



NEAR EAST SOUTH ASIA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

NESA Update

February 2021–March 2021

NESA Region Trends – NORTH AFRICA

Summary: In January and February, demonstrations to mark the tenth anniversary of the Arab Spring and the second anniversary of the Algerian Hirak, respectively, took place to varying degrees and moods in Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria, but were notably absent in Egypt. Libya also concluded its Political Dialogue Forum in February with some surprising results.

Tunisia:

- Unresolved grievances still haunt Tunisia. In January, Tunisians protested all across the country to mark the tenth anniversary of the Arab Spring that toppled former President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, as well as in response to declining living conditions, poverty, and endemic unemployment, especially among the country's young people. Some of the demonstrations turned violent and more than 600 demonstrators were arrested.
- One DC-based Tunisian NESA alumnus who was recently in Tunisia noted that “the situation in Tunisia is incredibly and palpably tense. The country has seen some political liberalization without any real economic progress over the past 10 years. There is still a lot of dissatisfaction.”
- Mr. Hichem Mechichi, the Prime Minister (and a NESA Alumnus), has been emphatic to the protesters but insisted the law would continue to be enforced.

Algeria:

- In late-February, mass protests took place in Algiers, Kherrata, and other parts of the country to mark the second anniversary of the Hirak, which had been mostly dormant over the past year. The government attempted to portray the demonstrations as cele-

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Engagement • Education • Outreach

NESA Region Trends – NORTH AFRICA

brations, and yet, partly in response to protestor demands, President Tebboune announced:

- the dissolution of the lower house of Parliament;
 - snap legislative elections promising incentives for youth;
 - a presidential pardon for approximately 60 Hirak political detainees; and
 - a partial, although somewhat unconvincing, cabinet reshuffle, particularly targeting the Ministers of Industry, Energy, and Tourism.
- While the dissolution of Parliament is viewed by most observers as merely cosmetic, there are some signs and reports of significant internal tensions. There is increasing speculation that President Tebboune may not finish his term. According to some Algerian NESA alumni observers, however, the Algerian regime/system is still unlikely to collapse; while the Hirak remains unstructured and ideologically divided, and questions linger as to whether the protest movement is ‘back’ in any significant, sustained form beyond anniversary demonstrations.

Libya:

- On 5 February, the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) concluded with UN-hosted political talks in Geneva. The results of the LPDF were largely welcomed, although there remains ample uncertainty and skepticism about the outcome. One Libyan NESA alumnus opined on Twitter shortly thereafter that “the inclusivity strategy is destined to fail due to irreconcilable visions of the [Libyan] state and its political character.”
- On the upside, it was significant that during the five-day proceedings of the LPDF, which were broadcast live on the internet and Libyan television, no controversy arose, and the losing candidates conceded defeat.
- The actual results of the LPDF were unexpected in many corners with what could be described as “dark horse” candidate victories. It should also be emphasized that the outcome led to a caretaker government whose members cannot stand again in the December 2021 elections, and that the previous front-runners may well return.
- Tripoli saw celebratory demonstrations on 17 Feb to mark the tenth anniversary of its uprising, while Benghazi remained quiet, perhaps reflecting the country’s remaining political divisions.
- On 25 February, Libya’s UN-designated PM, Abdulhamid Dbeibeh, submitted a governing plan to the House of Representatives for approval, parts of which he discussed in a subsequent news conference:
- Although the deadline was missed to name Cabinet members, the PM stated that the Government of National Unity (GNU) would be composed of technocrats from Libya’s 3 regions;
- The GNU’s priorities are the pandemic, reconciliation, and electricity services;
- Turkey and Tunisia were singled out for praise as partners; and
- The GNU intends to honor the Nov 2019 Maritime Boundary Treaty signed between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and Turkey.
- The new executive has pledged to meet a quota of no less than 30% for women [and youth] in executive positions, but some NESA alumni expressed concerns at the PM’s initial insinuation that ‘women will have only minor roles in the cabinet’.

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- Ongoing external meddling and regional power proxy struggles, as well as recent vote-buying/bribery allegations from a Dbeibeh rival, remain a real threat to the fragile peace.

Morocco/Western Sahara:

- There is uncertainty over President Biden’s course in the Western Sahara (whether he will reverse Trump’s December 2020 announcement or not). Moroccan-Israeli bilateral relations have come to a halt until there is more clarity on the new U.S. administration’s position, and Algeria has been mostly silent in the hopes that the Biden administration will reverse course, although a reversal appears unlikely. Meanwhile, tensions have flared between the Moroccan military and the Polisario Front in the UN-buffer zones located between Morocco and Mauritania.

Egypt:

- On 11 February, a group of UN experts urged Egyptian authorities to remove two activists, Ramy Shaath and Zyad El-Elaimy, from a ‘terrorist’ list and to stop the systemic misuse of counter-terrorism powers. Experts are deeply disturbed that the anti-terrorism law, its definitions, and misuse by the Egyptian authorities undermines broader international efforts to prevent terrorism and support the rule of law. Also of concern is the increasingly broad use of such methods.

Sahel:

- G5 Sahel Summit (15 to 16 February 2021):
 - President Emmanuel Macron pledged to keep French troops in the Sahel region of western Africa to help to “decapitate” Al-Qaeda-linked insurgent groups that local governments are struggling to hold back.
 - Operation Barkhane has never been this unpopular. A poll conducted in early January 2021 by the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP) revealed that 51% of France’s population no longer support military intervention in the Sahel. Echoing public concerns, the National Assembly and Senate called for debates on the country’s role in the Sahel. This was just days before a meeting of the leaders of the Group of Five Sahel countries (G5 Sahel) on 15 and 16 February in N’Djamena, Chad.
 - Many Sahelians – especially Malians – don’t understand why Barkhane’s mandate focuses on counterterrorism and not the protection of civilians.
 - On a related note, USAFRICOM is also studying AFRICOM’s military size and future role in Africa.

Visit www.NESA-Center.org for additional information.

NESA Programs & Events

Executive Seminar (February 1–11, 2021)

Dr. Gawdat Bahgat led the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies Executive Seminar on Global Power Competition (GPC). More than 80 foreign service and military officers from the United States and 26 other countries participated in the virtual seminar. To address this complex topic, the NESA Center brought in speakers from a multitude of backgrounds, ranging from think tanks to bureaucratic agencies to military, to discuss the topic of “**Development in a Period of Great Power Competition**” in a Senior Executive Seminar (SES).

<https://nesa-center.org/executive-seminar-global-power-competition>

Washington Seminar (February 11, 2021)

A joint session Washington Seminar (and the Executive Seminar) was held on the last day where foreign diplomats in Washington, DC joined the other participants. Two senior former U.S. diplomats spoke on United States foreign policy under the Biden Administration.



Speakers from top left, Dr. Gawdat Bahgat, Dr. Roger Kangas, LTG (Ret.) Terry Wolff, Dr. Frank Hoffman, Dr. Richard Russell, Mr. Jeffrey Payne, Dr. Steven Kramer, COL (Ret.) David Lamm, Dr. David Dollar, Ms. Jeanne Pryor, Dr. Jeni Klugman, Ms. Olivia Enos, Ambassador Ali Jalali, Dr. Thomas Lynch III, Mr. David Des Roches, Dr. Michael Sharnoff, Ambassador (Ret.) Anne W. Patterson, Dr. Fiona Hill

NESA Faculty & Staff Engagement

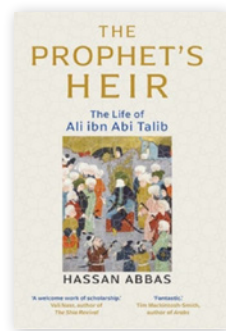
Dr. Hassan Abbas



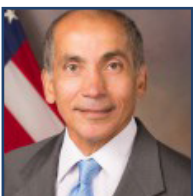
February 18, 2021 – Panelist at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) for a discussion on **Biden’s Foreign Policy Approach Towards the Middle East**. <https://bulletinobserver.com/2021/02/19/bidens-foreign-policy-approach-towards-the-middle-east>

February 18, 2021 – Published an article titled “**Extremism and Terrorism Trends in Pakistan: Changing Dynamics and New Challenges**,” in West Point’s CTC Sentinel. The article offers a detailed assessment about extremism trends in Pakistan. <https://ctc.usma.edu/extremism-and-terrorism-trends-in-pakistan-changing-dynamics-and-new-challenges>

February 25, 2021 – Dr. Hassan Abbas’ book launch for “**The Prophet’s Heir: The Life of Ali ibn Abi Talib**” (Yale University Press, March, 2021) by Harvard University’s Weatherhead Center for International Relations (Shiism and Global Affairs Project) had around 375 attendees.



Dr. Gawdat Bahgat



February 16, 2021 – Published an op-ed in Gulf International Forum titled “**The Iran Nuclear Deal: American-Iranian Dialogue and the GCC**”. Dr. Bahgat argues that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states cannot afford to be bystanders.

Rather, they should use their good relations with the United States to de-escalate the tension with Iran. <https://gulff.org/the-iran-nuclear-deal-american-iranian-dialogue-and-the-gcc>

February 17, 2021 – Dr. Gawdat Bahgat published an op-ed in Middle East Eye titled, “**Why Iran is determined to develop its missile programme**.” He explains why region-

al powers need to negotiate a new security architecture and to acknowledge each other’s legitimate concerns. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-iran-determined-develop-its-missile-programme>

David Des Roches



February 3, 2021 – Discussed U.S. policies towards Yemen and sanctions on the Houthis at a roundtable held by the Washington Center for Yemeni Studies. <https://youtu.be/yuaJT1O-K6c>

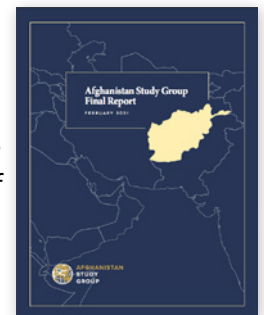
February 4, 2021 – Participated in the latest iteration of the **Middle East Institute’s Cyber Working Group**, a two-year old initiative of which he is a founding member.

Ali Ahmad Jalali



February 3, 2021 – Professor Ali Ahmad Jalali was a Senior Advisor (from April 2020 to February 2021) and contributed to the study for the “**Afghan Study Group Final Report**” which was sponsored by USIP.

The report concluded that there is a real opportunity to align U.S. policies, actions, and messaging behind achieving a durable peace settlement to end four decades of violent conflict in Afghanistan. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/02/afghanistan-study-group-final-report-pathway-peace-afghanistan>



February 12, 2021 – Was the featured speaker at an hour long program of Kabul News TV for a comprehensive discussion on dimensions of peace and conflict in Afghanistan as the new U.S. Administration reviews its Afghan policy. https://youtu.be/pyp_il7pAjo

NESA Faculty & Staff Engagement

February 23, 2021 – Professor Ali Ahmad Jalali was a guest speaker at the Westminster Institute in Virginia. The event was moderated by the President of the Institute, Robert Riley. Ali Ahmad Jalali presented for about one hour on the topic of **“Is there a Pathway to Peace in Afghanistan?”** with a 30 minute question and answer. <https://westminster-institute.org/events/a-new-pathway-to-peace-in-afghanistan>

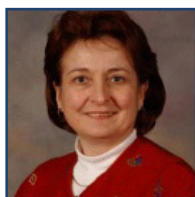
Dr. Roger Kangas



February 26, 2021 – Dean Roger Kangas participated in the **Senior Advisory and Editorial Board Meeting of the Near East Policy Forum**, which is a research center at the Australian National University (ANU), located in Canberra,

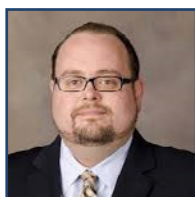
Australia. The objective of the meeting was to provide a development strategy for this independent organization to address the policy needs of the Australian government and its partners and allies – specifically those that relate to North Africa, the Levant, the Gulf, and Central Asia.

Anne Moisan



February 1–12, 2021 – After conducting the first-ever **Women, Peace, and Security add-on workshop** with women attending the Executive Seminar 02-21 continued over the two-week program to reinforce, support, and mentor the

women from the region. The women were also invited to provide a short video or essay for a possible on-line book that Professor Moisan has been working on to capture relevant yet personalized WPS efforts in their countries.



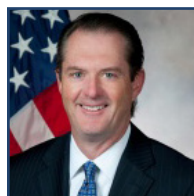
Jeffrey S. Payne

February 1, 2021 – Along with two others, Jeff Payne, created the **IOR Bulletin**, which went live this month. The bulletin facilitates the exchange of current and

ongoing research and to connect experts interested in the Indian Ocean Region. <https://www.iorbuletin.com>

February 11, 2021 – Nick Iorio, Louis Bergeron, and Jeff Payne published **“The U.S. Needs a New Indian Ocean Strategy, Now”** with The Diplomat. The article highlights that it’s time to prioritize the “Indo” in “Indo-Pacific.” <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/the-us-needs-a-new-indian-ocean-strategy-now>

Richard Russell



February 25, 2021 – Richard Russell gave a lecture on **“U.S. National Security Agenda Takes Shape Under the Biden Administration”** to a group of Florida business professionals. Other speakers on the program included

CENTCOM commander Frank McKenzie, SOCOM Commander Richard Clarke, and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown.

Richard Wiersema



February 1–3, 2021 – Taught **Strategic Crisis Management** to 60+ Saudi War Course students (with Colonel and Brigadier rank) and faculty.

February 17, 2021 – Presented a proposal along with Dr. Jack Midgley to Lebanese Armed Forces G-5 for planning and design support to their National Defense College project.

NESA Alumni Activities & Contributions

February 2021 – The Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks (COSATT) and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung released a joint publication, entitled, “**Security and Economic Challenges in the Indo-Pacific**”. Various NESA alumni contributed chapters, including:

- **D. Suba Chandran (India)**, “India and the Indo-Pacific: Ideas, Strategies and Challenges.”
- **AKM Abdur Rahman (Bangladesh)**, “Changing Balance of Power in the Indo-Pacific Region: Challenges for Bangladesh.”
- **Shafqat Munir (Bangladesh)**, “The Indo-Pacific Strategy: Opportunities for Regional Institutions in South Asia.”
- **Geeta Madhavan (India)**, “India and the Indo-Pacific Strategy.”

http://www.cosatt.org/uploads/news/file/FInal%20Indo-Pacific%20Book_20210101123626.pdf

February 2021 – **Asanga Abeyagoonasekera (Sri Lanka)** published a book, entitled, “**Conundrum of an Island: Sri Lanka’s Geopolitical Challenges**.” <https://www.amazon.com/Conundrum-Island-Lankas-Geopolitical-Challenges/dp/9811227845>

February 2021 – **Ghazi Ben Ahmed (Tunisia)** published an article, entitled, “**Mobility in the Mediterranean: Refocusing EuroMed relations on work, vocational training and mobility**,” for the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Global Governance Programme. https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/70235/RSC%20PP%202021_01.pdf

February 2021 – **Uttam Kumar Sinha (India)** published an article for The Nationalist, entitled, “**India’s Arctic Approach: Not so far and away anymore**.” (pages 18–20): <https://www.spmrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Nationalist-January-February-2021.pdf>

February 2021 – **Uttam Kumar Sinha (India)** published a book, entitled, “**Indus Basin Uninterrupted: A History of Territory and Politics from Alexander to Nehru**.” <https://penguin.co.in/book/indus-basin-uninterrupted>

February 2021 – **Shanthie D’Souza (India)** co-authored an article, entitled, “**What if the Afghan Peace Process**

Fails?,” for ISPSW-Berlin. https://www.ispsw.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/744_DSouza_Weinbaum.pdf

February 2, 2021 – **Asanga Abeyagoonasekera (Sri Lanka)** was interviewed on StratNewsGlobal on a segment entitled, “**Terminal Trouble: India-Sri Lanka Ties Under Strain?**” https://youtu.be/4rtap_Mx4P0

February 5, 2021 – **Zine Labidine Ghebouli (Algeria)** published a Policy Analysis for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy’s Fikra Forum, entitled, “**Algeria’s Political Crisis: An Ongoing Vicious Cycle**.” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/algerias-political-crisis-ongoing-vicious-cycle>

February 8, 2021 – **Emadeddin Badi (Libya)** co-authored a thought piece for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, entitled, “**Agree to Disagree: Libya’s New Unity Government**.” <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/83839>

February 16, 2021 – **Asanga Abeyagoonasekera (Sri Lanka)** published an analysis for the Observer Research Foundation, entitled, “**Bandwagoning with China: Geopolitics of a container terminal in Sri Lanka**.” <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/bandwagoning-china-geopolitics-container-terminal-srilanka>

February 16, 2021 – **Hala Bugaighis (Libya)** co-authored an analysis for Chatham House, entitled, “**Can Libya’s New Interim Government Break the Impasse?**” <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/can-libyas-new-interim-government-break-impasse>

February 16, 2021 – **Emadeddin Badi (Libya)** published a commentary for The Institute for International Political Studies – ISPI (Italy), entitled, “**Libya: Ten Years of Compounding Security Sector Hybridity**.” <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/libya-ten-years-compounding-security-sector-hybridity-29251>

February 17, 2021 – **Emadeddin Badi (Libya)** authored an analysis for The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, entitled, “**A decade on, Libya’s revolutionary hopes are**

NESA Alumni Activities & Contributions

smouldering ashes set to ignite.” <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/a-decade-on-libyas-revolutionary-hopes-are-smouldering-ashes-set-to-ignite>

February 17, 2021 – Asanga Abeyagoonasekera (Sri Lanka) published an article in The Print, entitled, “In Sri Lanka, unions speaking geopolitics, Rajapaksa govt adopting protectionism.” <https://theprint.in/opinion/in-sri-lanka-unions-speaking-geopolitics-rajapaksa-govt-adopting-protectionism/606138>

February 18, 2021 – Saban Kardas (Turkey) published an article, entitled, “Revisionism and Resecuritization of Turkey’s Middle East Policy: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation,” in the Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19448953.2021.1888250>

February 19, 2021 – Antonia Dimou (Greece) published an article for Modern Diplomacy, entitled, “Lebanon and Syria: A Complicated Relationship between Energy and Geopolitics.” <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/02/19/lebanon-and-syria-a-complicated-relationship-between-energy-and-geopolitics>

February 22, 2021 – The Sadeq Institute published an edited volume, entitled, “Libya: The Great Game,” edited by NESA alumnus, Anas El Gomati (Libya) and including

chapters by various NESA alumni, including:

- **Yahia Zoubir (Algeria):** “Algeria: Preventing Chaos.”
- **Habib M. Sayah (Tunisia):** “Tunisia: Between Diplomatic Doctrine and Revolutionary Reality.”

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5eeb7ecb8c133f2d5ead8f9c/t/603423b83f836409197ee309/1614029766855/The+Great+Game+.pdf>

February 25, 2021 – Steven Blockmans (Belgium) co-authored a study, entitled, “Balkan and Eastern European Comparisons: Building a New Momentum for the European integration of the Balkan and Eastern European associated states.” <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/balkan-and-eastern-european-comparisons>

February 25, 2021 – Antonia Dimou (Greece) published an article for Modern Diplomacy, entitled, “Jordan, Israel, and Palestine in Quest of Solving the Energy Conundrum.” <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/02/25/jordan-israel-and-palestine-in-quest-of-solving-the-energy-conundrum/>

February 25, 2021 – Zine Labidine Ghebouli (Algeria) published a book chapter in Arabic for the American University of Beirut’s Asfari Institute on “Documenting the Algerian Protest Movement.” (page 80) http://www.activearabvoices.org/uploads/8/0/8/4/80849840/3rdpublication_ar_-_v.1.1-digital.pdf

NESA Upcoming Events

Eastern Mediterranean Roundtable | March 22, 2021 | Virtual

Tunisian NDI Seminar | March 24–25, 2021 | Virtual

NESA Senior Executive Seminar | March 29, 2021–April 2, 2021 | Virtual

Iraq NDC Discussion | March 31, 2021 | Virtual

Lebanese Armed Forces Staff College Visit | April 6–10, 2021 | Virtual

Community Oriented Policing & CVE Introduction Session | April 6, 2021 | Virtual

Washington Embassy Orientation | April 8, 2021 | Virtual

Bay of Bengal Workshop | April 27–29, 2021 | Virtual

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