



December 2019 Monthly Report

NESA Region Trends

Key participant conversations throughout the NESA Center's December programs touched on topics with global ramifications, including transnational illicit networks, the threat of violent non-state actors to states' political legitimacy, and perceived U.S. withdrawal from the NESA region acting as a vehicle for reshuffling of the region's power structure.

- **U.S. partners nervous as Iranian aggression flares in the Gulf:** As tensions between Iran and the United States ratchet up, participants from key GCC states expressed heightened concerns about the Iranian threat, especially in regards to critical infrastructure of Arabian Gulf states. In particular, participants described acute concerns about vulnerabilities in their countries' respective oil, desalination, electricity, shipping, and other systems. As Tehran continues irregular attacks to infrastructure using cyberspace, naval ships to impede oil tankers, and partners like Yemeni Houthis, Gulf states expressed their strong concern that if Iranian leaders feel further threatened, they may take bolder action, including against rivals' critical infrastructure. Gulf participants expressed a keen interest in bolstering their own defensive capabilities through enhanced security cooperation with the U.S. (including via foreign military sales and professional military education).
- **U.S. withdrawal from NESA Region is changing the region's landscape of power, participants say:** Participants again lament a perceived U.S. withdrawal from, and growing disinterest in, the NESA region, stating that only on issues like Iran and Israel has the U.S. maintained a sustained and consistent interest. As the U.S. pulls away, participants describe other actors inserting themselves into regional decision-making, giving rise to a new geopolitical structure involving six primary countries: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Israel, Russia, and the U.S., while China's economic influence is steadily rising.
- **Extremist groups and state legitimacy:** In unstable or failed states, some violent extremist organizations or terror groups can—for all their barbarity—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.
- **Technological impact and illicit networks:** An unfortunate hallmark of the contemporary Middle East is the presence of sophisticated illicit networks exploiting global economic integration and lack of state capacity. Participants noted how the proliferation of information and communications technology has opened new vistas for transnational criminality—but that such access is also two-sided. While internet access and smart devices provide new tools with which illicit networks can traffic goods, authorities can also utilize the same technologies to counter bad actors. Participants described key challenges for governments as including how to harmonize law enforcement approaches and grow the capacity and technical know-how of well-intentioned but struggling states.



Senior Executive Seminar, “Strategic Leadership in a Changing Global Order”

2–6 December 2019

From 2-6 December, NESAs Professor Daniel Curfiss led the final NESAs Center Senior Executive Seminar (SES) of the 2019 calendar year, “Strategic Leadership in a Changing Global Order”. The Senior Executive Seminar is a flagship NESAs program geared towards senior policymakers, including general- and flag-level military officers and civilian government leaders (including at the ambassadorial and ministerial levels), with the December 2019 SES convening 46 participants from 26 countries including the U.S. and key defense partners like Egypt, Israel, Jordan, India, Israel, Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

The seminar brought together NESAs faculty, leading subject matter experts on U.S. foreign and defense policy and NESAs region geopolitics, as well as military and civil society stakeholders from the NESAs region. Lecturers included former Ambassador Marc Grossman ; Georgetown University Professor Michael Brown ; and National Security Council staffers Mr. Christopher Miller and Mr. Rob Greenway, presently serving on the Counterterrorism and the Mid-East and North Africa desks, respectively. NESAs faculty and leadership also provided insights, including Professor Curfiss and LTG (Ret.) Terry Wolff, NESAs 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 countering Iran’s nuclear ambitions and its wide range of malign activities.

During their time in Washington, D.C., the SES group participated in numerous off-site visits, including a tour of George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate, and a welcome lunch at the Army Navy Club, where Professor Curfiss opened with a keynote discussion on topics relating to security cooperation.



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Countering Illicit Networks in the Levant and the Gulf

8-11 December 2019

The NESACenter, as part of its continuing series with CENTCOM, held its second “Countering Illicit Networks in the Levant and Gulf” workshop from 8-11 December, 2019 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

The focus of the workshop was to build a deeper understanding of the methods and challenges of counter-narcotics interdiction in the Gulf and Levant region at both the inter and intra state level; to improve participants’ functional ability to use analytically based problem-mapping tools to improve counter-narcotics interdiction efforts; and to develop a series of specific recommendations on improving interdiction efforts to counter the trafficking of illicit goods in the region.

Participants were divided into targeted multi-country working groups to best develop recommendations to confront challenges in counter-narcotics. Participants’ recommendations included urging states to develop incentives for information sharing as well as a trans-border operations coordination center, and for states to develop infrastructure better allowing governments to track digital currency and thus have greater insight into online trafficking patterns and networks.

During the workshop, participants heard firsthand from a former Special Agent of the Department of Homeland Security, who spoke on the strategic context of narcotics interdiction and the need to combat highly technical narcotics networks with agile, multi-level, and interdisciplinary taskforces. Other highlights included a panel conversation between a strategic advisor to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and a leader from the GCC Criminal Information Network, who led participants through inhibitors of interdiction along regional networks. Representatives from a leading U.S. think tank, Customs and Border Patrol, and a local anti-narcotics task force also shared successful methods of interdiction, noting particularly the importance of addressing the rule-of-law, networks, and financial crime.



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NESA Saudi War Course Program

9-11 December 2019

From December 9-11, the NESA Center hosted a delegation of senior program faculty from the Saudi Arabia Armed Forces Command and Staff College for a series of discussions and briefings. The workshop marked a continuation of the NESA Center's longstanding relationship with the Saudi War College, and course director Professor David Des Roches leveraged this experience and longstanding relationship to facilitate targeted conversations including one-on-one office calls between participating Saudi War College faculty and their NDU counterparts, with for example COL Khaled al Khaldi of the War College meeting with NESA Professor Dr. Michael Bell on Theater Strategy. The group also attended an office call with NESA Academic Dean Dr. Roger Kangas, as well as a discussion on the foreign military sales (FMS) process with NESA Deputy Director David Lamm and Dr. Bell. The group received briefings at Marine Corps Base Quantico on military education concepts at the Marine Corps University's Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Creativity, which supports scholarly research and creative curriculum development in warfighting. Military academics including Dr. Amin Tarz, Director of Middle East Studies at the Brute Krulak Center, provided insights to the group on innovation in military strategy and counterterrorism.

On their final day in Washington, D.C., the Saudi War College participants attended discussions at the legal and government relations firm Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, LLP, on the American legislative process, and at think tank The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington on geopolitics of the Middle East and America's role in the changing region.

NESA's continuing engagements with the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces Command and Staff College strengthen the ability of senior Saudi officers to understand U.S. military approaches to strategic thinking and problem solving, and better prepares them to collaborate in joint, interagency and multinational environments.



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OTHER DECEMBER EVENTS



Representatives of the NDU-Omani DATT visit (Dr. Bahgat second from right)



Above: NDU President VADM (Ret.) Roegge, left, and Omani DATT Al-Harasii, right.

5 December: NESA Director LTG (Ret.) Terry Wolff and Professor Michael Bell participated in a Joint Staff Directors' Offsite on Strategic Misalignment. The event was convened by the Joint Staff Historian's Office, and featured participation from VIPs in foreign and defense policy. LTG (Ret.) Wolff moderated a Middle East-focused panel with Mr. Michael O'Hanlon, Amb. Robert Ford, Amb. Barbara Leaf, and Professor Mike Bell. The event's concluding panel focused on Strategic Misalignment through the lens of strategic documents like the National Security Strategy, with panelists including Undersecretary Michele Flournoy, ADM (Ret) Sandy Winnefeld, Dr. Nadia Schadlow, and Dr. Frank Hoffman.

10 December: NDU hosted a delegation led by the newly appointed Omani Defense Attache CDRE Abdullah Al-Harasi for a series of meetings and briefings, including with NDU President VADM Fritz Roegge and NESA Professor Gawdat Bahgat. The 10 December engagement was requested by the Omani Defense Attache's office so that the newly appointed DATT could familiarize himself with NDU and its mission, and to discuss U.S.-Oman security cooperation.

12 December: Dr. Hassan Abbas spoke at the Jamestown Foundation's Thirteenth Annual Terrorism [Conference](#) on "Pakistan's Role in Regional Security After the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan". Dr. Abbas was joined by other counterterrorism and national security experts including Bruce Hoffman and Alex Vatanka.

OTHER DECEMBER EVENTS



14-15 December: Professor David Des Roches attended the Doha Forum 2019. He is pictured with NESA alumni Dr. Stepan Kartashyan, head of External Relations for Armenian President Armen Sarkissian.

16 December: Dr. Hassan Abbas participated in the Center for Global Policy's inaugural event "Religious Extremism, the Kashmir Crisis, and U.S. South Asia Policy", speaking on Pakistan's views on India's Kashmir policy. [Read more.](#)

16 December: Professor David Des Roches spoke about the longstanding DoD practice of condolence payments for civilian harm in a new [documentary short](#) for Newsy, which examined condolence payments in the counter-ISIS offensive.

17 December: NESA Director LTG (Ret.) Terry Wolff, Dean Roger Kangas and Professor Gawdat Bahgat held a roundtable discussion at Chatham House in London, U.K. The discussion focused on Iran's domestic politics, the JCPOA, and wider regional security, with the NESA team providing U.S. perspectives and European experts (including from Chatham House and other London-based think tanks) offering their own. The event is part of a two-year agreement between NESA and Chatham House to provide recommendations to the U.S. government on U.S.-Iran de-escalation strategies.



28 December: Professor Gawdat Bahgat spoke at the National Defense College in Muscat, Oman, delivering four lectures on the Middle East's domestic, regional, and international challenges, which were attended by about 40 senior military officers.

28 December: Dr. Hassan Abbas delivered the keynote address, "Kashmir, Geopolitics and Trends in Global Extremism", at a conference organized by American-Pakistani physicians in Islamabad. The conference was also attended by Masood Khan, President of Azad Kashmir, as well as federal-level Pakistani cabinet ministers.



23 December: Dr. Hassan Abbas addressed senior police officers in Karachi, Pakistan on "Emerging Security Threats and Policing in South Asia." The following day, Dr. Abbas visited a shrine that was previously the site of a major terrorist attack, and received briefings from local police on security reforms in Pakistan's Sindh province.

NEW FACULTY PUBLICATION: Dr. Gawdat Bahgat published a [chapter](#), co-authored with Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran's Asianisation Strategy" in the Italian Institute for International Political Studies' new publication "Iran Looking East?"



Professor Des Roches and
NESA alumni Dr. Stepan
Kartashyan at the Doha Forum



UPCOMING EVENTS

January-February 2020

Saudi Arabian MOI Drone Workshop
5-9 January 2020, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Executive Seminar 02-20,
3-14 February 2020 , Washington, D.C.

NESA/AFRICOM 01-20 "New World Order",
24-28 February 2020, Casablanca, Morocco

FLINTLOCK SLS 2020,
25-27 February 2020, Nouakchott, Mauritania

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



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