tensions: Iran and the US do not disagree on everything and national security is not always the primary issue at stake. The most promising avenue to alleviate tensions therefore may be to focus on issues on which US and Iranian interests tend to converge. However, there may be more leverage over what seem to be fully divergent interests than at first appears.²

Figure 1: Regional Issues & US and Iranian Interests



¹ This Reach-back report is based both on the expert contributions contained here and on existing Reach-back reports on Iran, adding insights from another 26 experts on Iranian interests and motivations to those listed above.

² For the sake of brevity, this report will focus on only some of the issues on the convergence-divergence continuum (shown in red boxes in Figure 1). More complete descriptions of Iranian and US interests can be found in prior Reach-back reports including:

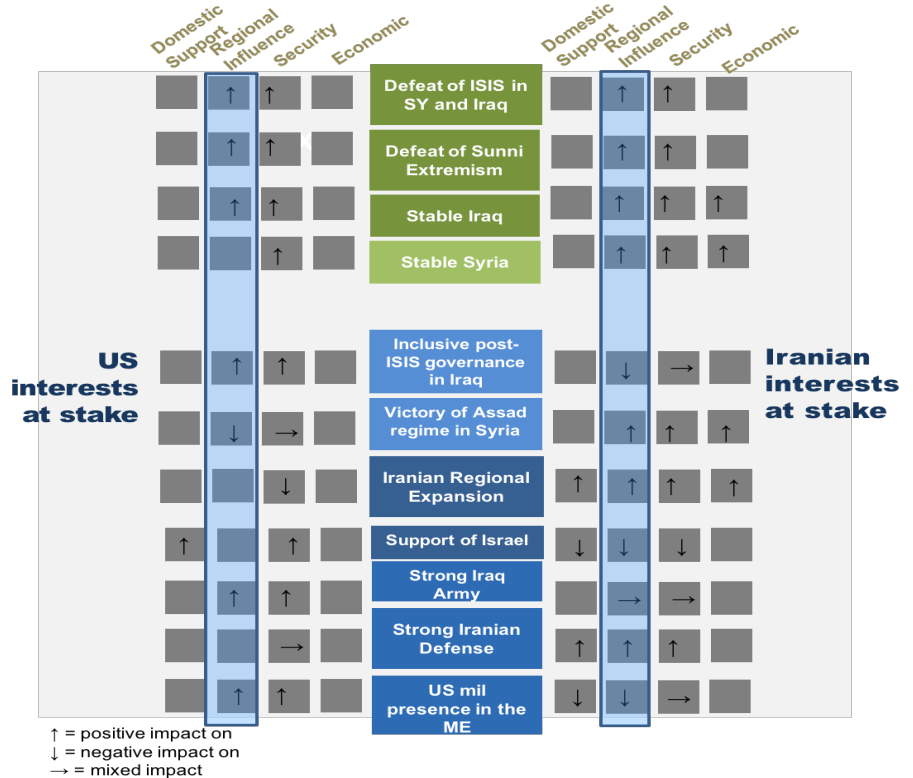
Question (R3 QL4): *What are the critical elements of a continued Coalition presence, following the effective military defeat of Da'esh [in Iraq] that Iran may view as beneficial?* Available at: <http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-iran-beneficial-elements-of-continued-coalition-presence/>

Question (R1 LR2): *What will be Iran's strategic calculus regarding Iraq and the region post-ISIL? How will JCPOA impact the calculus? What opportunities exist for the US/Coalition to shape the environment favorable to our interests?* Available at: <http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-irans-post-isil-strategic-calculus/>

Convergent Interests: Stability in Syria, Stability in Iraq

Regardless of current US policy, the defeat of ISIS, followed by relative stability in Iraq and Syria are in the interests of both Iran and the US. For Iran, there are potentially huge post-conflict reconstruction contracts in the offing in Syria, provided the Syrian regime is friendly or weak enough for Iran to control a large part of that business. The earnings could be a boon for Rouhani and the moderate leadership in Iran who had promised yet-to-be-see Iranian gains following the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA). US security interests in the region also are not served by instability in Syria, even if this means abiding by a weakened Assad regime for the immediate term.

Figure 2: Breakdown of US-Iran Key Interest Convergence-Divergence by Interest Type



Diverging Interests: Strong Iraqi Army

The strengthening of the Iraqi Army is a contentious subject between the US and Iran. The US would like to have influence in Iraqi military institutions, as would Iran. The ideal outcome for the US appears to be a professionalized Iraqi military strong and capable enough to secure its borders, maintain internal stability, and clamp down on radical extremist organizations in Iraq and elsewhere. While it is in Iran's interests to see a security force in Iraq strong enough to maintain internal order and put down any resurgence of Sunni extremism, an Iraqi force strong enough to pose a threat outside Iraq's borders is something no Iranian leader likely could or would support. The horrors and trauma of the Iran-Iraq War are still in the vivid memories of a good portion of the Iranian population.

Question (R1 V6): What are the strategic and operational implications of the Iran nuclear deal on the US-led coalition's ability to prosecute the war against ISIL in Iraq and Syria and to create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability? Available at: <http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-cell-v6-implications-of-iran-nuclear-deal/>

Question (R1 V7): What are the strategic objectives and motivations of indigenous state and non-state partners in the counter-ISIL fight? Available at: <http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-cell-v7-state-non-state-partners-countering-isil/>

Question (R2 QL9): What internal factors would influence Iran's decision to interfere with the free flow of commerce in the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb? Available at: <http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-commerce-in-the-strait-of-hormuz/>

Complete Divergence: Regional Security and Israel

Probably the most rigid points of conflict in US and Iranian interests involve how each defines regional security and, as a result, which actions and actors it perceived as threatening. Iran scholar, Dr. Payam Mohseni of Harvard University, identifies two security issues that serve as “the cornerstone” of US-Iran antagonism: “revisionism for the security architecture of the Middle East” including eliminating US military influence in the Middle East following ISIS defeat, and support of or opposition to Israel.

Iranian Revision to Regional Order. Iran has long had a goal of changing the power dynamics in the Middle East region. This serves multiple Iranian interests simultaneously and shapes the policies it pursues. First, from the Iranian perspective, expanding its reach via Shi’a groups in Iraq, the Gulf, and Lebanon is an important means of defending Iranian security in a region in which it is a minority. Considering what Iran perceives as its main security threats (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Israel—both backed by US force), together with a desire for regional recognition and prestige, explains Iran’s attachment to a nuclear program. Revisions to the current system that enable Iran to exert additional regional influence and establish additional economic ties also serve the domestic objectives of the more moderate political and commercial elite.³

Israel. Ironically, relations with Israel serve the US and Iran in similar ways. Support for Israel is a consistent element of US foreign policy and is very much tied to US electoral politics. Since the Iranian Revolution, the Government has used its strong opposition to the security threat posed by Israel and the West to garner domestic approval and underscore its break from the Iran of the past (i.e., its revolutionary bona fides) to enhance its (self-proclaimed) legitimacy as the regional protector of the Muslim people.

Both Iranian and US security concerns are indelibly intertwined with the desire of each to increase regional influence and prestige, and to some degree, domestic support. An argument can be made that this coupling of interests is what generates the zero-sum quality of the US and Iranian positions and makes mutual animosities so easy to ignite. A situation perceived as zero-sum, “I win-you lose” by definition is one in which mutual gain is not possible; antagonism is assumed. As a result, all action by the opponent is perceived as competitive and, in the strategic sense, the only options available to each side are opposition or capitulation.

At present, both US and Iranian policy-makers imagine the regional expansion, influence, and attempts to change the regional order by and of the other as important threats to their own security and prestige. In this context, a perceived security gain for the US or its allies, for example by increasing the presence of US forces in the region or inking a \$110 billion weapons deal with Saudi Arabia, inevitably is a loss for Iran. Similarly, an Iranian gain, for example increased influence within the Shi’a-led government in Iraq; professionalization and institutionalization of “mini Hezbollahs,” or IRGC clones in the Iraqi armed forces, is seen in the US primarily as Iranian aggression.

Can tensions be reduced? No. Not without reconceiving the US approach

Fortunately, the zero-sum nature of US and Iranian perspectives on these critical issues is not a mathematical absolute (as suggested by the term). Rather, US decision makers interested in alleviating tensions with Iran must recognize that the intractability in how the US and Iran have conceived of

³ However, as Mohseni notes, “In this new context [of transformation in the Middle East], Iranian revisionism to regional order is less a driver of Middle East conflict dynamics than the actual erosion and structural weaknesses, liabilities, and vulnerabilities of Arab states, many of which are traditional allies of America.”

regional security *is a psychological construct*, in large part based in mutual uncertainty about what the other will choose to do. While it may require considerable cognitive and perhaps emotional effort to accomplish, reconceptualizing how the US approaches Middle East regional security and Iran's role in it is very possible.

Mohseni emphasizes not just the possibility but the urgency of making these changes in US thinking. He argues that changed and changing conditions in the Middle East now demand rethinking of US interests in the region and the threats that it perceives from Iran: in "today's increasingly fractious and unstable Middle East, it is all the more important to understand where and how the United States and Iran can see eye-to-eye." He strengthens this argument with the discerning observation that even if the US were to succeed in containing Iran and eliminating the security threat that Iran poses to US allies in the region, some of the most pressing threats in the region, like the spread of violent jihadism and insurgency and political instability in traditional US allies, will remain. Critical threats to US interests and allies will not be mitigated by weakening Iran. This new context requires new thinking.

How? Small steps

If not seeing completely eye-to-eye, alleviating tensions essentially means that diverging Iranian and US interests are moved closer together; toward convergence. Each of the contributors suggests that this can only happen via direct engagement with Iran, which is essential not only for alleviating US-Iran tensions, but indeed for defending the US's own security interests in the region. First, Dr. Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins SAIS) argues that US-Iran tensions cannot be overcome in a bilateral setting, but instead that a regional security architecture that could help reduce tensions among other regional actors and on other issues (e.g., Sunni-Shi'a competition) is needed. In a similar vein, SFC Mark Luce (USASOC) suggests using diplomacy to reduce Iran's isolation by, for example, opening dialogues with Iran and Russia on Afghanistan and counter-VEO activities, encouraging others to expand diplomatic and economic relations with Iran, and providing US security guarantees to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states in the event of Iranian aggression. While negotiating these arrangements certainly would require time and significant US domestic and regional resolve, other experts suggest more tactical and short- to mid-term steps for initiating US-Iran cooperation. Specifically, Dr. Laura Jean Palmer-Moloney (Visual Teaching Technologies) and Dr. Alex Dehgan (Conservation X Labs) cite the value that Iran has historically put on science, and suggest scientific exchange particularly on water, food, and energy issues. They note that Iranian scientists already "co-author more scientific papers with US scientists than with scientists of any other country," and that US-trained STEM scientists serve in key positions in the Iranian government.

Subject Matter Expert Contributions

Mark Luce, 4th MISG, 1st SFC, USASOC

The United States and Iran possessed common goals and interests in the Middle East until the Iranian Revolution (1979). Historically, Iran has always been the dominant power in the region. After the British withdrew from the Persian Gulf, Iran, under the Shah of Iran, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, became the US proxy in the Persian Gulf (Nixon Doctrine) and was given carte blanche to buy almost any weapon systems that he desired.

The Iranian Revolution (1979) with its anti-Western, anti- US rhetoric and actions advocated for the export of its revolution throughout the Middle East and billed itself as the unifier of Muslims everywhere and the champions of the Palestinians to regain their homeland and liberate Jerusalem. The Embassy hostage situation in Tehran, the 1983 Beirut suicide bombing of the Marine barracks at the U.S. Embassy, other international acts of terror, and Iranian energies and resources expended in Lebanon to foster and nourish a militant Hezbollah among other things set the United States and Iran in clear opposition to one another.

The United States committed its Navy and forces to protect the Persian Gulf and the Straits of Hormuz (Carter doctrine), thus reassuring its Gulf allies that any Iranian aggression would be checked. Additionally, the United States supported Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War (1980 – 1988). American national interests at that time included the containment of Iran, the defense of Israel and its Arab allies, the maintaining of regional security and stability and the status quo. However, regional stability steadily deteriorated because of the consequences of the following:

- The 1st Gulf War,
- The 2nd Gulf War,
- The rise of Salafi-Jihadists (al-Qa'ida and affiliates and ISIS),
- The Arab Spring,
- The escalation of Sunni-Shi'ite strife, exasperated by the ISIS zero-tolerance for Shi'ites, and
- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA; [Persian: برنامه جامع اقدام مشترک] Iran Nuclear Deal)

The aftermath of these wars and events and their continued effects have changed the Middle East environment completely. Currently, there are wars raging in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan. Additionally, civil unrest, low-grade insurgencies or VEO activities drag on in Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Pakistan, and Iranian Baluchistan. The result of these volatile and hostile circumstances has altered both US and Iran's actions in the region.

The Iranian Situation: Growing Sectarianism and “Enduring Rivalries”

The wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen and the civil unrest in Bahrain are all difficult situations. Iran has come to the aid of its allies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Iran's relations with Syria and Yemen are tenuously linked to Shi'a Islam [Alawis (Nusayris) in Syria, Zaydis in Yemen]. In Iraq, the majority 12er [Ithna 'Ashari] Iraqis hold the same religious beliefs while rejecting the Iranian concept of *Vilayat-e faqih*. Iran's primary and immediate goal in Iraq is to prevent the collapse of the Iraqi government.

On the surface, these three conflicts (Syria, Iraq, and Yemen) demonstrate a growing sectarian Sunni-Shi'i divide that has broadened throughout the region. They can be partially explained by the "enduring rivalry" that exists between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Within the GCC, there is discord in the wake of the Arab Spring movement. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are especially panicked by:

- the Arab Spring [the toppling of the Tunisian, Libya, Egyptian, and Yemeni governments and the US response],
- Qatari endorsement and funding of the Muslim Brotherhood and other organizational movements,
- the Nuclear deal (JCPOA) mainly brokered by the United States,
- the rise of ISIS and AQAP,
- GCC and Yemeni youth joining al-Qa'ida, its affiliates and ISIS in Syria, and
- the uprising in Bahrain and Shi'i unrest in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia

The Iranians perceive themselves and their co-religionists as targets of intolerant Sunnis.

The JCPOA may have deterred the advancement of Iran's nuclear program but the Saudis and Emiratis are still profoundly disturbed. The Iranians continue to advance their missile development program and build-up their military.

In the region, Iran has furnished supplies, arms, troops and advisors (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) / Quds Force [also the Artesh in Syria]) in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Numbers of pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias in both Syria and Iraq (PMF) are loyal to the Iranian Supreme Leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, thus adding the potential for the emergence of additional united and armed Syrian and Iraqi Hezbollah-like organizations in the future. Internationally, the Iranians have allied with the Russians over Syria and have collaborated together with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Possible U.S. actions that may alleviate U.S./Iranian tensions for improving regional stability

The United States and Iran are both involved in four major conflicts (Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan). The two countries are on opposite sides in Syria and Yemen, yet are technically allies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The election of Iranian President Rouhani and the successful negotiation of the JCPOA have enabled Iran to move forward and begin to emerge from decades of international isolation caused by sanctions against it.

Those past sanctions strengthened the position of the political hardliners, allowed President Ahmadinezhad to weaken private sector businesses (which are guaranteed by Article 44 of the Iranian Constitution) and economically enriched and empowered the IRGC.

I believe that the following actions would alleviate U.S. – Iranian tension:

- Convince GCC countries, primarily Saudi Arabia and the UAE that the United States will not allow Iran to pose a security threat,
- Broker a peace settlement in Yemen and avert famine.
- Encourage countries around the world to strengthen diplomatic and economic relations with Iran. The Supreme Leader is continuing to advocate for his "Resistance Economy" which emphasizes domestic self-dependency. The Iranian economy is in shambles and all efforts should be made to stimulate and promote private businesses and international investment. This will help loosen the IRGC's artificial stranglehold on key contracts and projects and help loosen the effects of the "culture war" (*jang-e narm* - جنگ نرم) by improving trade and travel.

- Maintain a flexible negotiating position on the future of Syria. While the Asad regime is brutal, its ouster currently would only precipitate chaos or empower more radical Islamist elements.
- Open a dialogue with the Iranians and Russians on the future of conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the containment of Violent Extreme Organizations (VEOs) in Central Asia.
- In Iraq, work to strengthen the government and military and assist with strategies that will facilitate the disarming of Popular Mobilization Force(PMF) Shi'ite militias and integrating them into the Iraqi Security Forces. A number of these militias, such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, are loyal to Iran alone. All efforts should be made to assure that Iraqi political parties are not allowed to possess armed militias.

Payam Mohseni, Harvard University

U.S. and Iranian strategic visions for the Middle East clash across multiple fronts: ideologically between pan-Islamism and anti-imperialism vs. liberalism; geopolitically with regards to Israel and the nature of regional order; and militarily over the continued U.S. armed presence in the region. In particular, the cornerstone of the Iranian posture that sets the two countries on a confrontational path is Iranian opposition to the existence of Israel and Iranian revisionism for the security architecture of the Middle East. American goals to contain, undermine, or push back Iranian influence are thus consequences of fundamentally opposing regional visions of the two countries. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, the United States and its allies like Saudi Arabia have consistently aimed to limit, debilitate, and isolate Iran, whether as part of the “dual containment” doctrine in the 1990s or the current efforts to confront Iran’s increased regional reach. As a result, current flashpoints of contention with Iran across the region—whether in Yemen, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere—are naturally seen through the prism of this larger confrontation and assessed within the self-assigned parameters of U.S. national interests to push back Iran.

Today, however, there is an inherent flaw in how U.S. national interests and goals towards Iran have been traditionally conceptualized. The Middle Eastern landscape is undergoing a fundamental transformation with the erosion of the Arab state system, the de-legitimization and breakdown of brittle authoritarian regimes, and the expansion of power vacuums that result in violent conflicts, the rise of non-state actors, and military interventions in nominally sovereign territories by regional and international powers. This trend line towards Middle East disorder and chaos therefore changes the power relations and calculations of regional actors and thus necessitates a rethinking of previous analytical assumptions. Even if the United States succeeds in its pushback against Iran, the majority of the strategic problems that endanger U.S. interests in the region including the rise of jihadi terrorism, the threat to allies’ security and durability, threats to energy security and American political and military installations, the rise of anti-American social forces, and general political instability—will not be necessarily alleviated. In this new context, Iranian revisionism to regional order is less a driver of Middle East conflict dynamics than the actual erosion and structural weaknesses, liabilities, and vulnerabilities of Arab states, many of which are traditional allies of America.

Moreover, as a result of these structural dynamics, traditional American diplomacy and alliance-building is increasingly uncertain as its major partners and the poles of power in the Middle East—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey—are rethinking their role in the region or face serious internal social and political challenges. Turkey and Saudi Arabia are becoming increasingly assertive and expect the United States to do more as an active patron while simultaneously bending less to American wishes and interests in the region. The scramble for power and stability by American allies complicates the traditional convergences of interests that have existed between the partners. Many of these structural changes in the Middle East and new allied political-diplomatic mindsets increase the costs and lower the benefits that these traditionally allies offered America. The question of Saudi, Gulf, and Turkish patronage of jihadi groups in the region adds an additional question mark to the viability and utility of their partnership to the United States and its

Turkey and Saudi Arabia are becoming increasingly assertive and expect the United States to do more as an active patron while simultaneously bending less to American wishes and interests in the region. The scramble for power and stability by American allies complicates the traditional convergences of interests that have existed between the partners.

ideological goal to champion liberal democracy and human rights—especially given Turkey’s turn towards greater Islamic authoritarianism and Saudi’s growing adventurism.

Consequently, in today’s increasingly fractious and unstable Middle East, it is all the more important to understand where and how the United States and Iran can see eye-to-eye. The objective to isolate Iran has not worked successfully in the past as demonstrated by Iran’s steady rise in the Middle East, let alone now and into the future horizon of increased regional instability. Iran’s capabilities and capacities in the region—including the Shi’a militias that may be traditionally seen as contradictory to U.S. interests—could potentially be used to further U.S. goals of regional stability and the fight against terrorism in a context when previous state nodes of power are waning. By engaging with Iran, the U.S. will simultaneously reduce its perceived dependence on allies such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey and allow the country to leverage its multi-pronged diplomacy and influence to best shape the increasingly complex and multi-polar order of the region. It can also reduce the strengthening of ties between Iran and Russia, and thus open the space for the United States to influence regional events and the politics of the Axis of Resistance countries.

Iranian-American coordination can bring stability in critical geostrategic arenas—including in the Levant, Persian Gulf, and Central Asia. This cooperation has the potential to provide viable short and long term political paths for trans-regional order. Iran’s unparalleled position on the geopolitical map and its ability to simultaneously act as a power in multiple geographic areas makes it simply indispensable to most major issues that confront the Middle East, the Caucuses, Central Asia, as well as South Asia. In the short run, cooperation between the two states can provide a security umbrella over energy transit, combat terrorism, and ensure the security and legitimacy of the Arab Gulf states.

Iran’s interest in combatting radical jihadism, providing security for global energy exports and international trade, and its commitment to providing indigenous governing-security structures in the failed states of the Middle East mean that American-Iranian cooperation can take on novel trajectories to shape a new Middle East. Whether or not official policy in either state creates opportunity for working with one another remains to be seen, but geo-political factors dictate that cooperation must take place given the over-lapping zones of influence and priorities Iran and America have in the Middle East.

**Laura Jean Palmer-Moloney, Visual Teaching Technologies, LLC &
Alex Dehgan, Conservation X Labs**

Regarding options for alleviating U.S./Iranian tension and helping achieve regional stability—consider the importance of the water-food-energy nexus in the dynamic variation of regional climate and opportunities for DoD and DoS led engagement.

Scientific Cooperation as Positive Leverage

The U.S. may use its considerable scientific expertise in water and agriculture in engagement efforts. Iran is a society that greatly values science, both historically and in the present and has highlighted the importance of science in its national strategic plan, and in statements of the Supreme Leader Khameni (noted in 1387/2008, the year of “innovation and flourishing”). Science, technology, and education in Iran are as respected as much, or more so, than the mullahocracy. Within the Iranian government, scientists, physicians or engineers, some of which were trained in the West, serve in key positions in the Office of the President and in the Cabinet. America leads the world in science and technology, and US S&T commands great respect throughout the Islamic world. This is particularly true in Iran, where Iranian scientists co-author more scientific papers with U.S. scientists, than with scientists of any other country in the world.

Understanding and respect for Iran’s scientific heritage builds the mutual respect and trust necessary for real engagement. This, in turn, is a prerequisite for reducing the current insecurities that contribute to the aggressive and counter-productive behaviors, including nuclear proliferation, of the Iranian regime. Science also provides a common language and common values to engage Iranians in a manner that is transparent and non-threatening to the government, yet contains seeds for closer engagement and future change. Those values are honesty, doubt, respect for evidence, openness, accountability, meritocracy, tolerance and indeed hunger for opposing points of view. As an example, the extensive contacts between U.S. and Soviet scientists during the height of the Cold War helped effect the dramatic changes that ended the Soviet Union.

Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)

Iran is a revolutionary power looking to extend its security perimeter into neighboring states and to burnish its Islamist credentials by resistance to Israel. It will be impossible to overcome these problems exclusively in a bilateral US/Iran context, though increased communication between Tehran and Washington (including diplomatic representatives at some level in each of their capitals) is highly desirable.

Regional stability would also benefit from some sort of regional security architecture—think OSCE in Europe or ASEAN in Asia. This would aim at de-escalating Sunni/Shia, Saudi/Iranian, Turkish/Iranian, and other regional conflicts and tensions. There are few places on earth today with less regional cooperation and connectivity than the Middle East and North Africa.

Iran’s Strategic Interests Regarding Regional Conflict

Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team

Iran INTEREST	DESCRIPTION	INTEREST TYPE				
		National security/ population safety	Int’l/ intergroup prestige	Domestic politics/ regime security/ constituent support	Economic survival/ prosperity	Identity/ ideology
Increase Iranian influence in region; Dominate/sustain Sunni-Shi’a balance of power; mitigate threat from Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S.	<p><i>Iran has long sought to establish itself as a key cultural, political, and economic player in the Middle East by strategically engaging Shia populations in the region (Bazoobandi, 2014; Cook, Barkey, & Natali, 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015). As the largest Shia majority country in the region, Iran has a strong interest in offsetting Saudi influence across the region and claiming a place as a regional power with global reach (Bazoobandi, 2014). In Yemen, its backing of the Houthi rebels, a Zaidi Shia group directly opposes Saudi interests and influence (R. Mohammed, 2015).</i></p>	X	X			
	<p><i>In Iraq, Iran has sought to maintain strong political influence by investing in a Shia-dominated Iraqi government that supports Tehran’s foreign policy objectives in the region (Bazoobandi, 2014; Martin, Cowan, & Mcalaster, 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015). Providing military support to Iraq and aid to Shiite militias in the fight against ISIL (Almukhtar & Yourish, 2015; Martin et al., 2015; R. Mohammed, 2015) both strengthen Iran’s influence in Iraq and address the external threat of Sunni jihadism.</i></p>					
	<p><i>In Syria, Iran has worked to safeguard the survival of the Assad regime which enhances its influence in Syria – a strategic location that is the lynchpin of Iran’s influence over the Arab-Israeli conflict as it provides a transit way for Iran to ship arms and resources to Hezbollah (Bonsey, 2014). Iran’s backing of Hezbollah also provides it considerable influence in Lebanon, which provides leverage against Israel (Khatib, 2014; Salem, 2014).</i></p>					
Defend economic assets in Syria; gain foothold in post-conflict economy	<p><i>Syria remains a focus of Iranian economic activity and foreign investment, particularly in the face of remaining Western sanctions. Since civil conflict broke out in 2011, and Turkey and Qatar halted Syrian aid, the Islamic Republic has provided nearly \$5 billion in loans to Syria to prop up its economy and rebuild infrastructure (al-Saadi, 2015). Despite the fighting Iran’s trade with Syria is growing and expected to reach \$1 billion in 2015 (Press TV, 2015). Iran’s economic investments and previous banking and energy agreements may be undermined by an opposition or transitional government replacing the Assad regime (Rafizadeh, 2013). If Assad survives, Iran - the largest producer of cement and iron in the Middle East - will be in a good position to benefit from post-conflict reconstruction projects - a point reiterated by the top Iranian economic official in Damascus according to an 18 May 2015 news report (Press TV, 2015).</i></p>			X	X	

**Ensure Iranian
internal security
and sovereign
control**

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

X

X

Author Biographies

Alex Dehgan



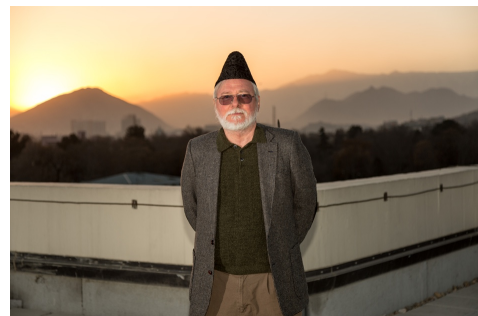
Alex Dehgan is the CEO & co-founder of a new startup, [Conservation X Labs](#), focused on harnessing exponential technologies, open innovation, and entrepreneurship for addressing global challenges, including launching the first Grand Challenge for Conservation on Aquaculture, creating the first digital makerspace, and developing new handheld microfluidics based DNA field scanners. He is also The Chanler Innovator in Residence at Duke University (and previously served as the Inaugural Rubenstein Fellow at Duke), where he researches and lectures on technology and innovation, including through a Massive Open Online Course with Coursera, *Innovation and Design for Global Grand Challenges*.

Dr. Alex Dehgan recently served as the Chief Scientist at the U.S. Agency for International Development, with rank of Assistant Administrator, and founded and headed the Office of Science and Technology, and conceptualized and helped create the Global Development Lab, USAID's DARPA for Development. Prior to coming to USAID, Alex worked in multiple positions within the Office of the Secretary, the Office of the Science Adviser to the Secretary, and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, at the U.S. Department of State, as well as with the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. At State, Alex developed political and science diplomacy strategies towards addressing our most challenging foreign policy issues in Iran, Iraq, and the greater Islamic world, including helping initiating the Obama Administration's diplomatic efforts with Iran through science diplomacy working with Amb. Dennis Ross, and serving as a liaison to the late Amb. Richard Holbrooke on Iran-Afghanistan affairs.

Alex was also the founding Afghanistan Country Director for the Wildlife Conservation Society's Afghanistan Program. Through his leadership, WCS led efforts to create Afghanistan's first national park (and later its second), conducted the first comprehensive biological surveys of the country in 30 years, and curtailed illegal wildlife trade on US and ISAF military bases. Alex holds a Ph.D. & M.S. in Evolutionary Biology from The University of Chicago, and a J.D. from the University of California, Hastings.

Mark Luce

Dr. Luce was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghazni, Afghanistan. He holds a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago. His specialization is in Islamic Thought and Persian literature, with regional expertise in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf and Yemen. He speaks Persian (Dari, Farsi, Tajik), Pashtu and Arabic. He has lived and worked in the Middle East and South Asia for more than 25 years (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, the U.A.E., Jordan, Yemen, Qatar, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia). His current interests and



projects are ISIS, Trans-regional Threat Streams and Sunni-Shia sectarian strife. Dr. Luce is an analyst for the Cultural Intelligence Cell, 4th MISG (A), 1st Special Force Command (provisional), USASOC at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Laura Jean Palmer-Moloney



Moving from her career as an established geography professor, Dr. Palmer-Moloney joined US Government service in 2009 and began her research on water in the national security context. She served in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012 as an AFPAK Hand/ Senior Adviser on Water Management to the Commanding Generals of Regional Command Southwest. She received the USACE ERDC award for Operational Support for Water Security in recognition of her geospatial reasoning contribution to Stability Operations during her deployment. After redeploying, Dr. Palmer-Moloney

was detailed from USACE ERDC to National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) where she led the InnoVision Anticipatory Analytics Water Security research team. She currently works as an independent research scientist with her consulting company Visual Teaching Technologies.

Dr. Palmer-Moloney is a recognized Subject Matter Expert and frequently contributes to water security dialogue sponsored by the Atlantic Council, the Stimson Center, the Near East-South Asia Strategic Studies Center (NESA), Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), and the OSD Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment Office. She has authored numerous publications, including *Human-Environment Interaction and Water Complexities: Mustering Science and Policy for a Coastal Resources Management Approach to Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations* (2012, East Carolina University dissertation on-line); "Water's role in measuring security and stability in Helmand Province, Afghanistan" *Water International*, 36 (3), 2011: 207-221; "Water as Nexus: Linking U.S. National Security to Environmental Security," *Journal of Military Geography*, 1 (1), 2011: 52-65; (with A.O. Dehgan and M. Mirzaee) "Water Security and Scarcity: Destabilization in Western Afghanistan due to Interstate Water Conflicts," in E. Weinthal, J.Troell, and M. Nakayama (eds.) *Water and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, London: Taylor & Francis (2012); and (with K. U. Duckenfield) "Water Insecurity, Human Dynamics, and COIN in the Sistan Basin," in *Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Global Security: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Human Geography in an Era of Persistent Conflict*, eds. R. Tomes and C. Tucker (US Geospatial Intelligence Foundation, in press).

She holds a BA in Anthropology, an MA in Geography, and two PhD degrees—one in curriculum and instruction with a focus in Geographic Education from the College of Education, University of Denver (1998); one in Coastal Resources Management with a focus in wetlands ecology and hydrology from East Carolina University (2012). In 2013, Dr. Palmer-Moloney completed the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Executive Education Program on the Water Future of South Asia.

Payam Mohseni

Dr. Payam Mohseni is the Director of the Iran Project and Fellow for Iran Studies at the Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He is also a Lecturer in the Department of Government at Harvard University where he teaches Iranian and Middle East politics and is a multiple recipient of the Harvard Excellence in Teaching award. Dr. Mohseni also serves as a scholar and member of Harvard's Iran Working Group, which he co-chairs with Professor Graham Allison, and he also manages the Belfer Center's Special Initiative *Iran Matters*, a premier outlet for policy analysis on all aspects of contemporary Iranian affairs. Dr. Mohseni co-chaired Harvard's Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies Study Group on the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe from 2014 to 2016.



Dr. Mohseni's research focuses on Iranian foreign and domestic policymaking, ideology and sectarian conflict in the Middle East, and the politics of authoritarianism and hybrid regimes. Dr. Mohseni is fluent in Persian and travels frequently to Iran. His analysis has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Washington Post*, *The National Interest*, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, *Bloomberg*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *MSNBC*, among others, including prominent international and Iranian media outlets.

Previously, Dr. Mohseni was a postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Belfer Center's International Security Program, a Junior Research Fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University, and a member of the Iran Study Group at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in Washington, D.C. He holds a Ph.D. in Government from Georgetown University, and he obtained an M.A. in Conflict, Security, and Development from the Department of War Studies at King's College London, and a B.A. in Development Studies from the University of California, Berkeley.

Daniel Serwer



Daniel Serwer is a Professor of the Practice of Conflict Management, director of the Conflict Management Program and a Senior Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. 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.

Allison Astorino-Courtois



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

Previously, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007) where she served as a STRATCOM liaison to U.S. and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX (1994-2003) where her research focused on the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. She has received a number of academic grants and awards and has published articles in multiple peer-reviewed journals. She has also taught at Creighton University and as a visiting instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Astorino-Courtois earned her Ph.D. in International Relations and MA in and Research Methods from New York University. Her BA is in political science from Boston College. Finally, Dr. Astorino-Courtois also has the distinction of having been awarded both a US Navy Meritorious Service Award and a US Army Commander's Award.