



# Middle East Studies In Review

2014-2015

April 2016



Middle East Studies

at the Marine Corps University

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The mission of Marine Corps University is twofold: 1) to develop, deliver, and evaluate professional military education and training through resident and non-resident programs to prepare leaders to meet the challenges of the national security environment and 2) to preserve, promote, and display the history and heritage of the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps University develops the professional competence of its Marine, other service, international, and civilian students. As the Marine Corps proponent for professional military education, the University focuses on the development of leadership, warfighting, and staff operations abilities of the nation's military forces through resident and nonresident learning programs. Graduates are prepared to perform with increased effectiveness in service, joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational environments at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war, across the range of military operations.

## Middle East Studies In Review 2014-2015

The *Review* is available both in print and electronically through the MES website at [www.mcu.usmc.mil](http://www.mcu.usmc.mil) under the "Middle East" tab as well as on Facebook at [middleeaststudies.mcu](http://middleeaststudies.mcu). For information on obtaining print copies, please contact Mr. Adam C. Seitz, Senior Research Associate at MES, [adam.seitz@usmcu.edu](mailto:adam.seitz@usmcu.edu), telephone number (703) 432-5260.

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# MES Mission Statement

The mission of Middle East Studies at Marine Corps University is to serve as the Marine Corps' center of expertise on the Middle East and South/Central Asia in order to deepen the Marine Corps' understanding of these critical regions and to link the Marine Corps to the broader academic, intergovernmental, and international Middle East studies community.

Middle East Studies (MES) accomplishes this mission by:

- 1) Analyzing and assessing current events, regional trends, U.S. policy decisions and strategies, and the cultural and historical complexity of the region;
- 2) Conducting and publishing academic research related to the Middle East and South/Central Asia;
- 3) Leading classes, supporting student papers, and offering lectures and discussions on the Middle East and South/Central Asia to Marine Corps University (MCU) schools and other U.S. Armed Forces professional military education institutions;
- 4) Providing lectures and discussions on the Middle East and South/Central Asia to other services and U.S. Government agencies, foreign governments and militaries, and academia/non-governmental agencies;
- 5) Representing the Marine Corps and MCU at seminars and professional forums related to MES's areas of responsibility by participation and professional engagement.

# Forward

Since 2010, the Marine Corps University's Middle East Studies has presented internal and partnered research and analysis in three different forms in order to enrich the Marine Corps' understanding of the complex security environment of the Middle East and to provide accessible, relevant information for Marines, the broader defense community, and academia. The Middle East Studies Occasional Paper Series disseminates original, peer-reviewed research papers on a wide variety of subjects pertaining to the Middle East and South/Central Asia. The MES Monograph Series focuses on timely subjects of strategic relevance to the current and future US Professional Military Education community and is meant to be published quickly to address fast-developing situations. The third and final publication forum is the Middle East Studies *Insights*, published bi-monthly since January 2010 as the newsletter of MES. This publication features short analytical pieces as well as information on events organized by MES and provides a forum for debate with our readers. In April 2012, we published *Middle East Studies in Review 2010-2011*, which presented in one volume articles from the first two years of MES *Insights*. We continued this in 2014 with the publication of *Middle East Studies in Review 2012-2013*.

It gives me great honor to present the third installment, *Middle East Studies Review 2014-2015*, with articles from volumes five and six of MES *Insights*. The articles fall within four categories: the Arab World, Afghanistan, Weapons Proliferation, and Democratization in the Middle East and North Africa region. Four articles examine the evolving situation in Yemen, and three articles review Afghanistan's 2014 elections. Other themes covered include the nuclear agreement with Iran, Saudi Arabia's missile forces, ISIL, the refugee crisis in Europe, and US democratization efforts in the Middle East. The *Review* also informs readers of MES activities and of selected engagements by MES staff during 2014 and 2015.

The articles in the *Review* represent the breadth and depth of the scope of MES's research as well as showcase the contributions from our colleagues at the Marine Corps' Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning and our guest speakers who presented papers as part of the MES lecture series.

We will continue to offer our analysis and assessment of current events and regional trends as well as the cultural and historical complexity of this strategically important region, all the while being mindful of our primary task to serve as a tool in the advancement of the MCU students and community and sister Professional Military Education institutions.

I look forward to your continued engagement with and support of our work.

Amin Tarzi  
Director, Middle East Studies  
Marine Corps University



# MES Insights: Arab World

MES Insights • Volume 5, Issue 1 • January 2014

## Syria's Civil War: No Resolution in Sight

by Ambassador Theodore H. Kattouf

While at a lunch some time ago attended by several of my former US Foreign Service colleagues, one, whom I had worked for and respected, told our Israeli guest that it was quite predictable that the Arab people would explode onto the streets against their dictatorial governments. You could see it coming, though holding my tongue, I wanted to blurt out, when did you or anyone else write a high-profile article about the coming Arab revolutions? His remarks reminded of the comment that economists had predicted 10 of the last six recessions.

It is true that those who worked in or on the Arab countries were well aware of the pent up popular frustrations and the poor records of the regimes that claimed to govern them. Yet, these same regimes had been in power for 40 years or more, largely following the same policies and practices. They trumpeted “security and stability” as their virtues. Challenges to their rule had been few and far between, not to mention short lived. You see, these regimes had become quite adept at coup-proofing themselves. They created overlapping and redundant security and intelligence services, all competing with one another and each one reporting to the leader or his most trusted family members. These family members were appointed to sensitive positions and allowed to profit from their offices and connections, as were other non-family loyalists who had proven themselves. Thus, since the 1970s, few threats existed to the entrenched regimes and almost none came from within the ranks of the militaries or security/intelligence services. Nevertheless, there is almost nothing the autocratic Middle East regimes feared more than large, widespread, and prolonged demonstrations and rioting. Knowing that their police forces might not be able to restore order, they would then face the dreaded need to call upon army units to confront their fellow nationals.

Secular liberals and human rights activists did not enjoy strong popular support and thus were easy for the regimes to silence. The only organized opposition in most Arab countries were Islamists. The most disciplined groups with the most committed followers were able to survive, often despite being outlawed. Their followers often endured torture and years of incarceration. Some were even executed or died in prison of mistreatment. Some Islamist groups came to denounce violence and were tolerated to a certain degree, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, while others groups remained officially proscribed, with even membership punishable by death. Such was the case in Saddam's Iraq and under the Asads of Syria.

Despite the regimes' efficient and ruthless state security organs, popular frustrations were building for years accelerated by a huge youth demographic. Arab countries have many similarities, but they also have plenty of differences, making it unfair and unsound to just stereotype the lot of them. However, among their similarities is the startling youth of their populations. About half of all the people in the Arab states are under 21 and about two-thirds are under 35. A youthful population can lead to rapid economic growth or, failing that, cause tremendous instability.

Unfortunately, another trait most Arab countries share is a weak public education system. The school systems seem intent on producing obedient, passive citizens. A great deal of rote learning and teaching to the test occurs. Inquiry and discussion in the classroom are the exception rather than the rule. In general, Arab society instills deference to authority figures and is characterized by paternalism. This is true at home, in school, in matters of religious instruction, and finally in dealing with governmental authority. Perhaps, these authoritarian aspects of the culture explain to some degree why the Arab revolutions didn't occur sooner and why some opposition movements are themselves authoritarian.

What the brash, brave, and innovative young people organizing the initial demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt didn't foresee was the degree to which their quest for dignity and a voice in their governance would come to benefit some of the more authoritarian and reactionary opposition movements in their countries. Although neither Tunisia nor Egypt are known for harboring the more extreme forms of Islam, they both had well organized, highly disciplined Muslim Brotherhood parties that were prepared to mobilize their supporters behind their candidates for the constituent assemblies and interim parliaments.

Both Tunisia and Egypt are relatively homogeneous countries. Their respective militaries' loyalty is to the nation, institutional values, and their perquisites. This homogeneity and the values of their professional militaries contrast markedly from Syria's. Those differences go far in explaining why Bashar al-Asad was not overthrown and why a terrible civil war has ensued. In Syria, the professional military identified with and was much more loyal to the regime and to their religious sect. On what basis do I make this claim? I served at the US Embassy in Syria on three separate occasions—in the 1970s, the 1990s, and at the beginning of the New Millennium.

To understand this conflict, it is important to understand who the Alawites are, how they came to dominate the military and eventually the rest of the country's power centers, and why they fight as a cohesive minority. It is said that the Alawites came from Shi'ite Islam, but their belief system has evolved into something far removed from other forms of Islam. While official census data for religion is unavailable, it is estimated that Syria's Alawites comprise about 12 percent of the population; the Christians, who have been emigrating, once may have been 20 percent of Syria, but today probably number only about 10 percent; the Druze are another 3 percent; and the Shi'ite may be percent. The Sunni Kurds in the northeast of Syria account for another 9 percent. The majority of Syria's populace, probably 60 percent, are Sunni Arabs. Regarded as heretics or even infidels, the Alawites suffered scorn and persecution during much of the Ottoman rule over Syria. They took refuge in the hard-scrabble coastal mountains overlooking Tartus and Latakia. So poor were many Alawite families that they sometimes sold their daughters as indentured servants to city folk. When the French after WWI were awarded the mandate for Syria and Lebanon, they followed their traditional divide and rule strategy. The Alawites were not only offered an autonomous area in their mountain redoubts but they also joined the French-officered gendarmerie in large numbers. Meanwhile, the majority Sunnis saw service in a colonial force as unpatriotic and beneath them. So Alawite men received military training and discipline that held them in good stead when the French finally evacuated Syria in June 1945 and the new Republic of Syria needed its own army. Successive coups and countercoups from 1949 through 1966 led to group after group being cashiered or retired until the Alawites were the only sect with dominant power. They then settled scores among themselves, with Hafez al-Assad's becoming President after the final coup in November 1970 that toppled his military and governmental rival, the Alawite general Salah Jadid.

In the past, the regime ruled effectively through the aforementioned series of overlapping security and intelligence services dominated by the Alawites and elite military units that had the best training and equipment. These units were either wholly Alawite—the Presidential Guard, or largely so, including the Special Forces. However, before the uprising, the Syrian army totaled between 250,000 and 300,000 soldiers and was largely a conscript armed forces. Most young Syrian males serve and acquire military training, including, of course, familiarity with various armaments. This

reality looms large in today's situation.

### **Bashar's Formative Experiences**

When Bashar al-Asad became President of Syria in July 2000, he had been understudying his father for six years. Originally, he was to become an ophthalmologist and was doing a medical residency in England when his brother, Baasil, the heir-apparent, died in a car accident. Bashar claims that his father left the choice to him as to whether to prepare for leadership of Syria.

In my talks, I cannot resist comparisons to the famous novel by Mario Puzo, *The Godfather*. My take is that Bashar al-Asad is Michael Corleone, the son who was going to make the family proud by pursuing a prestigious career outside the family business—governing Syria. And yes, the methods used by the Syrian leadership to remain in power and profit from its leadership have strong similarities to the classic Mafia families. Bashar, as Michael, thought he could make the family more legitimate. He began by encouraging some open discussions by intellectuals and other luminaries, who apparently took him much too seriously. His fathers' stalwarts and advisors are reputed to have intervened to school him on the limits of such initiatives, and very soon a crackdown occurred. The experiment was never tried again. Bashar came to understand that to maintain power, he would have to adapt to the family's ruthless system.

His confidence increased when he convinced himself that the Bush Administration had a plan to unseat him and that he had thwarted it. It didn't, but the Bush Administration did seek to isolate the Syrian regime especially after the assassination of the prominent Lebanese leader Rafic Hariri on 14 February 2005. His new circle of international friends, most importantly Turkey, helped him break out of beleaguered status. This further led him to believe that he was a gifted international strategist and knew best what his people needed. A formerly self-effacing young man had now acquired quite a bit of hubris. In a *Wall Street Journal* interview Bashar gave to Jay Soloman in January 2011, he dismissed any thought that the uprisings in Tunisia or Egypt could spread to Syria. He followed those statements by condescendingly stating that the introduction of democratic practice required a long period of dialogue with and among one's people, and that Syria was a long way from being ready.

Of course, less than two months later, the citizens of the impoverished southern border town of Dera'a came into the streets to protest the arrest and harsh treatment of their teenage boys for scrawling anti-regime graffiti around town. The regime quickly turned to lethal force, arrests, torture, and mass punishment to make an example of the town and to deter others from joining. This should have worked, but it didn't.

### **Post Dera'a**

Even as Dera'a protests were being brutally put down, other protestors emerged on to the streets of midland cities such as Homs, Hama, and Latakia, as well as the eastern Euphrates city of Deir al-Zor. The regime largely used loyalist units and the intelligence services to gun down and arrest peaceful demonstrators. In areas in which large Alawite populations existed, militias dubbed the *Shabiha* (ghosts) terrorized protesting neighborhoods.

It has been clear for some time that this conflict is a sectarian civil war. Civilian fighters, many of whom have military training, have been joined by defecting soldiers. Most military resistance is being locally coordinated. Makeshift clinics have sprung up after the regime began to kill and arrest those at hospitals being treated for their wounds. Small unit militias began to pick off regime convoys, checkpoints, and Shabiha thugs. More ominously, extreme Islamist movements with

substantial financing were bringing in fighters from a wide variety of countries to fight the Asad regime. However, unlike most Syrian oppositionists their goal was not a free, democratic, pluralistic Syria. Their ideology calls for the establishment of a caliphate encompassing as much of the Islamic populations as possible, starting with Syria and Iraq. Their narrow-minded and distorted interpretations of Islam revolve around strict segregation of the sexes, the domination of women by their husbands or close male relatives, the expulsion or extreme marginalization of not only religious minorities, but fellow Sunnis who do not adhere to their practices, and the belief that coercive violence in pursuit of their ends is sanctioned by God. They seek to return to a time in early Islam that never was. In their view, Shi'ite Muslims are heretics and the Alawites, who are an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam, are outright infidels. For both sides, then, this has become an existential conflict—neither side believes it will survive a victory by the other.

Facing an enemy that potentially has most of the country's population to draw upon for recruits and support, morale among the military and security units was plummeting as they found it increasingly difficult to control territory and protect themselves and their comrades. There are now whole regions in the north and east of the country that the military has largely ceded to the opposition. Some reports exaggerated the defections from the military, but late last year and early this year they appeared to be growing as soldiers could envision safe-haven areas for themselves and their families. The minorities, however, largely stayed loyal and willing to fight.

The regime has a powerful hand to play, even now, and cannot be easily dislodged. Despite agreeing to surrender their arsenal of chemical weapons, they still have a wide arrange of heavy weaponry and an air force that they can employ at will. More recently, it has become apparent that the theocratic Shi'ite regime in Iran and their Shi'ite co-religionists in Lebanon, who largely give fealty to Hezbollah, are providing highly trained and effective fighters to the Syrian regime. Some from these groups are also training Alawites not in the armed forces to be a home guard to protect their locales, intimidate opposition sympathizers, and augment the armed forces in their areas.

And what of US policy? In my opinion, President Obama called for Asad's ouster without a plan for achieving it. He may have believed in the inevitability of an opposition victory. The US government also leaned on allies such as Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia to provide only basic arms to well vetted groups, while resisting taking an active role itself. Only since last spring has the US begun in earnest to train and equip several hundred fighters in Jordan. Much of the hesitance understandably results from fears that the arms will fall into the hands of jihadists and be used to commit crimes against humanity. US policy seems to be largely focused on humanitarian aid to assist the millions of refugees and displaced persons and to work with the Friends of Syria group and the Russians, who are not members, to try to convene a Geneva II meeting to advance a diplomatic settlement. But, what did Geneva I accomplish? In late June 2012, a number of countries gathered in Geneva to develop a roadmap of sorts to end this conflict. There was consensus on the need to form a transitional government drawn from both sides that would revive government functions and prepare for elections. However, the US and Russia came away with widely differing interpretations of the role of President Asad and his close associates in all of this. The US stated that once a transitional process was in place, Asad must leave office. The Russians maintain that the Syrian people must ultimately decide on who should lead them and that Asad and his regime could not be excluded during the transition period. What we can say is that the US position looks increasingly untenable as Asad's forces have won several strategic battles of late that are helping to consolidate his hold over the capital and the routes to the coastal mountains and port cities.

Moreover, the September 2013 Russian-brokered deal on relieving Asad of his chemical weapons yielded some tangible gains for the Syrian president. First, his cooperation is necessary to rid Syria of this WMD and, thus, in a perverse way the US has a stake in his survival for now. Second, by concentrating so heavily on CW, Asad may believe he has a freer hand to utilize other highly lethal arms against the rebels and their supporters.

## **So How Does It End.....Or Does It?**

Two Boston-based academics who studied civil wars had this to say. “The historical record suggests that most insurgent movements fail.” Typically this is due to the disparity in resources available to the opposing sides. Established states enjoy an advantage in terms of well-organized militaries, heavy firepower, and deep financial pockets. However, when the insurgents do prevail, it is because of their strong will to win. In the cases of Algeria and Vietnam, the insurgents were willing to accept horrendous losses and sacrifices for their respective causes. They also enjoyed broad popular support. In both of these cases their main adversaries were foreign armies not fighting on their home soil.

In the case of Syria, we have already seen the opposition’s courage, willingness to sacrifice, and substantial popular support. They realize that failure will result in their slaughter. However, the Asad regime is not a bunch of outsiders. They have their backs against the proverbial wall and imagine the same fate for themselves and their families. Bashar al-Asad is further helped by the history of persecution the Alawites endured at the hands of Sunni rulers and by the growing presence and strength of radical, al-Qaeda-like elements among an opposition movement that may not like them, but respects their fighting prowess and is not prepared to dispense with their help.

I do not believe that either side can win an outright victory. To my mind, even the assassination of Asad or the collapse of most aspects of his regime’s governance, is more likely to result in a country divided de facto among several factions that are unwilling to negotiate with each other. The Alawites come from the coastal mountains of Syria and can regroup there, while trying to maintain control of the two key port cities of Tartus and Latakia. The Kurds are largely concentrated in Syria’s northeast and abut their fellow Kurds in Turkey and Iraq. The Arab Sunni opposition as some predicted has splintered into several factions, including those disparate and loosely affiliated militias that fight under the banner of the free Syrian army. And the extreme Islamists, the most prominent of whom is Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS have vowed their allegiance to al-Qaeda and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The bloodshed and suffering in Syria is bad enough, but it threatens to eventually engulf neighboring Lebanon and Iraq that have similar, if not identical, sectarian and ethnic divides. It is not entirely unthinkable that borders rather arbitrarily drawn up by Britain and France after WWI could be defacto redrawn by force of arms and “ethnic cleansing.” The growing hatreds, militarization of disputes, and desire for revenge and rough justice could even pull in Israel and destabilize Jordan. For the US much is at stake, but no solutions present themselves.

## **What Can Be Done**

The prospects of a negotiated peace agreement leading to a democratic, pluralistic Syria that respects human rights and is at peace with its neighbors are now slim. The circumstances are not ripe for successful negotiations and may not exist for many years. A military stalemate on the ground may be taking shape but it is far from consolidated. Neither side believes that a satisfactory negotiated solution is currently possible. Moreover, no party or group can clearly speak in the name of the opposition. If the jihadists come to dominate the armed opposition and control much of northern and eastern Syria, ask yourself, what incentives they would have to negotiate. They cannot hope to receive recognition or legitimacy from the international community for their emirate of Islamic Syria or Iraq. Yet they would have a populace to rule, new resources, and a huge base of operations. As I said, the US and the international community currently have no good options. We must provide humanitarian aid and services; we need to continue diplomatic efforts; and finally, we need to assist allies such as Jordan and Turkey in insulating themselves as much as

possible from the most destabilizing aspects of the Syrian conflict.

*Ambassador Kattouf served in the US Foreign Service from 1972-2003. His postings include US Ambassador to the UAE (1998-2001) and Syria (2001-2003). He is currently President and CEO of AMIDEAST.*

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## Building Yemen's Maritime Security Capacity

by Adam C Seitz

Over the past decade smuggling across the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb has risen steadily. The illegal trafficking of weapons, drugs and people continues to fuel sectarian and political violence, threatening Yemen's fragile political transition. At the same time, with a coastline stretching almost 2,000 km along some of the world most strategic waterways, Yemen's continued internal instability and insecurity perpetuates international concerns that Yemen may become regional hub for transnational smuggling, piracy and terrorism, posing a significant threat to the free flow of international trade and international security. As such, building the capacity of Yemen's maritime security forces should be a top priority, not only for the Yemeni government but for the international community as a whole.

### Countering Threats to the International Trade and Security

In the late 2000s, the strategic waterways situated between Yemen and the Horn of Africa had become a hot spot for pirate activities, with political instability and insecurity in Somalia providing a viable safe haven for pirates. Responding to the increasing threat of piracy in the region, the multinational Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) established Combined Task Force (CTF) 151 in January 2009, with a mandate to actively deter, disrupt and suppress piracy, to protect global maritime security, and to secure the freedom of navigation for the benefit of all nations. A combination multinational maritime cooperation and Somali government's increased ability to fight and deter piracy and instability in its coastal regions contributed to a rapid, and sustained, decline in hijackings 2010.

Although acts of piracy in the region remained on a steady decline, by March 2011 US officials assessed that piracy in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden was no longer a strictly Somali enterprise, but was becoming a multinational business, with Yemenis joining Somalis in these lucrative schemes. The assessment coincided with the 2011 Arab uprisings and a rapid deterioration of Yemen's internal security. Continued political instability and insecurity increases the risk of Yemen becoming a viable safe haven for pirates, and other groups, that threaten freedom of navigation in Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb.

The combined success of CTF-151 and international efforts to enhance the Somali government's capacity to combat piracy highlights not only the value of multinational maritime cooperation to combat maritime threats, but also the need to build the capacity of Yemen's coastal and port

security forces to mitigate potential threats to international and maritime security. Furthermore, building the capacity of the Yemeni navy, coast guard and port security forces would not only help to mitigate threats posed to international trade and security, but also help to stem the flow of arms and drugs fueling violence and political instability in Yemen.

### **Threats to Yemen's Internal Stability**

Although there has been a significant drop in piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea since its peak in 2009, the smuggling of weapons, drugs and people across the Bab al-Mandeb and Red Sea is on the rise. Since 2012 there have been a number of weapons shipments—ranging from Turkish pistols with silencers to missiles and explosives, allegedly from Iran—seized by Yemeni security forces. While the Yemeni coast guard and port security forces have received well deserved praise for the interception of these shipments, the proliferation of weapons to armed opposition movements, tribal militias and terrorist organizations continues to pose a challenge internal security and Yemen's political transition. Local Yemeni officials continue to complain of their inability to combat the flow of arms shipments entering through the Red Sea ports of Midi and Mocha, enroute to Houthi rebels fighting in the Sa'da.

Furthermore, the smuggling of qat and diesel fuel continues to help fund tribal militias, terrorist organizations and other armed movements in Yemen. Such illicit activity not only contributes to the perpetuation of sectarian and political violence, but also undermines the legitimacy of the Yemen's central government and the international state-building efforts at a critical time. Building the capacity of the Yemeni navy, coast guard, and port security forces would go a long way towards stemming the flow of arms, drugs, and other goods that continue to fuel political and sectarian violence, which continue to undermine Yemen's political transition.

### **Towards a Win-Win-Win Maritime Security Partnership**

While Yemen's partnership in the US counterterrorism efforts has resulted in a substantial amount of military aid and training since the 2001, under the regime of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh much of this US counterterrorism assistance was used to prop-up, or create, what amounted praetorian forces, and sideline potential opposition to the regime. Unlike the army and internal security forces, maritime forces have traditionally been viewed as neither coup proofing forces nor have they been considered potential threats to the government. Thus, while US military aid was to build the capacity of the Republican Guard, Central Security Forces, Special Forces and newly created counterterrorism units, maritime security forces remained largely underequipped, undertrained and under underpaid.

Today, the perception that maritime forces pose little risk to the internal balance of forces provides an opportunity for greater maritime security cooperation between the US and Yemen, which would benefit not only Yemen and the US, but the international community as a whole. For the Yemeni government, securing its coastline would cut off an important line of external support to armed opposition, insurgents, terrorist and tribal militias. This would not only help to limit political and sectarian violence, but also contribute to President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi's efforts to reform and restructure the Yemeni armed forces under a unified command structure. For the US, a strong and sustained maritime partnership would aid efforts to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and its local affiliates, by cutting off a source of revenue, arms and potential recruits emigrating from North Africa. For the international community, building the capacity of Yemeni maritime forces would help to secure the strategic waterways between Yemen and the Horn of Africa, especially in the increasingly important Bab al-Mandeb.

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# Limitations of the “Yemen Model” to Counterterrorism

by Adam C Seitz

On 10 September 2014, US President Barak Obama addressed the nation to lay out his administration’s strategy to “degrade and ultimately destroy the terrorist group known as ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant].” To this end President Obama proposed a counterterrorism strategy that relied on a “systematic campaign of airstrikes” and an “increase in support to forces fighting these terrorists on the ground.” Comparing his strategy for ISIL to counterterrorism campaigns in Yemen and Somalia President Obama stated that, “This strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years.”

President Obama’s use of Yemen and Somalia as models for a strategy against ISIL has once again reignited debate on the overall effectiveness of US counterterrorism strategy in both cases. In the case of the “Yemen Model,” a strategy, which has relied upon a combination of airstrikes and support for local forces, has thus far fallen short of the ultimate objective of destroying al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its local affiliate Ansar al-Sharia (AAS). Indeed, most intelligence and think-tank estimates point to an increase in the number of attacks and the size of AQAP in recent years. This is not to say that US counterterrorism strategy has been completely ineffective, but rather that US efforts have been limited by realities on the ground, especially those contributing to a lack of reliable and effective local partners. Understanding how the political and security environment in Yemen have limited US counterterrorism efforts against AQAP may be useful in managing expectations as the US seeks to duplicate the successes of the “Yemen Model” in Iraq and Syria.

## **Finding Willing, Able and Effective Local Partners**

US counterterrorism efforts in Yemen underscore the difficulty of finding and providing support to local partners to dismantle and destroy AQAP and AAS. Following the 11 September 2001 terror attacks by al-Qaeda, then Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to partner with the United States in the Global War on Terror. From November 2002 until December 2009, this partnership translated, primarily, into the United States providing support to the Yemeni government’s efforts to strengthen its counterterrorism capabilities with military aid and intelligence sharing. President Saleh’s commitment to combating terrorism, and especially destroying al-Qaeda and its affiliates, however, was questionable at best. Instead Saleh used US counterterrorism aid to build-up a praetorian guard while sidelining potential opposition. According to a report by the Washington based think-tank American Enterprise Institute, western intelligence sources accused the Yemeni security apparatus of being complicit, or at the very least complacent, in a 2006 prison break, in which twenty-three members of al-Qaeda, including the mastermind of the 2000 USS *Cole* bombing, escaped through a tunnel leading from the prison to a mosque.<sup>1</sup> The prison break came

at a time when the US was heavily engaged in Iraq and the threat from al-Qaeda in Yemen was seen as relatively contained, resulting in less interest and aid for the Saleh regime. The incident, and especially the timing, contributed to the perception that Saleh was using the threat posed by al-Qaeda and counterterrorism aid to pursue his own personal agenda, calling into question the Saleh regime's commitment to defeating al-Qaeda in Yemen, as well as the overall effectiveness of a strategy that relies on a potentially unreliable partner. Political factionalization and divisions within the armed forces in the wake of the 2011 uprisings have further impaired US efforts to effectively provide support to and partner with the Yemeni military.

### **Limitations of Airstrikes: Is “Disrupt” Enough?**

The case of Yemen highlights the utility and limitations of targeted airstrikes. Since 2010, a combination of drone strikes and partnerships with regional and local allies, have been effective in disrupting AQAP's ability to plan, coordinate and conduct attacks against the US and its allies.<sup>2</sup> Following a reassessment of the Yemeni military's ability to effectively combat the growing threat posed by AQAP and the attempted downing of a US bound commercial airliner in December 2009, US counterterrorism strategy shifted to include a greater role for drones to support the efforts of the Yemeni armed forces. Political unrest and insecurity resulting from the 2011 uprisings across the Arab world, has required the US to increasingly depend on drone strikes for mitigating the threat AQAP poses to the US and its allies, as political factionalization and a divided Yemeni military have further limited the ability of the US to provide effective support to forces fighting AQAP. Although US counterterrorism strategy in Yemen has been effective in disrupting AQAP's ability to plan, coordinate and conduct attacks against the US and its allies, it falls short of dismantling and ultimately destroying the organization. But as realities on the ground continue to evolve, with recent military and political successes by the Houthis providing potential opportunities and challenges for all involved, so too must the strategy for combating AQAP in Yemen.

### **Moving From Disrupt to Dismantle and Destroy?**

The question remains as to whether the “Yemen Model” can contribute to the dismantling and ultimate destruction of AQAP. Such a strategy, which has shifted AQAP's operations in Yemen from targeting the far enemy to the targeting the close enemy, has already begun to shift the perception of the Yemeni government and key tribal elites. While AQAP was seen as manageable under Saleh, the threat that the organization poses to Yemen's internal stability has increased significantly since 2011. In the spring of 2011, AQAP, and its local affiliate AAS, sought to exploit the political unrest and take territory in the south. Their gains were reversed the following spring when tribal militias cooperating with the armed forces supported by the US, recaptured the city of Zinjibar. Finally, while in recent months AQAP has been able to capitalize on growing political unrest and insecurity, its focus on the near fight, and especially high profile attacks against the Yemeni armed forces, have had a significant impact on Yemeni public opinion.<sup>3</sup> Miscalculations by AQAP—including its capture of Zinjibar in 2011, the attack on the Defense Ministry and an adjacent hospital in December 2013, and assassinations and brutal executions of members of the Yemeni security forces—are slowly chipping away at its local support base and slowly elevating the threat of AQAP as seen by the Yemeni government and influential elites. While the change in domestic perception may well contribute the demise of AQAP in Yemen, realities on the ground today, including internal factionalization, a divided and largely ineffective military and increased sectarian tensions, are likely to continue to limit US counterterrorism options and aims for the foreseeable future. At the same time, realities on the ground may shift once again presenting new challenges for efforts to combat to AQAP.

While Yemen is not Iraq or Syria, the “Yemen Model” and the factors that have limited US

counterterrorism efforts in Yemen should be taken into consideration when devising a strategy for combating ISIL in Iraq and Syria. If disrupting ISIL's ability to conduct attacks against the US and its allies is the objective, the case of Yemen should provide a model for success. But if the objective is dismantling and ultimately destroying ISIL, the "Yemen Model" may not produce such results. In the end, the case of Yemen underscores the fact that any strategy cannot dictate realities on the ground, but rather realities on the ground must inform strategy.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Harnisch, "Denying Al-Qaeda a Safe Haven in Yemen," American Enterprise Institute *Critical Threats*, 30 October 2009, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/denying-al-qaeda-safe-haven-yemen>.

<sup>2</sup> See Adam C. Seitz, "In Yemen, If Not Drones, Then What?," *MES Insights*, Volume 4, Issue 6, December 2014, [https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/Middle%20East%20Studies%20Documents/MES%20Insights/MES\\_insights\\_v4\\_i6.pdf](https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/Middle%20East%20Studies%20Documents/MES%20Insights/MES_insights_v4_i6.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Abu Bakr al-Yamani, "Massacre of soldiers by AQAP rallies Yemenis around army," *Al-Shorfa.com*, 13 August 2014, [http://al-shorfa.com/en\\_GB/articles/meii/features/2014/08/13/feature-01](http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/features/2014/08/13/feature-01).

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## Houthi Advances in Yemen Pose Security Dilemma for the US

by Adam C Seitz

In July 2014, the northern Yemeni city of Amran fell to insurgents led by Abdul-Maik al-Houthi. Amran had served as the capital for the elders of the influential Hashid tribal confederation since the 1962 Republican Revolution. Less than two months after the capture of Amran, Houthi militias swept into Sanaa, seizing a number of government buildings and military installations, setting up checkpoints throughout the Yemeni capital, and ultimately forcing the Yemeni government led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi to sign the "Peace and Partnership" agreement on September 21, 2014. This in effect created a new political order in Yemen. In the two month following the agreement, the Houthis have captured a number of strategically important cities, including the port city of Hudaydah, and have advanced on a number of others controlled by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its local affiliate Ansar al-Sharia (AAS).

Since 2002, US efforts to disrupt, dismantle and ultimately destroy al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Yemen have relied upon a combination of partnership with the Yemeni military that includes capacity building of Yemeni security forces and US airstrikes. Although the Houthis and the US share a common enemy in AQAP and AAS, this does not equate to a situation in which the enemy of my enemy is my friend. On the contrary, the military and political gains made by the Houthis have created a new set of challenges for counterterrorism efforts in Yemen by the United States and its allies .

As the Houthis continue to advance on areas that are controlled by or are considered safe havens for AQAP, the United States remains actively engaged with AQAP, launching drone strikes and aiding in raids by Yemeni security forces. While drone strikes have been an effective tool in

disrupting AQAP's ability to plan and execute attacks against the US and its allies, these same tactics may now inadvertently aid a group that has been quite outspoken in its opposition to US policies in Yemen. "Death to America and Curse to the Jews" is a common chant of Houthi militants and their supporters.

Beyond their anti-American rhetoric, the Houthis recent political and tactical successes are a great cause for concern for the Saudi government. In March 2014, the Saudi government labeled the group a terrorist organization. Many Saudi policymakers view the Houthis as a link in the chain of Iranian encirclement with Iran's reach already firmly established in Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus. Recent statements by some Iranian officials have only increased Saudi concerns of a Houthi-Iran alliance. Following the successes of the Houthis in late September, Ali Reza Zakani, a member of the Iranian Parliament and advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, boasted that "three Arab capitals have today ended up in the hands of Iran and belong to the Islamic Iranian Revolution" with the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, on its way to becoming the fourth.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Ali Akbar Velayati, former Iranian foreign minister and foreign policy advisor to Khamenei, expressed his hope that "the Ansar Allah (Houthi) group would play the same role in Yemen as Hezbollah does in Lebanon."<sup>2</sup> Head of the foreign affairs committee on Saudi Arabia's Shura Council, Abdullah Al-Askar, responded to the situation in Yemen, stating that "Sanaa cannot be left in the hands of the Houthis and the Iranians."<sup>3</sup>

The fall of Amran and Sanaa to the Houthis has dealt a substantial blow to Saudi influence in Yemen, and has left Riyadh in search of new alliances. The Saudi government is looking to rebuild a coalition that can perform the role the Hashids had previously played, which includes countering Houthi advances, and by extension the perceived threat of Iranian encirclement. This may well lead to Saudi policies that include supporting political and tribal elites, military factions, and militias with ties to AAS and/or AQAP. Such a scenario would greatly affect future US counterterrorism efforts in Yemen.

The political and security environment in Yemen is changing rapidly, raising a number of important questions for US policymakers. What effects are Houthi gains having on the threat perceptions and calculations of regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia and Iran? How are gains by the Houthis impacting the overall effectiveness of US counterterrorism efforts in Yemen? And ultimately, how can the US balance its response to the potential long-term challenges associated with the Houthis ascent with its efforts to simultaneously combat the more immediate threat posed by AQAP? Quite the dilemma.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> "Sanaa is the fourth Arab capital to join the Iranian revolution," *Middle East Monitor*, September 27, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> David Hearst, "Blowback in Yemen: Houthi Advance is a Saudi Nightmare," *Yemen Times*, October 23, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Sharif Nashashibi, "Grandstanding over Yemen may backfire on Iran," *The National*, October 28, 2014.

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# Why ISIS is More Dangerous than al-Qaeda

by Sebastian Gorka

In the space of just a few months, the jihadi threat group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham)<sup>1</sup> has accomplished more than al-Qaeda did in the thirteen years since the September 11th attacks. It will continue to grow in power and come to pose a direct threat to the United States, unless America guides a regional response and attacks the ideology that drives this jihadist insurgency.

Despite all of the above, the threat posed by al-Qaeda pales in comparison to that posed by its offshoot, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, which recently declared the establishment of a new caliphate and has, as a result, changed its name to the Islamic State.

How do I know that ISIS is a greater threat today than al-Qaeda? Here are just four reasons:

1 - ISIS has capabilities that exceed even the wildest dreams of the original founders of al-Qaeda. After capturing the city of Mosul and raiding the local government coffers, it now has over \$400 million at its disposal. According to the official 9/11 Commission, the original 2001 attacks only cost al-Qaeda \$500,000. ISIS has sufficient funds to conduct at least 800 9/11-type attacks. Add to that all the latest US military hardware it has captured and the older Syrian Scud missile it has paraded openly for all the world to see in October, it is clear ISIS and al-Qaeda are in totally different leagues.

2 - Although al-Qaeda was sheltered by the fundamentalist Taliban government in Afghanistan—with Osama bin Laden strategically ensuring that his commander's daughters married into Taliban families—as an organization, al-Qaeda never controlled a whole country. With the Blitzkrieg assault of ISIS fighters capturing city after city in Iraq and then declaring a new caliphate, ISIS is on the cusp of functioning as a de facto country, a Jihadi Nation. Al-Qaeda most often acted like a terrorist group and less often as an insurgency capable of overtaking a whole country. ISIS, however, is a full-fledged insurgency that with its territorial gains is on the brink of functioning as a quasi-state. Already it controls territory equivalent to the size of the United Kingdom.

3 - Al-Qaeda was predominantly successful in bringing Arab Muslims from the Middle East to fight in wars in their own region or in South Asia. Unclassified reports and ISIS's own videos confirm that ISIS is having unprecedented success in attracting Muslim men from the West to join the fight in Syria and Iraq. These young men—if they survive the current fight—will likely return back home to America, the UK, or elsewhere in the West, as hardened jihadis skilled in infantry tactics and in employing improvised explosive devices.

4 - Bin Laden and the current leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, always understood the importance of propaganda and information warfare, especially after the American jihadi Anwar al-Awlaki took over editorship of *Inspire* magazine. However, they never came close to the sophistication and media savvy of ISIS with its whirlwind establishment of a global social media presence. Not only is ISIS filming and distributing the standard jihadi footage of its vicious attacks and the mass murders of its prisoners, more importantly, it is disseminating more subtle and softer narratives via social media and other channels in ways that al-Qaeda never did.

For all these reasons, and many more, ISIS poses a significantly bigger threat than al-Qaeda ever did and not only to Shia-controlled states like Iraq or Syria. ISIS has made its plan clear. It is reestablishing the theocratic empire of Islam, the caliphate, which was dissolved after WWI in

1924, by the secularizing president of the new Republic of Turkey, Kemal Ataturk. ISIS is driven by an ideology that is absolutist and global.

After taking out the "Near Enemy" in Syria and Iraq, they wish to kill other apostates, others they deem to be false Muslims, be it King Abdullah II of Jordan, or the new president of Egypt, retired General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who has vowed to destroy the Muslim Brotherhood, the ideological cousin of ISIS and al-Qaeda. Then they will target the "Far Enemy", the United States and its allies. Theirs is a totalitarian ideology, as universalist and absolute as anything Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin came up with, albeit with holy sanction and a promise of salvation.

So before victorious American-born jihadis return home to the US to kill infidels here, we need a plan to destroy the caliphate. The response should leverage America's unique position as a leader and the investments we have made over the years in government and military institutions in allied Muslim countries. Since the 1970s, and far more intensively after 9/11, the US has built very strong ties with the militaries of Jordan and Egypt, amongst others. At the same time, there is a force in Iraq already, the Kurdish Peshmurga, which has highly disciplined fighters who hold no affection for the jihadists. Together, these Arab and Muslim forces should be brought together with American guidance to rout the forces of ISIS.

We do not necessarily need another large-scale US deployment of troops. This is not WWII or Korea. This is, in fact, irregular warfare (what the Marine Corps calls "small wars"). These types of messy wars are not won by Americans on the frontlines. What we need to do it to get back to what really works in foreign lands whose governments we wish to assist and who are threatened by an enemy we share. We should not have Americans fight that fight; instead, the local forces should with the assistance and guidance of a small number of soldiers or Marines trained exactly for such missions.

At the same time we must totally reorient America's national security focus. We must stop concentrating on one organization—al-Qaeda. It is not about one group or another. The threat emanates from the ideology of global jihad. Whoever supports or acts upon that ideology is a threat to America and its values, be it ISIS in Iraq or Syria, Hamas in Gaza, or a US Army Major in Fort Hood. Any group whose religious beliefs countermand the Constitution of the United States is an enemy. Period.

The stakes are the highest possible. The conflict is between a world led by religious extremists in which the unbeliever is enslaved or murdered versus a world in which the values of 1776 are protected and can flourish.

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#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Before Abu Bakr al Baghdadi declared the re-establishment of the caliphate and the change of his group's name to simply the Islamic State, the organization called itself the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS and not ISIL). This name in its original form is significant since Islamic eschatology sees the region of al-Sham as not simply the geographic area of the Levant, but also as the site of the 'Final Jihad' before Judgement Day. This means that those who fight in this 'Holy War' are qualitatively better than all previous jihadists from other theaters such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, or Chechnya. The special status of this conflict zone helps to explain the enormous number of Western fighters recruited by ISIS/IS (15,000-plus according to latest UN figures).

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## Avoiding Yemen's Abyss

by Adam C Seitz

The 22 January 2015 resignation of the government of Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the ensuing chaos have once again sparked both fears of the collapse of the Republic of Yemen as we know it and concerns about the effectiveness of international counterterrorism efforts in Yemen. The same combination of elite competition, military factionalization, and ever shifting alliances that contributed to Yemen's current political crisis and insecurity continue to provide al-Qaeda a foothold in Yemen. Any counterterrorism strategy by the US and its international partners must take such factors into consideration, or risk further internationalizing the Yemeni crisis and plunging deeper into Yemen's counterterrorism abyss.

### Competition Among Elites

There had been rumors of an alliance between Saleh and the Houthis well before the 2011 uprisings. During the six wars between 2004 and 2009, pitting the Yemeni army against Houthi insurgents in northern Yemeni Sa'da Province, a number of analysts and prominent Yemenis accused the Salehs of supporting Houthi forces against General Ali Mohsen. The wars in Sa'da were viewed by some as part of a broader power struggle between the Salehs and General Ali Mohsen. Adding to such suspicions, General Ali Mohsen was denied repeated requests for support to fight the growing northern insurgency.

Rumors of a Saleh-Houthi alliance have only grown over the last several months as Houthi militias have seen their ranks grow to include a number of Saleh loyalists that defected from the military in opposition to attempts by the Hadi government to restructure and reform the armed forces. Fueling suspicions further, over the past year Houthi militias fighting alongside factions of the Yemeni armed forces dominated by Saleh's old guard dealt a substantial blow to rival political factions. Militias formed by the Hashid tribal confederation, which had long served as Yemen's preeminent kingmakers and were also viewed as a conduit for pushing Saudi interests in Yemen, were handily defeated in Amran. Saleh's rival Islah party was pushed underground as the Houthis swept into Sanaa. General Ali Mohsen was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia in the chaos. And finally the Hadi government was forced to resign.

The struggle among competing elite factions dominated by the Salehs, President Hadi and General Ali Mohsen underscores the weakness of Yemen's institution and the difficulties of navigating a highly personalized patronage system. Within such a system of shifting alliances and elite competition the former president continues to see himself as the guarantor of Yemen's security and the only one who can manage Yemen's factions and internal power struggles. Over the past three years, Saleh has managed to retain substantial political influence, and his public image, at least in the eyes of some, has evolved from unpopular former dictator, to meddling party leader, and more recently to Yemen's potential kingmaker and savior of the Yemeni state.

### When Elite Competition Meets a Divided Military

The North Yemeni armed forces have played a significant political role since a group of army

officers led a revolution, ending the Imamate kingship and declaring North Yemen as a republic. Following the 1977 and 1978 coups that ultimately brought Saleh to power, the military's political clout has only grown, with the officer corps becoming a central player in patronage politics and elite bargaining. Even after Saleh's ouster in 2011, he and his son, General Ahmed Ali Saleh, still yielded a great deal of power and influence through their extensive ties to the officer corps of the Yemeni armed forces. This fact was not lost on President Hadi, who—just days after the GCC Initiative was signed—established a committee tasked with restructuring the Yemeni armed forces. The restructuring of the armed forces was not only a major demand of the Yemeni people during the 2011 uprisings and key stipulation of the GCC Initiative, but for Hadi it was also as a necessary step in disarming military factions controlled by the former president and his son, as well as their rival, and potential political wild card, General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar.

Through presidential decrees intended to integrate the armed forces under a unified command structure, Hadi attempted to simultaneously loosen the Salehs' grip on the military while strengthening his own base by forging new alliances with old rivals, including General Ali Mohsen. The decrees, which reshuffled commanders and reorganized the overall command structure of the armed forces, were met with fierce opposition and mutinies from within the ranks. In the end, they appear to have been little more than window dressings covering a system dominated by informal and highly personalized elite bargaining beyond the reach of President Hadi's institutional changes. Although Hadi replaced a number of commanders with his own allies and appointed Saleh's family members to diplomatic posts outside the country, the mid-level officers were still of the old guard, which remained loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh or his son Ahmed Ali through patronage relations and continued access to sources of wealth.

The Houthi's ascent stands as yet another example of Saleh's continued influence over the armed forces. The Houthi offensive was met with little military resistance in its push into Sanaa, with a number of commanders surrendering and handing over their units' armaments without a single shot being fired. In Amran some members of the armed forces were reported to have aided the Houthis against militias organized by the Hashid tribal confederation and its allies in the Islah party. Even as Houthi militias continued their military offensive following the signing of the "Peace and Partnership Agreement" in with the Hadi government in September, they met little resistance from the Yemeni armed forces. It was not until the army stood by as the Houthi militants shelled the presidential palace and stormed his private residence that Hadi likely realized that his efforts to restructure the armed forces and weed out the old guard had failed. In the end, the only unit to resist the assault was Hadi's own Presidential Protection Force. With the armed forces now seemingly under control of the Houthis and the former-presidents faction, Hadi and his cabinet likely saw no other choice but to resign.

### **AQAP Thriving on Competition, Division, and Insecurity**

It is within this corrosive environment that al-Qaeda has made its home and now appears to be in better shape than ever before. The strength of al-Qaeda in Yemen has ebbed and flowed since the outset of the US led Global War on Terror in late 2001. Between 2001 and 2005, the counterterrorism partnership between Washington and Sanaa pushed al-Qaeda in Yemen to its knees. These early successes, however, were short lived. In 2003, the Bush Administration's attention turned to war and stability operations in Iraq. The war in Iraq came at a time when al-Qaeda in Yemen and the international threat it posed appeared to be diminishing. As counterterrorism aid to the Yemeni government started to diminish, so too did the Saleh regime's resolve in the fight against al-Qaeda in Yemen. At the same time, the Saleh regime became increasingly distracted by a host of internal challenges; from combating a growing insurgency in the north, to putting down a resurgent secessionist movement in the south, to fighting off mounting political opposition in Sanaa. Within the deteriorating security and political environment and with the Saleh regimes apparent lack

of resolve, al-Qaeda was able to stage a comeback in Yemen, and in 2009 the Saudi and Yemeni based al-Qaeda branches merged in Yemen as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Following the attempted downing of a Detroit-bound flight on Christmas Day 2009, Washington's attention turned once again to the terrorist threat emanating from Yemen. While drone strikes served as an effective tool in disrupting AQAP's ability to plan and execute attacks against the US and its allies, al-Qaeda continued to exploit the regime's lack of control outside of Sanaa, allowing the group to maintain a safe haven in Yemen. In 2011, AQAP sought to capitalize on the security vacuum brought on by uprisings against the regime of then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and it moved to establish its own zones of control and authority over areas of southern Yemen. Rolling back the territorial gains by AQAP over the next year was the result of coordinated efforts by international, regional, and local actors, with local tribal militias playing a crucial role in both clearing and holding territories seized by AQAP and its local insurgent wing Ansar al-Sharia (AAS).

Saleh's ouster in November 2011, brought with it new opportunities and challenges for counterterrorism efforts in Yemen. On the one hand, it allowed for a renegotiation of the counterterrorism partnership between Washington and Sanaa, with newly elected President, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, taking greater ownership of counterterrorism operations, including controversial drone strikes. On the other hand, elite and regional competition, political paralysis, and military factionalization have all contributed to a deterioration of internal security conditions and increased sectarian tensions, all to the net benefit of AQAP.

The tribal elites and militias have played a pivotal, yet often overlooked, role in countering al-Qaeda's influence in Yemen. Indeed, Yemen has a long history of tribal militias supporting the central authority in the absence of and in parallel to a standing army, dating back to the time of the Imamate. Furthermore, since the 1962 military revolution, tribal militias have not only played an important role in regime security, but also provided important checks and balances to what is often viewed by Yemen's elites as government overreach. Support, however, has always been rather temporary, with alliances in flux and under constant renegotiation. Today is no different. While the tribes played an important role in past offensives against AQAP and in denying the group refuge, the Houthis' recent ascent has pushed a number of tribes into the open arms of AQAP and AAS. A number of Yemeni tribesmen and elites increasingly view the terrorist organization as a bulwark to the Houthis' domination of the central government and further territorial expansion. Not only have such factors allowed for AQAP's resurgence, but over the past several months the loss of reliable local partners has limited the options available to the US and its regional and international partners to counter AQAP's gains and the threat the group poses to international security.

### **Limited Options for the US and International Community**

The January 7, 2015 terrorist attack at the Paris based satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* brought AQAP back into the international spotlight. In the aftermath of the Paris attack French Prime Minister Manuel Valls declared that France was in a "war against terrorism, against jihadism, against radical Islam, against everything that is aimed at breaking fraternity, freedom and solidarity." His words were reminiscent of those of then-President George W. Bush following the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, who before a joint session of Congress declared that "Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda but does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated." But nearly a decade and a half into the US led war on terror al-Qaeda's Yemen affiliate continues to thrive and poses a significant threat to international security, raising questions as to the effectiveness of international efforts to combat AQAP.

Although there is renewed debate among western policymakers as to the effectiveness of international efforts to combat al-Qaeda and deny AQAP a safe haven in Yemen in the aftermath

of the Paris attacks, in reality there may not be much that the US, France, or the international community can do. As the pool of reliable local counterterrorism partners continues to shrink in Yemen, so too do the options and tools at the disposal of the US and its international partners. Furthermore, when regional rivalries such as those between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the overall threat perception of Yemen's neighbors are added to the mix the situation only becomes more complex for those trying to navigate the tangled webs of shifting alliances in Yemen.

The events leading to the collapse of Yemen's transitional government should serve as a reminder of the challenges that the US and its partners face in combating AQAP, and the limited influence the international community has over political and security developments in Yemen. Before diving further into the abyss of elite competition, military factionalization, and ever shifting alliances, international stakeholders should understand that their options are greatly limited by conditions on the ground and that the same factors that limit their options have helped al-Qaeda to maintain its safe haven in Yemen. Thus, denying al-Qaeda a safe haven in Yemen becomes not so much a question as to the effectiveness of international counterterrorism efforts, but rather of Yemen's ability, and resolve, to save itself from itself.

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## The Mediterranean Migration Crisis

by Timothy G Hammond

Increased international attention has recently been paid to the ongoing and escalating irregular migration crisis in the Mediterranean Sea. The combined death toll of more than 1,200 migrants in a series of shipwreck disasters occurring in mid-April 2015 triggered an upsurge in attention to the situation. Among these incidents was the worst single shipwreck tragedy on record in the Mediterranean, involving the death of an estimated 800 migrants. While by no means a new phenomenon, the number of sub-Saharan African and Middle Eastern migrants traveling across the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe—along with the associated death toll—is unprecedented in scale. Record immigration is occurring at a time when Europe is preoccupied with internal economic and political challenges, and is thus left ill-prepared to collectively address the crisis. The complexity of Mediterranean migration flows is challenging current frameworks, and Europe is struggling to develop a comprehensive architecture that balances efforts to assist persons in need with efforts to secure its borders.

### **The Migration Crisis Within its Mediterranean Context**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that an estimated 219,000 migrants crossed the Mediterranean and arrived to European shores in 2014. While various maritime migration routes are used, more than 170,000 of these migrants—nearly 80 percent—arrived in Italy and Malta by way of Libya and Tunisia. This is the Central Mediterranean route, and it is the most heavily trafficked and the deadliest maritime migration route in the world.

The number of irregular migrants reaching Europe in 2014 surpassed the previous record seen in

2011, when a wave of immigration followed the revolutionary struggles of the media-named “Arab Spring”. There are many indications that 2015 will see the highest number of migrants in the Mediterranean yet. The first six months of 2015 have seen 137,000 migrants cross the sea to reach Europe so far, compared to the 75,000 migrant arrivals in the same period last year. The first five months of 2015 also saw an estimated 1,800 deaths at sea. These figures are expected to continue to escalate if migrant smugglers follow past trends of facilitating increased passages during the summer months when there are calmer conditions at sea. Record numbers of migrants are not only traveling the Central Mediterranean route, but are also arriving in Greece using the Eastern Mediterranean route that passes through the Aegean Sea from Turkey.

Given its geographic position between Europe, Africa, and Asia, the Mediterranean region is particularly sensitive to the world’s highest numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons since World War II. The European University Institute’s Migration Policy Center stressed that the Mediterranean Sea is the most dangerous border between countries that are not at war with each other. Ongoing hybrid conflicts along the Mediterranean’s shores and in neighboring regions, which involve a blended array of state- and non-state-centric actors and issues, provide a contextual framework for understanding the record-breaking migration to Europe. The asymmetric form of warfare in these hybrid conflicts often directly targets civilians—resulting in large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Irregular migration in the Mediterranean is particularly complex considering that it directly traverses, involves, and affects the United States’ EUCOM, CENTCOM, and AFRICOM Geographic Combatant Commanders’ Areas of Responsibility (AORs). A map portraying these AORs may create an image of the Mediterranean Sea as a natural barrier between southern Europe, northern Africa, and the Middle East. However, throughout the history of human civilizations, the sea has provided connective tissue between the three continents just as much as it has acted as a barrier between them—if not more so. The Mediterranean Sea has witnessed many consequences that arise when diverse empires, ethnicities, religions, and cultures interact. Historically, such interactions have at times led to conflict and, at other times, to the sharing of knowledge that advanced humankind. Today, each of the involved AORs presents diverse socio-economic and geopolitical realities, yet they are strung together by mass human population movements. Irregular migration flows are a dramatic demonstration of how occurrences on one end of the Mediterranean reverberate across all its shores.

Tensions in Europe are high as the immigration influx is occurring at a time when Europeans are particularly concerned with terrorism, foreign fighter transit, and the fragile state of the Eurozone. Less portrayed in the media, however, is that the majority of refugees from Middle Eastern and African countries migrate to neighboring countries. This information presents important context for evaluating the relative scale of Europe’s responsibilities.

### **Irregular, Not Illegal, Migration**

Migrants crossing the Mediterranean are not representative of a single or homogenous group. The terms “mixed migration” and “irregular migration” are used to portray the reality that different types of migrants are subject to different international laws; based on this, they will face different treatments in their host countries. Given the legal rights to which they may be entitled under certain circumstances, many irregular migrants and asylum-seekers may not be considered illegal migrants.

Europe’s conventional immigration policy framework has been designed to distinguish voluntary versus forced forms of migration. The question is asked as to whether migrants are choosing to migrate to better their economic prospects (commonly referred to as economic migrants), or whether they are forced to flee their countries of origin due to political, ethnic, religious, or other forms of

persecution. The international legal principle of non-refoulement protects this latter group of migrants from being returned to a country where their lives are endangered, and host countries may grant them a form of asylum.

To process migrants' asylum applications, their identities must be verified, and their reasons for entry must be evaluated. The complicated reality is that migrants travel to Europe by irregular means from many countries and for varied reasons, and the distinctions between chosen versus forced forms of migration are increasingly unclear. At what point, exactly, are conditions deplorable enough that emigration is no longer a voluntary option but a necessity? Further complicating the process is that some migrants attempt to claim certain nationalities that are privy to better protection, such as Syrians and Somalis.

Despite these complications, the majority of migrants arriving in Europe via the Mediterranean are legitimately in need of protection. In evidence to this, Syrians and Eritreans have become the top two migrant nationalities with significant numbers of Somali, Afghan, and Sudanese migrants as well. Notably, UNHCR reports that one-third of the 137,000 migrants who arrived to Europe so far this year were from Syria and qualified for international protection.

### **Migrants' Journeys**

The majority of migrants in the Mediterranean reach Europe from Libya; however, most of them are not Libyan nationals. To provide clarity on migrants' nationalities, irregular migration may best be explained by differentiating the *countries of origin* from the *transit countries* and the *destination countries*.

The Mediterranean's irregular migrants originate from different countries throughout West Africa, East Africa, and the Middle East. Markedly, Syrian migrants represented 60 percent of all migrant arrivals by sea to Europe in 2014. In addition to providing this high number of asylum-seekers, Syria also currently holds the world's highest number of internally displaced persons—a figure standing at around 7,600,000. Syria's neighbors (including Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan)—have seen an influx of at least 3,000,000 Syrian refugees. These figures are the consequence of more than four years of violent conflict that began in 2011 when mass protests sparked against President Bashar al-Asad. An array of pro-Asad (including Hezbollah) and opposition (including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)) groups and militias continue to compete for ideological and territorial control. The failed status of Somalia and repressive conditions in Eritrea also make them major countries of origin.

From their respective home territories, many migrants traverse the Sahara, paying to travel from checkpoint to checkpoint until they reach Libya. Libya is a prime migration route in part due to its geographic position between the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea. The porous land borders to its south permit undetected entry and its long coastline and close proximity to Malta and the Italian Peninsula provide migrants with an exit strategy. The combination of its geography with the disintegration of its governance and border security has created near-perfect conditions for criminal networks.

Since the overthrow of Muammar Qadhafi in 2011, Libya has descended into near-failed state status. Two main rival governments vie for control in Libya: the internationally-recognized governing council elected in 2014, operating from the eastern city of Tobruk, and the coalition of armed groups known as Libya Dawn, which occupy the western capital of Tripoli. Various other local, tribal, and extremist groups (such as Ansar al-Sharia and ISIL) also compete for degrees of power and control.

Emigration of migrants out of Libya complicates distinctions between economic migrants and refugees. Libya has the largest proven crude oil reserves and the fourth-largest proven natural gas

reserves in Africa. These hydrocarbon resources provided Libya with a strong regional economy, and as such it was an attractive destination for economic migrants from other African countries. Many people from sub-Saharan Africa who originally left their country of origin to work in Libya have now fled from the country to Europe since 2011. Others not wishing to emigrate or risk their lives at sea are presented with the economic incentives of participating in the migrant smuggling business themselves.

Libya's security vacuum allowed human smuggling networks to fill the void and earn tremendous profits. After paying smugglers exorbitant amounts to be packed into inflatable vessels or wooden fishing boats, migrants voyage north toward Italy and Malta. The threats to voyagers include abuse from the smugglers, drowning at sea, and asphyxiation in over-packed hulls. Most migrants are aware of the risks, and they choose to take their chances to better their situations. Once intercepted at sea by Italian, Maltese, or Greek authorities, migrants are sent to migrant reception and detention facilities where they will wait—often for 12 to 18 months—for their identities to be verified and their asylum applications to be processed. Detention policies vary by country; however, Italy, Malta, and Greece have faced criticism from the international community for providing inadequate conditions. Many asylum-seekers detained in Europe have already experienced abysmal detention conditions in Libya. Strict detention practices in Europe have at times been unlawfully maintained—possibly as a deterrence mechanism. This approach has proven ineffective as migrant arrivals continue to increase. The implementation of stricter border security mechanisms carries with it the risk of unintentionally fueling criminal networks, as illegal methods of entry become perceived as migrants' only remaining options. Furthermore, when one route of entry is closed, migration flows tend to shift to other migratory routes in the Mediterranean region.

The majority of migrants do not intend to stay in the European countries in which they first arrive. These are primarily planned as transit countries while migrants intend to ultimately reside in more northern European countries, where they perceive they will find more opportunities and better treatment. Germany and Sweden currently host the highest number of Syrian refugees in Europe.

Europe's Dublin regulations complicate matters for migrants and for host countries. These regulations stipulate that the country through which an irregular migrant first enters the European Union is solely responsible for processing that migrant's asylum application. Additionally, a migrant caught illegally residing in another European country is sent back to the country in which they first arrived. The Dublin regulations have caused frustrations among southern European countries, declaring they face a disproportionate share of responsibility for regulating borders on behalf of Europe as a whole. Given their limited economic and geographic capacities, Italian and Maltese officials in particular have called upon the EU for increased "burden sharing."

## **Maritime Responses**

Illustrative of Italy's responsibility was its Naval Search and Rescue (SAR) operation *Mare Nostrum*, which saved the lives of some 150,000 migrants from October 2013 to October 2014. Notably, these rescues were made with regular assistance from the Armed Forces of Malta and merchant vessels. *Mare Nostrum* commenced operations following the October 2013 shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa (a small Italian island and popular migration hub), in which more than 350 migrants died at sea. Media attention to this tragedy galvanized public support for migrant rescue operations.

Some hailed *Mare Nostrum* as an essential humanitarian mission, while others argued that it facilitated immigration by creating a "pull factor" for migrants. Strong and polarized political opinions emerged as *Mare Nostrum*'s operating costs soared to more than 9,000,000 euros per month. After Italy ultimately scaled *Mare Nostrum* down, in November 2014, the EU's border control agency, Frontex, launched Joint Operation Triton.

In contrast to the SAR mission Mare Nostrum, Triton was primarily designed as a border surveillance operation with significantly reduced manpower, reach, and scope of operations. This scaled-back response increased concerns that the Mediterranean would further become a mass “cemetery” at sea. Five months later, the record-breaking shipwreck incident in April reignited debates on how best to prevent the loss of life along Europe’s shores.

Humanitarian principles, however, are not Europe’s only concerns. The established presence of ISIL affiliates on Libya’s coast has increased the perception that irregular migration from Libyan shores is a threat to European security. ISIL released propaganda declaring war on Rome. Additionally, rumors that terrorists could infiltrate the migration networks were disseminated. These ongoing developments have strengthened perceptions of the Mediterranean as Europe’s vulnerable underbelly.

### **Navigating the Challenges that Lie Ahead**

European leaders continue to try to find a balanced approach in responding to the migration crisis. Funding for Triton was increased following the shipwreck disaster in April 2015, and various proposals are currently on the table—from military solutions such as targeting migrant smugglers’ vessels on Libyan shores (a move that could stress the livelihoods of Libyan fishermen, risk significant civilian casualties, and threaten refugees) to the redistribution of asylum-seekers throughout European member states (which draws northern Europe into a situation which many perceive as a primarily southern concern).

The option of closing down borders in Europe (and perceiving immigration as a threat) will likely shake two significant pillars upholding the European Union’s ideology: freedom of movement (represented by member-states of the Schengen area) and respect for international humanitarian principles. The option of opening up borders to accept asylum-seekers (and perceiving immigration as a humanitarian crisis) will likely intensify European preoccupations over economic stability and job security and heighten concerns over long-term demographic shifts and fears over foreign fighter transit.

The trial and error approach has demonstrated that the treatment of the irregular migration crisis as either a humanitarian crisis or a security threat has proven ineffective and unsustainable. What is evident in moving forward is that the transnational and transcontinental nature of this issue requires a strong multilateral approach. This approach must take into consideration the interconnected nature of the wider Mediterranean basin and its specific socio-economic and geopolitical realities. The former president of Malta, Professor Guido de Marco, may have said it best when he proposed that, “there can be no security in Europe unless there is security in the Mediterranean and there can be no security in the Mediterranean unless there is security in Europe.”<sup>1</sup> At the heart of the irregular migration crisis we are reminded of the Mediterranean’s reemergence as a focal point for world affairs in an age when multifarious hybrid conflicts and their associated borderless threats challenge normative state-centric perceptions on how to address international challenges.

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#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Guido de Marco, “The Mediterranean Dilemma: A Bridge or a Great Divide?”, *Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies*, September 2007, [http://www.um.edu.mt/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/194233/Prof.\\_Guido\\_de\\_Marco\\_Med\\_Agenda.pdf](http://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/194233/Prof._Guido_de_Marco_Med_Agenda.pdf).

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## Get Saleh

by Mark A Caudill

*If you're gonna set somebody up, it's gotta be a surprise, you got that?*

Chili Palmer, mobster-turned-movie-producer, in the 1995 film "Get Shorty"

The United States' war-of-choice in Iraq vanquished Saddam Hussein, but it did not end the plague of personality politics in the Middle East. It might, in the long run, prove to have been the beginning of the end, however. The war unleashed centrifugal forces in the region. Autocrats (Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak, Muammar al-Qadhafi) have fallen, others (Bashar al-Asad) teeter on the brink, while a few (the Al Saud) have shown remarkable resilience. Among the latter, Ali Abdullah Saleh—despite stepping down in early 2012—remains the *bête noire* of Yemeni politics.

### **Our SOB?**

Saleh is a thug. But this fact should not blind us to his considerable talents. Saleh idolized Saddam, and his early career mirrored his hero's. An Army officer, his path to leadership was paved by a fortuitous presidential assassination in 1978, and he maintained power through mob-style ruthlessness. Possessing little formal education, Saleh's street smarts enabled him to play faction against faction, tribe against tribe. He built a vast patronage network with oil revenues and protection money the ever-paranoid Saudis paid him to ensure Yemen remained sufficiently dysfunctional to neutralize any revanchist sentiments regarding lands "Happy Arabia" lost to the Kingdom in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

Like Saddam, Saleh was susceptible to overreach. His disastrous decision to back Baghdad's 1990 invasion of Kuwait alienated the United States and prompted the Saudis to send nearly one million Yemeni workers back to the recently unified republic. Riyadh exacted further revenge by stoking southern Yemeni secessionist sentiments, igniting a brief civil war in 1994. Washington's cold shoulder persisted until shortly after 11 September 2001, when al-Qaeda's branch in Yemen became its most capable and successful franchise, Osama Bin Laden's ancestral homeland. The US change of heart recalled Franklin Roosevelt's alleged 1939 remark about the wisdom of supporting Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1939: "He may be an SOB, but he's our SOB." The Saudis pragmatically followed suit.

### **The Wasta King**

Fortunately for Saleh, Yemen is a land where government matters little to ordinary citizens, particularly outside the capital. People rely on family and tribal networks for food, water, and

essential services. *Qat*, a shrub whose leaves—like coca in the Andes—are chewed for a sense of elated stupefaction, suppresses hunger and provides daily relief from misery. In Yemen's remote highlands and *wadis*, fathers and *shaykhs* are the authorities. Sanaa might as well be on Mars.

Unfortunately for Yemenis, Saleh understood this and used intimidation and guile to ensure the powerful tribal confederations were beholden to him for any and all largesse he deigned to share. More than any other leader in the Middle East, Saleh exploited *wasta*—the Arabic term for sweetheart deals and influence-peddling from the verb to mediate or intervene—to make himself the indispensable personality. The security services were prime beneficiaries, and he installed his son and heir apparent—Ahmed—as head of the Army's elite Republican Guard force. Noncompliant tribes like the Houthis, the post-Saleh success of whose rebellion exposed the hollowness of Yemen's government institutions, were crushed.

## Forced Out

By 2011, however, Yemenis had had enough. Dwindling oil revenues and rapid population growth cut into the already meagre flow of Saleh's trickle-down despotism. Inspired, in part, by the "Arab Spring" uprisings elsewhere in the region, citizens took to the streets to demand change. Months of protests and bloody confrontations ensued, with the president showing no inclination to tap the billions the United Nations Organization later alleged he amassed during 33 years in power. Led by Saudi Arabia, the six member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) finally forced Saleh—unbowed by an assassination attempt in June that seriously wounded him—to the negotiating table in late 2011. A weak and divided Yemen was one thing, Riyadh seemed to reason; chaos that gave al-Qaeda a freer hand quite another.

Saleh formally ceded presidential powers to Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a Sunni, in February 2012. Critically, however, Ahmed and other Saleh relatives remained in key positions, and UN Special Envoy to Yemen Jamal Benomar (who resigned in April 2015) revealed that the terms of the GCC deal did not preclude either Saleh or his son from seeking office. By 2014, with the country's economic decline exacerbated by low oil prices, the Houthis—radicalized by the Iraq war and key players in the 2011 uprising—launched their rebellion, alleging the government cooperated with Sunni extremists and was hostile to Zaydi Shi'ism, the religion of some 35 percent of Yemenis, including Saleh. Tehran, has thrown its support behind the Houthis, but this does not equate to allegiance: A cliché about Yemenis holds that you may rent them, but you can't buy them. Many, if not most, Zaydis—like their Sunni Arab brethren—distrust the "Persians" for historical reasons and are not attracted to Twelver Shi'ism which is practiced by the majority of Iranians.

## The Enemy of My Enemy...

Saleh and his son (who was fired by Hadi but remains popular within the military) allied with the Houthis, their erstwhile enemies. They provided the muscle, in the form of breakaway Army units and tribal militias, enabling the Houthis to conquer Sanaa and much of the rest of the north, displace Hadi (who in March 2015 fled to Saudi Arabia), and threaten Aden. Saleh is motivated neither by love of Zaydi Shi'ism nor of country. Rather, as repeated revenge attacks on those who supported his ouster demonstrate, he seeks to return to power. Assuming this cannot be accomplished directly by his restoration as president, then—as rumors in Sanaa long have maintained—Saleh would be content for Ahmed to take the helm while he calls the shots behind the scenes, effectively establishing his dynasty.

Hadi and his rump government are backed by the Saudis. Since late March, Riyadh has led a coalition in conducting air strikes against Houthi/Saleh targets in Yemen and blockading the country's ports. In June, representatives of Hadi's government and the Houthis undertook indirect talks in Geneva, ostensibly to discuss implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which, among other things, calls for the Houthis to withdraw from Yemen's major cities. The hope for a "breakthrough", about which UN Special Envoy Ould Cheikh Ahmed enthused during an interview with *Al-Jazeera* on June 8, did not materialize.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the same day, Hadi pointedly ruled out both negotiations and reconciliation with the Houthis, reiterating his position that the Geneva sessions were "just a discussion" and calling Iran "more dangerous than al-Qaeda."<sup>3</sup> The talks ended days later with no appreciable progress having been made.

Efforts to impose a UN-brokered "humanitarian truce" during Ramadan proved equally feckless. At the end of the fasting month in mid-July, the Saudi-led coalition launched a ground offensive featuring the introduction of armor and 3,000 troops from the United Arab Emirates. Apparently reenergized, pro-Hadi forces—including Southern Resistance fighters—quickly recaptured Aden and pushed north to engage the Houthis at Ta'iz, Yemen's third-largest city, and Ibb en route to lay siege to Sanaa. Saudi and Emirati aircraft, meanwhile, have continued to pound the Houthis, including at al-Hudaydah, the capital's primary port and one of the few entrepôts for deliveries to 14 million Yemenis residing in the north. Despite optimism in Riyadh that the Houthis soon could be surrounded and forced back into the highlands near Sa'da, north of Sanaa, it remains too early to celebrate. The Southern Resistance, comprised of secessionists who seek the reestablishment of an independent southern state, helped push the Houthis out of Aden in pursuit of its own agenda, not the Al-Saud's or Hadi's. More disturbingly, al-Qaeda, elements of which reportedly also cooperated with the Saudi coalition, has asserted control over key parts of Aden.

### *Danse Macabre*

By any measure, Yemen is a failed state. Even before the current fighting began, it was the Middle East's poorest nation, with a per capita GDP of \$3,900 in 2014, according to the CIA's 2015 *World Factbook*.<sup>4</sup> It faces a severe water shortage; the UN estimates that 9.4 million of the country's 26 million people have little or no access to water. On 1 July 2015, the UN declared Yemen to be a Level-3 emergency, putting it on-par with Iraq, Syria, and South Sudan. UN officials report that more than 21 million Yemenis need aid and nearly 13 million face a food-security crisis.<sup>5</sup> Death and dispossession abound: Yemen's Ministry of Health claims that, between 19 March and 15 June alone, 2,800 Yemenis were killed and 12,500 injured in fighting;<sup>6</sup> the *BBC* reports that some 5,000 people, including 2,355 civilians, have been killed since 26 March.<sup>7</sup> The country has 1.3 million internally displaced persons, according to according to a top UN humanitarian affairs official.<sup>8</sup>

For all his truculence and disregard for the suffering of citizens amid the ongoing Saudi-led airstrikes and blockade, Hadi—who on 22 August proposed for a 15-day humanitarian ceasefire on condition the Houthis withdraw from all provinces, cities, and government and military facilities that they hold—is a bit player in Yemen's *danse macabre*. Tehran deserves credit for lending credence to Saudi fears of Persian predations in the Arabian Peninsula. The Al Saud, apparently oblivious to the US experience in Iraq and proving once more that history rhymes, launched their war-of-choice in the mistaken belief most Yemenis would welcome liberation from the Houthis. Instead, the conflict has intensified Yemenis' longstanding loathing of their northern neighbors, exacerbated the country's regional divide, and earned the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia worldwide opprobrium for—among other things—its use of cluster munitions. Princes in Riyadh, in particular thirty-year-old Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Muhammad bin Salman—architect of the war and third in line to the throne—appeared to have abandoned hopes for a quick victory and doubled down on the use of overwhelming force.

## Drawing the Curtain

But the undisputed star the Yemen tragedy is Saleh. Without his deep pockets and web of well-placed, well-armed cronies, the Houthi movement likely would still be a tribal mutiny confined to Sa'da. The former president's keen understanding of his own countrymen—not to mention his unparalleled knowledge of how to push the Saudis' buttons—have ensured the failure of all efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. Although he publicly backed June's Geneva talks, Saleh—under UN sanctions for supporting the Houthis—likely advised his allies privately to take a hardline in order to reinforce his role as Yemen's indispensable personality. Absent an agreement setting the stage for his restoration or providing a pathway for Ahmed to become president, Yemen—at least on Saleh's watch—will not experience peace anytime soon.

Indispensability, as Saddam's demise demonstrated, is a two-edged sword. By keeping himself at the center of the mess that is Yemen, the former president has provided his enemies with a clear—albeit difficult-to-accomplish—option for cleaning it up: Get Saleh. No doubt the Saudis and others have him at or near the top of their most-wanted card deck. But it is less certain they grasp how fundamentally the capture (or killing) of Saleh and his son would alter the situation on the ground. First, those beholden to Saleh's considerable financial clout are unlikely to continue fighting for free. This includes the breakaway armed forces units as well as the various tribal militias that have sided with the former president and the Houthis. Second, the Houthis—though backed by Iran—rely heavily on Saleh's wealth. Without it, and the men and matériel it affords, the movement would be unlikely to maintain effective control over the country. Third, and perhaps most importantly from the Saudi perspective, getting Saleh (and *fil*) would redeem, and hasten the end of, a military venture the Kingdom can ill afford amid depressed oil prices. Riyadh could cast the decades it spent alternately rewarding and punishing their incorrigible client as a herculean exercise in forbearance brought finally and decisively to closure.

## Unquenchable Thirst

Saleh almost certainly understands the stakes. He no doubt is alert to stratagems intended to draw him into the open and can count on his network to provide safe-havens throughout Yemen as well as operational security sufficient to stay one step ahead of his enemies. But there are two vulnerabilities the Saudis can exploit. First, for all his wealth, Saleh is a pauper compared to the Al Saud. They have the means to hire the services of the priciest of the former president's loyalists. Second, as a past master of personality politics, Saleh—like his late Iraqi idol—has an unquenchable thirst for recognition. If power corrupts, then fame intoxicates even the most savvy, seasoned survivor; Saleh, lying low at the moment, will be unable to resist the limelight's siren song forever.

The element of surprise, something for which the normally cautious Saudis—as illustrated by King Salman's unexpected shuffling of royal succession after assuming the throne in January—seem to have acquired a taste, could be used to set Saleh up. Does Muhammad bin Salman, whose matinee-idol looks belie a reputation for aggression and ambition, have the chops to play Chili Palmer? Perhaps Elmore Leonard can send him the script.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Arabia Felix (Happy Arabia) is Latin the term used to describe southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula, namely Yemen, but also parts of what is today Saudi Arabia in ancient times.

<sup>2</sup> Faisal Edroos, “Q&A: Geneva talks ‘could end Yemen conflict’,” *Al Jazeera*, June 8, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/qa-geneva-talks-yemen-conflict-150607213351055.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “Yemen’s Hadi says ‘no negotiations’ with Houthis in Geneva,” *Middle East Eye*, June 8, 2015, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/yemens-hadi-says-no-negotiations-houthis-geneva-1930209846>.

<sup>4</sup> “Yemen,” *CIA World Factbook*, last modified September 24, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Edith Lederer, “UN declares highest-level humanitarian emergency in Yemen,” *Associated Press*, July 1, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/un-declares-highest-level-humanitarian-emergency-yemen-163209288.html>.

<sup>6</sup> “Yemen conflict: WHO and partners striving to prevent collapse of Yemen’s health system,” World Health Organization, June 19, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-conflict-who-and-partners-striving-prevent-collapse-yemen-s-health-system>.

<sup>7</sup> “Yemen conflict: Wedding attack death toll rises to 130,” *BBC*, September 29, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34388463>.

<sup>8</sup> Jethro Mullen, “Civilian death toll in Yemen conflict rises above 1,500, U.N. says,” *CNN*, July 8, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/08/middleeast/yemen-conflict/>.

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# MES Insights: Afghanistan

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## Future of Direction of Afghanistan: A Look Into History

by Amin Tarzi

Afghans in surprising numbers have gone to the polls to elect their next president and successor to President Hamid Karzai. Karzai has been the longest serving president in Afghanistan's history. While his term is coming to a formal end, Karzai expects to play a crucial role in Afghanistan's future. How much power and influence he is going to wield depends largely on who the Afghans elect to lead them for the next four years and on the severity of voting irregularities discovered in the first and, especially, the expected run-off elections. However, what is sure is that Karzai has already maneuvered to cement his legacy as a nationalist, independent leader who stood against his most powerful patron and ally, the United States.

Karzai's actions surrounding the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) provide a good illustration of how he hopes to be remembered as a national figure. According to most calculations, Afghanistan's security situation is likely to deteriorate after the withdrawal of US and other foreign forces. The BSA is a mechanism that would provide a safety net, designed to give Afghanistan's security forces financial and training support and maintain a light American footprint to mitigate any major terrorist threats to the Afghan state and beyond.

In November 2013, an Afghan consultative grand assembly (*loya jirga*) overwhelmingly recommended that signing the BSA was in Afghanistan's interest. Karzai rejected the *loya jirga*'s position, providing a list of many grievances against the United States as his rationale. His refusal to sign has prompted the United States to launch additional contingency plans, including an orderly withdrawal of all US forces from Afghanistan by the end of this year. Arguments can be made, however, that the principal reason behind his actions has more to do with his understanding of his country's history and his own place therein than with actual discontent with the United States.

Earlier this year Karzai compared the BSA to two documents signed by nineteenth century Afghan rulers with British India, namely the 1879 Gandumak Treaty and the 1893 Abdul Rahman-Durand Agreement. These documents, while signed under very different circumstances and for different reasons, are regarded by the majority of Afghans as imposed, humiliating agreements through which Afghanistan lost not only its sovereignty, but also large tracts of territory that now form part of Pakistan.

The Gandumak Treaty, indeed, can be regarded as an imposed treaty. It was prepared without Afghan input by a victorious British military force who occupied portions of eastern and southern Afghanistan. It was then presented to an amir who had just been released from prison and installed as ruler by his defeated father who then fled the capital.

The Abdul Rahman-Durand Agreement, despite prevalent Afghan perceptions, was a negotiated document between British India's Foreign Secretary, Sir Mortimer Durand, and an Afghan amir who was fully cognizant of its provisions and actively participated in its crafting. Moreover, despite Abdul Rahman's own misgivings about certain aspects of the agreement, he and his successors up to the formation of the modern state of Pakistan in 1947 abided by it and reaffirmed it in subsequent treaties.

For Karzai, the historicity of the 1893 Agreement is irrelevant. He seems to embrace, like the majority of his fellow Afghans, the notion that the agreement was imposed on Afghanistan. Thus, in his mind, by signing the BSA, he would risk a legacy of being yet another Afghan ruler who signed away the country's sovereignty to a foreign power. As of late, Karzai has been characterizing US actions as those of a colonial power. Perhaps he is doing this as a means to draw historical parallels between nineteenth century British India and today's United States. If that is the case, he wants to be remembered as a contemporary version of the heroes of the anti-British campaigns rather than of the amirs who dealt with the British, whether under duress or, in the case of Abdul Rahman, as a strategic choice.

Understanding how Karzai is leveraging his country's historical narrative to rationalize his strategic posturing may shed light on what kind of Afghanistan will emerge after the election results are in. If Karzai's favored candidate wins, Karzai likely will maintain his power to maneuver Afghanistan's general policy direction. This would leave the security situation in the country tenuous at best, as Karzai seeks to both appease the Taliban opposition and blame all of Afghanistan's ills on Pakistan. However, a win by an independent candidate could spell a different future for Afghanistan. Perhaps a president, who has a forward-looking strategic vision rather than one bound by an imaginary historical yardstick, could envision his country as part of an interdependent region, partnering and cooperating with all of its neighbors and the larger international community.

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# MES Insights: Weapons Proliferation

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## Showcasing Saudi Arabia's Missiles: Connecting the Dots

by Norman Cigar, Research Fellow, MCU

The two-week-long April 2014 Sword of Abd Allah Exercise was a landmark event for Saudi Arabia's Strategic Rocket Force (SRF) and for the country's military in general. The parade that culminated the largest joint exercise ever held in the country represented the first time that Saudi Arabia's CSS-2 (or the Chinese designation DF-3) surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs), acquired from China in the 1980s, had ever been shown. The SSMs were paraded prominently on 28 April at the Hafr Al-Batin military base in front of an audience of high-ranking Saudi officials and attending foreign dignitaries, as well as highlighted in Saudi newspapers and on TV. The accompanying media accounts were standardized by and large and followed the still limited official narrative, although follow-on commentary elaborated for domestic and regional audiences on the importance of the event.

Although only this ageing liquid-fueled missile was put on display, in many ways, the unveiling of the missiles and the accompanying Saudi commentary did much to crystallize and underline the broader enduring themes of Riyadh's thinking. Such themes include its mistrust of Iranian policy and conviction that Tehran intends to continue its quest to acquire nuclear weapons, unease about the reliability of US security guarantees, pique at some of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states for their more benign outlook on Iran, national pride, faith in the effectiveness of the concept of deterrence, the portrayal of nuclear weapons and SSMs as a package, and a warning of the Saudi option to pursue a nuclear deterrent if Iran does so.

Unofficial spokesmen noted openly that the Saudi government wanted to send political messages to different audiences with the exercise and by publicizing its SSMs. Perhaps uppermost, as one Saudi commentator noted, was "a message specifically for [Saudi Arabia's] Iranian neighbor, who seeks to acquire nuclear weapons."<sup>1</sup> The same commentator saw the CSS-2, in particular, as "a message to those forces that harbor evil intent for the security of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf."

As part of that message, the Saudi media revived a recurring theme: that Saudi Arabia could now provide an effective security umbrella for its neighbors. According to one commentator, with the Sword of Abd Allah Exercise, "Saudi Arabia has become a different country, one that has military deterrent power for all, and not just for its immediate neighbors," and, moreover, "everyone has understood the message that the Kingdom is capable of defending its own holy lands as well as its

allies in the region.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps as a criticism or expression of disappointment with Riyadh’s traditional US ally, some Saudi observers also claimed that the exercise and, in particular, the factor of the country’s SSMS, provided proof of Riyadh’s self-reliance, and that Saudi Arabia “does not need anyone to defend it as the western and the hostile media maintain.”<sup>23</sup>

The Sword of Abd Allah Exercise also highlighted the importance of the domestic audience in securing the Saudi royal family’s legitimacy. Not surprisingly, Saudi press commentaries portrayed the CSS-2 as a source of national pride and saw the missiles as a significant achievement for the government. For example, one journalist claimed that learning about the CSS-2 had engendered “an enthusiastic response from the Saudi public.”<sup>24</sup>

In addition, some in the media hinted obliquely that Saudi Arabia might have assets beyond the CSS-2. One commentator, for example, noted that Riyadh “revealed only a small part of the advanced military systems in its possession.”<sup>25</sup> More broadly, this same commentator also alluded to the relationship between SSMS and nuclear weapons, albeit indirectly. Alleging that Iran trumpets its own SSMS and its assumed nuclear weapons program, he countered that “nuclear weapons are not such a big deal,” specifically because “many Islamic countries have [also] acquired that ... The Kingdom, however, does not need to always say things openly and to respond to the Iranian farces by telling what it has.”

Significantly, an additional message was directed more openly to the local audience using local electronic newspapers, as these media outlets have a local readership and are not likely to attract international attention. Perhaps assuming that international audiences would make the appropriate deductions anyhow and wanting to ensure that domestic readers did not miss a key element, the specific point almost invariably raised in the local media was to the effect that the CSS-2 displayed during the exercise “is capable of carrying nuclear warheads.”<sup>26</sup> That is, tying the SSMS to a potential nuclear capability may have been intended to reassure local and regional audiences that the country’s leadership is providing adequately for defense and is prepared to meet any potential threat, including a nuclear one. One Saudi electronic newspaper was particularly explicit with its hints on this score. Citing the CSS-2, this source underscored the “the nuclear dimension” of the message, thus openly hinting at a linkage between the SSMS and a nuclear capability. And, this observer went on to stress that the CSS-2 was not only nuclear-capable but that in the audience watching the parade was the chief of staff of “nuclear Pakistan” and suggested there was now a new alliance with “nuclear Pakistan,” a country that many have speculated could provide nuclear weapons to Saudi Arabia one day.”<sup>27</sup>

In addition, the Saudi edition of the *Al-Hayat* international Arabic-language daily, which the royal family owns, also suggested that the CSS-2 shown was not the only SSM in the national arsenal, as it spoke of the Saudis’ having “the East Wind missiles and other strategic missiles.”<sup>28</sup> In effect, over the years, a variety of sources have reported that Riyadh had upgraded its SSM arsenal, possibly with the Chinese-made CSS-5 or the Pakistani-made Shaheen.<sup>9</sup>

In the days following the parade, the Saudi media basked in the reaction of the Israeli and Iranian media to seeing the SSMS, which the Saudi media has interpreted as surprise and alarm in those countries’ official circles. However, an unintended consequence may be the strengthening of the hardliners’ hand in Tehran on the nuclear issue.

## Conclusions

Several conclusions may be drawn from the presence of the Saudi missiles at the Hafr Al-Batin parade:

First, Saudi Arabia considers its SSMS as a key component of its force structure and will continue

to do so. In light of its threat assessment, focused especially on Iran, its growing mistrust of international guarantees, and its desire to display its independence, Riyadh can be expected to continue devoting significant assets to the SRF and to work to improve the latter's material and human capabilities.

Second, the primary focus of Saudi Arabia's SRF will continue to be on deterrence. However, given the fine line between deterrence and warfighting, and based on Riyadh's past experience, if the situation were to become sufficiently grave, the Saudis would not hesitate to employ their missiles in a warfighting mode as well, and perhaps even preemptively.

Third, the apparent recent upgrade in the SSM force, if confirmed, is an additional indication that Saudi Arabia is likely to consider following suit if Iran succeeds in developing a nuclear capability, especially given the Saudi view of SSM and nuclear weapons as an interrelated package and its frequent hints and warnings that it would do so. To some extent, Riyadh presumably sees an SSM capability as part of its deterrent effort designed to convince Iran not to pursue nuclear weapons by lending credibility to its threats to also acquire and be able to deliver nuclear weapons if Iran were to do so. At the very least, upgrading its SSM arsenal is an indication of Riyadh's intent to have available in reserve an option to go nuclear in the future if necessary.

Fourth, the case of Saudi Arabia suggests that in some instances the international community's leverage to prevent proliferation may be very limited. Admittedly, Saudi Arabia may be a special case, due to its unique position as an international oil powerhouse. However, other countries as well, whether thanks to political or economic advantages, may also be able to resist outside pressure or avert it altogether when they judge that their vital national security interests are at stake.

Fifth, although Saudi Arabia intends its SSMs to have a stabilizing effect in the region by deterring potential aggression and adventurism, such upgraded arsenals also open the way for further arms races and increased regional tensions. Enhanced capabilities can also contribute to escalation and have the potential for miscalculation in a regional crisis, which would be especially risky if Iran and Saudi Arabia do eventually decide to acquire nuclear weapons. Counterproliferation efforts by the international community on the control of missile technology from potential suppliers and recipients must continue in order to promote genuine stability and to reduce the risk of unintended consequences.

#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Nayif Al-Asimi, "Sayf Abd Allah risala saudiya li-quwa al-sharr" [The Sword of Abd Abd Is a Saudi Message to the Forces of Evil], *Al-Watan* (Abha), 29 April 2014, [www.alwatan.com.sa/Local/News\\_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=186428&CategoryID=5](http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Local/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=186428&CategoryID=5).

<sup>2</sup> Bandar Al-Dawshi, "Abr al-sarukh al-balisti Al-Saudiya tafrud halat al-samt ala al-mutarabbisin" [By Means of the Ballistic Missiles Saudi Arabia Silenced Those Who Are Lurking], *Sabq* (Riyadh), 30 April 2014, <http://sabq.org/yGYfde>. Hereafter, Al-Dawshi, "Abr al-sarukh al-balisti."

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Mansur Al-Shihri, "Riyah Al-Sharq risalat itmi'nan li'l-shab wa-tahdhir li'l-aduww" [The East Wind Is a Message of Reassurance for the Population and a Warning to the Enemy], *Ukaz* (Jeddah), 1 May 2014, [www.okaz.com.sa/new/issues/20140501/PrinCon20140501696350.htm](http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/issues/20140501/PrinCon20140501696350.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Hasan Mufti, "Sayf Abd Allah risala li-man yahummuh al-amr" [The Sword of Abd Allah Was a Message for the Intended Parties], *Ukaz*, 6 May 2014, [www.okaz.com.sa/news/issues/20140506/PrinCon20140506697493.htm](http://www.okaz.com.sa/news/issues/20140506/PrinCon20140506697493.htm).

<sup>6</sup> For example, "Li-awwal marra sawarikh Riyah Al-Sharq al-qadira ala haml ru'us nawawiya bi munawarat 'Sayf Abd Allah'" [For the First Time in the Sword of Abd Allah Exercise the East Wind Missiles That Are Nuclear-Capable], *Tawasul* (Riyadh), 30 April 2014, <http://twasul.info/55974>, "Al-Salmi: Sayf Abd Allah tabath rasa'il mutaaddida" [Al-Salmi: Sword of Abd Allah Sends Multiple Messages], *Arkan* (Saudi Arabia), 30 April 2014, [www.arkan-news.com/?p=1556](http://www.arkan-news.com/?p=1556), Salih Al-Quthami, "Zhuhur sawarikh Riyah Al-Sharq li-awwal marra tuthlij sudur al-saudiyyin" [The Appearance of the East Wind Missiles for the First Time Delights the Saudis], *Sada* (Saudi Arabia), 29

April 2014, [www.slaati.com/2014/04/29/p181530.html](http://www.slaati.com/2014/04/29/p181530.html), or “Al-Saudiya tastakhdim silah jadid li-awwal marra fi mu-nawarat askariya” [Saudi Arabia Uses New Weapons for the First Time in Military Exercises], *Al-Rajul* (Saudi Arabia), 1 May 2014, [www.arrajol.com](http://www.arrajol.com).

<sup>7</sup> Al-Dawshi, “Abr al-sarukh al-balisti.”

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad Ghallab, “Al-Saudiya tastarid quwwatha amam al-alam bi-Sayf Abd Allah” [Saudi Arabia Displays Its Power to the World with the Sword of Abd Allah Exercise], *Al-Hayat* (Saudi edition), 29 April 2014, <http://alhayat.com/Articles/20544569>.

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Stein, “The CIA Was Saudi Arabia’s Personal Shopper,” *Newsweek* (New York), 29 January 2014, <http://mag.newsweek.com/2014/01/31/cia-saudi-arabias-personal-shopper.htm>.

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## Future of Nonproliferation after a Nuclear Deal with Iran

by Amin Tarzi and Talia F Ascher

The negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) have produced the parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to contain Iran’s nuclear program. Regardless of the final outcome of the JCPOA negotiations in June, these negotiations are affecting the future of nonproliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond. This piece analyzes the nonproliferation impact of Iranian nuclear politics. But first, it is critical to understand the Iranian rationale for pursuing a nuclear capability at great economic and political cost because this has direct ramifications for the nonproliferation analysis.

### Iran’s Long Quest for Nuclear Technology

The Iranian nuclear program did not begin in 2002. It was formulated during the pre-revolutionary Pahlavi era and was reinvigorated by the Islamic Republic during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88. Following the victory of the 1979 Islamic revolution, the Iranian regime found itself at odds with most of its neighbors and with major powers, such as the United States and the Soviet Union. Iran’s sense of being beleaguered, isolated, and victimized dramatically increased during its war with Iraq. Its war with Iraq taught the regime in Tehran several interconnected lessons and solidified the Iranian leadership’s quest to find an irrevocable security measure, not only to safeguard the country of Iran, but more specifically, to secure survivability of the regime. Seen from the Iranian perspective, and justifiably so, Iraq was the aggressor, but the international system, dominated by the United States and most of Iran’s Arab neighbors, stood either on the sidelines or supported Baghdad. The international system, according to Iran, failed even to respond to the Iraqi use of chemical weapons against Iranian targets. The assistance Iran did receive was part of the policies of some parties to keep both the regimes in Baghdad and Tehran engaged in fighting each other and, thus, weak and unable to act aggressively elsewhere. In short, the war with Iraq taught the Iranian leadership that the international system did not work in their favor; the international system was not

based on equality of states and justice; and finally, that coercion, if exercised cautiously through mechanisms of deniability of responsibility, could achieve results that were unattainable through playing by the rules.

Towards its end, the Iran-Iraq War brought Iran and the United States into direct military confrontations, exposing the fundamental inadequacy of Iran's conventional military power. Furthermore, the United States did not bow to the pressures of Iranian coercion in the Persian Gulf. It can be argued that this US action was instrumental to Tehran's decision to end the war without achieving its final stated objective of removal of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power or its securing any assurance that its border with Iraq would not be violated again. In Aytatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's words, he did away with his honor and drank the poisoned chalice, however, "for safeguarding of Islam and the protection of the Islamic republic."

The increased distrust of the international community of the Iranian regime and Iran's inability to reconcile its weak conventional army contributed to Iran's decision to go down the path of developing a nuclear weapons capability. It was considered part of Iran's national security strategy and became part of its national identity. Around the mid-point of the 1980s, Khomeini decided that, to secure the survival of the Islamic system from the perceived existential threats emanating from the United States and Israel, the regime needed to have a nuclear program. The authors have no doubts that the intention of Iran's nuclear program is to provide the regime with the technical ability to produce nuclear weapons. That said, we cannot be sure whether the country currently has plans or the capability to produce deliverable nuclear warheads and the associated delivery systems. Iranian leaders have continued to develop Iran's nuclear program as a source of national pride and dignity while denying that it has a military dimension. They claim it is purely for peaceful energy and medical research purposes and serves as a symbol of Iran's right to self-determination. However, many discoveries have been made by concerned parties, which put these claims into serious question.

### **Internal and External Threats to the Iranian Regime**

The regime entered the last decade of the twentieth century without the charismatic and unchallenged leadership of its founder and principal ideologue, Khomeini. This led to increased factionalism within the country's political system. During this time, there were the initial signs of a thaw in relations with the United States—Iran's major perceived arch enemy. However, US-Iranian relations refroze. Tehran's sponsorship of terrorism, development of nuclear technology, active opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, and abhorrent human rights records led to the imposition of economic sanctions by Washington in 1995. Despite the 1997 election of the reformist Mohammad Khatami, who spoke of "dialogue among civilizations" and whose government supported the US-led efforts in Afghanistan, relations did not improve. Furthermore, in January 2002, then US president George W. Bush's inclusion of Iran in the "axis of evil" cemented Iran's perception, and indeed conviction, that Washington's basic policy was to change the regime in Tehran, and not just the regime's behavior.

During Khatami's presidency, Iran took some of its most crucial steps toward establishing a viable nuclear program. Iran tested centrifuges and began constructing a covert uranium enrichment facility near Natanz and a heavy water production plant in Arak. These actions were in violation of Iran's safeguard agreements and the verification requirements under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The revelation of these illicit activities prompted greater attention from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and increased political and economic pressure to curb Iran's nuclear program. In talks with France, Germany and the United Kingdom (EU-3), Iran agreed to suspend uranium enrichment temporarily and forgo nuclear weapons, and the Europeans recognized Iran's right to work on nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Khatami's reformist presidency and policies resulted in the militarization of Iran's political landscape. It forced the relatively venerable Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to increase reliance on the hardline members of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) to undermine the populist and relaxed platforms of the reformist movement through direct action against the people and open threats addressed to Khatami and his coalition. In the 2005 elections, Khamenei backed the untested nationalist revolutionary candidate Mahmud Ahmadinejad. Perhaps this was due to the perceived dangers to the regime's security and stability after the experience of Khatami's presidency. Ahmadinejad was a hardliner who practiced a confrontational foreign policy based on destabilizing activities and fiery rhetoric and whose internal policies saw the systematic curtailment of minor freedoms ushered in during Khatami's presidency. To carry out these policies, Ahmadinejad relied on the IRGC, further bringing that organization into prominence.

Soon after Ahmadinejad's election, Iran resumed uranium conversion activities. In response, the IAEA referred Iran to the UN Security Council for noncompliance of its NPT Safeguards Agreement. This led to a series of resolutions, including the sanctioning of Iran. Throughout the presidency of Ahmadinejad, Iran dared the international system with its nuclear advancements while undermining United States' policies in Iraq and the Middle East in general and directly threatening Israel's existence. While Tehran withstood some of the toughest and broadest sanctions ever imposed on any country, their toll on the Iranian economy increasingly mounted. Ahmadinejad linked the nuclear program with Iran's national pride and its greatness narrative, trying to blame the worsening economic conditions of the people to the West's desire to keep a rising Iran from achieving its rightful place in the region.

However, the West could not be the scapegoat for the near demise of the regime in 2009. Rather, it was the political machinations of the regime elites. The systematically irregular 2009 elections which brought Ahmadinejad back for a second term as president nearly resulted in a fatal blow to the system in power since 1979. Khamenei openly supported Ahmadinejad's election and the ensuing brutal crackdown on the protests known as the "Green Movement." By doing this, Khamenei effectively made himself and the very ruling system of the Islamic republic—represented by his office of Supreme Leader—party to the street politics of Iran. In retrospect, by backing Ahmadinejad in 2009, Khamenei won a tactical victory but was faced with losing the strategic battle of safeguarding the regime itself. This time, the culprits were not sons of the Islamic revolution gathered around Khatami who wanted to change the nature of the Islamic Republic to a more accommodating system and with an opaque but expanding nuclear dimension. The new threats to the regime were younger nationalistic revolutionaries and IRGC members. While trying to safeguard the system, these nationalists were in fact undermining it by reducing the power of the Supreme Leader and increasing the power of the popular politics and the IRGC. On the nuclear front, UN Security Council had little trouble in justifying the tough and biting sanctions because of regime's internal and external rhetoric and behavior.

## **The Regime Savior**

Ahmadinejad's socioeconomic and foreign policies left the regime in Iran with its lowest approval rating internally and unprecedented isolation internationally. The authors believe that Khamenei sought to pave the way for a pragmatic and strategic conservative to serve as Iran's next president. This individual needed not only to be a trusted son of the revolution, but also have a proven record of negotiations with the Europeans on Iran's nuclear program. Hasan Ruhani, who had led Iran's negotiations with the EU-3 from 2003 to 2005, knew how to negotiate and also to keep pressure away from Iran by speaking in terms of accommodating to the West. With Ruhani as Iran's new face, a path was set, and the nuclear file was put on the table. EU-3, joined by China, the Russian Federation and the United States, agreed to hold talks with Iran aimed at resolving the nuclear file.

After the political commitment by the P5+1, Iran and the IAEA signed a Framework of

Cooperation Agreement, leading in January 2014 to the entry into force of the Joint Plan of Action. After some deadline changes, Iran and P5+1 on 4 April 2015 decided on the parameters for a JCPOA, which is to be finalized and signed before 30 June. On paper, the parameters of JCPOA go a long way in preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability in the coming decade or more. If fully implemented and if Iran upholds its agreements, the IAEA will have very intrusive inspection and verification access to all of Iran's known nuclear facilities, including uranium mines. According to the US Department of State, for a decade after the JCPOA goes into enforcement, the breakout time for Iran to acquire enough fissile material for one weapon will be extended from the current estimated 2 to 3 months to at least a year. And for Iran, the harsh sanctions are lifted the country continues to enrich uranium on its soil effectively keeping to its longstanding redlines. For the Iranian regime, the most immediate and pressing concern has been safeguarding its survival in face of strong—albeit quashed—internal opposition to the very nature of the Islamic republic, an unmanaged economic crisis, and potential external political and military threats. The JCPOA, if signed, will pave the way for Tehran to resolve most of these concerns. Is this a victory for nonproliferation?

The authors argue that the very negotiations threaten nonproliferation goals. The Islamic regime—that in 2009 openly targeted its own people on the streets and continues to stifle even the most basic of their freedoms, has opposition leaders in confinement for protesting election irregularities, stones women in public, internationally has either called for the destruction of other states in the Middle East, and continues to destabilize a list of regional countries directly or through proxies—now finds itself sitting with the world's six major powers as an equal and accepting their praise. Furthermore, they have not had to give up much to gain much. Therein lies the greatest danger to the advancement of nonproliferation in the region and throughout the world.

The message being sent from Lausanne to other states in the MENA region and beyond has two very different dimensions. On the one hand, the JCPOA is the best way to avoid another war in the Middle East and prevent Iran from making enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon, since under the sanctions regime, the argument goes, Tehran was able to expand its nuclear program. On the other hand, the message is that bad behavior is rewarded. Violating international obligations and possession of a robust nuclear program with weaponization elements present therein are political chips to play when regimes—even the most unsavory—need to advance their own policies, whether internal, regional, or international. And in the end, these regimes do not have to give up too much, just a delay in breakout capability and be subject to inspections of known sites. In the specific case of the MENA region, the Islamic regime can now expand its influence into more regional countries, free from fear of regime change and with international and internal prestige. Of course, this is having ripple effects through the region, as rival regional powers to seek the same level of assurance through attempts to further their own nuclear ambitions.

## **Beyond the Euphoria**

While the P5+1 and Iran are working to sign a JCPOA based on the parameters agreed upon in Lausanne, the work to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons in the MENA region has become more difficult, not simpler. Even with an agreement in place, it is not a sure bet that the Iranian regime, with its impressive track record, will uphold its end of the bargain. Ruhani's own words while negotiating with EU-3 should be a reminder for how Iran might use the calm that would be created by the JCPOA. "While we were talking with the Europeans in Tehran, we were installing equipment in Isfahan. ... In fact, by creating a relaxed atmosphere, we were able to complete the work in Isfahan."<sup>1</sup> The regional and international fallout is a whole other issue.

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Steven Ditto, “Reading Rouhani: The Promise and Peril of Iran’s New President” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 129, October 2013, p. 43.

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# MES Insights: MENA Democratization

MES Insights • Volume 5, Issue 4 • July 2014

## MES to Focus on Democracy and Democratization in the MENA

In a speech before the UN General Assembly in 2004, then US President George W. Bush proclaimed that, “for too long, many nations, including my own, tolerated, even excused, oppression in the Middle East in the name of stability... We must help the reformers of the Middle East as they work for freedom, and strive to build a community of peaceful, democratic nations.” The speech came almost three years after the terror attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing military action toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and a year and a half after the US invasion of Iraq to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussain. Although the US began to emphasize democracy promotion in the Middle East in the 1990s, the US drastically increased its democracy aid to the region following the attacks of 9/11; by Fiscal Year-2009 the annual US democracy aid was more than the total amount spent in the decade from 1991-2001.

Like his predecessor, democracy promotion has been a pillar of President Barak Obama Administration’s national security and foreign policy strategies. The 2010 US National Security Strategy recognizes the expansion of human rights and democracy as “fundamental” to US national security. Furthermore, the President has made democracy promotion a key talking point in many of his foreign policy addresses, including speeches at Cairo University in 2009 and West Point in 2010. In the 2009 Cairo speech, President Obama stated that he was there to “seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world” and to voice his “commitment to governments that reflect the will of the people.” President Obama went on in his Cairo speech to describe “the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose” as not just American ideas but universal human rights that the US will support everywhere.

Since President Obama’s Cairo speech, the region has undergone considerable political change, with long standing authoritarian regimes and young transitioning democracies put under increasing pressure from above and below to reform. The wave of uprisings which began in December of 2010 in Tunisia has had varied results throughout the region and resulted in mixed responses from local, regional, and international actors alike, especially concerning democratic reforms. These events have also ushered a multilayered debate on the very nature and aim of democracy among the public, political players and even terrorist entities. In the case of Egypt, the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak through public uprisings, the subsequent election of a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government, and later the ouster of the democratically elected government of President Muhammad Mursi by the military, as well as the regional and international response,

have had a profound effect on regional perceptions of democracy and the West's objectives alike.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the popular uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and the current crisis in Syria and Iraq have and are reshaping the political and social landscape of the region. The unexpected territorial gains in Iraq and Syria in the summer of 2014 by the group calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and its stated opposition to “the idol of democracy” have further complicated the meaning and future of democracy in the region. As this environment evolves, the United States Marine Corps, as the Nation's force in readiness and its premier crisis response force, must stay current on the emerging realities in the Middle East to ensure they stand ready to respond to the Nation's needs. Because of ongoing deployments of US forces in Middle East and the continued US military presence in the Gulf region for the foreseeable future, the Middle East Studies at Marine Corps University (MES), as part of its mission to assess current events, regional trends and US policy decisions and strategies in the Middle East, focused its efforts in academic year (AY) 2014-15 on broadening the Marine Corps' academic understanding of the events taking place throughout the region as well as of the impact these changes will have on US policy and Marine Corps planning for future operations. To support this, MES hosted a series of lectures concentrating on the concept of democracy and democratization in the MENA for its AY 2014-15 Lecture Series. The lecture series brought together regional subject matter experts to discuss such issues as: United States expectations from the expansion of democratic norms and institutions in the MENA; differences in perceptions and policies about democracy and democracy promotion among US policymakers and regional actors; and how the concept of democracy is evolving in the region, especially since 9/11, the US military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, events associated with the Arab uprisings, and the current upsurge of terrorist activities in the region.

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## Afghanistan's Presidential Elections

by Amin Tarzi

On 5 April 2014 Afghanistan managed to hold relatively fair and reasonably violence free presidential and provincial council elections. Eight candidates competed for the first democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan's turbulent history of succession. In fact, the last peaceful and pre-arranged transition of power occurred more than a century ago. Afghans and the international community alike lauded Afghanistan's success in the elections and the lack of direct interference in the results by the country's outgoing president, Hamid Karzai.

This served as maybe the only positive news in the midst of the chaos overtaking the region stretching from North Africa to South Asia and the failures of budding democratic experiments in most of the cases following the Arab revolts. It was a relief for the states contributing forces to NATO's International Security Assistance Force whose mandate in Afghanistan is to coming to an end. For Washington in particular, the smooth transfer of power in Afghanistan is necessary not only for an orderly withdrawal of the bulk of US forces in the country but also for determining the future shape, size, and mandate of US presence in Afghanistan. The latter is currently on hold mainly

due to President Karzai's refusal to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement with the United States.

The celebration of Afghans for exercising their right to choose their next leader was cut short when none of the candidates secured at least fifty percent plus one vote, which is required for victory by the Afghan Constitution. This forced the presidential runoff election between frontrunner Abdullah Abdullah (45.00%) and Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai (31.56%). In the runoff, Ahmadzai came out on top with 56.44 percent of the votes to Abdullah's 43.56 percent with the former claiming much higher voter turnout by his supporters and the latter crying foul on an "industrial scale." With Abdullah's boycotting the vote counting process and threatening to form a parallel government, the US Secretary of State John Kerry stepped in to find an expedient solution to the Afghanistan's electoral impasse to avoid the possibility of the country's reverting back into civil war. Kerry's efforts paid off, at least temporarily. Each candidate has agreed to an audit of all of the votes and, should he win, to forming a "national unity" government immediately following becoming Afghanistan's next president.

As the saying goes, the devil is in the details.

Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission has begun the auditing process in Kabul in the presence of representatives from both candidates, the United Nations, and other interested countries. However, the parties have yet to agree on the process for classifying votes invalid. The second open-ended and potentially perilous issue involves the nature of the "national unity" government should the result of the audit satisfy both candidates.

Afghanistan's tumultuous political history since 1978 should serve as a warning and dictates that preplanning be given a higher priority than hope. In the mid-1980s, various Afghan resistance groups based in Pakistan and Iran—some of whose members make up the current political teams hoping to lead the country in the future—discussed, signed, and sealed (even in Mecca) agreements on forming "national unity" governments to pave the way for a smooth transition should the Soviet-backed government in Kabul fall. Without going into all the details, the history of the entire region, including the upsurge of terrorist entities with international reach, mostly likely would have been very different had any form of "unity" existed among the Afghan resistance groups.

Then, as now, well-intentioned mediators of all stripes have tried tirelessly to forge power-sharing agreements between the Afghan groups. However, most of these agreements have been very vague in details and designed as a temporary measure to plug a hole to avert or manage a crisis. Furthermore, those agreements containing execution details have lacked clear, actionable measures for handling the violation of the agreement terms.

Last round, the result was a fragmented country in war with itself that served as host to the most unsavory terrorist organizations of the time. This is somewhat similar to what is currently going on in Iraq.

Afghans, similar to the many Arabs who poured in the streets, believe in the message and promise of democracy. Afghans ignored the threats made by the Taliban against participating in the elections, and some lost their lives and others their fingers for voting. These are a testament to their belief in democracy. Bringing democracy to Afghanistan is a delicate and detailed process. The first order of responsibility lies squarely on the shoulders of Afghan leaders—the two current presidential candidates in particular. However, the democracies that have bled with the Afghans have also a responsibility—if only out of their own national security concerns—to work for a well-grounded solution that leads to a reasonably swift, transparent, and enforceable outcome for Afghanistan's presidential election impasse. Otherwise, erecting facades may avert an immediate crisis but could result in a much more dangerous outcome in the long-term.

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## A Third Inning Ending to the Game in Afghanistan?

by Amin Tarzi

*Victory no longer happens when you capture the enemy capital. And we can't just declare victory in a photo op on an aircraft carrier. These events signal that the home team is ahead in the third inning. The game goes nine innings—or longer if necessary; and victory happens when you put in place a lasting stable environment.*

Retired US Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni

This visionary statement is an appropriate way to reflect on Afghanistan's first peaceful transition of power in more than a century. How should we characterize this transition? Are the expedient arrangements that have put in place a "National Unity Government" in the aftermath of electoral disputes a victory for the international involvement that began in 2001 or are they just a home run in the third inning that the foreign players in the Afghan field are celebrating, while the fans, convinced this represents certain victory, exit the stands?

On 29 September 2014, Muhammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai became Afghanistan's second post-Taliban president. The transfer of power from outgoing President Hamid Karzai to Ghani also marked the first peaceful transition of power in Afghanistan since 1901 and the very first transition of power based on elections, albeit not without controversy. The ambiguous outcome of the 5 April presidential election led to a runoff between Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah marred with major irregularities. Ghani and Abdullah refused to accept the runoff results, bringing the country once again to the brink of violence with the prospects of two parallel governments. After consultations and intervention by the United States and the United Nations, on 20 September, Ghani and Abdullah signed a four-page agreement to form a "National Unity Government" through which Ghani became president and Abdullah assumed the newly established position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) with the "functions of an executive prime minister." As the CEO, Abdullah is answerable to Ghani; however, the functionality of this new form of government, yet to be defined constitutionally, is left to the goodwill of these two gentlemen and their political allies and perhaps some undeclared carrots and sticks of the states financing the bulk of Afghanistan's expenses.

Going back to General Zinni's statement, the photo op moment in the game in Afghanistan for the United States perhaps occurred on 30 September when Afghanistan and the United States signed the long-languishing Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement. The agreement legitimizes the presence of US forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014 when the mandate of the NATO's International Security Assistance Force expires and with it the bulk of international military engagement in that country.

The United States now has access to several Afghan facilities and points of embarkation and debarkation. This allows for a more orderly and timely downsizing for the US forces currently stationed in Afghanistan and for the establishment of a new NATO-led mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. The agreement also enables the United States to have some degree of counterterrorism capability inside Afghanistan.

Under the rather vague Bonn Agreement of 2001, the head of the executive branch of the envisioned Afghan governing system was designed to be the mechanism through which the country would reorganize itself as a state and emerge as a democracy. The new agreement between Ghani and Abdullah on the formation of a “National Unity Government” is equally vague. This new government structure envisions an executive branch with a president and two vice-presidents as well as a CEO and two deputy CEOs. Under this structure, Afghanistan is expected to move ahead without large international military presence and, most likely, decreasing international monetary support.

After thirteen years of effort by dozens of states, including the participation of the world’s most powerful military alliance—NATO—with tens of thousands of casualties and mind boggling expenditures, has Afghanistan achieved a “lasting stable environment” so the states that supported Afghanistan can declare victory? The answer is still uncertain, and the game still in the third inning with the home-team ahead. However, as the old baseball sage Yogi Berra cautioned, “It ain’t over till it’s over.” Can the new president-CEO team in Afghanistan hold the country together, manage to reduce corruption, and increase the state’s capacities to manage the ongoing insurgency? The next six innings will determine that. Al-Qaeda remains a threat, and its offshoots are posing much more serious challenges in different arenas. In retrospect, one of the lessons of Afghanistan should be that the capture of Kabul from the Taliban in a few weeks was not victory; rather, it was the beginning of a long process for which most of the participants were not ready.

As the game in Afghanistan nears the next inning, it would be wise to look back to the lessons of the first three innings and adjust the strategies against outfits such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant accordingly.

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## “We like democracy, but elections ruined it”: Thoughts on Democratization in Afghanistan after 2014

by Scott Smith

The quote in the title comes from a comment reportedly made by an Afghan voter after the 2014 elections. It describes one of the more perplexing questions arising from the democratization effort in Afghanistan: Why has each successive election been better prepared technically but yielded a worse result politically? An exploration of this question reveals a great deal about political order in Afghanistan, but perhaps also about our own understanding, or misunderstanding, of what democracy is.

A great deal of hope was invested in the 2014 elections. President Hamid Karzai was constitutionally not allowed to stand for another term. The strongest candidates to replace him promised reforms. As international troops ended their combat role the same year and aid began to decline, these elections were expected to yield a reformist government that would allow Afghanistan

to govern itself more effectively and with greater self-reliance.

Reinhold Niebuhr once described democracy as “a method of finding proximate solutions to insoluble problems.”<sup>1</sup> In Afghanistan in 2014, the insoluble problem was political order and the proximate solution was the democratic constitution of 2004. The constitution, despite its lofty aspirations, had really only been successful in performing the dirty work of holding formerly warring elites together. Its real function was to serve as an agreed-upon set of rules that governed political competition between political actors with power that was somewhat autonomous from Afghanistan’s weak state institutions.

Viewed from this minimalistic perspective, the 2014 elections served two purposes. First, they were the means by which elites demonstrated their power relative to each other as part of the elite negotiation—the ability to command “vote banks” was a sign of power. Second, holding the elections on schedule demonstrated that the constitution was still accepted as the “rules of the game.” Both of these purposes are related to the distribution and legitimization of power among elites. Neither had much to do with increasing representation or citizen participation in political decisions, or other features of what is understood as democracy.

But something funny happened on the way to the polling station. As the campaign period progressed, popular excitement grew. Tens of thousands of people attended the rallies of the eight candidates. This interest was sustained throughout the two months of the campaign period. The first round, on 5 April, was a rare day of optimism in Afghanistan. There was high turnout—around seven million voters—and few security problems. The Independent Election Commission (IEC), with very little technical support from the international community, pulled off the complicated logistics of an Afghan election with few complaints, for which the IEC received significant praise.

From a political perspective, the electoral result was ideal. Abdullah Abdullah received the most votes with 45 percent—a commanding lead but too far from the 50 percent threshold to plausibly argue that fraud had denied him outright victory. Ashraf Ghani came second with 31.5 percent. Most importantly, Zalmay Rassoul, Karzai’s foreign minister, only received 10 percent. Rassoul had been perceived as Karzai’s preferred candidate. Many people interpreted his poor showing as a sign that the palace was not manipulating the election, further legitimizing the process. His weak showing also dissuaded him from arguing that fraud had deprived him of second place.

Interestingly, anecdotal reports emerged that voters increasingly had ignored local power-brokers and voted for whom they actually wanted. In other words, the “vote banks” were less reliable than in previous elections. This was encouraging for democratization, but problematic if the election was to serve as a means for power brokers to demonstrate their power. In other words, the more genuinely democratic the election became, the less helpful it was to maintaining the elite pact.

Perhaps for that reason, the Abdullah camp, with its solid lead, proposed negotiating a political agreement with Ghani to avoid a second round. The argument, backed by some in the international community, was that a second round would be expensive, violent, and more ethnically divisive. A negotiated pact between the two front runners would avoid these dangers. Ghani, however, had no incentive to negotiate. His strategy had been to win the most votes among Pashtuns in the first round and count on Pashtun votes to back him in the second round. The stage was set for an unprecedented second round in Afghanistan.

The two candidates adopted divergent strategies in the brief campaign before the second round. Ghani sought to mobilize Pashtun voters, while Abdullah sought the endorsements of the candidates who had lost as well as other influential politicians. Ghani’s ethnic strategy assumed that there would be a shift of voters from other Pashtun candidates to him. Abdullah’s “vote bank” strategy assumed that voters who had voted for certain candidates in the first round would transfer their votes to whomever their candidates endorsed in the second round.

The second round took place on 14 June. If the political result of the first round had been ideal, the result of the second round was catastrophic. But the catastrophe did not reveal itself immediately. Within 24 hours of the polls closing, and before any results had been released—although the IEC had announced a surprisingly high turnout of 8 million—the Abdullah campaign accused the IEC of committing massive fraud. According to observer reports, 95 percent of the 22,000 tally sheets had signatures from agents of both candidates. It is likely that in those 24 hours, the Abdullah campaign had added up their tallies and realized they were behind.

There were good reasons to believe that fraud had taken place. The Abdullah campaign quickly capitalized on these by releasing a secretly recorded tape of a purported phone conversation in which the IEC's Chief Electoral Officer appeared to have been ordering a provincial official to stuff ballot boxes for Ghani. This tape fatally undermined the credibility of the IEC, which it would never recover.

According to the electoral calendar, the IEC was supposed to release its preliminary results on 7 July. The allegations of fraud, however, and Abdullah's threats to withdraw from the process had forced the two camps into a negotiation over how to resolve the impasse. Pressure was put on the IEC to delay its announcement of the results.

Out of a sense of either panic or respect for its set procedures, the IEC released the preliminary results on 7 July anyway, announcing that Ghani had approximately 4.5 million votes to Abdullah's 3.5 million. For the Abdullah camp, this was further evidence of the IEC's pro-Ghani partiality, as the announcement strengthened Ghani's hand in the negotiations. Furthermore, the IEC had only removed around 140,000 votes, suggesting that hardly any fraud had taken place.

Abdullah supporters were genuinely incensed. Some of his powerful backers threatened to declare a parallel government or to march on the presidential palace. The entire effort to rebuild Afghanistan on a democratic premise was now in the balance. A failed political transition would put in jeopardy every real gain that had been made in the previous decade.

The United States, which had financed or inspired many of these gains, immediately grasped the stakes. Secretary of State John Kerry, then on a visit to China, immediately flew to Kabul. In 2009 he had helped broker a solution to electoral impasse between Abdullah and President Karzai; he was, therefore, familiar with the dynamics and many of the faces. Several days of shuttle diplomacy yielded the framework of an agreement: both sides would consent to a full audit of the vote, and both would simultaneously begin negotiating a power-sharing agreement. The victor, determined by the audit, would become the president, and the runner up would become the Chief Executive Officer—a position that did not exist in the constitution but that would be decreed by the new president.

It was at this moment that the tension was defused, but the election had ceased to be about democracy. To have only called for an audit would have preserved the vote count as the determinant of the election's outcome. To simultaneously call for a power-sharing agreement, however, conveyed that no matter what the voters said, the resulting political arrangement would be different from what they presumed when the election began. The rules were changing as the game was being played.

During the audit, every ballot box was reopened—a process unprecedented in electoral history. Nearly 125 United Nations electoral experts were flown in on short notice to provide technical assistance and often to adjudicate audit decisions; hundreds of national and international observers were present as well as hundreds of agents. The 22,000 ballot boxes were flown to Kabul from far-flung districts and stacked in hangers in the IEC compound in Kabul. Agents from both campaigns were intimately involved in the evaluation and adjudication of ballots. Violence between them was frequent.

No set of ballots has been as closely scrutinized as the Afghan ballots in 2014. Yet, after all of this, the verdict reached by Democracy International, which observed the audit, was stunning: “The audit was imperfect, but the process revealed that it was much harder to find evidence of fraud in this election compared to previous elections. The serious allegations of widespread fraud from both candidates remain unsubstantiated.”<sup>2</sup>

The more one looked at the actual evidence in the ballot boxes, the more it seemed that the 2014 election was a better election than had been characterized in media and other reports. This dissonance matters. Giovanni Sartori wrote, “wrong ideas about democracy make democracy go wrong.”<sup>3</sup> There were a number of cases in which it seemed that our wrong ideas about democracy made Afghan democracy go wrong. The fact that the post-audit results of the election have still not been released to the Afghan voters is the most obvious one. A few others deserve to be noted because democracy cannot be promoted abroad if it is misunderstood by those who would promote it.

The Kerry proposal for a power-sharing agreement regardless of the outcome of the audit was the first strike against a democratic outcome. An election where there is fraud is not necessarily a fraudulent election. The pre-determined power-sharing agreement undid this axiom; it assumed that fraud had been so prevalent that a political compromise was required before proof of fraud could be ascertained. The power-sharing agreement made the audit almost irrelevant before it began. Some observers claimed afterwards that the main purpose of the audit was to buy time to allow the parties to reach a political agreement. It had no electoral meaning.

Another indication that the international community had lost track of democracy’s essence was the confirmation bias evident throughout the process. International actors seemed supremely confident about the election results before the first vote had been cast. When the evidence, especially during the audit, began to contradict these presuppositions, they discounted the evidence.

Many internationals based their predictions of the second round on the results of the first. This ignored two salient features about democracy. The first is that every election allows voters to make up their minds again in light of the new facts. In the second round there were two candidates rather than eight. Many believed that Abdullah’s victory in the second round was inevitable because he had won the first round and secured the “vote banks” of powerful figures. When the initial results suggested he did not win, they assumed that the cause was fraud. They did not consider that the two-round voting system might have worked precisely as designed. The technical papers prepared in 2003 by international experts to inform the Afghan constitutional drafting commission all stated that in an ethnically divided country like Afghanistan, it was important for the president to be elected on the basis of a majority, not a plurality. The two-round system was a response to that advice. In other words, the constitutional designers anticipated a situation exactly like the one that occurred in 2014, where an ethnic minority candidate won the first round against a divided majority, and the second round was won by the candidate representing the ethnic majority. This outcome that was intended by international experts in 2003 was greeted with incredulity by many international experts in 2014.

Confirmation bias also existed in reporting on the election. *The New York Times* quoted Abdullah officials saying that the fraud was too sophisticated to be detected and western officials as saying “that the audit of millions of ballots cast on June 14 has made clear that the scope and sophistication of fraud was staggering.”<sup>4</sup> But the assertion that the fraud was massive in scope requires proof that massive fraud took place. If it was so sophisticated that it could not be detected, then there is only supposition rather than proof.

An alternative explanation is that when the Afghan people were on the verge of a democratic breakthrough, the international community, out of a sense of fear, political prudence, or a failure to appreciate the nature of the substance, sided with the elites against the emerging democratic process. In 2009, William Maley wrote, “It is more than likely that those who are unready for democracy

are not ordinary people but entrenched elites, for whom the idea of ejection from office at the hands of the electorate may indeed be unpalatable.”<sup>5</sup>

Never mind that it is not only the voices of the “ordinary people” that have been undermined by this election, but also the minimalist goal of preserving the constitution as a set of rules for elite pact-making. The political deal to resolve the election requires that a constitutional convention be held in 2016. But to convene a legitimate constitutional convention, district council and parliamentary elections must be held. The agreement also calls for a wholesale reform of the electoral infrastructure. Experience suggests that none of this can happen within the agreed time-frame. This means that there will either be a political crisis in two years time—since the conditions for convening a proper constitutional convention will not have been met—or the constitution will be amended on the basis of an illegitimate constitutional convention.

One can hope that the matters at hand are so important that Afghan leaders will find a way, even with dwindling international support, to resolve them. But the evidence so far from the “unity government” is not promising. It seems sometimes that, even though the votes have been counted, the election is not really over. And in the meantime the international community seems to be rapidly losing interest in elections as a means of preserving political order in Afghanistan. They too liked democracy until elections ruined it.

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Democracy International, *Afghanistan Election Observation Mission 2014 – Final Report*, January 2015, p.41.

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (New York: Chatham House, 1987), p.3.

<sup>4</sup> “In Afghanistan, Time for Compromise,” *The New York Times*, 4 September 2014.

<sup>5</sup> William Maley, “Afghan Elections: From the Sublime to the Ridiculous?”, paper delivered at “State-Building in the Contemporary Islamic World: US Intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq”, 13–14 November 2001, Indiana University.

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## US Democratization Efforts in the Broader Middle East

by Lisa Curtis

The political upheavals that have swept across the Middle East over the last four years, even though motivated largely by a desire for more representative government, have paradoxically made it more difficult for the U.S to effectively support democratic development in these countries. While the internet and social media have raised peoples’ expectations about how they want to live in their

societies and about the kind of political freedoms they expect from their governments, the vast majority of the civil societies in these countries are ill-equipped to facilitate a transition from authoritarian to democratic rule.

The chaotic developments have been accompanied by the flourishing of Islamist political movements throughout the region and the dramatic rise of the self-identified Islamic State (IS) that has brought with it new levels of terrorist brutality and depravity.

The US cannot stand by idly as the region faces cataclysmic changes. The US must develop a coherent set of policy principles to address the new challenges and use aid and other diplomatic tools to promote democratic ideals and practices in these transitioning states, even as events move rapidly and the outcomes are increasingly unpredictable.

### **Evolution of US Democracy Promotion**

The administration of former President George W. Bush (2001-2009) affirmed its support for democracy building in the Middle East shortly after the September 11, 2001, attacks. United States officials adopted the view that promoting democracy was essential to countering the ideologies of Islamist extremists and, thus, to countering global terrorism. The Bush administration established the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2002 to bolster civil society and rule of law, empower women and youth, improve education, encourage economic reform, and increase political participation through direct aid to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), educational institutions, local governments, and private businesses. The creation of MEPI was a far-sighted and strategically important step in promoting democracy in a pivotal region of the world.

The overall impact of efforts to rebuild societies in Afghanistan and Iraq after the US-led invasions of these countries is more questionable. In Afghanistan, the US poured billions of dollars in reconstruction assistance into the country that has helped improve quality of life indicators and established a politically freer society. However, as numerous US investigations have revealed, a great deal of this assistance has been wasted—either siphoned off by corrupt Afghan officials or misallocated by US defense and USAID contractors.<sup>1</sup>

In Iraq, the Bush administration erred in underestimating the significance of the sectarian divide as well as the enormity of the task of rebuilding and stabilizing the country following the US invasion.

In its first year of office, the administration of President Barack Obama distanced itself from the Bush administration's policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> Obama's cautiousness stemmed from his desire to dissociate from Bush's policies in Iraq, which had relied, in part, on the promotion of democracy in the Middle East as justification for regime change. Obama's reluctance to support Iranian democracy activists in 2009 further fed the perception that his administration was reversing the decades-old bipartisan policy of promoting and defending democracy as a core component of US foreign policy.

By mid-2010, however, the Obama administration started to reaffirm US commitment to standing up for democracy throughout the world. In the National Security Strategy published in May 2010, it stated that, "The United States supports the expansion of democracy and human rights abroad because governments that respect these values are more just, peaceful, and legitimate."<sup>3</sup>

In his 2010 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Obama said, "Experience shows us that history is on the side of liberty; that the strongest foundation for human progress lies in open economies, open societies, and open governments." He continued, "America will always extend our engagement abroad with citizens beyond the halls of government... And it is time to embrace and effectively monitor norms that advance the rights of civil society and guarantee its expansion within and across borders."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in a speech in October 2010, emphasized that the US had a unique responsibility to champion democratic values throughout the world. She talked about the need to construct an international “architecture of values” to counter repression and extend freedom and emphasized the need to challenge authoritarianism that stymies civil society and pluralism, declaring that “democracy needs defending.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite its initial reticence to talk about democracy promotion, the Obama administration has maintained a fairly consistent commitment to foreign aid programs focused on building democratic institutions. The FY2016 State Department budget request designates \$442 million for democracy and governance programming in the Middle East and North Africa; this represents an 8.8 percent increase over the FY2015 request, but a 10.6 percent drop from the FY2010 level of \$495 million.<sup>6</sup>

In the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, however, the Obama administration has fumbled the military strategies. The goal should have been to ensure that the US left behind substantial residual forces in each country to help keep the peace until the local security forces could contain terrorist threats on their own. Instead, President Obama has focused single-mindedly on leaving a legacy of being the President that ended two wars. This has led the White House to allow an agreement for keeping forces in Iraq beyond 2011 to fall through and to draw down US forces from Afghanistan too quickly.

The task of championing democracy abroad has been severely complicated by the chaos following the revolutions in the Middle East over the last four years and by the US interest in suppressing IS, which stormed the world stage a little over a year ago after it seized large swathes of territory in northern Iraq.

The US is less willing to challenge authoritarian regimes that oppose IS and has less diplomatic bandwidth and resources to engage in democracy promotion because of the immediate security concerns in countries like Iraq, Syria, and Libya. A poll released in June 2014 by Zogby Research Services concluded that “there is a sharp decline in confidence that the United States is committed to democracy across the Middle East.”<sup>7</sup>

## Rise of Islamist Parties

Another complicating factor in promoting democracy is the rise of Islamist political parties following the democratic revolutions in the region. Countering the illiberal agendas of Islamist parties should remain a key component of US foreign policy in the region. But the support for Islam-based identity parties and interest among the Muslim polities in seeing Islam play a greater role in the governing and political structures of their respective countries is undeniable. US officials must accept that Islamism represents a powerful political ideology that is unlikely to burn out or fade away any time soon.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, most Muslim-majority countries currently have legal systems that look both to *sharia* (Islamic law) and secular civil regulations as sources of law.

Based on polling in countries where large majorities of Muslims favor governing systems that include both democratic and Islamic values and practices, it is likely that most Muslim-majority countries will not place the same emphasis on separation of religion and state as Western countries did during their transitions to democracy. The polling shows that most respondents in Muslim-majority countries want neither a theocracy nor secular democracy.<sup>9</sup> They prefer a third option in which democratic values and religious concepts co-exist.

Western observers tend to believe that democracy can only succeed if there is a strict separation between religion and state. But as John Owen points out in his book, *Confronting Political Islam*, liberal democratic development in the West was influenced by both secular and religious concepts, including Catholic conceptions of natural rights and Calvinist ideas of covenant.<sup>10</sup>

One of the fundamental questions with which analysts continue to grapple is whether participation in electoral politics leads Islamist parties to moderate their agendas and develop a greater commitment to democratic principles related to constitutionalism, equality, and pluralism.

Many see Islamism as a direct threat to democracy and view it as a long-term social transformation project designed to make Muslim communities fearful and, thus, easier to control.<sup>11</sup> They would equate Islamism with totalitarianism and would hold up the 2012 rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as confirmation of their view.

Meanwhile, Middle East scholars like Fawaz Gerges argue that the most effective means to deal with Islamism is not less democracy but more liberalization. Gerges asserts that nourishing a vibrant civil society levels the playing field and provides the best counterweight to Islamists.<sup>12</sup>

Other Middle East scholars like Farid Senzai and Farhan Bokhari conclude that the democratization process is influencing the Islamists and that they no longer have the luxury of talking about Islam and democracy in the abstract.<sup>13</sup> They are compelled to take advantage of democratic openings, yet at the same time, they are helping to determine the way in which democratization is unfolding in their societies. These scholars make a strong argument that democratization in the Middle East will not follow a western template and that religion will undoubtedly play a role in these countries' democratic development.

## **Policy Recommendations**

So how should the US move forward with promoting democracy amidst the unsettled democratic transitions throughout the region, rise of Islamist politics, and escalating violence from terrorist groups like IS? While there is no one-size fits all strategy, there are a few guiding principles for the US to follow. Moving forward the US should:

- Support civil society groups and assist them in organizing and networking to strengthen their political voices. The success of Tunisia's transition to democratic rule demonstrates the important role of a robust and active civil society. It is encouraging that in the FY 2016 budget, the administration has doubled the bilateral aid request for Tunisia to \$134 million, including for democracy and governance.
- Encourage a comprehensive and consensus-based constitutional development process as part of the transition to democratic rule. Tunisia's emphasis on developing consensus and taking time to fully debate fundamental governance issues while creating its new constitution was integral to the success of the process. Writing a constitution is not merely a formality or technical process but a way to bridge ideological differences among various political parties. While the US does not have a role to play in defining those debates, it can facilitate the process for resolving them.
- Insist that political parties firmly shun all forms of violence. If Islamist leaders want to participate in electoral politics, they must distance themselves from the violent agenda of terrorists of all stripes.
- Keep pressure on militaries to stay out of civilian politics. The militaries in countries like Egypt and Pakistan continue to play significant roles in the politics and governance of their countries. While these militaries have on some occasions helped to preserve stability by intervening in times of crisis, this role should be limited and temporary.
- Prioritize improved rights and economic opportunities for women. According to recent studies, there has been progress in female education, declines in fertility rates, and improvements in life expectancy in the Middle East, but indicators such as women's economic participation and

political empowerment continue to lag. The entry of women into the labor force is a key step in economic and social development, as seen in the case of Bangladesh. Women's rights movements in Morocco and Tunisia also have been credited with the high rates of female labor participation in these countries.

- Discourage governments from shutting down non-violent, law-abiding Islamist parties. While there should be demands that the Islamist parties adhere to democratic principles and reject the use of violence, Washington should discourage countries from shutting Islamists out of the political process altogether. If the Egyptian military completely cuts off the Muslim Brotherhood's ability to participate in politics, there is a greater chance the group will go underground and engage in violence. There are similar concerns about the Bangladeshi Jamaat-e-Islami party that has been targeted by the Sheikh Hasina government through death sentences handed down by a War Crimes Tribunal.
- Make religious freedom a central component of democracy promotion efforts. The mistreatment of religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries is well documented, especially in places like Pakistan where misuse of anti-blasphemy laws is rampant.
- Avoid assuming that elections alone ensure that a country is on the path to democracy. When evaluating a country's level of democratization, the US needs to monitor institutions that are responsible for overseeing the electoral process, the structure of the political parties themselves, the level of media freedom, the independence of the judiciary, and checks on executive power. One crucial element of maintaining societal freedoms is to ensure that the judicial system remains independent and that no religious entity has the final say on legal questions.
- Develop ways to assess the impact of US democracy promotion activities to better focus efforts. For instance, one study by Chatham House revealed that US rhetoric was as important as programming.<sup>14</sup> This effort should involve assessments of the local environments to determine which actors are having the most impact and where there is a need to build capacity.
- Lastly, focus on long-term engagement and accept there is no quick way to establish democracy.

## Conclusion

Promoting democracy and liberty around the world has long been a core component of US foreign policy. Now, more than ever, the US needs to develop creative ways to promote democratization in the Middle East. As conservative foreign policy commentator Robert Kagan recently put it:

Today, as always, democracy is a fragile flower. It requires constant support, constant tending, and the plucking of weeds and fencing-off of the jungle that threaten it both from within and without. In the absence of such efforts, the jungle and the weeds may sooner or later come back to reclaim the land.<sup>15</sup>

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> There are numerous reports and investigations detailing US aid wastage in Afghanistan on the website of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) at <https://www.sigar.mil/>.

<sup>2</sup> Lisa Curtis, "Championing Liberty Abroad to Counter Islamist Extremism," Heritage Backgrounder #2518, February 9, 2011, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/02/championing-liberty-abroad-to-counter-islamist-extremism>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The White House Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks by the President to the United Nations General Assembly*, September 23, 2010, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/09/23/remarks-president-united-nations-general-assembly>.

<sup>5</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, “A Conversation with US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton,” remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., September 8, 2010, at <http://www.cfr.org/world/conversation-us-secretary-state-hillary-rodham-clinton/p34808>.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen McInerney and Cole Bockenfeld, “The Federal Budget and Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2016: Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights in the Middle East and North Africa,” Project on Middle East Democracy Report, May, 2015, p. 5 at <http://pomed.org/pomed-publications/fy16-budget-report/>.

<sup>7</sup> “Five Years After the Cairo Speech: How Arabs View President Obama and America,” Zogby Research Services, June 2014, at [http://b.3cdn.net/aai/04651e9aa1b5dcc741\\_3wm6brd3d.pdf](http://b.3cdn.net/aai/04651e9aa1b5dcc741_3wm6brd3d.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Lisa Curtis, Charlotte Florance, Walter Lohman, James Phillips, “Pursuing a Freedom Agenda Amidst Rising Global Islamism,” Heritage Special Report, November 17, 2014, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/11/pursuing-a-freedom-agenda-amidst-rising-global-islamism>.

<sup>9</sup> “Most Muslims Want Democracy, Personal Freedoms, and Islam in Political Life,” Pew Research Center Global Attitudes Project, July 10, 2012, at <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2012/07/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Project-Arab-Spring-Report-FINAL-Tuesday-July-10-2012.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Owen IV, *Confronting Political Islam: Six Lessons from the West’s Past* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> Zeyno Baran, “Engaging with Muslim Communities around the World,” testimony before the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, February 26, 2009, at <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/BaranTestimony090226p24.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Curtis, “Championing Liberty Abroad to Counter Islamist Extremism.”

<sup>13</sup> Kamran Bokhari and Farid Senzai, *Political Islam in the Age of Democratization* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 190.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Bibbins Sedaca and Nicolas Bouchet, “Holding Steady? US Democracy Promotion in a Changing World,” Chatham House, February 2014, at [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/home/chatham/public\\_html/sites/default/files/170214DemocracyPromotion.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/home/chatham/public_html/sites/default/files/170214DemocracyPromotion.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Kagan, “Is Democracy in Decline? The Weight of Geopolitics,” Brookings Institute *Journal of Democracy*, January 2015, at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2015/01/democracy-in-decline-weight-of-geopolitics-kagan>.

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# MES Hosted Events

## 2014

- 28 Feb: MES hosted Mr. Gregory Johnsen, Princeton University, as part of the 2013-14 Lecture Series “Revisiting the Arab Revolts” for a presentation entitled “Yemen After the Spring.”
- 7 Mar: MES hosted MajGen W. Lee Miller Jr (USMC), Brigadier Paul Nanson (British Army), Col James Donnellan (USMC), and Col Baz Bennett (British Army) for a panel entitled “A Time of Transition: The RC (SW) Coalition in Helmand and Nimroz Provinces, Afghanistan (Feb13-Feb14).”
- 19 Mar: MES hosted Dr. Steven Cook, Council on Foreign Relations, as part of the 2013-14 Lecture Series “Revisiting the Arab Revolts,” for a presentation entitled “Bringing the Military Back In: Civil-Military Relations in Post- Mubarak Egypt.”
- 8 Apr: MES hosted Dr. Douglas Streusand, MCU Command and Staff College (CSC), as part of the 2013-14 Lecture Series “Revisiting the Arab Revolts” for a presentation entitled “The Intellectual Challenge of Totalitarian Islamism.”
- 6 May: MES hosted a panel discussion entitled “Turkey at the Crossroads,” featuring Dr. Soner Cagaptay, The Washington Institute; Dr. Sinan Ciddi, Georgetown University; and Dr. Gonul Tol, Middle East Institute, as part of the 2013-14 Lecture Series “Revisiting the Arab Revolts” and the Marine Corps War College’s (MCWAR) Diplomacy and Statecraft Course.
- 6 Oct: MES hosted Dr. Dafna Rand, Center for a New American Security, as part of the 2014-15 Lecture Series “Perspectives on Democracy Promotion and Democratization in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)” for a presentation entitled “US Democracy Promotion in the Arab World: Illusory Promise or Potential Opportunity.”
- 4 Nov: MES hosted a panel discussion entitled “Dealing or Dueling With Iran?” featuring Dr. Michael Rubin, American Enterprise Institute; Mr. Alex Vatanka, Middle East Institute; and Dr. Amin Tarzi, MCU, as part of the 2014-15 Lecture Series “Perspectives on Democracy Promotion and Democratization in the MENA” and MCWAR’s Diplomacy and Statecraft Course.
- 14 Nov: MES hosted a book discussion with Dr. Edward Erickson, MCU CSC, entitled “Ottomans and Armenians: A Study in Counterinsurgency.”
- 3 Dec: MES hosted Dr. Janet Breslin-Smith as part of the 2014-15 Lecture Series “Perspectives on Democracy Promotion and Democratization in the MENA” for a presentation entitled “Perspective on the ISIL Crisis for Saudi Arabia.”

## 2015

- 24 Feb: MES hosted Dr. Eitan Shamir, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), for a roundtable discussion entitled “Gaza Operation 2014: A Clash of Strategies.”
- 10 Mar: MES hosted Dr. Steven Cook, Council on Foreign Relations, as part of the 2014-15 Lecture Series “Perspectives on Democracy Promotion and Democratization in the MENA” for a presentation entitled “Egypt: What Went Wrong.”
- 7 Apr: MES hosted Dr. Scott Smith, United States Institute for Peace, as part of the 2014-15 Lecture Series “Perspectives on Democracy Promotion and Democratization in the MENA,” for a presentation entitled “‘We like democracy but elections ruined it’: Thoughts on Democratization in Afghanistan after 2014.”
- 1 May: MES hosted a panel discussion entitled “Turkey: A Rising Power Falling Behind,” featuring Dr. Edward Erickson, MCU CSC; Dr. Nil Satana, Bilkent University; and Dr. Dimitrios Triantiphylou, Kadir Has University, as part of the 2014-15 Lecture Series “Perspectives on Democracy Promotion and Democratization in the MENA” and MCWAR’s Diplomacy and Statecraft Course.
- 29 Oct: MES co-hosted, with the Marine Corps University Foundation (MCUF), a one-day seminar bringing together eight nationally and internationally respected scholars to discuss democratization in the MENA, featuring Dr. Jon Alterman, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Mr. Mohammed al-Basha, Navanti Group; Dr. Daniel Brumberg, Georgetown University; Ms. Lisa Curtis, The Heritage Foundation; Amb. Karl Eikenberry, Stanford University; Dr. Shadi Hamid, The Brookings Institution; Mr. Grant Kippen, The Hillbrooke Group; and Mr. Ahmad Nader Nadery, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.
- 21 Oct: MES hosted Dr. Zeinab Abul-Magd, Oberlin College, as part of the 2015-16 Lecture Series “A Survey and Analysis of the Armed Forces and Civil-Military Relations in the MENA” for a presentation entitled “Egypt’s Adaptable Officers.”
- 20 Nov: MES hosted a panel discussion entitled “Clout of the Islamic Republic after the JCPOA,” featuring Mr. Michael Eisenstadt, The Washington Institute; Mr. Alex Vatanka, Middle East Institute; and Dr. Amin Tarzi, MCU, as part of the 2014-15 Lecture Series “A Survey and Analysis of the Armed Forces and Civil-Military Relations in the MENA” and MCWAR’s Diplomacy and Statecraft Course.
- 2 Dec: MES hosted Prof. Efraim Inbar, Israel Institute Visiting Professor at Boston University, as part of the 2015-16 Lecture Series “A Survey and Analysis of the Armed Forces and Civil-Military Relations in the MENA” for a presentation entitled “The Challenges of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).”

# MES PME Support

## 2014

- 20 Feb: Adam Seitz led a discussion entitled “US Counterterrorism Operations and the Use of Drones in Yemen” for the Small Wars Discussion Group, Operations Analysis Division, Marine Corps Combat Development Command.
- 21 Feb: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “History and Culture of Iran” to the Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS), MCU.
- 25 Feb: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Understanding Iran’s Culture and Politics” to the Senior Enlisted Professional Military Education (PME) Course, MCU.
- 27 Apr: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Grand Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran” to the Strategy and Policy Course, MCU.
- 28 Apr - 8 May: Adam Seitz supported the School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW) capstone planning exercise, serving as a regional SME and playing the role of the US Deputy Chief of Mission to the Government of the Republic of Yemen, MCU.
- 15 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Nuclear Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Future of Middle East Security Environment” to the Reserve Senior Staff Course, MCU.
- 23 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “A Review of the State of Affairs in the Middle East: What’s in Stake for the United States?” to the Reserve Senior Staff Course, MCU.
- 26 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Nuclear Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 26 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Politics and Society in Yemen After the Arab Uprisings” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 26 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “The Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Ally or Adversary?” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 27 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “*Bellum Iustum* in Islam – From Classical to Modern Interpretations” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.

- 28 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “The Egyptian Challenge” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 28 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Formation of the Modern Middle East” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 28 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Turkey’s Regional Ambitions and Politics” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 29 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Afghanistan” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 29 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Introduction to Islam” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 29 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Israel’s Security and the Balance of Power in the Middle East” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 30 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 31 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Formation of the Modern Middle East” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 31 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture with Dr. Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute entitled “The Iranian Challenge” to the senior Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 31 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “*Bellum Iustum* in Islam – From Classical to Modern Interpretations” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 1 Aug: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “*Bellum Iustum* in Islam – From Classical to Modern Interpretations” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 1 Aug: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Afghanistan” to the Marine and Navy personnel onboard USS *Makin Island*, Pacific Ocean.
- 8 Aug: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “State of States in the Middle East” to the Strategy and Policy Course, MCU.
- 26 Aug: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Understanding Iran’s Culture and Politics” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.

- 19 Sep: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “The Contested Environment of State Sovereignty: A New Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East” to Training Command, Military Academy of the Czech Republic, Olomouc, Czech Republic.
- 9 Oct: Amin Tarzi taught MCWAR’s Diplomacy and Statecraft Course entitled “Democracy Movements in the Middle East,” MCU.
- 5 Nov: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Iran’s Regional Roles” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.
- 13 Nov: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “ISIL: A New Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East?” to Headquarters Group, I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), Camp Pendleton, CA.
- 13 Nov: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Understanding Iran’s Religion, Culture and Politics” to Headquarters Group, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, CA.
- 1 Dec: Amin Tarzi taught MCWAR’s Diplomacy and Statecraft Course entitled “After the Arab Uprisings: Egypt, Syria, and Iraq,” MCU.

## **2015**

- 22 Jan: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Understanding Iran’s Religion, Culture and Politics” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.
- 18 Feb: Adam Seitz participated in a panel discussion on Jordan and Gulf Arab States to the US Army 3-197 Field Artillery Regiment (FAR), in support of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Leader Development and Education for Sustained Peace (LDESP) program, Fort Bliss, TX.
- 19 Feb: Adam Seitz presented a lecture on Gulf Geopolitics to the US Army 3-197 FAR, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Fort Bliss, TX.
- 24 Feb: Adam Seitz presented lecture entitled “Yemen in Turmoil: A Primer” to the MCU CSC Special Operations Forces Elective, MCU.
- 9 Mar: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Understanding Iran’s Politics, Culture and Religion” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.
- 12 Mar: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “The Islamic State” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.
- 17 Mar: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “History of Afghanistan” to Bulgarian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Veliko Tarnov, Bulgaria.

- 18 Mar: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Southern Afganistan” to Bulgarian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Veliko Tarnov, Bulgaria.
- 18 Mar: Amin Tarzi co-presented, with MG (Ret) Eric Olson, a lecture entitled “US Strategic Interests and Competing Interests of Afghanistan and Its Neighbors” to Bulgarian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Veliko Tarnov, Bulgaria.
- 14 Apr: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “History of Afghanistan” to the US Army 7th Infantry Division (7ID) Leadership Seminar, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA.
- 14 Apr: Adam Seitz presented lecture entitled “Yemen in Turmoil: A Primer” to SAW students, MCU.
- 14 - 24 Apr: Adam Seitz supported the SAW capstone planning exercise, serving as a regional SME and playing the role of the US Deputy Chief of Mission to the Government of the Republic of Yemen, MCU.
- 15 Apr: Amin Tarzi co-presented, with MG (Ret) Eric Olson, a lecture entitled “US Strategic Interests and Competing Interests of Afghanistan and Its Neighbors” to the US Army 7ID Leadership Seminar, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA.
- 30 Apr: Amin Tarzi taught MCWAR’s Diplomacy and Statecraft Course entitled “The Arab-Israeli Palistinian Conflict,” MCU.
- 5 May: Adam Seitz presented a lecture entitled “Yemen’s (In)Security Dilemma” to the Strategy and Policy Course, MCU.
- 12 May: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “History of Afghanistan” to Croatian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Zagreb, Croatia.
- 13 May: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “US Strategic Interests and Competing Interests of Afghanistan and Its Neighbors” to Croatian, Montenegrin, and Latvian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Zagreb, Croatia.
- 19 May: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “ISIL and New Challenges to the Security and Political Dynamics of the Middle East” to the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) Fellows, MCU.
- 1 Jun: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Understanding Iran’s Politics, Culture and Religion” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.
- 4 Jun: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “The Islamic State” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.

- 16 Jun: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “History of Afghanistan” to Romanian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Dej, Romania.
- 17 Jun: Capt Cory Ross, USMC AFPAK Hand attached to MES, presented a lecture on engagements and facilitation of scenario based exercise to Romanian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Dej, Romania.
- 17 Jun: Capt Cory Ross, USMC AFPAK Hand attached to MES, presented a lecture on working with ANDSF, SFA and transitioning security to Afghan forces to Romanian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Dej, Romania.
- 18 Jun: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “History of Afghanistan” to Romanian military personnel, in support of the NPS LDESP program, Dej, Romania.
- 14 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “The Deal” to the Reserve Senior Staff Course, MCU.
- 22 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Overview of ISIL and Assessment of Iranian, Saudi and Turkish Strategies” to the Reserve Senior Staff Course, MCU.
- 30 Jul: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Overview of ISIL and Assessment of Iranian, Saudi and Turkish Strategies” to the CMC Fellows, MCU.
- 11 Aug: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Overview of ISIL and Assessments of Turkish, Iranian, Saudi, US and Russian Strategies” to the Naval Education and Training Security Assistance Field Activity International Training Center (NITC) International Anti-Terrorism/Anti-Piracy Class, Naval Air Station, Pensacola, FL.
- 3 Sep: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Understanding Iran’s Political Culture through the Nuclear Deal” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.
- 16 - 25 Sep: Adam Seitz supported the Marine Corps Informational Operations Center (MCIOC) Concept Development Exercise as a Yemen SME, MCB Quantico..
- 20 Sep: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Overview of ISIL and Assessments of Turkish, Iranian, Saudi, US and Russian Strategies” to Training Command, Military Academy of the Czech Republic, Brno, Czech Republic.
- 20 Oct: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “ISIL and the Syrian Refugee Crisis” at the Center for Advanced Operational and Culture Learning (CAOCL), MCU.
- 22 Oct: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Iran’s Post-JCPOA Geopolitical Position and Posturing” to the Senior Enlisted PME Course, MCU.

- 5 Nov: Amin Tarzi presented briefings on Syria to five different Joint Planning Groups at the Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department's Capstone Synthesis event, Newport, RI.
- 19 Nov: Amin Tarzi participated in CSC Seminar 3141 to discuss the formation of the modern Middle East, MCU.
- 3 Dec: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "Islamism, the Rise of ISIL and Assessment of Turkish and Russian and US Strategies" to the Saudi Arabian Mobile Training Team (MTT) Course, MCU.
- 7 Dec: Adam Seitz presented a lecture entitled "Yemen (In)Security Dilemma" to the Saudi Arabian MTT Course, MCU.
- 8 Dec: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "Overview of ISIL and Assessments of Turkish, Iranian, Saudi, US and Russian Strategies" to the NITC International Anti-Terrorism/ Anti-Piracy Class, Naval Air Station, Pensacola, FL.
- 10 Dec: Amin Tarzi Presented a lecture entitled "Understanding Islamic Republic of Iran's Political Culture and Strategy" to the Saudi Arabian MTT Course, MCU.

# MES Outreach

## 2014

- 4 Feb: Amin Tarzi participated in a roundtable entitled “Peace and Stability in Afghanistan Post 2014: What Role for the Regional and Civil Society Actors?” organized by Freidrich Ebert Stiftung, Washington, DC.
- 19 Feb: Amin Tarzi presented a talk entitled “The Gulf States and the Contest for the Middle East” as part of a panel organized by the Foreign Policy Research Institute at the Reserve Officer Association, Washington, DC.
- 21 Mar: Adam Seitz presented a lecture entitled “Towards an Understanding of Ties that Bind and Divide in Yemen” to visiting Marshall Fellows, MCU.
- 2 May: Amin Tarzi presented a paper entitled “Status and Politics of Persian Language in Afghanistan: A Brief Review” at “The Wide World of Persian: Connections and Contestation, 1500 until Today” conference, held at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 19 May: Amin Trazi presented a talk entitled “The Internal Debate over Iran’s Nuclear Policy” at the Alliance Center for Iranian Studies, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel.
- 21 May: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Iran’s Nuclear Politics” at BESA, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel.
- 21 Jul: Amin Tarzi was a panelist at the Middle East Policy Council’s 77th Capitol Hill Conference “Obama’s Foreign Policy and the Future of the Middle East” at the US Capital, Washington, DC.
- 13 Aug: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “South Asia and Afghanistan” at the Senior Executives in National Security and International Security, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, MA.
- 21 Aug: Amin Tarzi presented a paper entitled “Nuclear Weapons Program as Safeguard of the Iranian Regime” at the 4th World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies, Ankara, Turkey.
- 26 - 28 Aug: Adam Seitz presented a paper entitled “Balanced Instability, Internal War and the Future of Yemen” and participated and participated in the “Future of Yemen” workshop at the 2014 Gulf Research Meeting, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom.

- 16 Sep: Amin Tarzi presented the First Alumni Guest Lecture for the Prague Security Studies Institute entitled “Syria and Iraq After ISIL,” Prague, Czech Republic.
- 30 Sep: Adam Seitz presented a paper via VTC entitled “Patronage Politics in Transition: Challenges to the Political and Economic Interests of the Yemeni Armed Forces” as part of the workshop “Businessmen in Arms: How the Military and other Armed Groups Profit in the MENA” at the Bonn International Center for Conversation, Bonn, Germany.
- 16 Nov: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Understanding ISIL in Historical and Theological Contexts” at St. George’s Episcopal Church, Fredericksburg, VA.

## **2015**

- 26 Mar: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Afghanistan: The New Realities” for the Foreign Policy Research Institute at Princeton, NJ.
- 31 Mar: Amin Tarzi gave a talk and led a discussion on ISIL at a workshop entitled “Character of Future Conflict” organized by Futures Assessment Division, MCU.
- 10 Jun: Adam Seitz participated in a simulated negotiation entitled “Building a Peace Agreement in Yemen” sponsored by the Public International Law & Policy Group, representing the General People’s Congress, Washington, DC.
- 24 - 27 Jun: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture on leadership and change in the Middle East region, and engaged in individual and small group discussions with young professionals from the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean regions, at the International Neighborhood Symposium, Heybeliada, Turkey.
- 30 Jul: Amin Tarzi facilitated a discussion on the Iranian nuclear agreement with the Atlantik-Brücke group visiting Marine Corps Base Quantico.
- 27 Aug: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “The Rationale Behind Iran’s Nuclear Program” at University of Southern California, School of International Relations, Los Angeles, CA.
- 31 Aug: Amin Tarzi participated at a roundtable entitled “Afghanistan Post-2016” organized by the National Security Council at the Army War College, Carlisle, PA.
- 10 Sep: Amin Tarzi presented a talk entitled “Assessing the Impact of the Iran Nuclear Deal on Regional Security” at the Center for International and European Studies, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey.

- 10 Sep: Amin Tarzi presented a paper entitled “Nation-Building in Afghanistan: Effects on the Persian Language” at the Seventh Biennial Convention of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies held in Istanbul, Turkey.
- 15 Sep: Amin Tarzi participated in a roundtable entitled “Flawed Transitions as a Cause of Rising Threats” as part of the Forum 2000 Conference, Prague, Czech Republic.
- 15 Sep: Amin Tarzi presented a talk entitled “The Middle East Democracy Dilemmas” at CEVRO Institute, Prague, Czech Republic.
- 15 Sep: Adam Seitz participated in a panel discussion entitled “Regional Security Concerns” as part of the Institute for National Security Studies Program on Irregular Warfare and Special Operations workshop “Assessing the Political and Economic Changes in Yemen” at National Defense University, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC.
- 8 Oct: Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled “Contradictions and Quandaries in Policies and Strategies to Counter ISIL: The Cases of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United States” as part of the National Security Lecture Series at University of Mary Washington, Dahlgren, VA.
- 16 Oct: Amin Tarzi participated on a panel entitled “The Mediterranean Conundrum: Between Economic Recovery, Migration and Radicalization” as part of the Bucharest Forum 2015, Bucharest, Romania.
- 16 Oct: Amin Tarzi participated in a closed-door session entitled “Stability in the Greater Middle East area: The Iranian Factor” as part of the Bucharest Forum 2015, Bucharest, Romania.
- 14 Dec: Amin Tarzi participated in a panel discussion entitled “Letting Go of Fear in the Midst of the Syrian Refugee Crisis” at St. George’s Episcopal Church, Fredericksburg, VA.

# Outside Publications by MES Scholars

## 2014

- Jan: Adam Seitz, “Yemen” in the American Foreign Policy Council’s *World Almanac of Islamism* 2014 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).
- Feb: Adam Seitz, “Ties That Bind and Divide: The ‘Arab Spring’ and Yemeni Civil-Military Relations” in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, edited by Helen Lackner (London: Saqi Books, 2014), pp. 50-67.
- Aug: Amin Tarzi, Kenneth Pollack, Paul R. Pillar and Chas W. Freeman Jr., “US Foreign Policy and the Furture of the Middle East,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XXI, No. 3 (Fall 2014), pp.1-30.
- Sep: Amin Tarzi reviewed, *Isalm and Democracy: Perspectives on the Arab Spring*, edited by Aylin Unver Noi (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), for *Marine Corps University Journal* 5:2 (Fall 2014), pp. 73-74.

## 2015

- May: Amin Tarzi, “Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi: The First History of ‘Afghanistan’” in *Afghan History Through Afghan Eyes*, edited by Nile Green, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 79-96.

# Media

## 2014

- 13 Jun: Amin Tarzi was quoted in Geneva's *Le Temps* daily in an article entitled, "Barack Obama est rattrape par le chaos irakien."
- 21 Jul: Amin Tarzi participation on a panel at the Middle East Policy Council's 77th Capitol Hill Conference, "Obama's Foreign Policy and the Future of the Middle East," broadcast live on C-SPAN.
- 25 Nov: Amin Tarzi discussed Iran, Turkey and the UAE as part of the Veteran's National Education Program <<http://v-nep.org/>>.
- 25 Nov: Adam Seitz discussed Yemen as part of the Veteran's National Education Program <<http://v-nep.org/>>.

## 2015

- 24 Jul: Amin Tarzi was interviewed by Hromadske International TV, Kiev, Ukraine.
- 25 Aug: Amin Tarzi was interviewed by Bloomberg News on Iran's regional ambitions. The interview entitled "Iran's Moderates Used Nuclear Deal to Save the Revolution" was published by the *Bloomberg View* on 26 Aug <<http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-08-26/iran-s-moderates-used-nuclear-deal-to-save-the-revolution>>, and was also republished by the *Miami Herald* on 29 Aug.
- 10 Sep: Amin Tarzi was interviewed by the Center for International and European Studies at Kadir Has University on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, The interview entitled "Assessing the Impact of the Iran Nuclear Deal on Regional Security" was posted on-line at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUoKrGSLesM>>.

# MES Scholars

**Amin Tarzi** is the Director of Middle East Studies (MES) at the Marine Corps University (MCU) in Quantico, Virginia. Dr. Tarzi established MES in 2007 and provides MES strategic vision, management, and personnel oversight. He establishes annual MES strategic goals and missions and associated budget requirements and determines MES program initiatives and emphasis. Beyond his administrative responsibilities, Dr. Tarzi supports MCU by providing a resident scholar with expertise on the Middle East and South/Central Asia. Dr. Tarzi teaches at the Marine Corps War College and other Marine Corps and sister service Professional Military Education programs, represents the Marine Corps at various academic and professional forums, and mentors the AfPak Hands Marines assigned to MCU. Prior to joining MCU, he was with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Regional Analysis team as the Afghanistan and Pakistan analyst where he initiated and compiled the weekly publication, "Afghanistan Report." While working at RFE/RL, he also taught courses in political Islam, cultural intelligence, terrorist organizations, and similar topics at the Washington-based Center for Advanced Defense Studies. Before joining RFE/RL, Dr. Tarzi worked as Senior Research Associate for the Middle East at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, where he established the Middle East section. His primary area of research was Iran and its missile and nuclear developments and policies. He also taught a graduate seminar at the Monterey Institute on Middle East security policies and threat perceptions. Dr. Tarzi's prior experience includes holding the post of Political Advisor to the Saudi Arabian Mission to the United Nations dealing with the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans and Somalia; the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty extension; Iranian behavior in the United Nations; and Security Council expansion. After his tenure with the Saudi government, Dr. Tarzi held the position of Researcher/Analyst on Iranian affairs at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Dr. Tarzi has a PhD and a master's degree from the Department of Middle East Studies at New York University and a bachelor's degree in philosophy and political science from Queens College of the City University of New York.

**Adam C. Seitz** is the senior research associate and instructor for Middle East Studies (MES) at the Marine Corps University (MCU), where his research focuses on the security sector, violent non-state actors and conflict studies in Yemen, Iran and the Gulf. Prior to joining MCU, Mr. Seitz was a research associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, where he co-authored the book *Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Birth of a Regional Nuclear Arms Race?* (Praeger Security International, 2009) with Dr. Anthony Cordesman. Mr. Seitz served in the U.S. Army as an Intelligence Analyst and is an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, serving in Anbar province in 2003 and 2004.

Mr. Seitz earned his BA in International Affairs from the University of Colorado at Boulder and his MA in International Relations and Conflict Resolution at American Military University. His latest works include, "Ties That Bind and Divide: The 'Arab Spring' and Yemeni Civil-Military Relations" in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition* (Al-Saqi, 2014), and "Patronage Politics in Transition: Political and Economic Interests of the Yemeni Armed Forces" in *Businessmen in Arms: How the Military and Other Armed Groups Profit in the MENA Region* (Rowman & Littlefield, Forthcoming April 2016).

MES Monographs No. 6, “Saudi Arabia’s Strategic Rocket Force: The Silent Service,” Norman Cigar, MES at MCU, September 2014.

MES Monographs No. 7, “The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Religion, Expediency, and Soft Power in an Era of Disruptive Change,” Michael Eisenstadt, MES at MCU, November 2015 (Expanded and Revised Second Edition).

*Middle East Studies In Review: 2012-2013*, MES at MCU, April 2014.

MES *Insights*, Volume 5, Issues 1-6, 2014.

MES *Insights*, Volume 6, Issues 1-6, 2015.



Middle East Studies

at the Marine Corps University