

UNCLASSIFIED

USCENTCOM Regional & Population Dynamics Project

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Futures Study
with an
Assessment of Syrian Refugee Camp Radicalization Dynamics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Prepared by:

TRADOC G-2
Modeling and Simulation Directorate
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027

For the
STRATEGIC MULTILAYER ASSESSMENT
Office of the Secretary of Defense Joint Staff J-39

3 March 2020

Analysis Team:

Study Lead: Mr. Howard E. Lee, Senior Research Analyst, DoD Contactor, TRADOC G-2
Dr. Jumanne Donahue, Senior Athena Analyst / Modeler, DoD Contactor, TRADOC G-2
Mr. Nathan 'Luke' Roth, Athena Analyst / Modeler, DoD Contactor, TRADOC G-2
Dr. David Hunter-Chester, Senior Research Analyst, DoD Contactor, TRADOC G-2

The overall classification of this document is UNCLASSIFIED

Executive Summary

At the request of the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), the Joint Staff J-39 Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) conducted a study to understand the strategic implications of destabilizing population dynamics within the Central Region. The SMA considered drivers of instability in the region to include long-term internally displaced persons and refugees, spread of radical ideologies and extremism, great power competition, disruptive non-state actors, and the potential for “black swan” scenarios.

In support of USCENTCOM and the SMA, the TRADOC G-2 Modeling and Simulations Directorate (MSD) employed the Athena Simulation to address a series of research questions posed by USCENTCOM to better understand the strategic implications of destabilizing population dynamics within the Central Region. USCENTCOM provided 24 questions for assessment, of those, two were selected for Athena-based analysis:

Question A7 - What happens if there is a revolt in the House of Saud? What happens if there is a collapse of the House of Saud? Will Wahhabi clerics seize or attempt to seize control? Do Saudi forces (especially SANG) stay loyal?

Question B5 – How do you protect an at-risk population from extremism in an IDP/refugee camp? How do you build community resilience to help prevent radicalization? How do you triage and segregate persons in IDP/refugee camps that have varying degrees of radicalization?

This [Final Report](#) compiles the insights derived by the Athena team from research, Subject Matter Expert (SME) engagements, Athena Simulation runs, and the collaborative analysis conducted with other members of the SMA community of interest.

The Athena Simulation is a sociocultural modeling capability that provides decision makers an improved understanding of the intended and unintended consequences, the second and third order effects, of their engagement options (police/military force activities, economic engagements, information operations, etc.) upon noncombatant populations when viewed across the entirety of the Operational Environment.

Two separate instantiations of the Athena Simulation were used to model potential regional futures. In the first, an assessment of possible regime change dynamics in the House of Saud was conducted. In the second assessment, various radicalization disengagement intervention strategies were modeled and evaluated using a simulated population from the Al-Hawl Refugee Camp in Hasakah, Syria.

UNCLASSIFIED

To inform the study objectives and provide an improved understanding of the underlying political, economic and sociocultural dynamics at work in each of these studies, multiple scenario use cases were employed to provide a range of possible futures. These use cases defined conditions leading to modeling outcomes that enabled a comparative analysis of Athena results to be conducted.

Use Cases (Saudi Arabia Regime Change Database):

- Use Case #1 (Progressive) establishes a set of conditions in Saudi Arabia reflecting the implementation of a progressive agenda by of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman upon his assumption of the throne.
- Use Case #2 (Traditional) reflects conditions in Saudi Arabia during a period in which the leadership of the country reestablishes a more traditional set of Islamic standards of conduct under the leadership of Mohammed bin Nayef.
- Use Case #3 (Coup) introduces a set of conditions in Saudi Arabia reflecting a period of significant turmoil following the death of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in which hardline traditionalists launch a coup to seize control of the regime.

Use Cases (Syria Refugee Camp Radicalization Database)

- Use Case #1 (Status Quo) reflects conditions of the Al-Hawl Refugee Camp¹ with 400 SDF² guard personnel and approximately 70,000 ISIL³ affiliated detainees, no official economic activity or legitimate jobs, and insufficient social services.
- Use Case #2 (Diversion through Work) represents a disengagement intervention that establishes an official economy in Al-Hawl along with jobs and consumables. All other factors (guard force, ISIL affiliates, etc.) in the camp remain unchanged. There are insufficient SDF personnel to properly secure the detainees and they are not given sufficient food and health services.
- Use Case #3 (Holistic Disengagement) portrays a disengagement intervention that combines increasing the size of the SDF guard force and reflecting that they are more culturally sensitive and compassionate towards detainees. Additionally, detainees are provided sufficient health and food services, while an official economy is simultaneously being established.

¹ The al-Hawl refugee camp is located on the southern outskirts of the town of al-Hawl in northern Syria. It holds individuals displaced from Islamic State group-occupied territory. It is controlled by the US-backed SDF.

² SDF - Syrian Democratic Forces. The SDF is an alliance in the Syrian Civil War composed primarily of Kurdish, Arab, and Assyrian/Syriac militias. The SDF is militarily led by the People's Protection Units (YPG), a mostly Kurdish militia.

³ ISIL - Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. ISIL is also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), is a terrorist militant group that follows a fundamentalist, Salafi jihadist doctrine of Sunni Islam.

UNCLASSIFIED

A combination of research, SME engagements, and Athena Simulation modeling and analysis produced the following insights:

Saudi Arabia Regime Change Insights:

Insight #1. The Progressive Agenda (Vision 2030) being implemented by Saudi leadership could be at risk if implemented too aggressively.

Insight #2. The civilian population has greater overall satisfaction with the conditions in Saudi Arabia established under the Progressive Agenda than they do under the more hardline traditionalist future.

Insight #3. The Saudi youth population is a key societal demographic that can sway Saudi Arabia towards the progressive agenda goals or toward more traditional hardline values depending on how it is engaged and/or influenced.

Insight #4. A coup in Saudi Arabia is unlikely to succeed unless a significant portion of the Saudi Arabian National Guard supports the rebellion.

Insight #5. The Progressive Agenda (Vision 2030) being implemented by Mohammed bin Salman leads to economically better conditions across all population groups despite how particular groups feel about the Progressive Agenda.

Insight #6. The Wahhabi clerics will not have sufficient long-term popular support to effectively seize control of the government.

Insight #7. Population satisfaction declines across all civilian groups if US forces remain deployed indefinitely in control of the oil producing region and resources of Saudi Arabia.

Radicalization Insights:

Insight #1. To mitigate radicalization, increases in social services and economic support need to be paired with the introduction of a robust, competent and ideologically compatible security force.

Insight #2. Establishing a conditional process for managing the distribution of social services and economic incentives is an effective strategy for disengaging at-risk populations from potential radicalization.

Conclusions.

The Athena Simulation was utilized to computationally model potential futures in order to assess the implications of regime change in Saudi Arabia, as well as for gaining an improved understanding of how Syrian refugee populations might be radicalized. Results of this Athena modeling provided insights that informed the development of conclusions which have been aligned the two primary CENTCOM research questions.

Question A7 - What happens if there is a revolt in the House of Saud? What happens if there is a collapse of the House of Saud? Will Wahhabi clerics seize or attempt to seize control? Do Saudi forces (especially SANG) stay loyal?

- 1) If there is a revolt in the House of Saud leading it to shift away from the emerging progressive agenda, it appears unlikely that the House of Saud would collapse and enable another external actor to take control.
- 2) If there is a transition in the House of Saud from its progressive agenda towards a more hardline future state, the existing regime/royal family line would be expected to continue to exert control over the kingdom.
- 3) The Wahhabi clerics will continue to exert significant influence over the leadership and agenda of the Saudi royal family; however, they do not appear to have the popular support necessary to shift the KSA into becoming a theocracy (like Iran).
- 4) Portions of the SANG might be expected to align with many of the hardline religious beliefs espoused by the royal hardliners and Wahhabi clerics; however, there does not appear to be sufficient support across the SANG to generate the strength necessary to create a regime change.

Question B5 – How do you protect an at-risk population from extremism in an IDP/refugee camp? How do you build community resilience to help prevent radicalization? How do you triage and segregate persons in IDP/refugee camps that have varying degrees of radicalization?

- 1) Employing a process that distributes economic resources and social services on a conditional basis can be an effective means for mitigating the amount of influence exerted by an extremist organization over a refugee population.
- 2) Refugee populations are less at-risk of becoming radicalized if the distribution of social services and economic assistance is paired with a robust, competent and ideologically compatible security force.

UNCLASSIFIED

Contact Information

Study Lead:

- Mr. Howard Lee; Senior Research Analyst / Athena Program Lead
howard.e.lee6.ctr@mail.mil; 913-684-3867

Study Team:

- Dr. Jumanne Donahue; Senior Athena Analyst / Modeler
jumanne.k.donahue.ctr@mail.mil; 913-684-7963
- Mr. Nathan 'Luke' Roth; Athena Analyst / Modeler
nathan.l.roth.ctr@mail.mil; 913-684-7895
- Dr. David Hunter-Chester; Senior Research Analyst
david.e.hunterchester.ctr@mail.mil; 913-684-5965