

NEAR EAST SOUTH ASIA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

The NESACenter hopes that all alumni who celebrate had a meaningful Ramadan and Eid!

May 2019 Monthly Report

NESA Region Trends

Geopolitical events of the last months shaped participant discussions throughout the NESACenter's May programming. Many conversations oriented around terrorism and Central / South Asia, with NESACenter's May programs occurring in the wake of events including the sharp escalation of India–Pakistan tensions, the Sri Lanka Easter attacks, and Afghanistan's preparations for Presidential elections and ongoing U.S.-Taliban peace talks. Great power competition, particularly between the U.S. and China, was again a recurring topic of conversation.

- **Afghanistan's fragile peace push, and the India-Pakistan factor:** Participants discussed the make-up of post-reconciliation Afghanistan, as well as the impact of democracy on Afghanistan over the past 18 years. Participants were united on the importance of constructive dialogue in the Afghan peace process, and expressed hope that the war-torn country could catalyze growth and development as a connective state for greater north-south commerce. Participants were united in calling for serious cooperation in addressing hurdles impeding regional transit, trade, and connectivity. Specific ways to achieve these goals, however, were not agreed upon.
- Participants expressed concern that India-Pakistan tensions, and even Indian domestic politics, could act as a spoiler for the fragile Afghan peace push: recent U.S. attempts to cool India-Pakistan tensions in part also aim to preserve the negotiations that could end 18 years of war between U.S. and the U.S.-backed Afghan government and Taliban insurgents.
- **Countering transnational threats—from terrorism to traffickers:** The global ramifications of the Easter Sunday attacks in Colombo, Sri Lanka shaped May discussions. In terms of political violence, Sri Lanka can be viewed as a microcosm of the evolution of terrorism, having witnessed the localized campaign of the Tamil Tigers to this April's Easter attacks, an act with many hallmarks of modern transnational terrorism. In the context of the Sri Lanka attacks, participants discussed new ways forward in countering violent extremism in South Asia and the wider NESACenter region, focusing on best practices that can be applied by governments in both the short and long-term. The challenge of re-entry and / or rehabilitation of jihadi fighters returning to their respective countries of citizenship (numbers of such demographics have swelled after the fall of the physical ISIS caliphate) was also heavily discussed.
- Tied to discussions of the changing nature of terrorism was that of illicit commons: illegal activities like trafficking of people and drugs has become increasingly profitable to terrorist entities. Sales of plundered antiquities were a source of funding for the Islamic State, for example, and human trafficking central to its modus operandi. Participants agreed that effective border management, technological developments—and even closed borders—are insufficient to eliminate illegal cross border trafficking of goods and persons, however, stating lasting solutions can only be brought about by good government and the full socio-political integration of marginalized or disaffected populations.
- **Great power competition and the future of the international order:** NESACenter program participants have repeatedly expressed anxiety about how U.S. foreign policy priorities are shifting in an era when new actors, particularly Russia and China, are challenging the status quo. In May, numerous discussions focused on South Asia as a theatre for great power competition; NESACenter region allies in particular stressed the need to better develop NESACenter May 2019 maritime connections throughout South Asia.



NESA-IISS South Asia Security Conference

27—28 April

In partnership with the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the NESA Center conducted the fifth annual NESA–IISS Track 1.5 South Asia Security Conference in Bahrain, 27–28 April. NESA was represented by Director LTG (ret.) Terry Wolff, Academic Dean Roger Kangas, and Adjunct Professor Jack Gill. The 44 conference attendees included serving officials as well as former officials and academics from the core countries of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, as well

as representatives from Uzbekistan, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, the U.K., Canada, and the U.S. Participants addressed key topics of regional security and stability, including India–Pakistan nuclear trends, India–Pakistan crisis management, stability in Afghanistan, and countering extremism regionally within the global context. This year's conference, which was extended from one day to two days for the first time following feedback received after previous conference sessions, took place within weeks of the sharp and sudden escalation of India–Pakistan tensions, which brought the two countries close to armed conflict. Afghanistan was also in the midst of preparations for its next presidential elections as well as peace talks between the U.S. and the Taliban.

Although this event in Bahrain is a stand-alone process, it also draws from and provides input to the NESA–IISS Southern Asia Security Dialogue held annually in Oman, the thirteenth iteration of which is slated for October 2019.



NESA Academic Dean Roger Kangas. Top photo: NESA Director LTG (ret.) Terry Wolff, second from left

Explore beyond the highlights. Visit [NESA-Center.org](https://www.nesa-center.org) and follow [@TheNESACenter](https://twitter.com/TheNESACenter)





NESA-AFRICOM “Tying Border Security to Illicit Commons from Latin America to Africa” Workshop

29 April—3 May

In partnership with U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the NESA Center conducted a NESA-AFRICOM “Tying Border Security to Illicit Commons from Latin America to Africa” Workshop 29 April – 3 May 2019 in Tunis, Tunisia.

The Workshop focused on the challenges and evolving nature of illicit commons in both Latin America and Africa. Professor Celina Realuyo of the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Studies (WJPC) began the program with an assessment of the global business of criminal trafficking, its financing, and the increasingly complex security challenges this poses. Illicit commons and the key importance of effective border management and monitoring were also discussed, with participants ultimately agreeing that neither technological advancements nor closed borders can eliminate illegal cross-border trafficking. Participants also addressed key topics including immigration, human smuggling, terrorism, and the challenges of foreign returning terrorist fighters.

The focus of this year’s program, the fourth in

NESA’s continuing Workshop series with African and Latin American participants, was highly focused on understanding what fuels the “business” of illicit commons. Participants were challenged to think more creatively as they confront the issue of trafficking nationally, regionally, and even from a transatlantic perspective. Speakers and panelists were drawn from Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, and Nigeria. The workshop concluded with a briefing by LTG (ret) Terry Wolff, Director of NESA and former Deputy Special Presidential Envoy for the D-ISIS Coalition at the U.S. Department of State. Despite the focus on illicit commons and the associated security implications, the group unanimously concluded that to be truly effective, the root causes allowing criminal and terrorist elements to flourish need to be addressed—specifically, lack of good governance, corruption, and poor socio-economic integration.

The Workshop, attended by 31 participants, was led by NESA Professor Anne Moisan, with assistance from Professor Celina Realuyo from the WJPC and Mr. Fahad Malaikah, the NESA Alumni Coordinator and Overseas Program Manager.



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NESA International Military Officers' Forum

6—10 May

The NESA Center's latest iteration of the International Military Officers' Forum (IMOF) was conducted at the NESA Center facilities at the National Defense University May 6-10, 2019. The IMOF, led by NESA Professor Dr. Richard Russell, was attended by international CENTCOM personnel, with representative countries including the United States, France, Germany, Turkey, Romania, and Saudi Arabia. The seminar's dominant discussion topics included Russia's rise on the world stage, China's socio-economic transformation and newly aggressive military posture, great power competition, the future of warfare, and the shifting role of the United States in the Middle East.

Participants engaged in rigorous discussion of crucial geopolitical topics—for example,

international participants raised questions of perceived hypocrisy in U.S. foreign policy and confusion at the Trump Administration's foreign and defense policy priorities, and U.S. participants voiced interest in exploring how artificial intelligence and cyber are transforming the domain of modern warfighting.

Participants heard from guest lecturers including notable subject matter experts like Mr. Elbridge Colby, Director of the Defense Program at Center for a New American Security; Dr. Patrick Cronin, Asia-Pacific Security Chair at the Hudson Institute; NBC/MSNBC National Security Contributor Dr. Evelyn Farkas; and LTG (Ret.) Terry Wolff and Dr. Roger Kangas, the NESA Center's respective Director and Academic Dean.

IMOF participants engaged with lecturers from the D.C. foreign and defense policy community



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NESA-SSN Central / South Asia Working Group Meeting

27—29 May

The NESA Center conducted the Strategic Studies Network (SSN) Central / South Asia Working Group in Bangkok, Thailand 27-29 May. Entitled "Central and South Asia Connectivity", the meeting addressed a variety of issues that included the prospects of Afghanistan as a connective state for greater north-south commerce, the role great power competition plays in the region, how better to develop maritime connections throughout South Asia, the after effects of the recent terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka, and how India will shape both Central and South Asia, amongst others. Thirty four participants took part in the meeting and represented 11 countries.

The meeting was led by Dr. Roger Kangas, NESA Center Dean, with facilitation provided by Jeff Payne, Academic Affairs Manager. Planning for the event was handled by NESA Center Senior Program Planner Mr. Omar Sedky. The event was a partnership between NESA and the Institute of National Security Studies of Sri Lanka.

The Strategic Studies Network is a unique initiative established by the NESA Center in 2005. The SSN is a partnership of over seventy institutions from North Africa and the Middle East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Europe. For more information about the SSN and its work, visit: <http://strategicstudiesnetwork.org/>.



NESA Academic Affairs Manager Jeff Payne, left, and Dean Dr. Roger Kangas, right



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MORE NESA EVENTS

Leading Efforts in Conflict Resolution

NESA Professor (and former Interior Minister of Afghanistan) Ali Jalali attended the India-Pakistan-Afghanistan (IPA) Track II meeting in Bangkok, Thailand April 15-19

The IPA Track II project is a long-running informal expert-level discussion led by mostly former officials from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan on challenges facing the multi-faceted relationship between their countries.

The IPA deliberations are aimed at finding specific and practical ways to address the dividing issues in the region in a spirit of bi-lateral and multi-lateral cooperation. Participant discussions focused on analyzing the current situation in and around Afghanistan, and possible near and medium-term support of the Afghan peace process by India and Pakistan.



NESA Professor
Ali Jalali



NESA Center Director LTG (ret.) Terry Wolff, center, spoke at the Embassy of the Czech Republic May 31 to diplomatic representatives of the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Romania, Cyprus, Croatia, Greece, France, and Poland on the strategic advantages of radical information sharing in bureaucracies and its necessity in countering violent extremism.

NESA in the News

Select faculty publications and media appearances:

NESA Professor Dr. Gawdat Bahgat provided insight to National Public Radio about Iran and drone warfare: "[In Yemen Conflict, Some See a New Age of Drone Warfare](#)".

NESA Professor Dr. Gawdat Bahgat interview with [Morning Wave Radio \(Korea\)](#) on U.S.-Iran tensions.

New publication from NESA Professor David Des Roches, [Dominance versus Disruption: Asymmetry in Gulf Security](#) for Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington

NESA Professor David Des Roches spoke to [Al Jazeera](#) May 10 and [Sky News Arabia](#) May 23, with both TV appearances focusing on escalating tensions with Iran.



UPCOMING EVENTS

June 2019

NESA Strategic Studies Network Workshop and Alumni
Event: 10-14 June, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

NESA Combating Transnational Threats Seminar “After
ISIS”: 10-21 June, Washington, D.C.

NESA Washington Seminar Luncheon Discussion With Vance
Serchuk: 18 June, Washington, D.C.

NESA Strategic Forum “Security in the Mediterranean Sea”:
10-12 June, Barcelona, Spain

NESA-AFRICOM “Changing Culture of Conflicts”
Workshop: 17-21 June, Casablanca, Morocco

NESA Indian Ocean Dialogue: 24-28 June, Bangkok, Thailand

NESA Central Asia-Afghanistan Security Executive Seminar:
24-28 June, Washington, D.C.

additional information and images at:
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