



March 2019 Monthly Report

NESA Region Trends

Participant discussions throughout The NESA Center's March programming ranged from sub-regional topics, notably the Trump Administration's efforts to spearhead an "Arab NATO", to the perceived return of great power politics to the NESA region.

- **MESA's uncertain future:** While participants, particularly from the Arab world and Europe, concur that the NESA region demands a collective security architecture, they are less enthusiastic about the U.S.-proposed Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), often touted as an "Arab NATO". While participants from prospective member states do not object to MESA's core priorities—constraining Iran and reducing the region's U.S. presence without allowing China or Russia to gain influence—many are extremely skeptical of MESA's success, and view it in the context of previous efforts to create a lasting regional security infrastructure (like the Baghdad Pact) and more recent efforts to create cooperative security in the region (like 2006's Gulf Security Dialogue 2006 and 2015's Camp David Summit). European participants in particular attributed their skepticism about the feasibility of MESA primarily to present disunity in the Arab Gulf.
- **Little hope of bridging the gulf in the GCC:** Participants from key NATO states agree with participants from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states that near-term prospects of achieving an end to the ongoing GCC crisis are dim. British and European participants are unoptimistic that U.S.-and/or U.K.-led diplomatic efforts can mend the crisis between Qatar and the blockading states, as the U.K. is consumed with Brexit, and the Trump Administration preoccupied with domestic concerns and winning re-election in 2020. Indeed, Qatari participants expressed the sense that the U.S. and U.K. have become disinterested in resolving the dispute, and characterized both actors as content with the GCC rift as a "new normal".
- The GCC crisis is seen as stymieing progress on achieving other broader regional goals: for example participants from NATO states expressed the urgency of defense reform and establishing homegrown industries in the Gulf—but also skepticism that a divided GCC could make much, if any, headway.
- **Recent events rock the West's relations with the Gulf:** While much recent discussion has centered on how events like the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the war in Yemen have tested Saudi Arabia's alliance with the U.S., less attention has been paid to the impact of such events on the ties between the U.K., Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Conversations involving perspectives from the U.K. described a fall in the standing of the Saudis and Emiratis in the U.K. due to both the Khashoggi affair and the arrest of British academic Matthew Hedges, who was detained in the UAE under accusations of spying for six months.
- **Great power politics returns to the Middle East:** Great power politics was a recurring topic of conversation throughout NESA's March programs, with participants openly curious about—but also wary of the implications of—Russia and China's renewed interest in their home countries. Many participants characterized the increased diplomatic, military, and / or economic overtures of Russia and China towards the NESA region—and the destabilizing activities of a newly confident Iran—as result of a power vacuum formed by overall U.S. withdrawal from the region. For example, some participants noted Russia has opened its doors wider to Saudi Arabia as the U.S. relationship with the kingdom has soured.



NESA-AFRICOM “World Trends, International Players, and Future Challenges” Workshop

4—8 March

In partnership with U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), the NESA Center conducted a “World Trends, International Players and Future Security Challenges Workshop” 4-8 March 2019 in Casablanca, Morocco.

The Workshop focused on factors and evolving global trends that will shape the world in decades ahead and how these factors will affect stability, crises, and other key security issues. Factors like demographic changes, mobilization of populations, emerging technology, types and quality of governance, and the nature of the world order will all continue to demand that governments and societies alike radically evolve over the next few decades. The program adopted a “whole of society” approach examining the changing role of women and youth in this new reality, the shifting concept of the “state”, as well as the much needed evolution in the nature, role, and cooperation of security forces to meet threats that are increasingly non-traditional, non-kinetic, and asymmetric.

Underlying successfully adapting to such challenges is the increasing need and important role of good

governance, rule of law, effective anti-corruption, implementation of laws, social and government accountability, as well as a better understanding of the concept of citizenship. Also compounding issues—both negatively and positively—is the influence of various international players in the region, including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), European Union, U.S., China, and Russia.

Complementing the discussion were insights into USAFRICOM’s vision for Africa and its role in North Africa and the Sahel in building capacity and encouraging collaboration and cooperation among countries of the region. Concluding the workshop was a “Youth-Only” session conducted by Mr. Fahad Malaikah, NESA’s Program Coordinator for the NESA-AFRICOM workshops and NESA Alumni Coordinator. The workshop was conducted under Chatham House Rule of non-attribution.

The NESA-AFRICOM “World Trends, International Players and Future Security Challenges Workshop” was led by NESA Professor Anne Moisan and supported by Mr. Fahad Malaikah, Program Coordinator and NESA Alumni Coordinator.



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NESA Executive Seminar, “Security Along the Seams and Border Areas”

4—15 March

The NESAC Center hosted its second Executive Seminar (ES) of 2019 at the National Defense University, 4—15 March. Focusing on the theme “Security Along the Seams and Border Areas”, the two-week seminar provided a key platform for participants across the NESAC region to engage in rigorous discussion on issues of regional and global importance, with a special emphasis on the unique challenges facing border areas, like transnational crime, illicit networks, and immigration crime. The Executive Seminar was led by NESAC Professor Daniel Curfiss, with NESAC Professors John Gill, Ali Jalali, and Dr. Gawdat Bahgat acting as course facilitators. The Executive Seminar is a flagship NESAC program geared towards select mid- to higher-level military and government officials from the NESAC region, with the March 2019 ES convening 37 participants from 21 countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, and Uzbekistan.

Throughout lively seminar sessions, participants gained new insights on crucial topics through guest lectures and various group activities. Discussion

topics included tackling cyber as a new warfighting domain, Iran’s destabilizing actions throughout the region, countering terrorist and illicit networks, and how the American security apparatus and political system meet such challenges. Guest lecturers included noted practitioners and subject-matter experts like Dr. George Perkovich of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Ambassador (ret) Marc Grossman; and Professor Paul Pillar of Georgetown University’s Security Studies program. In targeted group activities, participants discussed, debated, and advanced solutions towards an extant regional issue, and shared their insights and best practices with fellow participants.

As the seminar was conducted in Washington, D.C., participants toured the U.S. Capitol and Library of Congress. During the tour of the Capitol, participants visited the floor of the House of Representatives and discussed contemporary U.S. politics with former Representative Dennis Hertel, who previously represented Michigan’s 14th district. Participants also visited George Washington’s Mount Vernon, where Professor Curfiss spoke on the life and legacy of America’s first President.



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NESA “Qatar General Officer” Washington Workshop

21 March



On 21 March, the NESA Center hosted the Qatar General Washington Program. Participants from various Qatar government organizations and defense learning institutions attended the daylong seminar, which featured presentations from NESA faculty member Dr. Gawdat Bahgat, National Defense University Professor Dr. Brittany Bounds, and NESA Center Director LTG (ret.) Terry Wolff. Topics ranged from the continuing fight to defeat and degrade remaining Islamic State (IS) holdouts, the current polarization of U.S. domestic politics, Iran’s destabilizing actions throughout the NESA region, and topics especially pertinent to the U.S.-Qatar relationship. Throughout lively discussion sessions, participants were particularly interested in heightening their understanding of international security issues as seen through a U.S. perspective, and to delve into the evolution and prevailing status quo of U.S. domestic politics. Participants learned also about the dynamic nature of the U.S. citizenry’s participation in politics, and about the nuances of the American social contract between citizens and state and federal institutions.

Recurring themes throughout the seminar included skepticism from participants about U.S. political and military involvement in the NESA region, particularly concerning the fight against ISIS and relations with Iran. Additionally, participants were curious about the degree of President Trump’s influence on future U.S. Administrations’ foreign policy. Conversations centered on the impact of news and social media, especially platforms like Twitter acting as major popular sources of information—or misinformation—about U.S. politics, as well as participants’ concerns about the increasing polarization of the U.S. political landscape and associated impact on U.S. foreign policy.

NESA Center Director LTG (ret.) Terry Wolff with a representative of the Qatar delegation



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NESA Roundtable with Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Lolwah Al-Khater

25 March

On 25 March, 2019 the NESACenter hosted a roundtable discussion featuring Her Excellency Lolwah R M Al-Khater, Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the State of Qatar, as well as other representatives from the Qatari MFA. The roundtable was facilitated by NESACenter Professor Dr. Gawdat Bahgat.

H.E. Ms. Al Khater provided insights and perspectives on Qatar's various security and diplomatic concerns, including Iran, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, as well as the causes and implications of the ongoing Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis, and H.E. Ms. Al Khater described Qatar's desire for compromise. While discussion centered primarily on Qatar's positions on the GCC rift, roundtable attendees including NESACenter Director LTG (ret.) Terry Wolff, the former Deputy Presidential Envoy to the D-ISIS Coalition, extensively engaged with the delegation on U.S. and Qatari efforts to counter

terrorism and stymie the financing of terrorist actors throughout the NESACenter region. The roundtable was also attended by other NESACenter leadership and faculty including Academic Dean Dr. Roger Kangas and Professor David Des Roches. Both representatives from the NESACenter and the Qatari MFA concluded the roundtable expressing the mutual desire to uphold and reinforce regional stability throughout the Middle East and pledging support towards shared goals and Qatar's continued socio-economic development.

The NESACenter regularly reaches out to policymakers from across the NESACenter region for intimate roundtable discussions, making it a priority to hear perspectives from diverse voices across the region. Leading stakeholders in NESACenter region affairs have also been engaged. Previous NESACenter roundtable talks have featured Turkish Ambassador Burak Akcapar, Uzbek Ambassador H.E. Javlon Vakhabov, and U.S. Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV).



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NESA Professor Dr. Gawdat Bahgat attended the Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs' "An Improved Regional Mechanism for Conflict Prevention in MENA" meeting, held 9-10 March in Amman, Jordan. Dr. Bahgat was joined by international peers and counterparts from the League of Arab states, as well as Iran, Israel, and Turkey.

MORE MARCH EVENTS

Professor David Des Roches' King's College London Lecture Tour: United Kingdom and Paris, France

In a lecture tour organized by King's College London, NESA Professor David Des Roches spoke on key regional topics, including the proposed Middle East Security Alliance and diplomatic and security issues of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, to various government and academic audiences in the United Kingdom and Paris, France.

The lecture circuit, held 5-9 March 2019, was facilitated by King's College Professor Dr. David Roberts, presently also teaching courses at the U.K. Joint Services Command and Staff College. In his time in the U.K. and France, Professor Des Roches' representative engagements included discussions with audiences such as the Gulf Unit at the U.K. Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office; the U.K. Ministry of Defence; the Royal United Services Institute; and graduate students at Sciences Po, Paris.



NESA Professor
David Des
Roches

Faculty and Alumni Publications

Faculty publications:

Professor John H. Gill. "Provocation, war and restraint under the nuclear shadow: The Kargil conflict 1999". Journal of Strategic Studies, DOI: [10.1080/01402390.2019.1570144](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1570144). 5 March 2019.

Dr. Gawdat Bahgat. "Iran's Ballistic-Missile and Space Program: An Assessment". Middle East Policy Council. Published online March 2019. <https://www.mepc.org/journal/irans-ballistic-missile-and-space-program-assessment/>.

Select alumni publications:

Dr. Eman Ragab, "Terrorism in the Sahel and Sahara", Al-Ahram Weekly. 14 March 2019. Opinion editorial. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/26781.aspx>

"The Limits of India's Soft Power in Afghanistan", Fair Observer. 18 March 2019. Opinion editorial. https://www.fairobserver.com/region/central_south_asia/afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks-india-south-asia-security-news-00081/



UPCOMING EVENTS

April 2019

NESA-AFRICOM Tunisia National Defense
Institute Seminar, Phase II: 25 March -3 April,
Washington, D.C.

NESA Silk Road Future Leaders Seminar: 1-5 April,
Washington, D.C.

NESA Afghanistan Building & Sustaining
Governance Capacity: 3-10 April, Washington, D.C.

NESA Lebanese Armed Forces Staff College
Seminar 2019: 15-26 April, Washington, D.C., U.S.
Military Academy, and New York, New York

NESA-AFRICOM “Tying Border Security and Illicit
Commons: Making The U.S. More Secure”
Workshop: 23 April -3 May, Tunis, Tunisia

additional information and images at:
www.nesa-center.org



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