



September 2019 Monthly Report

NESA Region Trends

Participants of NESA's September programs explored a wide spectrum of topics, from the role (or lack thereof) of ethical principles and norms governing AI technologies, to Beijing's and Moscow's ambitions in the NESA region .

- **Trump Administration Middle East policy perceived as erratic:** September program participants expressed confusion over the U.S. foreign and defense policy posture towards the NESA region under the Trump Administration, describing a confusing series of radical shifts. Participants cited for example the reversal of the announced pullout of U.S. troops from eastern Syria in December 2018, and President Trump's policy of non-intervention standing in contrast to ramped up U.S. airstrikes, from Somalia to Syria. Most participants were in agreement however over their concern of a perceived U.S. turn away from—and loss of interest in—the region.
- **AI systems, human values:** Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to be a prime security concern for participants, as it has been for consecutive months. As in past NESA programs, AI-related discussion focused on relatively easily quantifiable developments including technological advances, AI's impact on the future of warfighting, cyber and computational power, and AI industrialization—but also on an aspect of the AI debate that is less quantifiable: control over the norms and values that shape the development and use of AI globally.
- Participants expressed concern over the lack of any normative framework for the development and use of AI technologies, calling for “rules of the road” to be established governing ethical use of AI and cyber technologies—especially important as the ascent and spread of these technologies means a larger role for non-state actors on the global stage.
- **Great power politics returns to the Middle East:** Great power politics was a recurring topic of conversation, 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 longstanding U.S. relationship with the kingdom has soured.



NESA Executive Seminar “Technology and Security in the NESA Region”

9—20 September

From 9-20 September, NESA Professor David Des Roches led the third NESA Center Executive Seminar (ES) of 2019, “Technology and Security in the NESA Region”. The Executive Seminar is a flagship NESA program geared towards select mid- to higher- level military and government officials from the NESA region, with the September 2019 ES convening 40 participants from 26 countries including Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Uzbekistan, Turkey, the U.S., and Yemen.

The seminar brought together NESA faculty, leading subject matter experts on U.S. foreign and defense policy and NESA region geopolitics, as well as military and civil society stakeholders from the NESA region. Lecturers included Mr. Michael Brody, DHS Chair at the National Defense University’s College of Information and Cyberspace ; Ms. Kara Fredrick, Associate Fellow of Technology and National Security Program at the Center for a New American Security ; and NESA faculty and leadership including LTG (Ret.) Terry Wolff, NESA Center Director and former Deputy Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Representative discussion topics included the explorations of how cyber and AI are transforming the domain of modern warfighting, the exploitation of social media and critical infrastructure in crises, and best practices in countering violent extremism, in a changing landscape in which violent actors are growing increasingly tech-savvy.

During their time in Washington, D.C., the ES group participated in numerous off-site visits, including a tour the U.S. Capitol building, where they engaged with the Honorable Dennis Hertel, who previously represented Michigan’s 14th District, on topics relating to American governance.



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NESA-AFRICOM U.S.-North Africa Colonels' Workshop

11-19 September

In partnership with AFRICOM, the NESA Center conducted the first-ever “US-North Africa Colonels Workshop” 11-19 September 2019 for 12 officers from 4 North African countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt), along with 9 U.S. officers from West Point, AFRICOM, SOCAFRICA, the NESA Center, and OSD/African Policy.

The Utah National Guard additionally participated as the State Partner for Morocco through the National Guard State Partnership (which links state-level National Guard units with partner countries for the purposes of fostering mutual interests and establishing long term relationships).

The two-week Colonel’s Program was divided into two components, with week one activities held in Washington, D.C., and week two activities held at the United State Military Academy in West Point, New York, and New York City, New York. The Washington, D.C. component provided a “scene setter” for the crisis response table top exercise to

follow at West Point. In D.C., participants heard from subject matter experts including Dr. Anita Chandra of RAND ; Dr. Nora Bensahel of Johns Hopkins University, who lectured on military adaptability ; and Professor Celina Realuyo of the William J. Perry Center, who spoke on transnational threat networks. The D.C. program concluded with a Military panel from OSD, AFRICOM, SOCAFRICA, and the Utah National Guard on security cooperation and building partner capacity.

While at West Point, the group was joined by several faculty, members of the West Point Counter Terrorism Center, and cadets from Egypt and Tunisia, with two full days devoted to participants focusing on a table top open discussion demanding responses to a series of national security challenges discussed by speakers in the previous D.C. portion of the program. The workshop concluded in New York City, with a presentation at the NY Police Department’s Counterterrorism Center by Detective Robert Sirignano. The Workshop was led by Professor Anne Moisan.

Detective Robert Sirignano of the NYPD’s Counterterrorism Center lectures on best practices in CT



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NESA FACULTY UPDATE



Dr. Michael Sharnoff joined the NESA Center in September 2019 as an Associate Professor. Prior to NESA, Dr. Sharnoff served as Associate Professor of Middle East Studies and Director of Regional Studies at the Daniel Morgan Graduate School of National Security (DMGS) in Washington, D.C., where he taught graduate courses on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Arab Spring uprisings, and radical Islamist movements.

His articles have appeared in major publications including Foreign Policy Research Institute, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, The Washington Post, Huffington Post, and Al Arabiya. Dr. Sharnoff is the author of *Nasser's Peace: Egypt's Response to the 1967 War with Israel* (2017). He holds a Ph.D. in Middle East Studies from King's College, London.

**ADVANCING SECURITY COOPERATION WITH
KEY AMERICAN ALLIES**



Above: The Uzbekistan Armed Forces Academy visited NESA September 9-10 for a series of meetings and lectures, including with NDU President VADM Fritz Roegge and Dr. Amer Latif, Central Asia Policy Advisor at the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, as well as with Rep. Trent Kelly (R, MI-1), onsite at the U.S. Capitol. The visit was led by **Professor Brianne Todd**, who hosted the group in part to facilitate discussions of NESA's forthcoming 2020-2021 engagement with Uzbekistan.

Dr. Gawdat Bahgat spoke on the Iran threat at the conference "Grand Strategy: Mapping the Contemporary Middle East" hosted September 4-5 September at Durham University (U.K.). The conference was aimed at exploring historic and conceptual underpinnings of Grand Strategy as it has developed across the contemporary Middle East.

Dr. Hassan Abbas spoke at the "Iraq is Recovering" conference hosted by the Al Rafidain Center September 26-28 in Baghdad, on the importance of police reforms in strengthening Iraqi governance and civil society.



Spotlight

NESA in the News



September 2019 was a busy month for NESA faculty, with much external media engagement.

Clockwise from top left: **Dr. Hassan Abbas** speaks to [NowThis News](#) about the persecution of Shia Muslims in Pakistan; **Professor David Des Roches** speaks to [Al Araby](#) about Saudi Arabia-Iran tensions ; **Professor Ali Jalali** on [Voice of America Dari](#) on the September 2019 Afghanistan elections ; Professor Des Roches speaks to [Al Araby](#) about the Abqaiq-Khuras attacks.

Other media engagement includes Dr. Hassan Abbas providing [comments](#) to VOA Urdu about human rights challenges faced by Pakistan's police, and Professor Des Roches' comments on Saudi Arabia's defense articles and the Abqaiq-Khuras attacks being published in [CNBC](#) and [Reuters](#). Portions of an interview with Professor Des Roches were also published in the [book](#) *A Woman's Place: U.S. Counterterrorism Since 9/11* by Dr. Joanna Cook (pub. August 2019, Hurst and Co. Publishers).



UPCOMING EVENTS

October 2019

Washington New Embassy Orientation Seminar:
7-11 October, Washington, D.C.

Washington Seminar Luncheon Discussion “U.S.
Defense Priorities in an Era of Great Power
Competition”: 10 October, Washington, D.C.

NESA-IISS South Asia Conference: 11-13 October,
In-Region

NESA-SSN-IEMed Working Group:
14-17 October, In-Region

NESA Executive Seminar 01-20:
21 October-1 November, Washington, D.C.

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



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