



December 2018 Monthly Report

## NESA Region Trends

Key participant conversations throughout the NESA Center's December programs touched on topics with global ramifications, including the threat of violent non-state actors to states' political legitimacy, and isolationism reasserting itself as a vehicle for skepticism of the post-World War II global order.

- **Extremist groups and state legitimacy:** In unstable or failed states, some violent extremist organizations or terror groups—for all their barbarity—can sometimes be surprisingly effective in governing, outperforming existing governments. Policymakers from around the NESA region, especially from weak states in conflict zones, were vocal in their concern about the threat to political legitimacy posed by terrorist and other violent extremist outfits.
- **Diminishing faith in neoliberal institutions:** Participants primarily from the Middle East and Central Asia expressed some skepticism of neoliberal institutions, including of the strength of the treaties and agreements that anchor international organizations like the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system. Participants also questioned how these international systems and institutions can feasibly adapt to a rapidly changing world.
- These participants explored and debated how “Eastern” and “Western” member states can best collaborate in the liberal postwar system, and debated whether or not concepts (like human rights) underpinning the global system are more expressive of “Western” values, mores, and norms.
- **Country first—but not alone?** Participants from Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia expressed interest in a return to prioritizing domestic issues and safeguarding and investing in their respective homelands. However—participants stressed that such steps would not necessarily equate to a nationalist rejection of the post-Cold War international system, and discussed how countries could balance prioritizing interests at home with being full and active members of the global concert of nations.
- **Engagement from the Gulf:** Participants from key Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states distinguished themselves in their desire for continued security cooperation with the United States. They demonstrate a well-rounded foreign policy perspective, analyzing American, Iranian, Russian, and Chinese ambitions in geopolitical rather than ideological terms, with Iran remaining their predominant security pre-occupation.

# D-ISIS Global Coalition Working Group Co-Leads Meeting

28 - 29 November

In coordination with the U.S. Department of State, the NESACenter hosted the Global Coalition Against ISIS Working Group Co-Leads Meeting 28-29 November, attended by representatives of 23 countries from the 79-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. The event provided a critical forum for member countries to determine the Coalition Core and Global requirements for 2019, with participants organized into working groups exploring one of the following key subjects: communications, counter-finance, foreign terrorist fighters, and stabilization. Following rigorous discussion and analysis, each group advanced recommendations on how to effectively degrade and destroy remaining ISIS holdouts, as the terrorist group enters a new counter-insurgency phase following defeat on the battlefield. The event

featured participation from VIPs including the Coalition’s Special Presidential Envoy Brett McGurk, NESAC Director and Coalition Deputy Envoy LTG (ret.) Terry Wolff, and U.S. Special Representative for Syria Engagement Ambassador James Jeffrey.

Highlights from the two days of in-depth discussions included the Communications Working Group sharing best practices on how Coalition members can amplify counterterror messaging, including by interfacing with newly-appointed Official Coalition Representative Nancy Jamal, who was also in attendance. The Counter-Finance Working Group advocated for “mapping” ISIS’ remaining sources of revenue, and for creating a shared Coalition information-sharing database, a proposal echoed

by the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Working Group. The Stabilization Working Group stressed the need to prioritize civilians still trapped in conflict zones as the stabilization phase of global D-ISIS efforts assumes priority, and of the need to push for continued conversations with the Iraqi government relating to state-building and reconstruction.

The challenge of rebuilding in territories formerly occupied by ISIS in war-torn Syria—particularly in Syria’s east—was a heavy topic of discussion, with a special lecture by Ambassador James Jeffrey providing crucial insight. Brett McGurk and LTG (ret.) Wolff also lectured on the Coalition’s remaining work in stabilizing a region left devastated by the terrorist group, and in eradicating the enduring ISIS “brand” after the group’s physical defeat.



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# International Military Officer's Forum 2018

3—7 December



The NESACenter conducted its annual International Military Officer's Forum (IMOF) at the National Defense University 3–7 December, bringing together 35 senior officers from 21 NESACenter region and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) partner countries. The theme of the seminar, “Hotspots in Global Security,” provided an opportunity for participants to discuss extant regional conflicts impacting the national security strategy of the United States. NESACenter professor Dr. Richard Russell led the one-week seminar and invited policy-makers and foreign affairs experts to share their unique perspectives on subjects germane to the security of the wider NESACenter region: representative discussion topics included the continuing work of the D-ISIS Coalition, the Syrian War, security dynamics in Asia and the Middle East, and U.S. global defense strategies.

Special guest lecturers included Dr. Steven Cook, Senior Fellow for Middle East and Africa Studies, Council on Foreign Relations; Ambassador Barbara Leaf, Senior Fellow at Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Dr. Natan Sachs, Director of the Brookings Institution's Center for Middle East Policy; Dr. Douglas Ollivant (Future of War Senior Fellow, New America; Mr. Abraham Denmark, Director of Asia Program, Wilson Center; Dr. Michael Rubin, Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute; Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya, Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; and Dr. Seth Jones (Director of Transnational Threats Project and Senior Adviser of International Security Program, Center for Strategic International Studies).

The seminar also featured talks by NESACenter Director LTG (Ret.) Terry Wolff, who also serves as the Deputy Presidential Envoy to the D-ISIS Coalition, as well as NESACenter Deputy Director COL (Ret.) David Lamm and NESACenter Academic Dean Dr. Roger Kangas.

On the seminar's final day, participants were treated to a farewell lunch at Mount Vernon, the former personal estate of George Washington.



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# Saudi Armed Forces War Course Curriculum Development Workshop

12 - 14 December



L to R: Prof.s Baltrusaitis and Wiersema

From 12 – 14 December, NESAs Professors Daniel Baltrusaitis and Richard Wiersema conducted a curriculum development workshop for select faculty from the War Course (SAF WC) of the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces Command and Staff College at the National Defense University (NDU). The workshop focused on applying concepts introduced during previous faculty development sessions, one hosted at NDU in August, and another at the Saudi War College in October. In November, NESAs Professor David Des Roches also taught an intensive course curriculum on disaster management to 50 Saudi War College participants over a weeklong seminar, with planned lectures throughout the coming year.

The NESAs team leveraged this experience to critique the current SAF WC objectives and course structure. In subsequent sessions, the SAF cadre extended this critique to lesson-level, using their own curriculum structure. The workshop was a waypoint in developing SAF WC capacity to write and maintain a war college curriculum. This capacity is essential to attaining the SAF PME transformation objective of an academically accredited war college program.



Prof. Des Roches at the SAF WC

As in two previous sessions, SAF cadre participation was active and engaged. The War Course faculty, in particular, stand out for their interest and ability in developing and honing their adult education, graduate-level instructor skill sets. Such cooperation with the Saudi War College strengthens the ability of senior Saudi officers to understand U.S. approach to problem-solving and prepares them to work with U.S. forces in joint and coalition environments.

“ I have been teaching at the war course for five years, and this week, for the first time, I understand what I need to be doing.

- BG Saeed Moghis Alqahtani, SAFWC Director of Strategic Leadership



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## faculty & alumni publications

Dr. Gawdat Bahgat. “The Emerging Energy Landscape: Economic and Strategic Implications”. *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf*. Ed. Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. Arabic language Summary Report pub. 2018. Hurst Publishers.



## nesa in the news

### Select media:

Professor David Des Roches. “The Story of the Other Saudi Weapons” [title translated from Arabic]. Al Jazeera. Aired December 2018. Television.



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[nesa-communications@ndu.edu](mailto:nesa-communications@ndu.edu)

additional information and images at:  
[www.nesa-center.org](http://www.nesa-center.org)



## contact us

### **Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies**

Abraham Lincoln Hall, Fort Lesley J. McNair

300 5th Ave SW

Washington, DC 20319-5066

Phone: (202) 685-4131      Fax: (202) 685-4999

### **Media Requests:**

#### **Media and Communications Office**

Phone: (202) 685-9467      [NESA-communications@ndu.edu](mailto:NESA-communications@ndu.edu)



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