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USCENTCOM

*COMBINED STRATEGIC ANALYSIS GROUP
(CSAG)*

Strategic Estimate 2021

May 2021

Combined Strategic Analysis Group – CCJ5-G – USCENTCOM

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FOREWORD

The Coalition Strategic Analysis Group (CSAG) is a unique organization. Charged with providing 'unvarnished advice' to the Commander and Staff, it leverages its vastly experienced and diverse international membership to provide different perspectives, challenge perceptions, and provide a counter-view for planners and commanders within United States Central Command.

The Annual Strategic Estimate is one of the principal mechanisms for doing so. By reviewing the last year, the CSAG draws on open source (and, therefore, unclassified) reporting to generate conclusions and recommendations for the coming period. I do not intend to rehearse the significant events of the period here as they were numerous and complex; suffice it to say that the situation in the Central Region continued to evolve at a high tempo. But there are certainly themes and patterns of behavior that have endured, that bear consideration as we plan for the future and which CSAG officers have analyzed within this document.

We do not expect that many will read what follows from cover to cover, but anticipate more selective reading of those sections and chapters that are of particular interest. Either way, we would welcome comment and feedback through the administrative team or direct to the authors, whose details are included at the end of each section. Finally, we encourage you to engage CSAG members in your work, to provide a different perspective and to challenge your thinking.

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INTRODUCTION

USCENTCOM CCJ5 Combined Strategic Analysis Group (CSAG) produces a yearly, forward looking AOR Strategic Estimate for Commander USCENTCOM and staff. This Estimate is the 48th since 2003. The previous Estimate was released on 4 May 2020. The May 2021 Estimate is current as of 27 April 2021.

The Estimate draws together the perspectives of the nineteen international officers currently supporting the CSAG and includes insights for how other countries might interpret US actions in the AOR. These assessments may differ from those produced elsewhere in the headquarters and are not necessarily unanimous perspectives. The assessments capture the diverse views of the CSAG in accordance with the CSAG charter of providing “unvarnished advice from an international perspective.” Readers may note different styles and tones, reflective of different nationalities and languages.

The aim of the Estimate is to present a current assessment of the AOR and provide USCENTCOM with relevant implications and opportunities to pre-empt and/or address developing issues. It supports the USCENTCOM Theater Strategy and Theater Campaign plan.

The Estimate is not exhaustive on the issues across the AOR but intends to inform about the most significant factors in the twenty AOR countries. This assessment will describe the influence from external actors through political, economic, security/military, societal, environmental, and non-state domains. Where applicable, analysis within this Estimate was conducted in the context of USCENTCOM priorities:

Strategic

1. *Deterring Iran*
2. *Resolving Conflict in Afghanistan*
3. *Maintain D-ISIS Campaign Continuity*
4. *Competition with China and Russia*

Functional

5. *Developing Counter-UAS Capabilities*
6. *ISIS Detainees & Radicalization of IDPs*

The Estimate contains two sections:

1. The Middle East and Central Asia South Asia Branch Chiefs highlight the most significant developments in the AOR since the last Estimate.
2. Main body: an assessment of each AOR Country and internal/external influences.

CSAG uses the SWOT model (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to analyze the countries in the AOR. This model allows for a structured method for assessing the four elements of stability **from the perspective of the country/entity government, and/or its people**. The current situation is described in the “strengths and weaknesses,” while “opportunities and threats” project current trends into the future. Each section closes with recommendations for the US and CENTCOM.

The data in the national statistics chart was sourced from the International Monetary Fund website, World Population Review, and Global Firepower as a standardized sourcing method. Referenced CSAG ‘Strategy Papers’ and ‘Snapshots’ are available on the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies website at <https://nesa-center.org/category/centcom-csag-papers/> and via CENTCOM CCJ5 CSAG SIPR and NIPR SharePoint sites at:

http://rel.centcom.smil.mil/sites/ccj5/G_DIV

<http://pcent.centcom.mil/sites/ccj5/ccj5-g/pages/home.asp>

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Disclaimer

**The opinions and conclusions expressed herein
are those of the international officers
within the Combined Strategic Analysis Group (CSAG)
and do not necessarily reflect the views of United States Central Command,
nor of the nations represented within the CSAG,
nor any other government agency.**

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CSAG STRATEGIC ESTIMATE 2021

SECTION ONE



Significant Developments in the AOR since the Previous Estimate

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Political, diplomatic, economic, and military developments in the Middle East over the past 12 months are contrasted with regard to CENTCOM's strategic and functional priorities. Noting the recent elevation of "Competition with Russia and China" as a strategic priority, it reflects CSAG's long standing perspective on Great Power Competition (GPC). GPC is an overarching paradigm that transcends through all of the priorities. The CENTCOM Area Of responsibility (AOR) is definitely one of the most recognizable and prominent battlespaces and arenas of GPC with the US with Russia and China being the primary external competitors.

Deterring Iran

It is undeniable that the Trump administration can be credited with the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, with the tacit agreement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the first two. Thus, this initiative contributes to making the region more stable and implicitly seems to support the idea of constituting a front against the main threat represented by Iran and its remote-controlled militias such as Hezbollah, the Houthis, the PMF, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

How effective the determining role of the US was in the discussions of these normalization agreements during 2020 remains to be confirmed in the future with the new Biden administration (See Section 2.2). Continuing brokering with potential new candidate Arab countries in the region (such as Oman) but also contributing to the practical implementation of the Abraham agreements already signed: recognition of Western Sahara by the US for Morocco, cancellation of the financial debt for Sudan, and the acquisition of fifth generation fighters, drones, and surface-to-air defense systems for the others.

In contrast, it should be noted that this "Realpolitik" does not reflect the aspirations of the governed peoples. Numerous protests in the region and in countries that have normalized their relations with Israel have shown that the people's support for the Palestinian cause and for a two-state solution appears unwavering.

Late January, the Biden administration announced a review of Foreign Military Sales to UAE and KSA in addition to stop supporting the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen (See Sections 2.20, 2.24, and 2.25). The last announcements are likely to slow normalization dynamics at the political level.

The Pentagon's decision to modify the Unified Command Plan by moving Israel from the area of responsibility of USEUCOM to that of USCENTCOM is likely to contribute positively to CENTCOM's top priority (See Section 2.11). If the tangible consequences of this new situation for CENTCOM, its allies and its partners in the region will surely not be visible before the second half of 2021, in terms of perception, Iran must see this strategic movement as a harbinger of increased military coordination among countries designating it as the major destabilizing threat in the region.

The recent developments listed above seem to positively affect CENTCOM's top strategic priority. Nevertheless, over the past 12 months, other events observed in the region seem to contrast the picture. First, the campaign of maximum pressure accentuated with the establishment of unilateral sanctions against Iran after the lifting of some by the international community in October 2020 does not seem to have obtained the desired results (See Section 2.9).

In addition, the change in foreign policy of the new US administration in the Middle East with the stated desire for a return to multilateralism, while respecting the principles of Rules-Based Order, should adjust the level of pressure and lower it, especially if the US are returning to the JCPOA.

Besides, the 25-year contract signed between Iran and China in September 2020 is likely to limit the number of countries actively deterring Iran as economic and trade relations with China are so important (See Sections 2.5 and 2.9). (To deter Iran for a country is to run the risk of seeing its relations with China deteriorate.)

Finally, the reduction of US troops in Iraq also seems to negatively affect CENTCOM's major strategic priority. How difficult it was to fight Iranian influence, politically and economically, as well as in the defense sector with a military footprint of 3,000 US troops, it will inevitably be more difficult if the number of soldiers which will gradually be reduced (See Section 2.10).

Maintain D-ISIS Campaign Continuity

Undoubtedly, the gradual withdrawal of US troops from Iraq is likely to negatively affect USCENTCOM's third strategic priority. However, Iraqi security forces succeeded in conducting successful operations on very-high-value targets (Daesh leadership).

The new Biden Administration has not questioned the Trump Administration's decision to reduce the US military footprint in Iraq and its practical implementation over the past 10 months. The withdrawal therefore seems irreversible. It implies that now the Iraqi security forces (ISF) have reached a degree of autonomy deemed sufficient to lead the campaign to defeat ISIS on its soil. The remaining US forces within the Coalition (Operation Inherent resolve) are fulfilling their role as concurrent forces, supporting the operations of the Iraqi security forces, but no longer fighting directly alongside them. However, the latest quarterly report from the Inspector General of the OIR mission (July - September 2020) qualifies the “long-awaited” autonomy of Iraqi forces. The document specifies that while it is undeniable that the Iraqi security forces are able to plan and then conduct large-scale land operations to hunt and then destroy Daesh cells in the north and north-west of the country, the absence of control of operational processes and that of critical capacities limits the effectiveness of the effects sought in the campaign against Daesh (See Section 2.10).

Regarding the campaign against Daesh in Syria, we should first note how little open sources information is available to assess and analyze it. The vast majority of Daesh attacks focus on government forces, democratic forces and also Russian forces. As far as Daesh is concerned, the organization has been gaining a foothold over the past 10 months, in areas of northeastern Syria as well as in northern and northwestern Iraq. The terrorist attack of January 26, 2021 in Baghdad shows that Daesh is once again capable of planning, preparing and carrying out large-scale and coordinated terrorist attacks (See Sections 2.10 and 2.21).

The intangible fields of Cyber space for spreading propaganda, for carrying out influence and psychological operations are widely used by Daesh. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic appear to be helping the organization achieve its propaganda and recruitment goals. The lockdowns imposed by states to stem the spread of the virus have further exposed the target population by Daesh to screens (including computers and smartphones). The more these young people, some already vulnerable, stay connected, the more likely they are to be recruited by Daesh.

It is an imperative that the idea of exerting continuous and permeant pressure on Daesh must be nested within the continuity of the D-ISIS campaign. The Iraqi security forces and the various forces in Syria supported, all or part, by the Coalition through Operation Inherent Resolve, therefore have an obligation to maintain sufficient pressure on Daesh. While this remains a constant challenge in Iraq, it appears to be increasingly difficult to achieve in Syria. Moreover, under Russian pressure, the government of Bashar Al-Assad now seems to be making the reconstruction of the country its priority (See Section 2.21).

Another challenge is that of foreign fighters imprisoned in camps within Syria and Iraq. In the Syrian-Iraqi zone, there are 2,000, mainly in the camps of the Syrian Democratic Forces, and 10,000 members of their families are distributed in refugee camps. There is a major requirement, which according to the international community and several partners do not take seriously enough, to repatriate these combatants and their families, to judge them if necessary, and especially to allow their reintegration and rehabilitation. A “doomsday scenario” would be one in which the children of these combatants, radicalized in the camps, would return to their countries of origin by their own means, without benefiting from support by their State of origin, and could then constitute a

threat. One might say that although the US, and other countries like Kazakhstan, have been very active on this subject, other partners are still too unwilling.

Competition with China and Russia

Russian and Chinese encroachments on Middle-East are more visible over the last 12 months. Iran could be considered as the very country in CENTCOM AOR where GPC is the most prevalent. Therefore, assuming that “Deterring IRAN” will remain the top priority, CENTCOM’s contribution to GPC is likely to grow.

The recent deal between Russia, China and Iran, of which the first visible manifestation could be the Chinese presence at the Chabahar port, in the Gulf of Oman, will create opportunities for Beijing to exploit a new path to Europe and Africa, and push further with the Belt and Road Initiative (See Section 2.5). Following the most recent developments in Caucasus, Moscow now has greater direct access and more opportunities to interact with Iran. From a strategic perspective, Iran has “moved closer” into Russia’s near neighborhood (See Section 2.3).

In Syria, Russia maintains an important military footprint through land, air and sea bases (Tartous port). Militarily, the Russian forces are fighting Daesh and are making it known. Politically, the recent decision of President Bashar-al-Assad to reduce the Syrian armed forces seems to herald a new phase of reconstruction in the country, or at least in the areas controlled by the loyalist armed forces. This important decision seems to have been proposed by the Kremlin who, after having made efforts, now want to reap benefits in the ‘juicy’ reconstruction market (See Section 2.21).

China is influencing the culture of people in the Middle East: an increased population is enrolled in a class or self-studying Chinese language and there are increased cultural exchange programs between China and countries in the Middle East, unlike the US, which banned immigration from countries in the region in 2020. The economic and health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to further increase the influence of China in the region (See Sections 2.5, 2.8, 2.24, and 2.20).

Developing Counter-UAS Capabilities

The KSA was directly targeted by bombing Aramco facilities, which posed a threat to the global economy as a whole. Since the beginning of the war, it is estimated that the Houthi rebel militia have launched more than 250 ballistic missiles and 550 drones towards the cities of the KSA and Civilian targets.

An upsurge in drone attacks (230 drones) has been observed over the past 10 months in the Arabian Peninsula. The attacks on Saudi Arabia from Yemen and those inside Yemen have intensified. These attacks led by the Houthis are now mostly coordinated with those of tactical ballistic missiles maximizing devastating effects. Iranian-backed militias continue to enjoy a reliable supply of weapons from Tehran.

The decision taken by the Biden Administration to remove the Houthis from the list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) has apparently contributed to a resurgence of attacks in recent weeks, both against Saudi infrastructure but also in the battle of Marib.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is on the defensive after Washington downgraded the alliance and limited arms sales. The Biden administration issued a warning beginning of March to its allies in the Middle East not to oppose US policies and not to seek military solutions to the region's problems. Saudi Arabia may find itself unable to defend itself against Houthi threats, she relies directly on American weapons to ward off Houthi threats. US Patriot system missiles and airborne missiles are the best available defenses to these threats. It is normal that KSA should search for alternatives, including developing its relationship with Russia and China if the US continues its policy towards its strategic ally in the region.

ISIS Detainees & Radicalization of IDPs

Regarding the CENTCOM's second functional priority, several important elements have been noted over the past 12 months. These elements are likely to negatively affect this priority. As a reminder, CENTCOM's area of responsibility has the largest number of internally displaced persons and refugees: almost a third of the overall total in the world, or about 22 million people.

12 months ago, it was established that displaced people and refugees faced the same health threat from COVID-19 as the populations of host countries. However, the over-population combined with poor sanitary conditions were aggravating factors. Now, while national vaccination campaigns have started since the end of the year in certain countries within the area of responsibility of USCENTCOM (UAE, KSA, Kuwait, Qatar) and new variants of the virus make it more transmissible, it appears that displaced people and refugees are the last to receive the vaccine and that managing the virus in the camps is proving difficult. The closure of camps and the transfer of these populations to other camps or to their region of origin also poses a real health challenge that the host countries must meet (See Section 2.10). Admittedly, many countries have pledged World Health Organization (WHO) funds to ensure access to the vaccine to as many people as possible. However, the current low production of vaccines and the competition between states to procure enough do not support widespread dissemination of the vaccine in the coming months.

The factors previously mentioned are not likely to improve a particularly worrying general situation in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula. Certainly, the new Biden administration has announced the return of the US to WHO. Once effective, this return will allow governmental and non-governmental organizations to work to improve the humanitarian situation in the region. Moreover, the Biden Administration nullified the designation of the Houthis as a terrorist group by the former administration prior to President Biden's Inauguration Day. This move appears to prevent the work of humanitarian organizations making it more difficult in the area controlled by the Houthis, which is home to 70% of Yemenis (See Section 2.26). No positive development is to be noted concerning the Syrian refugees (5.6 M) dispersed in camps in neighboring countries. Some of these countries are facing either a major crisis like Lebanon or recurrent economic difficulties like Iraq. The funding necessary for the proper management of camps for refugees as well as for displaced persons is less and less available. Sometimes, the host country closes the camp - around 40 camps, mostly comprising women and their children, are gradually being closed in Iraq. The Iraqi government says that the closure of the camps is decided when the conditions for return to the areas of origin are met: securing areas empty of terrorist groups.

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIAN STATES

US foreign policy towards Central Asian States (CAS) revolves around the diplomatic platform (C5 + 1) on which the entire region is viewed as one entity rather than as individual states. Regardless of the common threats and opportunities that the region as a whole face the competing interests between the CAS, the different thinking of the political leadership in the region and the different desire to open the respective countries to the world, especially in the economic field, vary. Uzbekistan is more open to international economic, diplomatic and security cooperation. Its multi-vector foreign policy aims to maintain the balance. Kyrgyzstan has a completely different character and is still unstable. Kazakhstan has a multi-vector approach concerning investments and engagements, and leans towards Russia to maintain the balance. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have more reactive policies. However, they all focus on exporting their energy resources. All CAS are interested in using their natural resources to develop their diverse markets the differ in size, capabilities and capacities.

Competition with China and Russia

In addition, the US faces increasing competition in the region from Russia and China, both of whom vie for power and influence through a combination of diplomatic, military, and economic means. This adds another layer of tension and instability to an already complex and challenging region. In 2020, Russia and China took advantage of the regional crises, financial and infrastructure needs, perceptions of declining engagements in the US, and the opportunities created by COVID-19 to advance their goals in the Middle East. In Central and South Asian countries, Russia is trying to undermine and disrupt US influence and to restore its own identity as a world power in order to gain a foothold in the region or to make them dependent on Moscow as much as possible.

While Russian engagement with regional partners will remain largely transactional and opportunistic, Moscow's larger strategic goals in the region include strengthening its global power status, combating US influence and expanding its own influence in the region (See section 2.3 RUS Influence in the AOR).

China's current interests in the region are largely economic. China currently imports nearly 50% of its crude oil from the region and continues to cultivate trade relationships, economic investment and extensive partnerships between regional states. China is using its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to expand Chinese influence and presence within the AOR (See Section 2.5 CHN Influence in the AOR).

A broader and most common driver of instability in the region is the threat from violent extremist organizations or VEOs. The threat comes from several different groups across the region, but none is as widespread and global as ISIS and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Resolving Conflict in Afghanistan

The security situation in Afghanistan is fragile and the failure of an integrative political solution is likely to lead to a severely deteriorated security situation giving the VEOs space to gain influence. The Taliban are growing in strength both diplomatically and militarily, and the public are in favor of the Taliban. It is becoming increasingly difficult to bring them to the negotiation table. Given the US's intention to end the war in Afghanistan, the US-Taliban peace agreement and the intra-Afghan negotiations presented an historic opportunity. The opportunity must not be missed and peace must be sought through the active participation of the US in the negotiations. The US must use its leverage with the Afghan government and the Taliban to move the process forward and proactively protect the process from spoilers rather than just dealing with the conflict (See Section 2.6 Afghanistan).

US-Pakistan relations over the years have centered heavily on mil-mil relations in support of the Pakistani military. Pakistan has consistently been a key member of US-led Combined Maritime Forces and consistently steps up to lead the combined task forces that conduct maritime security operations throughout the region. Pakistan is absolutely critical owe to its location next to Afghanistan, because Pakistan plays a critical role for the ongoing Afghanistan peace talks, which has been stalled for months in terms of the relation between the US and Pakistan (See Section 2.18 Pakistan).

Uzbekistan consolidates its economic prosperity by reaching its neighbors through connectivity and trade projects with South Asia and the Middle East via Afghanistan. To achieve the goal, the country is likely to have a more dynamic foreign policy. However, the cardinals of its current foreign policy - broad engagement and multi-vector approach - are unlikely to change, until an external power (i.e. the Russian Federation) decides to interfere with this. Improved transparency, improved accountability, less corruption and improved human rights are indicators of the correct strategic direction. The positive developments need to be supported instead of putting

pressure on the country to accelerate reforms. The mil-to-mil cooperation and support will help develop long-term leverage and achieve the US goals in Afghanistan (See Section 2.25 Uzbekistan).

Kazakhstan (See Section 2.13) continues to pursue its multi-vector policy and remains one of the most stable countries in Central Asia. The domestic politics is influenced by the dominance of the ruling party, the lack of real opposition, restrictions on freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and access to information.

Since COVID-19 Kyrgyzstan's economy has significantly decreased and external debts are now over 60% of GDP. Kyrgyzstan will hold parliamentary elections in June 2021, which could change the political balance in the country again. Kyrgyzstan is also the most exposed of the five CAS to Chinese direct influence and expansion (See section 2.15).

The economy in Tajikistan remains in crisis. Despite the measures taken by the Tajik authorities, the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the economy will be significant. In particular, the flow of remittances from Tajik workers to Russia has decreased significantly, regional trade has stopped and world commodity prices are low, depriving the country of additional resources (See Section 2.22 Tajikistan).

The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, falling gas prices and increasing violence in neighboring Afghanistan are threats that are forcing the Turkmen government to rethink its neutrality policy. Resolving these problems and the country's troubled economy requires stability, which the Turkmen authorities believe is easier to achieve with international assistance (See Section 2.23 Turkmenistan).

In a nutshell, economic integration and infrastructural developments are the cornerstones of CAS engagements. Afghanistan plays an important role in the connectivity and economic ambitions of CAS, less so to Kyrgyzstan, which is still not receptive to global connectivity. The expansion of the BRI through CAS is essential to Chinese ambitions. Pakistan is absolutely critical because of its position alongside Afghanistan and the opportunity to provide China the shortest waterborne, relatively safe connection to the Middle East. The Russian influence, the changing geopolitical environment, and the need for economic integration are likely to push the CAS towards China. There is no military threat to the sovereignty of the CAS. However, radicalization and proliferation of VEOs can destabilize the region. It is extremely important that lines of communication remain open at the mil-to-mil level. Central Asian States might also suffer significantly from any possible split/conflict between Russia and China.

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SECTION TWO



Assessment of Influences from the AOI and of the Countries in USCENTCOM AOR

2.1 DAESH AND VEOs WITHIN CENTCOM AOR

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strong transnational and compelling ideology b. Adaptable command and control structure, can control all organizational and administrative aspects of the Caliphate, resilient to new leaders' appointment c. Leadership is easily replaceable, and power is shared within leadership, Strong power held in the hand of the organization’s number two d. In-depth knowledge of the area and robust networks of sleeper cells and militants e. Combat hardened fighters with a consolidated experience of guerrilla warfare f. Improved unmanned aerial systems (UAS) capabilities g. Social media propaganda with technologically advanced computer skills capable of spreading a pseudo-religious and sectarian message entrusted to the Caliphate's Militants h. Effective and evolving strategic communication i. Global and active network of sleeper cells, foreign fighters, and lone wolves j. Available financial resources, especially thanks to cryptocurrency and block chain mesh networks k. Strong resilience and ability to rapidly exploit security gaps, social tensions, ungoverned spaces l. Operational management is almost completely entrusted to former senior army personnel m. A large number of Organized Islamic Extremism inside Sunni tribes guarantees internal force 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Loss of physical caliphate across Syria and Iraq, with degraded ability to control new territories b. Enormous losses in fighters, planners, experienced members c. Recent loss of important (oil) revenues and resources despite significant cash available d. Uncertainty surrounding the new caliph, with a possible erosion of internal cohesion e. Degraded lines of communication f. Declining propaganda quality g. Rival Islamist groups
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Absence of strong state authority; Syria and Iraq already heavily destabilized provinces b. Recruitment improving in Libya, in some African states, in Egypt's Sinai, and in regions of the Caucasus where the government is weak c. COVID-19 pandemic consequences in terms of economic recession and the cessation of military operations (kinetic and training) d. Political and economic instability, as well as ethnic and sectarian tension throughout the Central Region e. The US maximum pressure campaign will impact US credibility in the AOR 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improved sharing of resources and intelligence among the D-Daesh partners b. Improved global mechanisms to intercept funding sources c. Enhanced counter-terrorism and lethal capabilities of Coalition-trained local security forces d. Infighting with competing VEOs (AQ/HTS/Taliban) e. Alignment of Iran, Russia and US-led Coalition's objectives to eradicate VEOs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. Humanitarian crises, new influx of refugees, dire conditions and radicalization in IDP and refugee camps g. Withdrawal of US troops from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan; perception of diminished US commitment to the AOR h. Foreign fighters and growing sleeper cells in North and Central Africa, as well as in Central and South Asia i. Waning coalition coherence and fatigue within the D-Daesh coalition j. Vulnerable cyberspace and social media platforms 	
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG’s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>	

Executive Summary

Daesh is an armed extremist group which utilizes acts of violence and propaganda to achieve their political purposes. They follow an asymmetric modus operandi to foster the disparity between military and political strength. Daesh has left behind territorial defeats through reorganization and adaptation. It has regained balance by spreading to many other areas and regaining tactical capabilities. In 2021, Daesh may launch a new phase of strong actions aimed at urban centers and centers of government power. In territories previously under Daesh control in Iraq and Syria, it is estimated they have approximately 10,000¹ active fighters. A prolonged insurgency in the desert and rural areas is being pursued and maintained by ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. The experience of extremist and radical Jihadist groups has confirmed that neither their military defeats nor their loss of leaders means the end of its organization and its religious ideology. Daesh continues to show strong resilience in Iraq and Syria.

Since its conventional defeat in Iraq and Syria, Daesh has shifted to a more insurgent type organization. This could mislead the common thought that Daesh is close to final defeat. The hit and run activities carried out by Daesh and its affiliates favors the resumption of the terrorist group. In particular, Daesh has taken advantage of the region's geopolitical situation and the internal social and political conditions of Iraq and Syria.

The worldwide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the anxiety among large segments of the population, and highlighted severe political and economic malaise. These consequences are likely to offer VEOs the perfect breeding ground for spreading their ideology and for recruiting. ISIS has been unable to develop a coherent propaganda strategy that would give it a significant advantage from the pandemic situation. States should take all necessary action to voluntarily repatriate their citizens living in camps or detention centers in Iraq and north-east Syria. The voluntary repatriation of these people remains an urgent and strategic imperative for international peace and security. Of course, we must recognize that the pandemic has further reduced states' efforts to repatriate their citizens.

Regardless of setbacks, the potential global threat posed by Daesh fighters is growing. There have been reported cases of radicalization, fundraising, and training in the camps. Daesh supporters call the camps "the last remnant of the caliphate." Furthermore, the defeat of Daesh funding remains an imperative of the OIR coalition for the defeat of the terrorist group. In Iraq and Syria, Daesh funds its operations from: cash reserves, businesses, payments from abroad, criminal activities (such as kidnapping for ransom), and extortion of businesses and

¹ Lederer, Edith M, "UN: Over 10,000 Islamic State fighters active in Iraq, Syria," *The Washington Post*, Aug 24, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/un-over-10000-islamic-state-fighters-active-in-iraq-syria/2020/08/24/f1021ca0-e659-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5_story.html (accessed Sep 25, 2020).

individuals. Countering terrorist financing has become more difficult for states because of terrorists' use of social media, the internet and cryptocurrencies to move and raise funds. The Commander's third priority "Maintain D-ISIS continuity campaign" continues to be valid and effective in responding to the aforementioned terrorist actions, especially in a fragile socio-political context.

Overview

The Islamic State/Daesh differs from "traditional" terrorist organization. It acts to produce revenue through illicit activities and (when afforded the opportunity) operates as a conventional force. In addition, Daesh differs in its use of media through manipulation and recruitment campaigns. Daesh is able to adapt to current counter operations, geopolitical changes, and takes advantage of globalization. In this context, Daesh is expected to regain its ability to build community 'incubators'² to improve the organization's ability to capture a social base, or restore its ability to recruit heavily.

Daesh has adjusted by restructuring the physical caliphate towards an elusive virtual model. It has begun to rearrange its priorities (military and security tactics, media and political rhetoric) regionally. It also uses discourse in the sectarian domain and at the regional level. It takes advantage of three factors: first, Arab authoritarianism reinforces the crisis of Government legitimacy; second, disenfranchised populaces provide fertile pools for recruitment; and third, Daesh benefits from the Palestinian situation following the Abraham Accords.

Daesh has demonstrated its ability to take advantage of those three factors. It has trained and raised its recruits in the regions it controlled. Neither local communities, international organizations, nor nations have developed a clear strategy to rehabilitate and reintegrate members of the Lion Cubs of the Caliphate living in detention camps. Instead of having an actionable strategy to address root causes of extremism, the international community follows counter-terrorism policies focused on symptoms (not causes), conditions, and context.³ This means that ISIS, or other terrorist organizations, will always find a fertile environment for recruitment and propaganda.

In 2020, there was a growing re-emergence of the terrorist threat. A report published by the UN in August 2020 reported that more than 10,000 Daesh militants⁴ are still active in Iraq and Syria. They are organized into small cells and move freely between Syria and Iraq. Others find refuge in northeast Iraq, and in the mountainous area of Hamrin from which they waged a "war of attrition" against Iraqi security forces. Daesh intends to increase its presence and operations within urban centers. Beyond the Daesh's core group, affiliates are generating security issues and should not be underestimated.

² Abu Rumman, Dr. Muhammad, "The future of ISIS: Strengths and Weaknesses Dynamics of the 'Virtual Caliphate' and the Gap in Counterterrorism Strategies," Friedrich-Ebert- Stiftung, Nov, 2020, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/16943-20201214.pdf> (accessed Jan 21, 2021).

³ Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg, "PERSPECTIVE: Can We Repatriate the ISIS Children?" *Homeland Security Today News*, Jul 7, 2020, <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/perspective-can-we-repatriate-the-isis-children/> (accessed Oct 28, 2020).

⁴ United Nations – Security Council, "Repatriating Detained Foreign Fighters, Their Families Key to Combating Threat Posed by Islamic State, Counter-Terrorism Officials Warn Security Council," Security Council Press Release, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14282.doc.htm> (accessed Sep 25, 2020).

In Afghanistan, the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant Khorasan (ISIL-K) continues to claim responsibility for high-profile attacks. This is despite ISIL-K's inability to hold large swaths of territory. An estimated 1,000 and 2,200 ISIL-K fighters operate in Afghanistan.⁵

As of 2020, Al-Qaeda is gaining strength in Afghanistan by operating with the Taliban under their protection.⁶ Al-Qaeda capitalizes on its relations with the Taliban through its network of mentors and advisers embedded with the Taliban. Al-Qaeda provides advice, guidance, and financial support.⁷ In addition, reports show Pakistani-based Haqqani⁸ has increased its presence in Afghanistan. Its members are now present in both the western and northeastern regions of the country. The group was known to operate mainly along the southeastern border with Pakistan. However, over the years, Haqqani has cultivated a close relationship with the Taliban. A UN counterterrorism report released in October 2020 underscored that Al-Qaeda is still heavily embedded within the Taliban.

In Yemen, Daesh failed to take off due to its indiscriminate brutality, poor messaging, weak tribal ties, and overbearing leadership style. For the al-Houthis, Daesh attacks justify a military push against the terrorist group. Thus, the al-Houthi faction can present itself to the international community as an offended party and a potentially valuable ally in the fight against Daesh. In light of the collapse of Yemeni institutions, the Houthis participated in the war on terror. As a militant group opposed to the ideology of both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, the Houthis group has conducted multiple field operations aimed at eliminating Islamic State militants. In August 2020 during an operation led by the Houthi rebel group Islamic State in Iraq, the Levant-Yemen (ISIL-Yemen), reportedly lost its leader Abu al-Walid al-Adani.

Daesh has strong relations with affiliated terrorist groups in Africa and enables extremist ideology, the spread of propaganda, and recruitment. Several Daesh affiliates operate in several African countries. In Libya, ISIL Libya continues to decline, especially after its leader's death in September 2020.⁹ However, ISIL-Libya is still present in the south of the country and has sleeper cells in some coastal cities. Both Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, known as Boko Haram, and the West African Province of Islamic State are maintaining their operations in the Lake Chad basin area. In Mozambique, supporters of the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) seized the port in the city of Mocímboa da Praia on August 11, 2020. These groups present a cohesive threat to Cabo Delgado's province in Mozambique. They also carried out an attack in Tanzania on October 16, 2020.¹⁰ In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ISCAP continues to attack in Ituri and Northern Kivu

⁵ Seldin, Jedd, "Islamic State Poised for Possible Resurgence in Afghanistan, US Officials Warn," *VOA News*, Feb 9, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/islamic-state-poised-possible-resurgence-afghanistan-us-officials-warn> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

⁶ Sisk, Richard, "Amid Biden-Ordered Review of Afghanistan Troop Drawdown, Report Finds al-Qaida Gaining Strength," *Military News*, Jan 27, 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/01/27/amid-biden-ordered-review-of-afghanistan-troop-drawdown-report-finds-al-qaida-gaining-strength.html> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

⁷ Joscelyn, Thomas, "Al Qaeda 'Gaining Strength' in Afghanistan, U.S. Treasury Says," *Real Clear Defence*, Jan 26, 2021, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/01/26/al_qaeda_gaining_strength_in_afghanistan_us_treasury_says_657848.html (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

⁸ Atakpal, Haseeba, "Haqqani Network Increases Presence in Afghanistan: Nabil," *Tolo News*, Feb 4, 2021, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-169754> (accessed Feb 5, 2021).

⁹ Reuters Staff, "Eastern Libyan forces say they killed Islamic State leader," *Reuters News*, Sep 23, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/eastern-libyan-forces-say-they-killed-islamic-state-leader-idUSKCN26E3BW?edition-redirect=in> (accessed Nov 23, 2020).

¹⁰ Intel Brief, "Islamic State Expanding Central Africa Province with Attack in Tanzania," *The Soufan Center News*, Oct 21, 2020, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-islamic-state-expanding-central-africa-province-with-attack-in-tanzania/> (accessed Jan 15, 2021).

provinces. In Beni, ISCAP attacked a prison in Kangbayi to free its' agents. More than 1,000 prisoners have fled, including approximately 200 ISCAP agents.¹¹

A serious global reflection on the fight against terrorism and extremism requires addressing the causes and drivers of the political, economic, and social situation in many countries. Actions must be taken on the following: build a climate of freedom and democracy; develop capacities to integrate young people; and reduce their state of discontent, anger, and frustration. It is also necessary to cooperate at the regional levels to generate political solutions collaboratively. This is especially important in the European countries that have strict legal and rights restrictions for prosecuting returnees. The situation requires a strategic political and social vision to ensure that these repatriated individuals are not recruited and radicalized.

Middle East

Iraq - Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi took office on May 7, 2020. One of the prime minister's first promises was to hold early elections. On several occasions, the Al-Kadhimi government has been accused of not delivering on this promise or addressing wide-spread corruption. Tackling electoral issues and corruption will be difficult as the same politicians that created the situation are likely to remain. Furthermore, although the electoral law has been partially amended, it does not appear sufficient to offer guarantees to avoid fraud and tampering with votes. In addition, Iraq continues to face economic and social problems. The political debates during the next election is likely to center on the following: strengthen the security services, prevent fraud, and invite international observers to ensure broad and equitable participation.

The terrorist threat is still prevalent in Iraq. Its provinces remain the epicenter of Daesh activity and reorganization. The main targets include the Iraqi army, intelligence and police personnel, popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Shiite militias sponsored by the Iraqi regime, tribal mobilization forces, Sunni militias supported by the Iraqi regime, and the Kurdish military force "Peshmerga." Most of the Daesh attacks are simple guerrilla operations, IED attacks, and targeted killings. Such activities provide a wake-up call, warning that its capacity for action is still remain. Daesh continues to launch attacks against civilians and security forces, particularly in Iraq's northern provinces and disputed territories between Baghdad and Erbil.

On November 17, the US Interim Secretary of Defense, Christopher Miller,¹² announced the withdrawal of thousands of US troops from Iraq by January 15, 2021. Miller said about 2,500 troops would remain in Iraq - keeping the US as the lead in the anti-ISIS coalition. Coalition goals are defeating Daesh, destroying physical networks, and hampering the organization's expansionist aims. The primary objectives are undermining Daesh's financial and economic infrastructure, stemming the flow of foreign fighters across borders, and restoring essential services to areas liberated from the terror group's grip.

The Iraqi government is taking steps to defeat Daesh and counter drug trafficking along the Syrian border. As tensions between Washington and Tehran escalated, the border was seen as a hot spot due to the presence of Daesh and Kurdish fighters. The 600-kilometer border between the two countries is controlled by various forces, including the Iraqi army, the Syrian army, US-backed Kurdish forces, Iranian-backed militias, and anti-

¹¹ Mike Ives and Isabella Kwai, "1,300 Prisoners Escape From Congo Jail After an Attack Claimed by ISIS," *The New York Times News*, Oct 20, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/20/world/africa/congo-jail-attack-prisoners-freed.html> (accessed Jan 11, 2021).

¹² Garamone, Jim, "US Will Draw Down Forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, Acting Secretary Says," US Department of Defense, Nov 17, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2418416/us-will-draw-down-forces-in-afghanistan-iraq-acting-secretary-says/> (accessed Nov 21, 2020).

government rebels.¹³ The border requires constant monitoring; to address border issues requires coordination between Baghdad and Damascus.

The Iraqi government is grappling with a severe financial crisis further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Daesh has targeted Iraqi electrical infrastructure in remote areas, causing social destabilization and significant economic damage. Terrorist have targeted high-voltage power lines in remote areas of the eastern province of Diyala and the northern provinces of Kirkuk and Salahuddin. These 'bite and flee' type attacks in northern Iraq continue to undermine the government in Baghdad. Terrorist cells affiliated with the Islamic State are active in Baghdad's so-called 'Great Agricultural Belt.'

In January 2021, there was a dual suicide attack in the Iraqi capital. Similar attacks across the country calls into question both the Iraqi security apparatus and the measures taken by the Al-Kadhimi Government. The recent suicide attack in Baghdad represents a change in Daesh techniques. The terrorist groups have been able to move undisturbed in the Iraqi capital.

Syria - On March 23, 2019, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) officially announced the last enclaves of Daesh were defeated in eastern Syria. During 2020, terror attacks mainly targeted the area of the Western Euphrates, the Deir Ezzor Valley, Raqqa, Homs, and As-Suwayda. On December 22, 2020, the Assad-army initiated a security campaign with the aim of defeating terrorist cells active in the country. Since the formation of the SDF on October 10, 2015, it has played a vital role in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria. Syrian Regime forces offensives have mostly affected the Russian-backed Aleppo-Hama-Raqqa triangle.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the al-Hol refugee camp is a "ticking time bomb," capable of unleashing a wave of chaos in northeast Syria. There is an increase in the number of crimes inside Al-Hol Camp with killings attributed to Daesh. Al-Hol, is under the control of Kurdish authorities and is home to more than 70,000 people including 11,000 family members of suspected ISIS fighters. These figures represent a significant burden on the Kurdish forces to prevent crime and numerous escape attempts. According to the Syrian Observatory, al-Hol has become a "State in State" occupied by members of the Daesh and their families.¹⁴ There is a growing crisis that the international community is currently trying to ignore.

Yemen - Al-Qaeda's leader in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Khalid Batarfi,¹⁵ was detained for several months and its second in command, Saad Atef al-Awlaqi, was killed. The al-Qaeda branch trained him in Afghanistan up to the September 11, 2001 attacks. After leaving Afghanistan, he rejoined the al-Qaeda branch in Yemen. Khalid was considered an ideologue of the group. He contributed to several operations abroad before being appointed to lead the organization.

At the end of 2020, AQAP suffered a series of setbacks due to internal dissent led by Abu Omar al-Nahdi. Regardless of its reverse of fortune, Yemen's terrorist threat should not be underestimated, as local terrorist groups continue to remain active and target infrastructure. AQAP is considered among the most dangerous al-Qaeda affiliates in the region.

The US has stepped up counter-terrorism operations against Daesh and AQAP and President Biden stated that the US will continue to support the fight against terrorism in Yemen. Recent agreements between Israel and

¹³Abdulla, Namo, "Kurds Warn of Growing Islamic State Capabilities in Iraq," *VOA News*, Feb 7, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/kurds-warn-growing-islamic-state-capabilities-iraq> (accessed Feb 7, 2021).

¹⁴Seldin, Jeff, "Islamic State Families to Be Cleared from al-Hol Camp," *VOA News*, Oct 5, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/islamic-state-families-be-cleared-al-hol-camp> (accessed Nov 28, 2020).

¹⁵De Luce, Dan, "Al Qaeda leader in Yemen in custody, U.N. confirms," *NBC News*, Feb 4, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/al-qaeda-leader-yemen-custody-u-n-confirms-n1256820> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

some Arab countries have been at the center of propaganda by terrorist organizations to fracture counter-terrorism alliances. Both al-Qaeda and AQAP have made statements, in which they condemn the agreements made by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Egypt – For years, the Sinai region has had an enduring military operation. The Egyptian army launched a campaign to increase control in the region, and to counter Islamist and criminal activities. Among the most active organizations, Wilayat Sinai,¹⁶ derived from Ansar Bayat al-Maqdis, supports the grouping of several militants involved in the Sinai region. Wilayat Sinai pledged allegiance to Daesh. The number of fighters fluctuates between 1,000 and 1,500, mostly operating in that region.

North Sinai lives in a constant state of alert. The region is considered as the centerpiece of Islamist violence in Egypt. Daesh's affiliated organization, Wilayat Sinai has claimed responsibility for attacks near a pipeline infrastructure in the North Sinai Region. Wilayat Sinai's goal is to stop gas transfers to Israel and disrupt the supply of power to the Egyptian military factories in the central Sinai.

In addition to Daesh, several new terror actors have been active in Egypt's northern areas of Ansar al-Jihad and Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. The organization has apparently joined the ISIS franchise. Terrorist organizations active in Sinai have declared themselves firm supporters of al-Baghdadi's successor the new leader of the Islamic State, al-Qurayshi.

Central and South Asia

Afghanistan - The situation in the country is extremely complex and the climate is very tense in light of the recent Biden administration announcements. Prior to these developments there were some diplomatic efforts underway between the Kabul government and the Taliban, the start of a genuine intra-Afghan dialogue still seems a long way off.¹⁷ Fighting between the government and the Taliban in multiple provinces and internal violence are caused by the Taliban and perpetrated by other armed groups is rising. The attacks are directed against public officials, members of the media, human rights workers, and former and current security forces. This represents a shift from targeted attacks on high-profile officials by the Taliban and other civil society groups in the country. As a branch of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, based in the Middle East, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) emerged in late 2014 in southern and eastern Afghanistan.

The ISIS-K group was immediately under heavy military engagement by Afghan forces and the coalition. These engagements resulted in the deaths and capture of more than 13,000¹⁸ of its fighters, including five consecutive high-level leaders. Although it received significant losses, the group has shown resilience by managing to replace lost forces. ISIS-K has expanded its geographical foothold and increased its operations in both number and intensity. ISIS-K is present throughout eastern and northern Afghanistan. ISIS-K also controls fighters in neighboring Pakistan in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

ISIS-K is lined up to grow in size and take the lead among terrorist groups in the region. The ISIS-K is ready to absorb Taliban fighters seeking ideological alignment and employment. Terrorist groups such as Pakistanis Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and others have worked with

¹⁶ Tomer Naveh and Yoram Schweitzer, "Islamic State Province in Sinai Changes its Strategy: Are Israel and the Suez Canal in the Crosshairs?" Dec 3, 2020, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/sinai-isis/> (accessed Jan 10, 2021).

¹⁷ Doucet, Lyse, "Afghan-Taliban peace talks an 'opportunity for peace,'" *BBC News*, Sep 12, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53976968> (accessed Sep 12, 2020).

¹⁸ Sharifi, Arian, "Could the Islamic State – Khorasan Province Be the Next Chapter of Global Terrorism?" *The Diplomat News*, Sep 24, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/could-the-islamic-state-khorasan-province-be-the-next-chapter-of-global-terrorism/> (accessed 18 Nov, 2020).

the Taliban for years. Reports show that ISIS-K has developed relationships with most of these groups and are likely to strengthen if an Afghan-Taliban peace deal is reached.

Pakistan – The authorities of Islamabad have provided to the Secretary-General of the UN a report which accuses India of sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan. In the document published in November 2020,¹⁹ the Pakistani government claimed to have evidence confirming India's link and support to Pakistani terrorist organizations. The report contains the names of suspected Indian intelligence agents, dates of their alleged encounters with terrorists, audio recordings, and banking documents. The Pakistani foreign minister made a statement stating, New Delhi is 'sponsoring terrorism' in Pakistan by organizing attacks within Pakistani borders, and targeting its economic partnership with China.

The terrorist organizations backed by India include the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (aka the Pakistani Taliban) and armed Baloch-armed separatists. The separatist groups in Baloch have been carrying out an insurgency in the region for years. These Islamic extremist groups and the Taliban are active in Balochistan province. Their attacks have targeted the Hazaro people. ISIS-K, which operates in Afghanistan and is a rival group to the Afghan Taliban, has been responsible for January 2021 attack on 11 Shiite Hazara miners in Baluchistan.²⁰ Speaking on this attack, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan again accused India of 'supporting ISIS' to 'spread unrest' in Pakistan.

Impact of COVID-19

Initially, the COVID-19 pandemic was seen as an opportunity to launch new attacks by Islamic terrorists. The central belief of terrorist groups was exploiting the health emergency to strengthen their power where instability reigns. However, the various terrorist organizations' reactions are very different. ISIS has taken up the invitation while the Taliban have stopped hostility in the name of public health. They stated their willingness to support all humanitarian organizations that help those who have fallen ill with COVID-19.²¹ Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed said that, if an outbreak were to arise in an area they controlled, the consequence would be "to stop fighting in that area."²² Al Qaeda has released a vigorous propaganda message stating that the spread of COVID-19 in the Muslim "world" is caused by obscenity and moral corruption.²³

¹⁹ Farook, Umar "Pakistan to provide 'irrefutable evidence' India sponsors militant groups," *Reuters News*, Nov 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-india-pakistan-militancy/pakistan-to-provide-irrefutable-evidence-india-sponsors-militant-groups-idUKKBN27U0JH?edition-redirect=uk> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

²⁰ Sattar, Abdul, "IS gunmen kill 11 minority Shiite coal miners in SW Pakistan," *APN News*, Jan 3, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-a78a217749cddd2194e9424e8d64debf> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

²¹ Roshni Kapur and Chayanika Saxena, "The Taliban makes the most of Covid-19 crisis in Afghanistan," *The Interpreter News*, Apr 27, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/taliban-makes-most-covid-19-crisis-afghanistan> (accessed Oct 23, 2020).

²² Salahuddin, Sayed, "Taliban reject Ghani's ceasefire call despite looming coronavirus crisis," *Arab News*, Apr 16, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1660066/world> (accessed Oct 23, 2020).

²³ Johnson, Bridget, "How Terrorists Are Trying to Make Coronavirus More Friend Than Foe," *Homeland Security Today News*, Apr 14, 2020, <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/how-terrorists-are-trying-to-make-coronavirus-more-friend-than-foe/> (accessed Oct 24, 2020).

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Implement proactive combat activities against the remnants of Daesh/ISIS in Iraq and Syria.
- Support all regional partners in the fight against VEOs.
- Implement anti-Daesh/ISIS propaganda by emphasizing activities conducted on the ground against VEOs, aimed at combating the ISIS ideology.
- Support regional partners in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.
- Limit the impact of sanctions on the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical equipment needed to curb the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Support regional partners, as part of the closure of camps for IDPs and refugees, in the repatriation of refugees, preventing possible recruitment and radicalization activities.
- Promote the coordination of intelligence capability between regional partners through the sharing of intelligence information.
- Continue maintaining financial pressure on all terrorist groups in close coordination with regional partnered countries.

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2.2 THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Executive Summary

The Trump administration's intense influence and diplomatic power directly enabled the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement. Moreover, the regional "Iranian threat" proved to be the main factor that made the agreement possible. Theoretically, the Agreement's normalization process could positively affect CENTCOM's first priority, "Deterring Iran." However, from a strategic perspective, Israel will not likely fight Iran on behalf of or to defend the Gulf States. Israel may use the Gulf States, their territory, and capabilities, to defend Israel and deploy forces against the Iranian threat. Therefore, the Abraham Accords' strength may diminish if such events show the parties will not achieve their desired goals, or when the Agreement's preconditions disappear. The US Trump Administration strongly sponsored the normalization process and necessary Gulf State concessions. The new Biden administration, which is expected to mirror the Obama administration, could disrupt the normalization process. As the new administration establishes its policies and as regional actors adapt, normalization momentum could quickly diminish. This momentum may be hard to regain and no new normalization agreements may be possible in the foreseeable future. While Israeli normalization with some Arab countries will lead to new regional alliances, Great Power Competitors (China and Russia) acting regionally risk provoking new complicated conflicts among regional powers. Normalization agreements between several Arab countries and Israel cannot replace Palestinian peace negotiations, which remains the key factor to achieve real stability in the region.

Israel / Palestine Dispute

As Israeli/Arab normalization will likely continue, the Israeli right-wing influence will likely grow and Israel may push Palestinians to comply with the Oslo Accords. The unresolved Israel/Palestine issue is a significant threat to peace in the region and serves as a potential catalyst for a new intifada.

The internal Palestinian situation

Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) both seek to strengthen the Palestinian position against Israeli annexation and Judaization, and the processes of normalization in the Arab and Islamic world.²⁴ Specifically, Hamas has waived most objections to summer 2021 Palestinian elections and committed for the moment to stopping the popular resistance. Thus, the door is now open to start Palestinian Legislative Council elections, according to terms and conditions agreed by Fatah, the PA, and the Palestine Liberation Organization.²⁵

Currently, the PA and the Palestine Liberation Organization (the Fatah leadership) control most of the internal Palestinian influence. Furthermore, the international community considers these parties "legitimate." The PA seeks to hold legislative elections in summer 2021, but will likely postpone those elections if Hamas and the Palestinian resistance forces appear likely to win a majority of the seats.

²⁴ Mohsen, Mohammad Saleh, "Expected Palestinian Developments in 2021," Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, Jan 12, 2021, <https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2021/01/12/political-analysis-expected-palestinian-developments-in-2021/> (accessed Apr 08, 2021).

²⁵ Ibid.

The internal Israeli situation

The 24th Knesset elections, held in March 2021, were the fourth such elections in less than two years. The right and far-right parties are likely to maintain their majority. Israel's Likud party won more seats than any other party, but failed to achieve a majority. Thus, all parties have several months to negotiate a government or face a new election this summer.²⁶

The election results, as well as the movements of the leaders of the various Israeli parties, indicate Likud has not succeeded in increasing its seats significantly despite Israel's success in normalization agreements with Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Netanyahu's management of the COVID-19 crisis and vaccine development. Corruption accusations and demonstrations against his government are the main issues curbing Netanyahu's popularity.²⁷

Regional Perspectives

Recent Middle East developments indicate a major change in regional dynamics and balances. Four Arab countries have established diplomatic relations with Israel; and other Arab and Muslim countries are considering following suit. Improved bilateral security, political, and economic relations with Israel over the past decade made normalization between Israel and the two Gulf States possible. The countries made decisions based on shared interests primarily in countering Iran's regional influence and to create a regional alignment to compensate for diminished US engagement.²⁸

Sudan also normalized relations with Israel. However, the issue created disagreement between the military and civilian components of Sudan's Sovereign Council. Normalization also causes some discord within the transitional government and among the population. Morocco has long-lasting security and diplomatic ties with Israel. The Moroccan government's downplay of this significance has raised public criticism. Morocco seeks to strengthen ties with Israel's sizeable native Moroccan community. In contrast to the Gulf States' process, normalization with Morocco and Sudan appears more commercially driven than a deliberate political process.²⁹

Kuwait has so far rejected normalization due to public opinion and the Kuwaiti Palestinian community's influence (approximately 450,000 personnel are affected). Further, Kuwait is keen to maintain balanced relations with its neighbor, Iran. Oman maintains diplomatic communications with Israel and also sensitive relations with Iran, considering Oman's Shiite population (45%). With the Biden administration, Kuwait and Oman expect to regain their Gulf region role mediating between the US and Iran.³⁰

Saudi Arabia has not yet officially modified its relationships with Israel due to the internal militant Islamic threat and its unique place amid Sunni Muslim leadership as a hub of the Sunni Muslim world. Furthermore,

²⁶ Lis, Jonathan, "Israel Election Results: As Deadline Nears, No Candidate Has Enough Support to Form Government," *Haaretz*, Apr 4, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/elections/.premium-with-deadline-looming-no-candidate-has-enough-support-to-end-israel-s-stalemate-1.9679302> (accessed Apr 9, 2021).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Avishai, Bernard, "Why Israeli Nuclear Experts Disagree with Netanyahu About the Iran Deal," *The Times Of Israel*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/understanding-the-wave-of-normalization-in-the-middle-east/> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

²⁹ Krasna, Dr. Joshua, "Understanding the Wave of Normalization in the Middle East," Jan 14, 2021, *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/why-israeli-nuclear-experts-disagree-with-netanyahu-about-the-iran-deal> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

³⁰ Marshoud, Maj. Gen. (R) Khalid, "Israeli-Gulf Normalization Between Optimism and Cautions," *South Front*, Jan 02, 2021, <https://maps.southfront.org/israeli-gulf-normalization-between-optimism-and-cautions/> (accessed Jan 29, 2021).

normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel centers on the requirement of a permanent solution to the Palestine issue.³¹

Qatar seeks to reassert its regional importance through mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Qatar vehemently opposes normalization, but maintains extensive under-the-table communication with Israel, and formal ties with both Hamas and the PA. Qatar perceives itself as an indispensable broker with relationships among all the parties. Future Gulf state normalization could also encourage a formalization of Qatar's relations with Israel.³²

If Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi can improve internal security and gain control over the Iranian militias, Iraq could further reduce Iranian support to Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon by pursuing normalization with Israel. This could reduce the Hezbollah threat to Lebanon and Israel as Iraq may provide a buffer between those countries and Iran.

Current normalization efforts have marginalized the US' and Israel's long-standing Arab ally, Jordan. The negotiations largely ignored Jordan's King Abdullah and gave little consideration to the impact on his regional and domestic positions. The marginalization of the Jordanian role in support of the Palestinians and the two-state solution likely eliminates the Jordan option as an alternative Palestinian homeland. Further, this could transform the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a Jordanian-Palestinian one, similar to the 1970 civil war.³³

Egypt has welcomed the normalization agreements (including Sudan's) with which Egypt has a deep and influential relationship. Egypt's public favors normalization as a benefit from the important Egypt-Israel partnership in the eastern Mediterranean. Regarding regional Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) disputes and the related struggle over Libyan stabilization, Israel openly supported the Greek and Egyptian position against Turkish provocations. The Mediterranean is key to Egypt's future. Thus, normalization between Israel and other Egypt's allies is crucial.³⁴

Realistically, Israel will not likely fight Iran on behalf of or to defend the Gulf states. On the contrary, the Gulf states' normalization with Israel will raise the Iranian pressure and threat. The Gulf states will likely become the center of gravity of espionage operations, assassinations, and terrorism in the Iranian-Israeli confrontation arena. Therefore, the normalization agreements' momentum may diminish if parties prove unable to achieve their desired goals.

International Perspectives

The previous US administration strongly sponsored the normalization process and provided concessions to the states concerned. The new Biden administration (which is expected to more closely mirror the Obama administration) could disrupt the normalization process. Substantial momentum may be lost in the next few

³¹ Keyser, Zachary, "Pompeo: I know 'many' inside Saudi Arabia want normalization with Israel," *Jerusalem Post*, Mar 01, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/pompeo-i-know-many-inside-saudi-arabia-want-normalization-with-israel-660567> (accessed Jan 29, 2021).

³² Roiter Jesner, Shlomo, "Qatar Is Using the Palestinians to Assert Its Regional Influence," Jan 26, 2021, *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/26/qatar-is-using-the-palestinians-to-assert-its-regional-influence/> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

³³ Fishman, Ben, "Jordan Must Be Included in Future Israeli-Arab Normalization Deals," Jan 03, 2021, *The National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/jordan-must-be-included-future-israeli-arab-normalization-deals-175277/> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

³⁴ Lerman, Colonel (res.) Dr. Eran, "Egypt's Support of Normalization is part of the Mediterranean Alignment," Nov 01, 2020, *The Jerusalem Institute*, <https://jiss.org.il/en/lerman-egypts-support-of-normalization/> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

months as regional actors react to the new administration's policy shift. If the reaction is strong, it is difficult to predict when regional parties could regain such momentum or begin new normalization efforts.³⁵

While President Biden's administration will not likely support Israel as aggressively as President Trump's, Biden has a long and good history with Israel. The new administration will also likely publicly accommodate the PA, and oppose legalization of Jewish West Bank settlements. More friction will likely follow between the US and Israel, but ultimately the relationship will remain strong.³⁶

The US decision to shift Israel to the USCENTCOM AOR can be viewed as the culmination of efforts to publicly normalize Arab states' military relations with Israel. Israel and the US seek to build consensus and partner with Arab countries against the common foe: Iran. However, adding Israel to the USCENTCOM AOR complicates US military relations with the Arab region. USCENTCOM not only operates major bases in the Gulf to deter Iran, but also leads the "war on terror" with overt or covert operations in several Arab states, including Iraq and Syria. The US may find it difficult to address Israel's belligerent operations in Iraq and Syria, which some Arab states consider as a violation of international law. On the other hand, aligning Israel inside USCENTCOM AOR, the US and its most favorable Arab states are likely to be more publicly accountable for Israel's major military operations against the Palestinians. Although there are risks with an AOR realignment, Israel will certainly benefit from the more formal alignment with Arab states against Iran.³⁷

Palestinians have called for a revival of the Quartet of Mideast mediators (US, UN, EU, and Russia) to create a turning point in this conflict. However, US priorities in the Middle East have changed, and even the PA's European allies view Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his Authority as a lower priority. A weakened EU, due to the departure of the UK and the COVID-19 pandemic's devastating economic impact, has pushed Palestine to the bottom of Western agendas.³⁸

Following the announcement of the normalization agreements, Russia continued to emphasize the Palestinian issue's importance. However, most Arab countries no longer prioritize the Palestinians like a decade ago. Instead, Arab nations are more concerned about Iran's regional ambitions. Moscow has long favored the Shiite axis in the region. The Russian government views a hardened Israel-UAE alliance against Iran with considerable unease. If the US sells F-35s to the UAE and offers Israel sophisticated weaponry to preserve its qualitative military edge, Iran will likely seek to buy Russian defensive weapons systems such as the S-400. Despite the marked strengthening of Russia-Iran relations over Moscow's support for the removal of the UN arms embargo, the Russian refusal to sell Iran weapons could jeopardize the relationship.³⁹

China's perspective on normalization is ambiguous. China welcomes the potential for enhanced Israel-UAE military cooperation against Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁰ This alliance provides a stable balance of

³⁵ Cicecki, Dr. Ceyhun, "Scenarios for future of Arab-Israeli 'normalization'," Jan 27, 2021, *Anadolu Agency*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-scenarios-for-future-of-arab-israeli-normalization/2124870> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

³⁶ Stavridis, James, "Biden's Middle East Balancing Act: Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia," Feb 04, 2021, *Bloomberg*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-02-04/biden-s-middle-east-balancing-act-israel-iran-saudi-arabia> (accessed Feb 06, 2021).

³⁷ Cook, Jonathan, "Why Israel is joining the Pentagon's 'Arab Nato'," Feb 02, 2021, *Middle East Eye*, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-israel-joining-pentagon-arab-nato> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

³⁸ Baroud, Ramzy, "2021: Palestine's Chance of Fighting Back," Jan 08, 2021, *CounterPunch*, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/01/08/2021-palestines-chance-of-fighting-back/> (accessed Feb 05, 2021).

³⁹ Ramani, Samuel, "Russian and Chinese views on the Israel-UAE normalization deal," Aug 27, 2020, *Middle East Institute*, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/russian-and-chinese-views-israel-uae-normalization-deal> (accessed Feb 01, 2021).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

power in the eastern Mediterranean, and deterrence against prospective Turkish expansionism. However, the Abraham Accords could sharpen divisions in the Arab world. Chinese officials are concerned by its potential to 'crowd out' commercial opportunities. The relationship between Dubai-based port operators and China has been fraught with competition in the past. The synergy in timing between this deal and China's port construction ambitions in Haifa could sharpen that rivalry. Furthermore, the reassertion of US diplomatic influence in the Arab Gulf could cause Washington to pressure both Israel and the UAE on their commercial links with China⁴¹. On the same day that the normalization agreement was made public, US officials also announced they were close to a deal to exclude China from Israeli 5G networks. Such activity alarms Beijing.⁴²

Despite criticizing Arab normalization, Turkey has signaled its desire for rapprochement with Israel. The Turkish position may be largely due to concerns the incoming Biden administration will take a harder line towards Turkish President Erdogan. Thus, Turkey, like other regional players, may seek to use Israeli rapprochement to preemptively improve its political position in Washington. Turkey's concerns about the Iranian threat may play a role as well.⁴³

Israeli normalization with some Arab countries will lead to new regional alliances and potentially complicated conflicts due to regional and international powers' responses. These normalization agreements will not be able to replace Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Israel-Palestinian peace is ultimately what will bring stability to the region.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Support Palestinian efforts to hold effective elections and legitimate leaders who might leverage normalization to build a peace agreement.
- Leverage Israel's inclusion in USCENTCOM and normalization to facilitate/mediate open and frank dialogue between Israeli and Arab leaders on Palestinian and regional stability issues.
- Provide economic aid and incentives to the Palestinians as part of any peace deal aimed at promoting enduring stability.
- Continue to sponsor the Middle East Peace Process as other powers are looking to play this role.
- Ensure that Jordan's role in the Palestine issue is not marginalized.
- Discourage King Abdullah from turning to Russia or China.

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⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Smith, Alexander, "Israel, US near deal to exclude China from Israeli 5G networks: US official," Aug 14, 2020, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-usa-5g-china/israel-u-s-near-deal-to-exclude-china-from-israeli-5g-networks-u-s-official-idUSKCN25A2CF> (accessed Feb 30, 2021).

⁴³ Krasna, Dr. Joshua, "Understanding the Wave of Normalization in the Middle East," *The New Yorker*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/why-israeli-nuclear-experts-disagree-with-netanyahu-about-the-iran-deal> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

2.3 RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE IN THE AOR

Head of State Head of Government	President Vladimir Putin / Supreme Commander-in- chief of the Armed Forces Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin	Population	145,872,000 (about half of the Soviet Union) Expected growth rate ~0.04%
Minister of Defense Chief of Defense	Sergei Shoigu, Minister of Defense of the RF Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the RF / First Deputy Minister of Defense	Religion	Christianity 73% (Russian Orthodox 70%) No religion 15% Islam 10%
Type of Government	Federal Constitutional Republic / semi-presidential system	Ethnicity	Based on 2010 census Russian 77.7% Tartar 3.7% Ukrainian 1.4% *expected Chinese ~ 1.5%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	1,580 B (+2.8%)	Military Personnel	Active 1,014,000 Reserves 2,000,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	"Current Situation"	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Vast territory and the largest strategic and operational depth b. Abundance of natural resources c. Nuclear arsenal d. Armed forces' development programs e. Popular belief in national ideas and readiness to accept sacrifices f. Consolidated authoritarian power benefiting from streamlined decision making and executive channels g. Ability to maintain 360° communication channels with international partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Narrowed economy, reliant on too few commodities and markets b. Population overstretched by lack of social and wealth improvements, internal debt c. Demography – high death rates, dropping life expectancy, declining fertility rates d. Underdeveloped society and lack of leadership alternatives e. Kleptocracy, oligarchs, and organized crime on all societal and governance levels 	
Opportunities	"Future Outlook"	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Determination to project influence and power b. Ability to pose an existential threat to the US c. Widespread anti-Americanism d. Russo-Sino tandem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Unprepared regime change b. Dependency on China, Chinese expansionism and revisionism c. Strong and sovereign CAS 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. Rifts within NATO, EU malfunctions f. Control of vital energy supply lines g. 'Infodemics' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Diversification of energy markets among European countries e. COVID-19 pandemic impact on economy f. Trans-national crime, terrorism, and radicalism
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>	

Executive Summary

President Vladimir Putin assured himself lifetime rule through amending the Russian Constitution. Despite unexpected COVID-19 pandemic caused impediments/obstacles, the Kremlin maintains bold policies increasing Russia’s soft and hard power capabilities and assets. As it builds power projection capabilities, internally Russia is facing a growing and unprecedented domestic unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Putin’s pivot to the East/Asia and new openings with China are leading to growing and tightening Russo-Sino collaboration. While this security-economy tandem moves forward, the relationship is experiencing difficulties relating to an imbalance between the two partners. China may seek to recover territories lost to Russia several centuries ago. China may contribute to yet another Russian regime collapse by moving Russia into excessive dependency. The Russian leadership will likely seek to identify strategic partners and timing to oppose uncontrolled Chinese expansion. The Middle East, and Iran in particular, may play an increasingly important role in future Russo-Sino relations.

Foreign Policy/Security

The Russian Federation remains the sole power able to threaten the US with a strategic nuclear arsenal and potentially modern conventional weapon systems such as hypersonic missiles, stealth submarines, and autonomous weapon platforms, etc.⁴⁴ Despite significant internal issues and harmful COVID-19 pandemic societal effects, the Kremlin continuously solidifies the country’s position as a global major power by exploiting opportunism, pragmatism, and expanded hybrid warfare capabilities. Russian President Putin has implemented a foreign policy which is largely designed to satisfy internal needs and retain power. The policy focuses on ensuring Moscow’s dominance over the former Soviet Union zone of influence, maintaining Russia’s major power status, and pushing back against a US-led world order. Russia benefits by exploiting a fragmented and polarized US, the reduced US presence and influence in Europe, a divided NATO, and a dysfunctional EU. Russia further supports these efforts through a form of ‘energy politics,’ projecting Russian influence and power by leveraging its status as one of the three largest oil producers, second largest natural gas producer, and the largest global gas exporter. President Vladimir Putin alluded to this approach when he stated, “I have never referred to Russia as an energy superpower. But we do have greater possibilities than almost any other country in the world. This is an obvious fact.”^{45 46 47}

Due to Western resistance to Moscow’s aggressive adventurism, the Kremlin needed to diversify from its dependence on European markets and search for alternatives. Opportunity arose when China decided to use more natural gas and other EU energy resources to fuel its growing economy. This directly facilitated the so-called Russo-Sino ‘marriage of convenience’ or security-economy tandem. In this tandem, Russia remains the key

⁴⁴ Global Firepower, “Russia Military Strength (2021),” https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=russia (accessed Feb 17, 2021).

⁴⁵ Yergin, Daniel, “The New Map. Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations,” (New York, Penguin Press 2020), p. 70.

⁴⁶ Stent, Angela, “The Limits of Partnership: US-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century,” (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 191.

⁴⁷ Stone, Oliver, “The Putin Interviews,” (New York: Hot Books, 2017), p. 149.

security provider, and sometimes spoiler, in a significant part of CENTCOM's AOR. China became the major economic investment sponsor. As Daniel Yergin suggests in "The New Map," a relationship between Russia and China, that was once based on Marx and Lenin, evolved. Moscow and Beijing are now "conjoined" by their vision of statehood, rejection of universal Western values and norms, and opposition to an alleged unilateral US hegemony. Further, opening the Power of Siberia pipeline revealed how the strategic collaboration between Russia and China is founded on energy.⁴⁸

President Putin's Asia pivot generated unprecedented Russo-Sino military cooperation. As Russian Defense Minister, General Sergei Shoigu, stated, "the expansion of ties with China in the area of defense is an absolute priority."⁴⁹ In fall 2018, Chinese troops and aircraft participated in the largest Russian military exercises since 1981, simulating a major, multi-front war. In summer 2019, Russian and Chinese aircraft began joint air patrols over the Pacific. Joint Russo-Sino military activities became common.

Despite President Putin's traditional Western focus and using Russia's 'petro-ruble' to buy Western politicians' support and/or silence, Moscow recently intensified its Arctic focus.^{50 51 52} The shrinking Arctic polar ice cap has revealed not only an abundance of resources, but also increases Russia's own strategic movement capability and importance. Furthermore, Russian access to and control over the region, provides Moscow value to offer China. Arctic resources and sea lanes enable Beijing to build further global connections, preferably without US supervision or interference. Finally, Russian development of Arctic LNG for China's benefit could signal a major geopolitical shift with worldwide impact.⁵³

Despite substantial collaboration, the Russo-Sino marriage of convenience is likely doomed to collapse violently. Neither Moscow nor Beijing appears willing to permanently share the power. Neither country has a tradition of sharing power with its neighbors. Historically, Russia and China tend to eliminate the competition or contain the threat respectively. Also, China has never accepted the loss of far east former Chinese lands to Russia. In fact, Xi's narratives indicate China seeks a revisionist approach.^{54 55} Further, the Chinese people never forgot the humiliation and suffering caused by foreign powers, including Russia, from the Opium Wars. Conversely, Moscow has always disregarded China and considered it as inferior or at most a junior partner. Near-future Russo-Sino conflict could arise from:

- Chinese migrants in Siberia showing sympathies or preferences leaning towards Beijing;
- Chinese expansion in the Central Asian States creating a threat near the Russian border; or
- China cooperating with Iran leading to significant incentives and profits while pushing out Russia.

⁴⁸ Yergin, "The New Map" p.126

⁴⁹ RT news agency, "Russia China military ties 'at all-time high', no threat to other states," Nov 23, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/367880-russia-china-cooperation-stability/> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁰ The Arctic Institute, "Russia," <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/russia/> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵¹ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "The Ice Curtain: Russia's Arctic Military Presence" <https://www.csis.org/features/ice-curtain-russias-arctic-military-presence> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵² *Financial Times*, "Polar powers: Russia's bid for supremacy in the Arctic Ocean" Apr 27, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/2fa82760-5c4a-11e9-939a-341f5ada9d40> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵³ Yergin, "The New Map" p.114.

⁵⁴ *The New York Times*, "Why China will reclaim Siberia," Jan 13, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/07/03/where-do-borders-need-to-be-redrawn/why-china-will-reclaim-siberia> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁵ *The Tribune*, "Lessons from Sino-Russo border row," Jun 10, 2020, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/lessons-from-sino-russian-border-row-96864> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

In any of these scenarios, the threat of collateral damage to all CENTCOM AOR countries would be enormous.

Internal Politics

Historically, Russian internal affairs have always revolved around its leadership. Today's Russia is mostly about Vladimir Putin. Putin's rule began somewhat unexpectedly and rather unnoticed by the people. He soon established himself as the long-awaited answer to Russians' longing for a great leader. Putin was formed largely by the initial trauma of his early KGB career, when he witnessed the socialist world collapse during his stint in communist-ruled East Germany. Soon after, his experience working for Saint Petersburg city administration shattered his faith in democracy. Putin learned early how important it is to balance quarrels between oligarchs to prevent disputes among elites, and how to leverage traditional popular motives to unite Russian society. After the 2020 constitutional revision, Putin proudly told the Duma (Russian parliament) that he would continue to be "the guarantor of the country's security, domestic stability, and evolutionary development," particularly as Russia faced domestic and foreign enemies. The revision allows Vladimir Putin to stay in power until 2036, effectively for life.⁵⁶

Regardless of how unacceptable the constitutional revision appears by Western standards; this event would not prompt the Russian people to demand a new President. Russia's political scene lacks competitors since President Putin has never tolerated political opponents or competitors. Longtime critic and runner-up, Aleksey Navalny, appears doomed to share the fate of others who tried to oppose Putin.^{57 58} However, recent events in the Russian Federation, and widespread unprecedented protests, show Putin's approval shrinking among the population. The combination of the Navalny's case, devastating COVID-19 pandemic consequences, and the people's growing dissatisfaction over Putin's unfulfilled promises of prosperity has brought thousands of Russians to protest nationwide. Nevertheless, President Putin will likely manage the populous by scapegoating disfavored government officials or stoking nationalism through neighbor conflicts. It does not seem realistic any opponent will depose Putin without the oligarchs' support. Therefore, the country will most probably continue boiling with populous frustrations as long as oligarchs are happy with the current setup.

Economy

Russia's weak, fragile, and insufficiently diversified economy feeds domestic dissatisfaction. The COVID-19 pandemic effects further Russians' growing dissatisfaction with the government's economic performance. Yet, President Putin continues to spend more on expensive military-boosting projects. And despite an excessive dependency on energy exports,⁵⁹ Putin has never provided any reasonable alternatives. About 40 - 50% of the state budget comes from oil and gas exports. President Putin knows how crucial Russia's energy market is to the state economy. Therefore, nearly all key leading appointment in the state energy industry have long relationships with Putin. Further, Putin seeks to pressure Central Asian states to either route pipelines through Russia or share profits with Moscow.

⁵⁶ Vladimir Putin, born 7 October 1952, will be age 84 in 2036.

⁵⁷ *Forbes*, "Navalny is the latest in a grim line of Putin opponents believed to have been poisoned," Aug 21, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielcassady/2020/08/21/navalny-is-the-latest-in-a-grim-line-of-putin-opponents-believed-to-have-been-poisoned/?sh=4bc811844522> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁸ Insider, "List of people Putin is suspected of assassinating," Mar 11, 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.com/list-of-people-putin-is-suspected-of-assassinating-2016-3> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁹ Yergin, "The New Map" p. 71.

Aggressive Russian adventurism and opportunism frequently leads to serious disputes between Moscow and key Western customers. Fallout from recent conflicts such as the Russo-Georgian war, annexation of Crimea and Ukraine conflict, and Russian intervention in Syria influenced President Putin to pursue alternative economic partners. Thus, Russia pivoted to the east and began to forge new bonds with China. After Xi's first official foreign visit to Russia in 2013, China became Russia's largest trading partner. The deal became very clear. China provided manufacturers, cheap labor, consumer goods, and finance. Russia provided energy resources, other commodities, and geopolitical alignment. This arrangement enabled Beijing's expansion towards its Great Rejuvenation, and specifically the BRI.⁶⁰

Today, China is Russia's most crucial economic partner and receives about 11% of Russia's total exports. This percentage is growing steadily. For China, Russia is an important energy resources supplier but receives only about 2% of Chinese exports. Russia is also a key element of China's energy diversification strategy to power bold plans to take over global leadership. Energy diversification also reduces China's dependence on Middle East resources and maritime supply lines, a current vulnerability to US maritime capabilities.

Lastly, the Russo-Sino security-economy tandem has the potential to benefit from one of the most successful COVID-19 recoveries. China appears to be recovering well through reopening and reviving its pre-lockdown potential. With Beijing as its partner, the Kremlin may remain confident that Russian resources will still be needed in the east, and that money and goods will keep coming in return. China might therefore substantially help Putin deal with numerous domestic economic issues.

Society

Two hundred ethnic groups make up the unique Russian society. The mix includes all major religions and many diverse cultures and traditions. President Putin regularly claims that for centuries all Russian peoples have lived peacefully, regardless of their beliefs and origins. However, he also frequently plays on radical nationalistic narratives supporting ethnic Russian dominance. Nevertheless, the mix of Russian citizens remains mostly peaceful. The Kremlin immediately exploits internal disruptions with narratives of foreign interventions or meddling.

Russians want to be viewed as exceptional people and expect others to recognize and respect their culture, tradition, and global importance. To them being a Russian means more than just citizenship, it means a unique state of mind and heart.⁶¹ Recent unrest, triggered by the Aleksey Navalny case, will not likely cause significant internal changes. However, the thousands of protesters on Russian cities' streets, supported by millions of internet voices, could eventually force Putin to respond.

Influence in the Central and South Asian States

Despite overwhelming Chinese expansion, many Central Asian people remain pro-Moscow as Russia is far less offensive against religious groups, compared to the Chinese Communist Party, and that is particularly important for Central Asian Muslim communities. Russia's approach to Central and South Asia remains mostly unchanged. Protectionist Russia continues working to bring these former Soviet Republics as close as possible, and make them as dependent on Russia as possible. Recent disturbances, such as those in Kyrgyzstan, could indicate the Russo-Sino security-economy tandem is showing signs of tension. China provided an alternative when the West attempted to isolate Putin and Central Asia played a pivotal role. President Putin praised the new

⁶⁰ Yergin, "The New Map" p.117.

⁶¹ Erofeev, Viktor, "Encyclopedia of the Russian soul," Moscow 1999.

Russo-Sino cooperation stating, “[w]e share the same priorities both on global and regional scale.”⁶² Central and South Asia will likely determine how long and effectively this cooperation continues.

Influence in the Middle East

Russia views the Middle East as key to causing rifts between the US and its allies and partners. The Kremlin aggressively targets the region for arms deals. However, throughout the last year, Russian Middle East influence evolved as Russia:

- took over most of the Black Sea;
- deepened relations with Turkey, and further divided from NATO and the EU;
- rebuilt the ‘Fortress Caucasus,’ used the Azeri-Armenian conflict to justify sending troops to places in the Caucasus;
- expanded its presence to move closer geographically to Iran;
- entered the new Russo-Sino-Iranian deal of which the first visible manifestation could be Chinese investments in the Iranian Chabahar port at the mouth of the Arabian Gulf;
- solidified presence in Syria securing Moscow’s access, basing, and overflight (ABO) interests to an extent Russia never previously enjoyed; and
- made inroads with key regional US partners.

Since the beginning of 2020, Russia’s most significant Middle East influence has been with Syria and Iran. In Syria, Russia maintains an important military footprint through land, air, and sea bases. Militarily, the Russian forces are overtly fighting Daesh. Russian messaging through numerous press articles, communiques and speeches, contrasts with that of US forces. Indeed, few open-source articles mention actions by US forces supporting the Commander's third priority. Politically, Syrian President Bashar-al-Assad recently decided to reduce the Syrian armed forces, apparently signaling a new phase of reconstruction, at least in areas controlled by loyalist armed forces. The Kremlin, eager to benefit from Syrian reconstruction projects, apparently proposed this important decision.

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh produced three victors: the Azeris, the Turks, and the Russians. The latter ensure peacekeeping missions. Thus, Russia now has military bases close to the Iranian border, effectively bringing Iran into Russia's close neighborhood. Ukraine, Georgia, and Crimea demonstrate what it means for Moscow to be in a country’s “close neighborhood.” Now developments in Iran matter to Moscow even more. The Middle East may soon be where Russia, which traditionally builds ABO capacity in response to the US, may shape its new capabilities and capacities to respond to China.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Use all relevant CENTCOM assets and engagements with AOR partners to closely monitor the Russo-Sino collaboration. Start preparing for a potential collapse.
- Promote pragmatic dialog with Russia, based on position of strength rather than trust or friendship.
- Support efforts backing synchronization and a multi-domain approach.
- Promote awareness of Russian ‘ways.’ Remain vigilant and agile to decisively respond to Russian hybrid, and irregular activities, and *fait accompli* scenarios.
- Promote and support the approach focused on the US becoming a partner of choice.

⁶² Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks, Shanghai, May 20, 2014: <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21047> (accessed on Feb 16, 2021).

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2.4 TURKEY'S INFLUENCE IN THE AOR

Head of State	President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	Population	84,745,343
Head of Government		Religion	Muslim 98% (mostly Sunni) Other 2%
Minister of Defense	Hulusi Akar	Ethnicity	Turkish 75% Kurdish 18% Other 7%
Chief of Defense	General Yaşar Güler	Military Personnel	Active 355,000 Reserve 380,000
Type of Government	Presidential Republic		
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$652.41 B (-5.0%)		

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Geostrategic location b. Member of NATO c. Hosting of critical NATO infrastructure d. Large industrial potential and tourism industry e. Strong Turkish identity f. Dialog member within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Energy dependence b. Rising authoritarianism c. Polarization of society and political parties` stands d. Unsolved Kurdish question e. Deterioration of democratic standards f. Strong dependence on imports (sophisticated military equipment)
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Crucial partner for many regional and global stakeholders, with critical shifting alliance behavior b. Use of geostrategic position for trade between East and West c. The growing potential of defense industry (drones) d. Increase in trade due to Beirut port explosion 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Drifting from NATO b. Spillover of regional conflicts c. The dispute over Mediterranean gas exploration d. A large number of refugees e. Possibility of domestic radicalization f. Water issues with Iran and Syria
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

Due to Turkey's current economic situation and departure from fundamental democratic values, Turkish politicians may face challenges in the 2023 elections. Turkey continues its policy of moving away from its Western allies. Leveraging its advantageous geography, Turkey attracts significant investments from China, for which Turkey is an indispensable Silk Road Initiative partner. By prioritizing its own national interests, Turkey creates new crisis hotspots. Conflicts with Greece, Egypt, Cyprus, and Israel over the eastern Mediterranean and potential gas fields could lead to further sanctions. Despite the country's conflicting goals in Syria and Libya, Turkey still maintains complex cooperation with Russia. Russia uses NATO member Turkey to sow discord in Russia's NATO adversaries.

Turkey's operations in Syria and Iraq contradict CENTCOM's priorities to maintain the defeat ISIS campaign and prevent the weaponization of IDPs and refugees. Its cooperation with Iran significantly threatens the Commander's first priority.

Foreign Policy/Security

Relations between Turkey and its Western allies (US, EU, and UK) continue to deteriorate, particularly due to the following: 1) Turkish military engagements in Syria, Iraq, and Libya; 2) disputes with Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel; 3) Turkey's support in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict; and 4) open disagreement with France over Eastern Mediterranean maritime boundaries and potential energy resources. The possibility that Turkey will fully activate S-400 or deepen cooperation with Moscow in response to sanctions threatens the strategic relationship with NATO, the US, and the EU. The potential of additional US sanctions against Turkey's state-owned Halkbank could significantly impact Turkey's economy. Considering Turkey's current issues with Western allies, Turkey appears to seek new partners according to current needs and preferences. As Turkey's national policies show its increasing distance from the West, Ankara has improved its relations with China, Russia, and Iran in search of new, more pragmatic allies who show greater flexibility in their relations.

Turkey seeks to advance its position and dominate its regional neighbors.⁶³ Towards this end, Turkey has increased and enhanced its power projection and forward operational capabilities. For example, Turkey has established new bases in the region, is building a new aircraft carrier/amphibious vessel,⁶⁴ and unsuccessfully sought to purchase a light aircraft carrier from the UK.⁶⁵ However, since Turkey's anticipated S-400 purchase would preclude Turkey using the F-35, Turkey will need to find another aircraft to equip its aircraft carrier.

Turkey's separation from western alliances appears likely. Due to Turkey testing the S-400, in December 2020 the US imposed sanctions on Turkey under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).⁶⁶ The Turkish government reacted with strong messaging that NATO countries did not allow Turkey to implement NATO air-defense systems, and forced Turkey to search for a Russian solution.

The current Turkey/Cyprus dispute stems from fighting between Turkish and Greek Cypriots in 1963. Cyprus, a Mediterranean island less than half the size of New Jersey, was partitioned in response to the 1963 fighting. Cyprus was further divided in 1974 after Turkey intervened, capturing the northern third of the island and claiming to protect minority Turkish Cypriots following an Athens-backed coup by supporters of union with Greece. That brought the two neighbors close to war.

Turkey's territorial assertions in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea have increased tensions with Greece and provoked other countries' reactions. The dispute primarily stems from conflicting claims by Turkey and Greece regarding maritime Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), and Cyprus. While this dispute does not center around energy, it does affect the situation. For example, Israel's Eastern Mediterranean gas discoveries: 2009 and 2010 (Tamar and Leviathan, respectively), 2011 (Cyprus), and 2015 (Zohr, Egypt), have precipitated and aggravated the situation.

⁶³ Vertin, Zach, "Turkey and the new scramble for Africa: Ottoman designs or unfounded fears?," *Brookings*, May 19, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-and-the-new-scramble-for-africa-ottoman-designs-or-unfounded-fears/> (accessed Jan 15, 2021).

⁶⁴ Sutton, H., "Turkey's New Assault Carrier Will Transform Navy," *Forbes*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/05/13/turkeys-new-assault-carrier-will-transform-navy/?sh=c672189f1d15> (accessed Jan 15, 2021).

⁶⁵ Newsfeed, "Turkey consults with UK on Purchase of new or used aircraft carrier," *Armenia News*, Feb 03, 2021, <https://news.am/eng/news/626885.html> (accessed Feb 11, 2021).

⁶⁶ Gatopoulos, Alex, "What do US sanction on Turkey mean for NATO," *Aljazeera*, Dec 17, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/17/what-do-us-sanctions-on-turkey-mean-for-nato> (accessed Jan 05, 2021).

To this day, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognized only by Turkey. The Republic of Cyprus (ROC), which is internationally recognized, officially has sovereignty over the entire island, but is only able to govern in the south. Turkey doesn't recognize the ROC. Unification efforts have stalled. Adding further to the strained relationship, the US eased its decades-old arms embargo on the Republic of Cyprus in September, a move condemned by Turkey.⁶⁷

These Turkey/Greece territorial disputes extend to the maritime domain. Turkey doesn't recognize Greece's claim that its maritime territorial rights are determined by the location of its many islands, some just off Turkey's coast. Rather it argues that a country's boundary should be measured from its mainland. Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, coastal nations can maintain an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as far out as 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from their coast where they're entitled to fishing, mining, and drilling rights. Where two zones intersect, the countries are obligated to reach a settlement, but Turkey has yet to ratify the convention. Turkey also takes the position that island states such as Cyprus are only entitled to rights within their legal territorial waters, which can extend to a maximum of 12 nautical miles. Meanwhile, the self-proclaimed Turkish Cypriot state claims rights to any energy resources discovered off the Cypriot coast.⁶⁸

Long-standing frictions between Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus are further compounded by recent geopolitical tensions and Eastern Mediterranean energy disputes between Turkey, France, Egypt, and the UAE.⁶⁹ Not only has the number of countries involved in the crisis grown, but the dispute's scope has broadened to include recent energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean and the ever-sprawling Libyan imbroglio. These issues, in turn, have qualitatively changed the nature of the crisis. Despite Turkey's energy ambitions, the recent Eastern Mediterranean gas discoveries have deepened its concerns of being sidelined from the region's emerging energy and security order. This is primarily due to two linked reasons: first, the projected route for the eastern Mediterranean gas pipeline project, and second, creating the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum. The envisioned €6.2 B pipelines to Europe is introduced on closer cooperation between Greece, Cyprus, and Israel and excludes Turkey.⁷⁰ This tripartite cooperation gained an institutional form in January 2020 with the creation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, including Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Italy.⁷¹

Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean has also become a significant thorn in the EU's side, largely due to the bloc's requirement that foreign policy decisions be made unanimously. Some member states seek to demonstrate solidarity with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus. Both these EU member states are anxious to see retaliation against Turkey within the EU for Ankara's aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean. France, for whom tension with Turkey is at a high, has been a key supporter of Greece and Cyprus. France aggressively demonstrates hard power in the region, including having deployed an aircraft carrier in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁷²

On the other hand, several EU member states—including Italy, Spain, Malta, and Germany—prefer diplomacy and negotiation. Their position is rooted largely in fear of antagonizing Ankara given Turkish control

⁶⁷ Selcan Hacaoglu and Paul Tugwell, "The conflicts That Keep Turkey and Greece at Odds," *Bloomberg*, Sep 10, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-10/the-conflicts-that-keep-turkey-and-greece-at-odds-quicktake> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Dr Ian Anthony and Ambassador Michael Sahlin, "Maritime dispute in the eastern Mediterranean: Why and who now?," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Oct 23, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2020/maritime-disputes-eastern-mediterranean-why-and-why-now> (accessed Feb 11, 2021).

⁷⁰ Dalay, Galip, "Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a way out of the current deadlock," *Brookings*, Jan 28, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Antonopoulos, Paul, "France Sends Nuclear-Powered Aircraft Carrier to East Mediterranean," *Covert Geopolitics*, Sep 11, 2020, <https://geopolitics.co/2020/09/11/france-sends-nuclear-powered-aircraft-carrier-to-east-mediterranean/> (accessed Feb 04, 2021).

over refugee flows into Europe.⁷³ Germany, in particular, which held the EU's six-month presidency through the end of December 2020, has taken the lead on mediating talks between Athens and Ankara to resolve the conflict. The December 2020 European Council summit's conclusions offer a perfect example of the divergence in approaches to Turkey within the bloc.⁷⁴ In October 2020, the EU threatened to "use all the instruments and the options at its disposal" in case of "renewed unilateral actions or provocations in breach of international law" from Ankara⁷⁵. but two months later, disagreement at the summit between Greece, Cyprus, and France on one side, and Germany, Italy, and Spain on the other, resulted in limited sanctions on individuals involved in planning or carrying out unauthorized drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁷⁶

Canada recently suspended arms sales to Turkey due to its use of drones utilizing Canadian equipment in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Canada's suspense of exporting essential drone parts to Turkey further highlighted Turkey's ongoing effort to develop an autonomous defense industry.⁷⁷

Turkey's new bilateral agreement with Iran, intended to boost trade and cooperation in the energy, petrochemical, transportation and investments sectors, was affected by Iranian sanctions. The agreement also enabled cooperation between the countries on joint operations against Kurdish rebel groups, including the PKK, its Iranian-based offshoot Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), and other mutually agreed "terrorist organizations." This agreement covers further coordination on a broad spectrum of issues and negatively impacts the Commander's first priority.⁷⁸

Turkey's foreign policy checks Russian influence in key conflict areas. Turkish President Erdogan's assertive support to Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh war provided Turkey a role overseeing the truce agreement. This balances the new Russian presence President Putin established when he secured a ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia which allowed him to deploy Russian peace-keepers. In Syria, Putin and Iran supported Bashar al-Assad to retake substantial Syrian territory. Turkey, pursuing its own interests, blocked Syrian efforts to retake the key rebel bastion of Idlib. While Russia sent mercenaries earlier this year to spearhead an assault on the city, it suspended the operation because of Turkish opposition.

In oil-rich Libya, Turkey supports the UN-backed government in Tripoli, rather than Russian-backed military chief Khalifa Haftar. Haftar is currently losing ground amid renewed international efforts to negotiate a political settlement with the Tripoli government.⁷⁹ Turkey was once Moscow's top energy customer outside the former Soviet Union, but it has reduced gas purchases in recent years by turning to rival suppliers like Azerbaijan.⁸⁰ Even with these strains on the relationship, Putin still publicly praises Erdogan for his independence in making energy and weapons deals with Russia despite opposition from its NATO allies. "It's not just nice to work with that kind of partner, it's reliable," Putin said in October.⁸¹ Thus, for the moment, Russia and Turkey maintain a fraught

⁷³ Agneska Bloch and Israa Saber, "What's Driving the Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean," *Lawfare*, Jan 25, 2021, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/whats-driving-conflict-eastern-mediterranean> (accessed Feb, 05, 2021).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Bekdil, Burak Ege, "Canadian block on drone parts shows Turkey's defense industry still not independent," *Defense News*, Oct 13, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/10/13/canadian-block-on-drone-parts-shows-turkeys-defense-industry-still-not-independent/> (accessed Jan 15, 2021).

⁷⁸ Jalilov, Orkhan, "Iran, Turkey Target \$30B in Bilateral Trade," *Caspian News*, Sep 09, 2020, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/iran-turkey-target-30b-in-bilateral-trade-2020-9-9-25/> (accessed Feb, 10, 2021).

⁷⁹ Henry Meyer and Stepan Kravchenko and Ilya Arkhipov, "Putin bets Turkey will strain EU and NATO relations in his favor," *World Oil*, Dec 12, 2020, <https://www.worldoil.com/news/2020/12/11/putin-bets-turkey-will-strain-eu-and-nato-relations-in-his-favor> (accessed Jan 03, 2021).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

relationship, “despite their mutual differences of opinion.” By some experts’ opinions, “[f]or Russia, Erdogan is not an easy partner, not an easy actor to deal with.”⁸²

In 2016, the EU and Turkey executed an agreement under which the EU would provide € 3 B for 4.1 M internally displaced persons (IDP’s) in Turkey.⁸³ However, that arrangement concludes in mid-2021, leaving an urgent need for the EU and Turkey to agree on a new financial framework which would divide the burden between Turkey and the EU more equally. Moreover, the current agreement does not address the critical situation in Idlib. That Turkish military-controlled area could soon cause a crisis as almost 3 M IDPs currently lack adequate shelter and basic needs. The EU will need strong support from all member states to resolve these issues.⁸⁴ Still, Turkey’s action is vital to the EU’s core interest: preventing another refugee flow into Europe.⁸⁵ Poor IDP living conditions and ongoing military operations in Syria leave millions of refugees vulnerable to radicalization. This directly harms the CENTCOM’s functional priority towards “displaced person and the “weaponization” (or exploitation) of refugees.”

Internal Politics

Democratic norms and civil rights continue to decline in Turkey. In 2018, Turkey changed its constitution to make the president the head of the executive branch, while allowing President Erdoğan to retain the dominant political party’s leadership. The government plans further constitutional changes in 2021.⁸⁶ President Erdoğan’s overriding interest appears to be regime security. That security rests in an authoritarian structure with little real challenge. Further, should the young conservative, Soylu emerge as a likely Erdogan successor, Turkish-Western relations will likely further deteriorate. Soylu is the only senior Turkish official who openly accused the US of fomenting the 2016 coup attempt and is another advocate for reactionary and aggressive Turkish nationalist politics.⁸⁷ Under his leadership, virulently anti-Kurdish and anti-American positioning would likely remain a durable feature of Turkish conservatism.

The popularity of opposition mayors Babacan and Davutoğlu, each of whom appeal to a segment of the Turkish right, shows that large segments of the Turkish public do not share Soylu’s combative outlook. Jingoism on Turkey’s conservative right could fade if the opposition wins in 2023 and forms a government. This appears unlikely⁸⁸ as an opposition government might stoke anti-Western feelings or provoke policy clashes with the US. More likely, Turkey would experience a contested election without any clear successor to Erdoğan, with hardliners continuing to define mainstream Turkish politics.⁸⁹

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Kemal Kirisci and Basak Yavcan, “As COVID-19 worsens precarity for refugees, Turkey and the EU must work together,” *Brookings*, Jun 11, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/06/11/as-covid-19-worsens-precariety-for-refugees-turkey-and-the-eu-must-work-together/> (accessed Mar 9, 2021).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Daily Sabah*, “It is time to draft a new constitution, Erdogan says,” Feb 01, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/it-is-time-to-draft-a-new-constitution-erdogan-says/news> (accessed Feb 05, 2021).

⁸⁷ Hoffman, Max, “Turkey President Erdogan Is Losing Ground at Home,” *Center for American Progress*, Aug 24, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2020/08/24/489727/turkeys-president-erdogan-losing-ground-home/#fn-489727-8> (accessed Jan 15, 2021).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Turkey's economy hard and devastated its primary economic sector of tourism. From late 2019 to April 2020, Turkey's budget deficit grew from \$500 M to \$5.6 B due to an increased trade deficit and drop in tourism revenues.⁹⁰

Turkey's primary economic partners are China and Russia. Despite COVID-19, Russia–Turkey Bilateral trade increased 9% in 2020.⁹¹ Chinese investment has rescued Turkey, which has nearly run out of crucial foreign reserves needed to repay its debt. In late July 2020, the People's Bank of China swapped Turkish lira for Chinese yuan valued at \$400M.⁹² Though this currency swap deal was originally signed in 2012, Turkey only executed it to stave off a currency collapse when every other door closed. Beijing will likely leverage this opportunity to ensure Turkey becomes a vital part of its BRI.

Belt and Road Initiative

Once seen as a model of democracy and economic development in the region, Turkey is now more and more authoritarian. As President Erdogan tightens his control over the central bank and the courts, foreign reserves are shrinking, the trade deficit is rising, and the Turkish lira is plunging. Western companies and investors once attracted to Turkey's fast-growing economy and population are staying away. China's appetite for expansion into Western Asia and Europe offers president Erdogan a lifeline. China invested \$3 B in Turkey between 2016 and 2019 and intends to double that by the end of next year.⁹³ Cash flowing in from China has become critical for Erdogan's regime and has strengthened the president's hand at crucial moments. As President Erdogan's popularity dwindled amid the pandemic and a severe currency shortage, China came to the rescue again in June 2020. Beijing is now allowing Turkish companies to use the Chinese yuan to make trade payments, allowing easier access to Chinese liquidity.

China's BRI offers Turkey a new cash source, and Beijing a strategic foothold on the Mediterranean Sea. One Chinese logistics company recently bought 48% of Kumport Terminal for \$940 M. Located on the northwest coast of the Marmara Sea, Kumport is Turkey's third-largest container terminal and is a strategic link to Europe.⁹⁴ In another part of the infrastructure-building initiative, Turkey completed a railroad from Kars in eastern Turkey, through Tbilisi, Georgia, to Baku, Azerbaijan. The Caspian Sea port Baku links to transportation networks to China. In January 2020, a Chinese consortium bought 51% of the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge which spans the Bosphorus Strait to connect Europe and Asia.⁹⁵

The BRI projects support President Erdogan in other ways. They have reinforced Turkey's strategy to assert itself as a transportation corridor. They have boosted President Erdogan's political brand by promoting him as someone who can develop infrastructure, attract funds, and undertake large-scale projects. Also this year, China's Export and Credit Insurance Corporation committed up to \$5 B for Turkey's Wealth Fund, to be used for BRI projects.⁹⁶ However, the fund's limited transparency and accountability raise concerns about the money's destination and Turkey's ability to repay.

⁹⁰ Lerner, George Marshall, "China to the Rescue in Turkey," *The Diplomat*, Jul 03, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/china-to-the-rescue-in-turkey/> (accessed Jan 05, 2021).

⁹¹ Russia Briefing, "Despite Covid-19, Russia-Turkey 2020 Bilateral Trade Is Up 9%," May 14, 2020, <https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/despite-covid-19-russia-turkey-2020-bilateral-trade-9.html/> (accessed Feb 19, 2021).

⁹² Lerner, George Marshall, "China to the Rescue in Turkey," *The Diplomat*, Jul 03, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/china-to-the-rescue-in-turkey/> (accessed Jan 05, 2021).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ayca Alemdarogul and Sultan Tepe, "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey Into a Chinese Client State," *Foreign Policy*, Sep 16, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/16/erdogan-is-turning-turkey-into-a-chinese-client-state/> (accessed Jan 15, 2021).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

The BRI has provided even greater investment in energy, another sector whose development has been key to Erdogan's power. China is providing \$1.7 B to build the Hunutlu coal-fired power plant on the Mediterranean Sea. This plant is projected to produce 3% of Turkey's electricity when completed.⁹⁷ Ankara further plans to allow China's State Nuclear Power Technology Corporation to build Turkey's third nuclear power plant. Huawei, which the US and others designate a national security threat due to its Chinese military ties, has no such opposition in Turkey. Allegations about the Chinese use of telecommunications infrastructure for state surveillance and suppression are especially worrisome in Turkey. The population relies on the internet and social media for information due to strict state controls on other media channels.

Currently, strengthening relations between China and Turkey appear to benefit both sides. China has found a highly strategic foothold in Turkey, a NATO member with large energy, infrastructure, defense technology, and telecommunications markets at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. For Turkey and President Erdogan, China provides desperately needed resources to fund high-profile megaprojects, and to maintain the veneer of development despite the suffering economic reality. Equally important, Chinese cash helps President Erdogan avoid seeking help from Western-dominated institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, which would require him to commit to reforms and other measures that could undermine his unfettered control over the country's economy.^{98 99}

Russian COVID-19 Vaccine

Turkey is ready to produce Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine upon positive results in toxicological tests. In late January, the Russian Direct Investment Fund agreed with, and transferred technologies to, a leading Turkish pharmaceuticals developer to produce the Russian vaccine in Turkey. Turkey could produce millions of Sputnik V vaccine doses per year. Turkish Minister of Health Fahrettin Koca said:

"We are holding negotiations with various countries and companies, especially with those who are ready to provide us with the vaccine until April. From the very beginning, we have been focusing on three vaccines: the Russian one, the Chinese one, and the vaccine developed by Turkish scientists. Russia's Sputnik V vaccine has some problems with toxicology. However, we are continuing the work on it. If these problems are removed, we will be ready not only to register and purchase it but also to launch its production in Turkey."¹⁰⁰

A recent peer-reviewed study published in The Lancet Journal stated that Sputnik V, developed by Russia's Gamaleya Research Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology, showed 91.6% efficacy in Phase 3 clinical trials.¹⁰¹ The vaccine was registered by the Russian government on August 11, 2020. Over 20 countries have already approved Sputnik V for emergency use.

Society

During the last year, Erdogan's popularity declined particularly among the youth population. Young voters have grown to political age entirely under AKP rule with President Erdoğan dominating public life. However, this

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ *Xinhua*, "First cargo train from Turkey to China reaches Xi'an," Dec 23, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-12/23/c_139613868.htm (accessed Jan 05, 2021).

¹⁰⁰ *Business Standard*, "Turkey may launch production of Sputnik V vaccine against COVID-19," Feb 11, 2021, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/turkey-may-launch-production-of-sputnik-v-vaccine-against-covid-19-121021100079_1.html (accessed Feb 12, 2021).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

group is no devoted “Generation Erdoğan,” but is largely unenthusiastic about him and his party.¹⁰² Many see Erdoğan as the “least bad option” and struggle to imagine alternatives. Erdoğan remains the embodiment of an establishment perceived to be failing young Turks as unemployment rate hovers around 25% before the COVID-19 pandemic further devastated the economy.¹⁰³ In every survey conducted, younger Turks support Erdoğan and the AKP less than their older counterparts. The 18-29 age group is currently the largest demographic voting bloc in Turkey. Several million more will reach voting age before the next scheduled election in 2023.¹⁰⁴ Along with these numbers, further change is presaged by student protests at Turkish universities.¹⁰⁵

Turkey's COVID-19 vaccination plan started in early January 2021. To start, 600,000 health workers were vaccinated in the first two days. The pace then slowed to 100,000 vaccinations a day. The Turkish government states it can vaccinate more than a million persons a day, but is limited by the number of vaccines provided by Corona Vic (Chinese vaccine). Turkey ordered 50 M doses, but received only 3 M. Despite temporary supply delays, the country plan should allow all IDP's to receive the vaccine.¹⁰⁶ Turkey's reported 24,000 COVID-19 deaths and more than 2.4 M infected since March are among the highest in the Middle East.

Influence in the Central and South Asian States

Turkey has special bonds with the Muslim Central Asian countries and to a lesser extent with South Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan). The ties stem from history, tradition, religion, and language (Turkic societies). Further, some Central Asian legal systems arose from ancient Turkish foundations mixed with other pre-Muslim and Muslim Middle East influences. Some Turkish media outlets advance narratives suggesting Turkey may emerge as the leader of the Muslim world (i.e., Great Turan or pan-Turkic narratives), while they advocate restoring close ties between the Turkish peoples. For instance, the outcome of the most recent Azeri-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh contributed to restoring some old relations between Turkey and Central Asian states. During a military parade to mark victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Baku, Erdogan stated, “as long as Turkey and Azerbaijan work hand in glove, they will continue to overcome all difficulties and run from one success to the next.”¹⁰⁷ However, Erdogan has not yet expressed such interest in fully pushing that narrative in Central and South Asia.

Influence in the Middle East

Turkey's main military efforts are manifest in Iraq and Syria. Its forces carry out operations to counter Kurdish forces, and create a deeper security buffer between Turkey's borders and Kurdish controlled territories.

Turkish Influence in Iraq

Turkey's interventions into Iraq and Syria support the same national objectives. Ankara's primary goal is to conduct operations against regional Kurdish minorities premised on countering the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an internationally designated terrorist organization. Last year Iraq became a new front in the war of influence between Turkey and its Arab opponents. Despite Iraq's foreign minister summoning Turkey's ambassador to protest Ankara's attack on Iraq's sovereignty, Turkey launched a new major northern Iraq

¹⁰² Hoffman, Max, “Turkey President Erdogan Is Losing Ground at Home,” *Center for American Progress*, Aug 24, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2020/08/24/489727/turkeys-president-erdogan-losing-ground-home/> (accessed, Jan 05, 2021).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Clare Busch and Merve Pehlivan, “The High Stakes of Turkey University Protests,” *Foreign Policy*, Feb 09, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/09/the-high-stakes-of-turkeys-university-protests/> (accessed, Feb 11, 2021).

¹⁰⁶ Gumrucku, Tuvan, “Turkey's COVID-19 vaccination may quicken after elderly are inoculated-coordinator,” *Reuters*, Jan 21, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-turkey-vaccine-int-idUSKBN29Q0H3> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

¹⁰⁷ Associated Press, “Azerbaijan holds military parade after Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,” *PBS News Hour*, Dec 12, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/azerbaijan-holds-military-parade-after-nagorno-karabakh-conflict> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

offensive on the pretext of fighting terrorist Kurds. Turkish military operations against northern Iraq PKK positions continue today. Turkey launched Operation Tiger Claw against PKK positions in mid-June, 2020. Turkish officials claim that 348 militants have been killed¹⁰⁸ or captured in cross-border Tiger Claw operations. Further Turkish military operations are likely in northern Iraqi Kurdistan over the near term. Retaliatory PKK attacks are possible along border regions while Turkish operations continue. However, when Turkish soldiers operating against PKK this month discovered 13 Turkish citizens kidnapped and killed by PKK, Erdogan declared that “the killings have strengthened Turkey’s will to form a secure zone along its border in northern Iraq to protect Turkey’s frontiers from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party.”¹⁰⁹

Turkey will continue, if not expand, Iraq operations based on the success of the June 2017 ground assault where Turkish troops advanced up to 25 miles inside Iraq, and established over 30 “temporary bases.”¹¹⁰ Further, Turkey and Iraq have agreed to continue cooperation fighting extremist organizations, including the Islamic State and Kurdish rebels. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi told reporters that it was “not possible for Iraq to show tolerance toward any (group) that threatens Turkey.”¹¹¹ President Erdogan and Prime Minister al-Kadhimi also arranged cooperation regarding rebuilding an Iraqi-Turkish oil pipeline damaged by ISIS operations in Iraq. The two countries also agreed to continue working on a Turkish-proposed action plan geared toward the “effective use” of the Tigris River’s waters, following Turkey’s construction of the Ilisu Dam in southeast Turkey.¹¹² This meeting strengthened Turkey’s position in Iraq and provided the base for future operations against Kurds in Iraq.

Turkish Influence in Syria

Turkish military operations in Syria focus on suppressing Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Turkish forces attacked through Ayn Issa to drive SDF deeper from Turkish borders. SDF-controlled Ayn Issa is the capital of the Kurdish “Autonomous Administration” in northeast Syria and includes SDF command facilities and training camps. Beginning November 2020, Turkey built up forces and strengthened fortifications opposite Ayn Issa. Turkey also resupplied its local proxies. In response, the SDF, Russia, and the Syrian regime established three joint observation posts in Ayn Issa.¹¹³ By late November, Turkish forces and proxies began sporadic attacks around outer Ayn Issa, while also conducting similar attacks on other key towns of Manbij and al-Hasakah.¹¹⁴

Turkey would need to hold all these towns to consolidate its security corridor. Turkish forces also obstruct civilian travel on the highway, violating Russia’s agreement on joint patrols along the M4. SDF refused the Russian request to hand over Ayn Issa to the Syrian regime, after which the SDF and Russia began joint drills and technical meetings.¹¹⁵ After SDF refusal, Moscow reportedly tacitly gave Turkey’s operation the green light. Turkish artillery struck two SDF-controlled villages just north of the M4 around Ayn Issa and the city itself; Turkish proxies also

¹⁰⁸ *Garda World*, “Iraq: Turkish operations in Iraq Kurdistan continue,” Nov 24, 2020, <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/402936/iraq-turkish-operations-in-iraqi-kurdistan-continue-november-22-update-7> (accessed Feb 19, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ Associated Press, “Turkey Vows to Expand Anti-PKK Operations in Northern Iraq,” *US News*, Feb 16, 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-02-16/turkey-vows-to-expand-anti-pkk-operations-in-northern-iraq> (accessed Feb 19, 2021).

¹¹⁰ Orhan Coskun, Daren Butler, and John Davison, “Turkey shifts fight against Kurdish militants deeper into Iraq,” *Reuters*, Jul 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-iraq-idUSKCN24N26F> (accessed, Jan 07, 2021).

¹¹¹ Associated Press, “Turkey, Iraq agree to cooperate against extremist groups,” *Ozarks First*, Dec 17, 2020, <https://www.ozarksfirst.com/local-news/world-news/turkey-iraq-agree-to-cooperate-against-extremist-groups/> (accessed, Jan 15, 2021).

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Tokyay, Menekse, “Turkey quits more observation posts in Syria’s Idlib,” *Arab News*, Dec 18, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1779016/middle-east> (accessed, Jan 06, 2021).

¹¹⁴ Kajjo, Sirwan, “Turkish-Backed Rebels Intensify Attacks on Syrian Town,” *VOA news*, Dec 06, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/turkish-backed-rebels-intensify-attacks-syrian-town> (accessed, Dec 20, 2021).

¹¹⁵ Tokyay, Menekse, “Russia, SDF to set up joint military posts in strategic Syrian Town,” *Arab News*, Dec 12, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1775871/middle-east> (accessed, Dec 20, 2021).

begin attempting to push across the M4 highway, resulting in gun battles with the SDF, who replied with artillery fire on Turkish positions north of the highway.¹¹⁶

Turkey may seek to expand its territorial holdings in eastern Syria to enable repatriation of over 3 M Syrian refugees still in Turkey. Further Turkey seeks to prevent new refugees fleeing fighting in Idlib from entering Turkey. Despite the Turkish-Russian ceasefire, Moscow might be willing to acquiesce to Turkish operations and territorial gains in Manbij and Kobane as a means to extend the Assad regime's control over SDF-controlled territory. Assad's aim of gaining control of oil production facilities in northeast Syria is likely critical to the regime's survival, and therefore a key interest for Moscow. Recent Turkish diplomacy with the Iraqi government and the Kurdish Regional Government to form a united front against the PKK could be a Turkish effort to isolate the SDF and cut off possible assistance from Iraqi Kurdish factions. Turkey may act aggressively now to exploit the US presidential transition when a US response is deemed less likely.

Turkey's Middle East influence generally counters CENTCOM's priorities to maintain the defeat ISIS campaign and prevent the weaponization of IDPs and refugees. Turkish military operations further harm the SDF D-ISIS campaign support as resources are relocated in defense against the Turks. The Turkish offensive could also cause regional IDP's to move from current camps. Those IDPs then become increasingly vulnerable to be radicalized by terrorist fractions that provide sanctuary and basic needs. Turkey executes its national agenda mainly to counter regional Kurds. This requires deep buffer zones between Turkey and any Kurdish territory.

Recommendations for the US/ for USCENTCOM:

- Increase military exercises with Turkish Armed forces, to enhance cooperation, in bilateral framework agreements between US and Turkey.
- Offer mediation between Kurds and Turkey.
- Conduct Security Cooperation to enhance Turkey's defense capabilities.

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¹¹⁶ Reuters, "Turkey-backed fighters clash with Kurdish forces in north Syria town," Dec 18, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-ainissa-idUSKBN28S298> (accessed, Dec 20, 2020).

2.5 CHINA'S INFLUENCE IN THE AOR

Head of State Head of Government	President Xi Jinping	Population	1,437,285,314
Minister of Defense Chief of Defense	Gen. Wei Fenghe Gen. Li Zuocheng (Chief of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission)	Religion	Folk Religion 30% Buddhist 10-18% Atheist 15% Christian 5% Muslim 3% Other 29-37%
Type of Government	Unitary de-facto One-Party Socialist Republic	Ethnicity	Han 92% Zhuang 1% Uyghur 1% Tibetan 1% Other 5%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$14,140.16 B (+2.3%)	Military Personnel	Active 2,185,000 Reserve 510,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Agile decision-making in one-party dictatorship b. The world's second largest economy and leader of BRI economic sphere c. Center of critical global supply chain as “world`s factory” d. Formidable internal controls on population through surveillance and speech control e. World's largest military force with advanced weapons technology, cyber, and space capabilities f. Unmatched big data processing capabilities and advanced 5G capabilities g. United Nations contributions and influence in major international organizations h. Selective adherence to international rule of law. i. Use of the Chinese diaspora and media as a tool of influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. International criticism of China’s human rights record and flouting international law b. Increasing international skepticism on BRI’s “Debt Trap,” transparency, and India's opposition to BRI c. Corruption, broad internal dissatisfaction, widening rural versus urban disparities among citizens, aging society d. Decrease in food and water self-sufficiency e. US-China trade tension f. Senior officers’ keep assets outside of China, vulnerable to foreign influence g. Domestic environmental damage, air pollution, water pollution, desertification 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increased international collaboration, globalization b. Elaborate information campaign (media war) over the origin of COVID-19, “infodemics” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Growing domestic demand for transparency, liberty, and democracy b. Less demand for Chinese products 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Control over critical medical supply d. Active engagement in the Pacific, Space, and Arctic regions e. Closer relations with Russia f. International adaptation to proposed Chinese rules by taking full advantage of international organizations g. Fracturing US coalitions and alliances h. Regional control of the Middle East and the Pacific i. Export Chinese governance system and methods including “Digital Leninism” 	<p>post-COVID-19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Historical inability to maintain diplomatic and military bonds and share power with Russia d. Failure of BRI e. Strong US-led alliances/coalitions f. Russian Federation joining other major powers against China g. Combined push back by the Central Asian states/societies
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG’s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>	

Executive Summary

China has assisted many nations around the world to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many nations view the Chinese internal COVID-19 response as effective. China is trying to use the current global situation as a way to portray the Chinese governance model as a success and export it to other nations. China recognizes the US-led western world is in decline and sees this as an opportune time to showcase the superiority of the Chinese regime and governance model. On the other hand, China’s reputation has plummeted during COVID-19 and the west has an increasingly negative view of the country. The Chinese government is aware of its current position in an increasingly hostile international environment. To increase the appeal of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to its citizens and to raise China’s state-sponsored nationalism to a new level, Chinese diplomacy has taken on an unprecedented assertiveness on territorial issues with neighboring countries. Under its new defense laws, China can use military force when its overseas “development interests” are threatened. China’s historic and aggressive territorial ambitions have resurfaced across Asia and into Central Asian States (CAS). In the Middle East, China is increasing its influence through investments. China has established a new economic and military relationship with Iran despite severe US sanctions. China became the champion of globalization and will try to force the international community to its global narrative.

Foreign Policy/Security

China used its experience in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic to aid other nations around the world. Chinese leaders see the situation as a golden opportunity to try and portray the Chinese governance model as a success.¹¹⁷ China recognizes that the western democracy and the US led world order is in decline and this represents an opportunity to showcase the superiority of the Chinese regime. The political and social divisions of the US and the turmoil over the presidential election are seen as an opportunity by China to take pride in its own system and show its efficiency both internally and externally.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, the international reputation of the Chinese government has plummeted during the COVID-19 pandemic and public opinion of China in Western countries has diminished. The Chinese government

¹¹⁷ Kinling Lo and Kristin Huang, “Xi Jinping says ‘time and momentum on China’s side’ as he sets out Communist Party vision,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan 12, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3117314/xi-jinping-says-time-and-momentum-chinas-side-he-sets-out> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹¹⁸ Kurlantzick, Joshua, “China thinks the pandemic will make it the world’s new leader. It won’t,” *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/china-uses-the-pandemic-to-claim-global-leadership/2020/05/21/9b045692-9ab4-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f_story.html (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

is aware of its position in an increasingly hostile international environment.¹¹⁹ To strengthen CCP's internal appeal and to raise Chinese nationalism to a new level, Chinese diplomacy has taken on an unprecedented assertiveness on territorial issues with neighboring countries. If the challenges confronting the Chinese regime develop further, it will seek to rally the country by amplifying its nationalist and revisionist rhetoric, and by adopting a more aggressive posture. The growing likelihood of such behaviors are already noticeable. In January 2021, the Chinese government strengthened its defense laws. Under these new defense laws, China can use military force when its overseas "development interests" are threatened." This includes mobilization of a force of Chinese nationals already residing in the threatened area.¹²⁰

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has proceeded with its own information operations and evolved its cyber strategy. The PLA recognized that "information dominance" is crucial for seizing the core initiative in modern warfare.¹²¹ Moreover, from the perspective of information dominance, the Chinese government strives to take the lead in expanding and exploiting international norms and standards related to cyberspace. In regards to space, the PLA uses it for information support to operations on land, sea, and air; and is developing capabilities to disrupt other countries' use of space.¹²²

Internal Politics

China promotes a strong national assimilation policy. Xi Jinping wants to eliminate religion and engrave the Chinese nation's community spirit and ethnic language deep into the heart of the Chinese people to improve the sense of belonging to a Chinese community. There are protests against human rights violations against ethnic minorities such as the Tibet Autonomous Region and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. There are also activities aimed at secession and independence. The international community's interest in the human rights situation in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is also growing. Western countries have accused the government of invisible ethnic cleansing.¹²³ The international community and central Asian people are very concerned about CCP's actions against religion. The Chinese government is in the process of controlling the debate by banning Western media. In 2020, Mongolian language education was banned in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Xi Jinping is focusing on ensuring that the 2022 February Winter Olympics is conducted safely in Beijing. He wants to use the Olympics to showcase China's influence around the world. The Chinese government is preparing strong sanctions against countries that boycott the Olympics.

In Oct 2020, Xi Jinping tried to increase his control of the nation. He seized power as "the party chief" in the same way as Mao Zedong did for the PLA, and is now in the position of supreme commander. In January 2021, the CCP raised the salaries of military personnel by up to 40% in an effort to increase military morale and allegiance.¹²⁴ Xi Jinping continues the political cleansing. On behalf of the anti-corruption movement, he is trying to consolidate power by eradicating anti-government forces and political rivals. He also consolidated his control

¹¹⁹ Wang, Hongying, "The Global Pandemic and China's Relations with the Western World," *CIGI*, Jul 22, 2020, <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/global-pandemic-and-chinas-relations-western-world> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²⁰ Feng, John, "New China Defense Law Could 'Justify' PLA Action Against U.S.," *Newsweek*, Jan 13, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/new-china-defense-law-justify-pla-action-against-us-think-tank-1561146> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²¹ Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²² NIDS China Security Report, "China's Military Strategy in the New Era 2021," NIDS, Nov 13, 2020, http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/publication/chinareport/pdf/china_report_EN_web_2021_A01.pdf (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²³ Buckley, Chris, "U.S. Says China's Repression of Uighurs Is 'Genocide,'" *The New York Times*, Jan. 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/politics/trump-china-xinjiang.html> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²⁴ Chan, Minnie, "China to boost pay for PLA forces after years of sweeping reforms," *South China Morning Post*, Jan 23, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3118636/china-boost-pay-pla-forces-after-years-sweeping-reforms> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

over the secret police and the PLA.¹²⁵ Lastly, internal Chinese affairs and politics might soon be influenced or overcome by consequences of Xi's attempts to bring back the 'one hand' rule system used during Mao's reign to quickly eliminate dissent.

Economy

Unemployment has reached about 20% due to the impact of COVID-19. The real GDP growth rate in 2020 is still up 2.3% due to strong containment of infections and reactive policies. According to the International Monetary Fund, China was the only country that achieved positive growth among major countries. With the contribution of land management and highly efficient production factors, the growth forecast for 2021 is 7.9%. Based on an economic policy that focuses on the "internal cycle", the Chinese government will formulate a basic policy to expand domestic demand which, given a population of approximately 1.4 B,¹²⁶ will be more effective than looking abroad. The Chinese government aims to "reach the level of GDP per capita in developed countries," reduce the disparity between urban and rural areas, and expand the middle-income group by 2035.¹²⁷

The national development plan is based on the US-China conflict. In 2021, the 14th five-year plan advocates that "safety and development" grasps core technology under the "new national unity system" and promotes innovation focused on the independence of scientific and technological developments.¹²⁸ Under the Xi Jinping regime in China, the strengthening of military force promoted this approach through military and civilian fusion. The strategy aims to strengthen and promote military power by linking military and economic society. But it raised concerns from the perspective of security in Western countries, leading to the tightening of trade and investment regulations in Western countries.¹²⁹

In 2020, the use of the digital yuan began, known officially as the Digital Currency Electronic Payment. The digital yuan is part of China's plan to move towards a cashless society. The digital yuan is helping to circumvent US sanctions and aims for monetary hegemony in the future.¹³⁰

Society

The social contract between Xi Jinping and the populace is based on only two freedoms: freedom from war and freedom to get wealthier. This rejects freedom of speech and freedom of belief. President Xi has not managed to fulfill the contract, yet. Recently, domestic unrest in China has also intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Immediately after the outbreak of COVID-19 the initial response failed, but the majority of Chinese people support the later CCP measures because of the quick recovery China made compared to other nations.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Wong, Chun Han, "China's Xi Jinping Tightens Grip on Domestic Security Forces in First Broad Purge," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug 18, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-xi-jinping-tightens-grip-on-domestic-security-forces-in-first-broad-purge-11597773887> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²⁶ King & Wood Malleons, "China's 14th Five-Year Plan: a blueprint for growth in complex times," *Lexology*, Feb 9, 2021 <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=50083c2e-9e68-4b80-b075-07f20334429f> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²⁷ "Mnuchin says IMF and World Bank funds won't repay debts to China," *Reuters*, Mar 11, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-debt-idUSKBN20Y2I4> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²⁸ Wong, Dorcas, "What to Expect in China's 14th Five Year Plan? Decoding the Fifth Plenum Communique," *China Briefing*, Nov 12, 2020, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/what-to-expect-in-chinas-14th-five-year-plan-decoding-the-fifth-plenum-communique/> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹²⁹ *IntelBrief*, "China's Military-Civil Fusion Strategy," Aug 13, 2020, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-chinas-military-civil-fusion-strategy/> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹³⁰ Paterson, Stewart, "The digital Yuan and China's potential financial revolution," Hinrich Foundation, Jul 1, 2020, <https://www.hinrichfoundation.com/media/2kybhumm/hinrich-foundation-white-paper-digital-yuan-and-china-s-potential-financial-revolution-july-2020.pdf> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹³¹ Cho, Sungmin, "COVID-19 Has Dimmed Xi's Approval Ratings Abroad – But Not in China," *The Diplomat*, Oct 09, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/covid-19-has-dimmed-xis-approval-ratings-abroad-but-not-in-china/> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

With the successful manipulation of information by the CCP, it is widely believed in China that COVID-19 originated in the US.¹³²

Influence in the Central and South Asian States

Chinese expansion into Central Asia was largely made possible by an unusual, opportunistic Russo-Sino marriage of convenience. Russia has for a long time been the key security provider and ‘supervisor’ in the region, but with either Moscow’s permission or the turning of a blind eye, China was allowed to push forward with its BRI. Through this, China acquired the freedom to act and make the Great Rejuvenation of Chinese Nation happen. In return, Moscow benefited from Chinese investments and financial resources in the region. This security-economic Russo-Sino tandem greatly determines the environment, conditions and opportunities of the CAS.

Since the Uighur autonomous region in Xinjiang in western China borders on the Central Asian region, the political stability and the security situation of the CAS is of great importance to China. Examples of Chinese concerns for security stabilization are the strengthening of border controls, countering terrorism by Islamist extremists, participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and participation in Afghanistan stabilization. In addition, China has a strong interest in Central Asia in order to diversify its natural resources procurement. For example, China is promoting cooperation in the energy sector with CAS by the construction of oil and natural gas pipelines between China and Central Asia. Another example of Beijing’s diversification strategy in Asia is the Power of Siberia pipeline.

However, China's historical and aggressive territorial ambitions have resurfaced across Asia and the CAS. In April 2020, China's major portal site "Sohu" published an article titled, "Why Kazakhstan is eager to return to China."¹³³ The article challenged the legitimacy of Kazakh sovereignty and made statements such as "the present Kazakh territory was historically a land that should belong to China." In August, China claimed the Pamir region in Tajikistan (which accounts for 45% of Tajik territory) through the state-owned Chinese media outlet. Some CAS fear that this revisionist behavior will lead to China amending the 1997 border agreements.

Afghanistan has become increasingly important for the BRI. China is concerned about Afghanistan as a potential haven for Uighur militant groups. To strengthen security in Afghanistan and prevent a further influx of extremism, security cooperation between China and Afghanistan is likely to increase. In order to prepare Afghanistan for the withdrawal of the US, China has sought to play a leading role in peace talks to ensure its influence and to maintain good relations with the Taliban. In September 2019, a Taliban delegation met with China's special envoy for Afghanistan in Beijing to discuss the group's peace talks with the US. On the other hand, the Afghan government arrested ten Chinese nationals for espionage in December 2020. At least two of the ten spies had contact with the Haqqani network.¹³⁴

China traditionally has particularly close ties with Pakistan and the leaders of both countries frequently visit each other. Their military cooperation, including bilateral exercises, arms exports and transfers of military technology has deepened. With the increasing importance of the sea routes of communication for China and Pakistan’s advantageous geopolitical location on the Indian Ocean, it is assumed that the importance of Pakistan for China will increase accordingly. China has also conducted various bilateral military exercises with Pakistan, including navy search and rescue training and counter-terrorism exercises. The China-Pakistan Economic

¹³² Kuo, Lily, “‘American coronavirus’: China pushes propaganda casting doubt on virus origin,” *The Guardian*, Mar 12 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/12/conspiracy-theory-that-coronavirus-originated-in-us-gaining-traction-in-china> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

¹³³ Altynbayev, Kanat, “Kazakhstan lodges protest with China over article questioning its sovereignty,” *Central Asia News*, Apr 17, 2020, https://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2020/04/17/feature-02 (accessed Aug 16, 2020).

¹³⁴ Gupta, Shishir, “Afghanistan busted Chinese spy ring, kept it a secret. NDS chief explains why,” *Hindustan Times*, Jan 06, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/afghan-intel-chief-confirms-busting-chinese-spy-ring-says-it-s-sensitive/story-iFqT1qRYftMikEN7ATxN.html> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

Corridor, a China-backed development plan for power plants and transport infrastructure in the region from the port of Gwadar to Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, is a BRI flagship project. While some have indicated that the project has encountered difficulties (disagreements over the Main Line 1 Railway Project and Special Economic Zones), but expects to progress a further increase in China's influence in Pakistan. The US is expected to move closer to India to counter China's growing influence in South Asia. In particular, Pakistan has expressed concern that excessive military and diplomatic support to India could lead to strategic imbalances.

Influence in the Middle East

China's most significant interest and influence in the Middle East is trade. China has established itself as a significant exporter of products to the region. Chinese encroachments in the Middle East have become more noticeable since May 2020.

Since then China has continued or intensified its activities with the aim of surpassing the US on the commercial level with the Middle East countries. This has led to its increased investment in the region through political and economic action. China's trade interest was to secure a sustainable source of energy for its industries and domestic consumption. However, in the last six months China's interest has shifted to manufacturing and infrastructure. This shift was fueled by a desire to gain more trade dominance globally and becoming a better trade partner than the US. Therefore, China created good relations with many countries in the region, influencing their trade policies and trade agreements. China's desire to create the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road led to an increase in its infrastructure investment in 2020. China hoped to expand the BRI in 2020 and in 2021 through a 25-year partnership with Iran. The deal between Russia, China and Iran, could include Chinese investment in the Chabahar port, located in Iran but outside the Arabian Gulf, and Anti-Access/Aerial-Denial capacity which would have a regional impact. This port offers the Chinese strategic access to the Middle East, Africa and Europe while avoiding Russia, advancing the BRI concept further. Chinese presence on Iranian soil provides a sort of legitimacy for Iran and this will challenge other nations from deterring Iran. Iran's successful end to the UN arms embargo, with the support of the UNSC members, created the option for China to start delivering weapons to Iran, which will affect the region's power balance.

The UAE has forged closer ties with China. As China's second-largest trading partner in the Middle East, the UAE views Beijing's BRI as an opportunity to expand its capacity as an international trade, shipping, and commerce hub. The China North Industries Group Corporation announced plans to join forces with an Emirati defense company, to set up a joint research venture. Under the agreement, the two companies will open a facility in Abu Dhabi, staffed by Chinese and Emirati engineers and supported by universities from both states, to develop weapons and training in cooperation with the UAE armed forces. The center's first project will reportedly focus on developing surveillance and battlefield drones. The UAE has also purchased military drones from China. This move was likely in response to America's refusal to sell its armed drones due to US restrictions imposed as part of the Missile Technology Control Regime and concerns that they may end up in the wrong hands. The UAE currently possesses the Chinese Wing Loong II, which is intended for surveillance and capable of carrying missiles and laser-guided bombs, in addition to the CH-4, an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance drone. For UAE, arms purchased from outside of the US have the added benefit of not being accompanied by the same restrictions on their deployment, or third-party transfer, that the US requires. They are also not accompanied by calls to improve human rights records, as Congress demands.

Chinese influence was also visible in Egypt. President Al-Sisi has visited China more than six times since he took office. He pledged to cooperate in the BRI. However, President Al-Sisi is relying on "no pressure" ties with China considering that China did not intervene in Egypt's political situation during the revolution in 2011. In return, Egypt is taking a similar approach, especially regarding the Uyghur Muslims in China. One of Egypt's main interests regarding ties with China is to avoid becoming dependent on one geopolitical axis and to diversify Egypt's foreign policy and military options.

China has influenced the culture of people in the Middle East. A report presented in September 2020 indicated an increase in the enrollment in classes or teaching themselves the Chinese.¹³⁵ There are increased cultural exchange programs between China and countries in the Middle East, unlike the US, which banned immigration from countries in the region in 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, China was quick to donate relief to Lebanon through its cooperation with Arab countries. China has established a large market for various products in the region, especially during the pandemic.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Approach AOR counterparts, promote ideals of national sovereignty, rule of law, economic engagement, and regional security both internationally and in cooperation between government agencies.
- Counter China's messages that its policies for Xinjiang and Uighurs should be an international model for combating radical jihadism, and counter China's narratives exploiting the 2022 Beijing Olympics.
- Synchronize efforts and strengthen collaboration with allies in Central and South Asia and the Middle East.
- Promote US and AOR country partnerships. Message that the US is the partner of choice.
- Promote and conduct Regional Cooperation Mil-Mil activities/exercises with CAS bordering China. Focus on scenarios that assume China's "unrestricted warfare" and "militarized People's Armed Police."

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¹³⁵ Anderlini, Jamil, "China's Middle East Strategy Comes at a Cost to the US," *Financial Times*, Sep 9, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/e20ae4b9-bc22-4cb5-aaf6-b67c885c845c> (accessed Feb 19,2021).

2.6 AFGHANISTAN

Head of State	President	Population	38,482,646
Head of Government	Mohammad Ashraf Ghani		
Minister of Defense	Asadullah Khalid	Religion	Muslim 99%
Chief of Defense	Lt. Gen. Yasin Zia		- Sunni 85%
			- Shia 15%
			Others 1%
Type of Government	Islamic Republic	Ethnicity	Pashtun 42%
			Tajik 27%
			Uzbek 9%
			Hazara 8%
			Aimaq 4%
			Turkmen 3%
			Balochi 2%
			Others 5%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	19.69 B (-5%)	Military Personnel	Active 175,000
			Reserve N/A

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strategic geographic location; conduit between South and Central Asia b. Potential commercially viable natural resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Afghan legacy of governance and international contestation b. Deep rooted ethnic, sectarian and linguistic divide, exacerbated by long and bloody civil war c. Highly centralized system of governance with excessive powers vested in the office of President d. Fragile security situation e. Weak criminal justice system f. Non-existent / weak institutions and rampant corruption g. Highly dependent and frail economy threatened by donor fatigue h. Negative public perception of the government. i. Limited civic facilities 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Regional and international consensus for peace, stability and development b. East-West and North-South Connectivity. c. Potential for being an energy corridor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Competition for post US withdrawal regional power contestation b. Domestic, regional and extra regional influence on peace process 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Hydroelectric and agriculture potential e. Opportunities for investments in infrastructure, agriculture and mining projects f. Will of the international community to invest in peaceful Afghanistan g. Human resource development h. Repatriation and capitalizing on potentials of refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Donor fatigue and receding financial and diplomatic support from international community d. Possibility of VEOs’ resurgence e. Sustainability of security forces after the withdrawal of NATO forces f. Fear of a civil war as the society remains divided on ethnic and sectarian lines
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG’s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>	

Executive Summary

Afghan society remains divided on ethnic, tribal, and sectarian grounds. The level of political, military, and economic support from the international community has yet to bring prosperity, peace and stability. Power overwhelmingly remains vested in the President’s office providing him near absolute authority. Historically, and under the current incumbent, Kabul remains under the ethnic Pashtun rule which causes other ethnicities to continuously feel marginalized. The President’s absolute powers make him largely immune to accountability. This incentivizes rampant corruption, poor governance, and broad Afghan loss of confidence in government. The President’s absolute power inhibits the peace process therefore exercise of US leverage over the incumbent becomes a necessity.

The security situation in Afghanistan is fragile. Failure to reach an inclusive political solution will further severely deteriorate the situation and destabilize the region. The Taliban are gaining diplomatic and military strength. Public perception is also beginning to favor the Taliban. This trend has made coercing the Taliban to negotiate increasingly difficult. In the backdrop of US withdrawal, settlement of conflict through Intra Afghan Negotiations becomes imperative and calls for immediate sincere efforts from the domestic, regional and extra regional players especially the US. The US must use its leverage over the Afghan government, Taliban, and regional players to push the process ahead, and proactively protect the process from spoilers’ actions. Security of withdrawing forces is also threatened by the spoilers warranting a careful analysis of the situation. Only an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process can provide a realistic solution to the Afghan crisis. Such a solution will likely take considerable time and conform to Afghan culture and traditions. Therefore, the process first requires an inclusive interim government. Concurrent with the peace process, stakeholders must keep the process moving and ease regional anxiety by negotiating post-allied-withdrawal counter terrorism or residual forces. Irrespective of who forms the government in Kabul, the country will need short to mid-term financial support and long-term assistance to develop the sustainable economic and military capabilities to maintain stability. Afghanistan has the potential to ultimately become independent provided stability and security is ensured through non-interference by all regional and extra regional players.

Foreign Policy/Security

Prolonged instability and the Afghan government’s dependence on foreign assistance in economic, diplomatic, and military domains has dis-incentivized the country to develop capacity and pursue long-term development.¹³⁶ While Afghanistan has developed many security-based bilateral relations in the region, it maintains close ties with the US, the European Union, South Korea, Japan, Australia, India, China, Russia, the

¹³⁶ Cooper, Rachel, “Aid dependency and political settlements in Afghanistan,” Sep 14, 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d0ced7ae5274a065e721702/428_Aid_Dependency_and_Political_Settlements_in_Afghanistan.pdf (accessed Jan 12, 2021).

Greater Middle East, and African nations regarding economic, infrastructure, and military interests.¹³⁷ The US-Taliban peace deal, largely motivated by the US' desire to "[c]onclud[e] the never-ending War in Afghanistan," impacted Afghanistan's diplomatic relations¹³⁸ in the region and beyond. The world community region (less mainly India¹³⁹ and to some extent Iran¹⁴⁰) backed the US effort to bring stability in Afghanistan through negotiations. Since signing the deal, the US persuaded the Afghan government to negotiate with the Taliban. However, the Afghan Government's tone changed dramatically at the start of the Biden Administration¹⁴¹ and the government remains slow to adapt to ongoing developments.

Despite stalemate in Intra-Afghan negotiations, the Taliban political leadership has engaged with regional countries¹⁴² and Western diplomats.¹⁴³ Such engagements not only highlight the Taliban's growing strength, but also its status as a legitimate stake holder. Turkmenistan's official statement on the Taliban's pledge to secure the TAPI gas pipeline project¹⁴⁴ shows growing regional confidence in the Taliban leadership and their potential role in the Afghan government. The Taliban pledge also highlights the Taliban's new thinking and approach towards the international community and their quest for improving diplomatic and economic engagements. Given the current trends, if the Taliban assumes Afghan Government control, the international community will likely recognize it as legitimate. Regardless of the government in Kabul, the international community's primary concern is that Afghanistan can manage external affairs in a way that does not threaten regional and global security interests.¹⁴⁵ However, without international support, especially economic, no administration is likely to be able to deliver the core government functions. Thus, supporting countries will continue to retain significant leverage on any political dispensation in Kabul.

After signing the US-Taliban peace deal, Taliban violence surged. The Taliban initially struck major population centers and the Afghan security establishment, then shifted towards targeted killings. The Taliban were able to conduct military operations against Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and increase their area of influence across the country.¹⁴⁶ Despite \$88.3 B in funding,¹⁴⁷ the ANDSF underperformed largely due to lack

¹³⁷ Foreign relations of Afghanistan, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_relations_of_Afghanistan (accessed Jan 8, 2021).

¹³⁸ RFE/RL Turkmen Service, "Taliban Expresses Support for TAPI Pipeline During Turkmenistan Visit," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, Feb 7, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-expresses-support-for-tapi-pipeline-during-turkmenistan-visit/31090649.html> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

¹³⁹ Paliwal, Avinash, "Decoding India's move in Kabul," *Hindustan Times*, Jan 19, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/decoding-india-s-move-in-kabul-101610974153284.html> (accessed Jan 20, 2021).

¹⁴⁰ Roshan Noorzai and Zafar Bamyani, "Iran's Suggestion of Using Shiite Fighters in Afghanistan Seen as Risky," *VOA News*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/irans-suggestion-using-shiite-fighters-afghanistan-seen-risky> (accessed Jan 15, 2021).

¹⁴¹ "Afghanistan's Ghani urges Biden to up pressure on Taliban," *Pakistan Today*, Jan 30, 2021, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/01/30/afghanistans-ghani-urges-biden-to-up-pressure-on-taliban/> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

¹⁴² Gannon, Kathy, "Taliban on diplomatic blitz after Afghan peace talks stall," *AP News*, Feb 3, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-afghanistan-qatar-doha-taliban-a10fe39f44c6fc400e718c58ccfcf438> (accessed Feb 6, 2021).

¹⁴³ Haseeba, Atakpal, "Foreign Diplomats Criticized For 'Backdoor' Meetings with Taliban," *Tolo News*, May 22, 2019, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/foreign-diplomats-criticized-%E2%80%98backdoor%E2%80%99-meetings-taliban> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

¹⁴⁴ Bruce Pannie and Abubakar Siddique, "What Happened When the Taliban Visited Turkmenistan?" *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, Feb 11, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-turkmenistan/31098344.html> (accessed Feb 13, 2021).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Bezhan, Frud, "The Taliban, The Government, And Islamic State: Who Controls What In Afghanistan?" *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-government-islamic-state-who-controls-what-in-afghanistan-/30644646.html> (accessed Jan 3, 2021).

¹⁴⁷ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Jan 30, 2021, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2021-01-30qr.pdf> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

of air cover and questionable professionalism at all levels.¹⁴⁸ The US Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report highlights that in December 2020, nearly 200 checkpoints in Kandahar were abandoned to the Taliban by the Afghan National Army's (ANA) 205th Corps, raising questions about the troops' will to fight. Key violent trends include: increased attacks in Kabul; an uptick in targeted assassinations of Afghan government officials, civil-society leaders, and journalists; and intensified pro-government forces operations against Taliban strongholds in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces.¹⁴⁹ Recently, the Afghan government has announced its overwhelming superiority over the Taliban. However, the Taliban's lack of either political or military response makes the claim questionable. The ANDSF are still unable to control violence and lawlessness even inside Kabul creating doubt regarding their efficacy. Afghanistan security is contingent upon numerous factors and multiple actors including regional and domestic spoilers, VEOs including ISIS, and other US-designated terrorist organizations.¹⁵⁰ Other major spoilers include war and illicit drug economy actors who promote violence to serve their vested interests.

Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, declared the terrorist threat from Afghanistan has been reduced to a negligible level.¹⁵¹ The Bipartisan Panel on Afghanistan cautioned that Afghan VEOs maintain the capacity to grow their influence if NATO forces withdraw before Afghanistan is more stable.¹⁵² If NATO delays the troop withdrawal without Taliban coordination, the Taliban will likely renew violence that jeopardizes long-term stability. In the short to mid-term, ANDSF will not likely gain sufficient capability and capacity to conduct independent security operations. Irrespective of who controls the Kabul government, Afghanistan will require assistance to counter remaining internal threats. Given the Taliban's sensitivity towards foreign troop presence, international partners must develop appropriate security cooperation to assist, train, equip and enable the Afghan security forces. Any extended foreign troop deployments or further physical intervention would likely prove destabilizing and cost prohibitive. To best secure Western security interests, NATO and other partners must focus more on intelligence-based operations, robust regional security cooperation mechanisms, and maintaining regional air assets to respond to worst-case scenarios.

Afghanistan's NATO allies are caught between the 'devil and the deep blue sea.' If they leave in a hurry, they risk losing the last 20 years' gains. If they stay too long, they risk an un-ending war. Therefore, NATO allies talk of condition-based withdrawal. NATO has defined those conditions as Afghan government self-sufficiency. If the Afghan government is not militarily and economically self-sufficient after 20 years, it is not likely to achieve such self-sufficiency in the next couple of years.

Internal Politics

For the past four decades, Afghanistan has remained extremely unstable, volatile, and politically challenging. The US spent enormous diplomatic and economic capital to bring democracy and build political institutions.

¹⁴⁸ Weiss, Jonathan, "Afghan's militias are growing. Is that a good thing?" SOFREP, Dec 30, 2020, <https://sofrep.com/news/afghans-militias-are-growing-is-that-a-good-thing/> (accessed Jan 18, 2021).

¹⁴⁹ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Jan 30, 2021, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2021-01-30qr.pdf> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Toms, Lauren, "Mike Pompeo: Fewer than 200 al Qaeda members remain in Afghanistan," *Washington Times*, Sep 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/sep/15/mike-pompeo-fewer-200-al-qaeda-members-remain-afgh/> (accessed Jan 12, 2021).

¹⁵² Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, February 4, 2021, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/afghanistan_study_group_final_report_a_pathway_for_peace_in_afghanistan.pdf (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

However, the general public's democratic participation remained far below the desired level.¹⁵³ Further, political impasse after the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections forced the US to intervene and coerce an end to the tussle between President Ashraf Ghani and candidate Abdullah Abdullah. It is also not clear whether the solution, appointing Abdullah Abdullah as Chief Executive, was constitutional.¹⁵⁴ As the Study Group on Afghanistan highlighted in its final report, "the country is a textbook example of a "fragile state" given its broken social contract, weak institutions, and the disputed legitimacy of its government."¹⁵⁵ Therefore, achieving political stability in Afghanistan is a colossal task particularly due to excessive government corruption,^{156,157} highly centralized governance over a polarized and divided society,¹⁵⁸ security instability, societal makeup,^{159,160} warlord influence,¹⁶¹ and war-based economy interests.^{162,163}

To succeed, the Afghan domestic political infrastructure must balance the competing demands of three major factions: tribe, religious leadership, and government.¹⁶⁴ The government must maintain that balance to achieve political and security stability.¹⁶⁵ In effective modern democracies, governments' executive, legislature, judiciary branches, and the media, check each other and prevent excessive power concentration. However, the Afghan constitution concentrates nearly all power in the presidency, leaving negligible judiciary and legislative powers. This excessive power concentration creates resentment in such a fragmented society.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵³ "Afghan election sees just one in five voters cast ballot," *Deutsche Welle*, Sep 29, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/afghan-election-sees-just-one-in-five-voters-cast-ballot/a-50629649> (accessed Jan 18, 2021).

¹⁵⁴ Shamas, Shamil, "Understanding Afghanistan's Chief Executive Officer," *Deutsche Welle*, Sep 30, 2014, <https://www.dw.com/en/understanding-afghanistans-chief-executive-officer/a-17965187> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

¹⁵⁵ Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, February 4, 2021, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/afghanistan_study_group_final_report_a_pathway_for_peace_in_afghanistan.pdf (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

¹⁵⁶ "US Embassy to Afghan officials, 'stop corruption,'" *Khaama Press*, Feb 12, 2021, <https://www.khaama.com/us-embassy-to-afghan-officials-stop-corruption-445544/> (accessed Feb 12, 2021).

¹⁵⁷ Fisk, Robert, "Nobody supports the Taliban, but people hate the government," *The Independent*, Nov 27, 2008, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-nobody-supports-the-taliban-but-people-hate-the-government-1036905.html> (accessed Feb 12, 2021).

¹⁵⁸ Raofi, Wahab, "Afghanistan must decentralize its government," *Stripes*, Oct 2, 2020, <https://www.stripes.com/opinion/afghanistan-must-decentralize-its-government-1.647250> (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

¹⁵⁹ Brian Glyn Williams And Javed Rezayee, "The perils of a US troop drawdown to the Afghan army and tribes," *The Hill*, Nov 29, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/527626-the-perils-of-a-us-troop-drawdown-to-the-afghan-army-and-tribes> (accessed Nov 30, 2020).

¹⁶⁰ Miakhel, Shahmahmood, "The Importance of Tribal Structures and Pakhtunwali in Afghanistan; Their role in security and governance," *Pashtoonkhwa*, <http://pashtoonkhwa.com/files/articles/Miakhel - Importance of Tribal Structures in Afghanistan.pdf> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

¹⁶¹ "Afghan warlords and militias fill the security vacuum left by a weak central government," *PBS Newshour*, Feb 10, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/afghan-warlords-and-militias-fill-the-security-vacuum-left-by-a-weak-central-government> (accessed Feb 11, 2021).

¹⁶² "Afghanistan's Multibillion Dollar Opium Trade, Rising Heroin Addiction in the US," *Geopolitics*, Jun 27, 2020, <https://geopolitics.co/2020/06/27/afghanistans-multibillion-dollar-opium-trade-rising-heroin-addiction-in-the-us/> (accessed Feb 8, 2020).

¹⁶³ Lawrence, J.P., "Troop levels are down, but US says over 18,000 contractors remain in Afghanistan," *Stripes*, January 19, 2021, <https://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/troop-levels-are-down-but-us-says-over-18-000-contractors-remain-in-afghanistan-1.659040> (accessed Jan 20, 2021).

¹⁶⁴ Miakhel, Shahmahmood, "The Importance of Tribal Structures and Pakhtunwali in Afghanistan; Their role in security and governance," *Pashtoonkhwa*, <http://pashtoonkhwa.com/files/articles/Miakhel - Importance of Tribal Structures in Afghanistan.pdf> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Masooud, Ahmed, "What Is Missing from Afghan Peace Talks," *NY Times*, Apr 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/opinion/afghanistan-peace-talks.html> (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

Democracy provides opportunity for the majority to rule. However, in a multi-ethnic society where one ethnicity holds a substantial majority, decentralization is necessary to protect minority ethnicities from marginalization and discrimination. The Afghan government has almost lost control and has become unpopular.¹⁶⁷ Government critics have become more vocal and increasingly call for an inclusive interim government.^{168,169} Thus, the government must work to be more inclusive and acceptable to all ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan. Only such an inclusive government can effectively balance between all societal pillars and provide long-term stability. Western allies must understand that implementing a ‘Western-style’ democracy in Afghanistan is unrealistic, so therefore, they should support a relative democracy with ‘Afghan character.’

US/NATO forces withdrawal will intensify the political struggle and temporarily bring smaller factions together. Afghanistan will likely be divided into the Afghan Government, Taliban, and Northern Alliance, who will fight each other for control. In order to prevent a large-scale violent conflict, stakeholders must initially develop and employ a decentralized governance model until the Afghans reach consensus on the future government system.

Economy

Stability is a major requirement for economic growth. However, in Afghanistan, economic growth is needed to improve stability.¹⁷⁰ Despite the enormous economic assistance provided by the international community, the Afghan economy is still unable to sustain itself.¹⁷¹ Since 2001, nearly 50% of international aid has been lost to government corruption, mismanagement, or inefficient fund use.¹⁷² The recent World Bank Report states, “the basic needs poverty rate was 55% at the time of the last household survey (2016/17) and is expected to have worsened after the COVID-19 pandemic that hugely impacted the living condition of households. Poverty is expected to remain high, driven by weak labor demand and security-related constraints on service delivery.”¹⁷³

Currently, the Afghan economy is dependent on agriculture, limited transit trade, and mining activities. These activities provide a meager financial resource to a limited population. Thus, many people are forced to either join militant organizations or turn towards smuggling and narcotics. Narcotics remains a perennial component of the Afghan economy. Despite NATO’s two decades presence, Afghanistan is still the largest opium poppy cultivation center in the world.^{174,175} Afghanistan can improve its economy if it develops the country’s

¹⁶⁷ “Kabul demonstrator: We want interim government,” *Afghanistan Times*, Feb 2, 2021, <http://www.afghanistantimes.af/kabul-demonstrator-we-want-interim-government/> (accessed Feb 11, 2021).

¹⁶⁸ “Afghan republic’s negotiator backs interim government as way forward,” *1TV News*, Jan 2, 2021, <https://1tvnews.af/02/01/2021/6883/> (accessed Jan 21, 2021).

¹⁶⁹ Ansar, Massoud, “Critics Seek End to ‘Caretaking Trend’ in Govt Institutions,” *Tolo News*, Oct 3, 2020, <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-166779> (accessed Feb 12, 2021).

¹⁷⁰ Khan, Abdul Qadir, “Stability Through Economic Growth in Afghanistan,” Boise State University, Dec 15, 2019, <https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2733&context=td> (accessed Jan 18, 2021).

¹⁷¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Writing Off Afghanistan: Does Biden Have a Choice?” *CSIS*, Jan 19, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/writing-afghanistan-does-biden-have-choice> (accessed Jan 20, 2021).

¹⁷² Samina Ansari and Elliot Memmi, “Europe in Afghanistan: After nearly 20 years, what has been achieved?” *The Diplomat*, Feb 8, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/europe-in-afghanistan-after-nearly-20-years-what-has-been-achieved/> (accessed Jan 22, 2021).

¹⁷³ Afghanistan Overview, *The World Bank in Afghanistan*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview> (accessed Feb 11, 2021).

¹⁷⁴ “Main countries for opium poppy cultivation based on acreage in 2019,” *Statista*, Jul 24, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264744/top-countries-for-opium-cultivation-based-on-acreage/> (accessed Apr 21, 2021).

¹⁷⁵ UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2019, https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/20210217_report_with_cover_for_web_small.pdf (accessed Apr 21, 2021).

energy corridor and mineral resources potential. However, any sustained growth depends on Afghanistan's security situation. Currently, Afghanistan's macroeconomic indicators are not very positive,¹⁷⁶ and the country is likely to remain dependent upon foreign assistance for the foreseeable future. The Geneva Conference conditions-based \$12 B pledge over the next four years¹⁷⁷ provides the international community leverage over Afghanistan, but is critical to promoting stability.

Over time, Afghanistan can reduce its dependence on donor support, especially if it gains stability through a political agreement. Economic integration, development of communication infrastructure, construction of energy corridor, security and political stability, efficient use of government resources, reduced corruption, and continuous conditions-based economic assistance, are all imperative to Afghanistan's short to mid-term economic recovery. Agriculture, exploitation on natural resources, and transit trade with regional countries will enable the long-term economic prosperity and stability for Afghanistan.

Society

Afghan society remains divided along ethnic and tribal lines as the 2019 presidential election showed.^{178,179} Around half of the population is Pashtun and their tribal culture is governed by Pashtunwali. Corruption, weak institutions, and inability to ensure rule of law decreased the public's confidence in government and makes Afghanistan a "fragile state."¹⁸⁰ The tribes and religious leaders are central to Afghan daily life, and the government must include them accordingly. Developing consensus amongst tribes is important for socio-economic growth in respective zones,¹⁸¹ and religious leaders are key to introducing popular reforms. Excluding those key pillars as well as over-centralization have severely restrained Afghan social development despite billions of dollars in aid.^{182,183}

Afghanistan's social indicators are generally positive, but Afghanistan requires stability and assistance to maintain this trajectory. The country's population growth, homicide, and infant mortality rates have reduced, whereas education and health spending have increased.¹⁸⁴ Women's rights have also improved over time. However, the country has the lowest higher education enrollment rate amongst all countries.¹⁸⁵ To empower women, increase access to civic facilities, and protect minorities' rights, Afghanistan must continue the achievements made over the past two decades.

¹⁷⁶ Afghanistan - Economic Indicators, *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/afghanistan/indicators> (accessed Feb 11, 2021).

¹⁷⁷ "Foreign aid to Afghanistan could reach \$12 billion over four years, some with conditions," *Reuters*, Nov 24, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/afghanistan-diplomacy-aid-int-idUSKBN2842S2> (accessed Nov 25, 2020).

¹⁷⁸ Nabizada, Khushnood, "Ghani wins the preliminary election results by securing 2.3% of nation's votes," *Khushnood*, Dec 23, 2019, <https://www.khushnood.co.uk/ghani-wins-the-preliminary-election-results-by-securing-2-3-of-nations-votes-7685876/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

¹⁷⁹ Heat map showing the clear division in Afghanistan, *Khushnood*, <https://www.khushnood.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Votes-proportions-of-Ghani-and-Abdullah-in-provinces.jpg> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

¹⁸⁰ Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, USIP, Feb 4, 2021, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/afghanistan_study_group_final_report_a_pathway_for_peace_in_afghanistan.pdf (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Afghan population distribution, *CityPopulation.de*, <https://citypopulation.de/en/afghanistan/cities/> (accessed Jan 21, 2021).

¹⁸³ \$19 billion in aid to Afghanistan lost to corruption: SIGAR, Oct 21, 2020, <https://afghanistanpeacecampaign.org/2020/10/22/19-billion-in-aid-to-afghanistan-lost-to-corruption-sigar/> (accessed Dec 20, 2020).

¹⁸⁴ UN Data on Social Indicators – Afghanistan, <http://data.un.org/en/iso/af.html> (accessed Feb 12, 2021).

¹⁸⁵ UN Academic Impact, "Advancing Women's Higher Education in Afghanistan," <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/advancing-womens-higher-education-afghanistan> (accessed Feb 12, 2021).

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Maintain peace process momentum and develop diplomatic consensus supporting Intra-Afghan Negotiations.
- Proactively work against Afghan domestic and regional spoilers' actions to protect the peace process and execute an orderly withdrawal.
- Establish structure and mission for post-withdrawal counter-terrorism forces.
- Develop a regional security cooperation mechanism and continue US engagement to address security concerns.
- Support short to mid-term financial assistance and facilitate long-term economic development through global infrastructure, trade, and human resource development assistance.

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2.7 BAHRAIN

Head of State	Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa,	Population	1,701,575
Head of Government	King		
Minister of Defense	Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa (COM in Chief)	Religion	Muslim 70%
Chief of Defense	Lt Gen Abdulla bin Hasan Al Nuaimi (MoD Affairs)		- Shia 62%
	Lt Gen Theyab bin Saqer al-Noaimi		- Sunni 38%
			Christian 10%
			Other 20%
Type of Government	Unitary Presidential Constitutional Monarchy	Ethnicity	Bahraini and other Arab 50%
			South Asian 46%
			European 1%
			Other 3%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$36.6 B (- 6.9%)	Military Personnel	Active 8,200
			Reserve 0
			Paramilitary 11,250

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Close ties with GCC countries, especially with KSA and UAE respectively b. Close ally to US, host of NAVCENT, US Fifth Fleet c. Member of US-led IMSC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Overdependence on foreign labor b. Rising debt, impacted by oil prices and COVID-19 pandemic c. Overdependence on allies for security and economic aid 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. New commercial, tourism and travel opportunities after Abraham accords signing b. Economy diversification endeavor to reduce oil dependency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Shia majority may cause internal conflict b. Struggle with low oil prices and COVID-19 pandemic impact c. The looming conflict with Iran in the region 	
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

Bahrain, like other countries in the region, has struggled with the COVID-19 pandemic and low oil prices since March last year. As for the pandemic, the Kingdom has put strict control measures in place to prevent the spread of the virus. These control measures also prepared the kingdom for an effective vaccination campaign. Bahrain plans to vaccinate almost the entire population this year. However, the low oil prices and strict COVID-19 control measures have generated long-term negative impacts on the country's economy.

The UAE and Bahrain signed the Abraham accords and worked with other GCC countries to resolve disputes with Qatar. With these efforts, Bahrain contributed to the stabilization of security in the Gulf region. Bahraini activities to support regional stability will have a positive impact to CENTCOM's priority No. 1 "detering Iran." In addition, the Abraham accords will lead to new commercial and travel opportunities for both Bahrain and Israel. In the last 10 months the Kingdom has had no attacks from terrorist groups or any anti-governmental demonstrations.

Foreign Policy/Security

The Abraham Accords were a major event in 2020. They had an impact on both domestic and foreign policies. The signing of the Abraham Accords and the normalization of relations with Israel is monumental and is expected to enhance the security and stability in the region. In addition, the accord may help to solve the Palestinian issue.¹⁸⁶ Such progress is promising, but there have not been any visible Palestinian visible benefits from the accords to date. This is likely due to the growing tensions with Iran and the Palestinians' doubt that the accords will support a two-state solution.¹⁸⁷ Foreign partners perceive the accords as a move by Bahrain to increase investment opportunities. There have not been many details released about the content of the Abraham accords. We can expect that the two states will open their embassies for the first time and allow tourist visas. This first step will benefit both countries economically.¹⁸⁸

Bahrain joined other GCC countries in signing the Al Ula agreement to lift the boycott of Qatar. It has been an important step in restoring unity in the Gulf region. This step will be followed by a series of bilateral negotiations that will adjust all the details of the renewed cooperation between the countries. However, some experts believe that lifting the boycott of Qatar has not removed the core problem that preceded the Gulf Rift.¹⁸⁹

Bahrain hosts the US Fifth Fleet and is a member of the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC). Bahrain provides permanent Access Basing and Overflight (ABO) for the US. In 2020, the global pandemic resulted in the suspension of many regional military exercises. Bahrain participated in a combined joint anti-terrorism exercise with the US NAVCENT in January 2021. The exercise took place in the 5th Fleet AOR and focused on enhancing mutual security and anti-terrorism capabilities.¹⁹⁰ Joint activities within the framework of security cooperation and multilateral Defense agreements bolstered interoperability among participating countries. This regional interoperability positively impacts CENTCOMs priorities. Bahraini Forces participated in drills with the Egyptian Armed Forces in November 2020. The main objective of these drills was to enhance cooperation and interoperability which will ensure maritime security in the future.¹⁹¹

Internal Politics

In November 2020 one of the longest-serving Prime Ministers in the world, Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, passed away at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The Prince represented the conservative style

¹⁸⁶ *Arab News*, "Bahrain agrees to normalize relations with Israel," Sep 11, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1733046/middle-east> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

¹⁸⁷ Abdelrahman, Abdelhalim, "Analyzing the Palestinian's reaction to the Abraham Accords," *The Times of Israel*, Nov 23, 2020, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/analyzing-the-palestinians-reaction-to-the-abraham-accords/> (accessed Feb 5, 2021).

¹⁸⁸ Gabe Friedman and Ben Sales, "The Israel-UAE-Bahrain peace deals, explained," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Sep 17, 2020, <https://www.jta.org/2020/09/17/politics/the-israel-uae-bahrain-peace-deals-explained> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

¹⁸⁹ Jacobs, Anna L., "Resolution of Gulf Rift Not Likely to Mend Fault Lines in North Africa," *The Arab Gulf states Institute in Washington*, Jan 21, 2021, <https://agsiw.org/resolution-of-gulf-rift-not-likely-to-mend-fault-lines-in-north-africa/> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

¹⁹⁰ US Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs Office, "Bahraini, US Armed Forces conduct joint anti-terrorism exercise," *Military News*, Jan 28, 2021, https://www.militarynews.com/news/bahraini-u-s-armed-forces-conduct-joint-anti-terrorism-exercise/article_ffb429b6-5f1a-11eb-833f-ab099a73e2fa.html (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

¹⁹¹ *China Global Television Network*, "Egyptian army intensifies military exercises over regional concerns," Dec 25, 2020, <https://newsaf.cgtn.com/news/2020-12-25/Egyptian-army-intensifies-military-exercises-over-regional-concerns-Wuv2AgRsvS/index.html> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

of Gulf leadership. The Island's Shiite majority and others challenged conservative governing during the 2011 protests. The protests were largely over long-running allegations of corruption surrounding the Prime Minister. The current PM has been named the Crown Prince and became the second Prime Minister since Bahrain's 1971 independence. Prince Khalifa was responsible for shifting Bahrain from oil dependence to the banking and financial sectors, and becoming one of the Middle East's biggest aluminum producers.¹⁹² The Crown Prince, who will now serve as Prime Minister, is likely to promote a more liberal leadership style.

Economy

After a year of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanied by dropping oil prices, the economic effects on the Kingdom are visible. According to the IMF, Bahrain's fiscal break-even price for oil in 2020 was estimated at around \$90 per barrel. This estimate is assuming other sectors of their economy continue to operate without restrictions (tourism, banking, etc.). Bahrain's tourism industry has been almost completely shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shutdown is mainly because international flights have been stopped and the King Fahd Causeway leading to Saudi Arabia is closed. The causeway between the two kingdoms is how 90% of all tourists flow into the Kingdom.

Bahrain's fiscal deficit is estimated to have more than doubled to \$4.4 B last year, compared to a projected \$2.1 B. At the end of 2020, Bahrain's total debt was \$39.8 B which is 118% of their GDP. To cover the deficit, Bahrain sold \$2 B worth of bonds at the beginning of this year.¹⁹³ Bahrain has a poor credit rating according to all three of the major national credit assessors. The credit rating for Bahrain is negatively impacted by their precarious public finances and strained reserves.¹⁹⁴

In 2018, a \$10 B aid package was provided to Bahrain by other GCC countries with no interest over five years. Bahrain has received approximately \$6 B of the aid package and expects a further \$1.85 B this year. With the current economic situation, Bahrain is unlikely to make future payments in a timely manner. The COVID-19 pandemic and low oil prices have affected KSA and other GCC' economies making additional support unlikely.¹⁹⁵ Restoring the economy of such a small and overly oil and gas dependent country will be difficult. Insufficient diversification and weakening support from neighboring countries will burden Bahrain for longer than its leaders anticipate.

Society

The signing of the Abraham accords and the associated normalization of relations with Israel led to a divided Bahrain, which was unexpected. A survey revealed that both Shiites and Sunnis agree on this matter. Half of each group perceive it negatively and the other positively. No public demonstrations nor any conflicts were observed.¹⁹⁶

For Bahrain, 2020 was a calm year in terms of anti-government demonstrations or attacks by terrorist groups. All the issues with COVID-19 and the associated restrictions allowed for the overall situation in the

¹⁹² 9News Staff, "Prime minister and crowned prince of Bahrain Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa dies in the US," *9News*, Nov 11, 2020, <https://www.9news.com.au/world/bahrain-crowned-prince-khalifa-bin-salman-al-khalifa-prime-minister-dies/47c574b4-c52d-476d-bf19-b4ccbc1654b1> (accessed Feb 5, 2021).

¹⁹³ Saba, Yousef, "Bahrain gets \$2 billion in bond sale after deficit spike," *Reuters*, Jan 20, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bahrain-bonds-idUSKBN29P125> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

¹⁹⁴ Archana Narayanan and Farah Elbahrawy, "Bahrain Plans to Sell Dollar Bonds to Plug Budget Deficit," *Bloomberg*, Jan 19, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-19/bahrain-plans-to-sell-dollar-bonds-to-plug-budget-deficit> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

¹⁹⁵ Saba, Yousef, "Bahrain gets \$2 billion in bond sale after deficit spike," *Reuters*, Jan 20, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bahrain-bonds-idUSKBN29P125> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

¹⁹⁶ Kenneth R. Rosen and David Pollock, "Bahrain Poll Shows Split on Peace with Israel, But Sunni-Shia Divide Is Small," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Dec 23, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/bahrain-poll-shows-split-peace-israel-sunni-shia-divide-small> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

country to remain under control.¹⁹⁷ The death of Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa allowed for his position to be filled by Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. We can expect a more open approach to the demands of the Shia majority.¹⁹⁸ In general, the Kingdom has dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic successfully. The country has put a number of restrictive measures in place, including a complete lockdown, which has prevented the virus from overloading the health service's capacity. The protective measures were government controlled and enforced. The countries protective equipment supply was more than adequate as all treatment and testing (more than 2 M) related to COVID-19 were free of charge.¹⁹⁹

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Communicate to Bahrain that new US administration's approach towards the country will be as positive as the previous one.
- Nurture Bahrain's continued commitment to the IMSC and the MESA while advocating for inclusive policies.
- Encourage Bahrain to cooperate with Israel at MIL/MIL level.

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¹⁹⁸ Hubart, Ben, "Khalifa Bin Salman al-Khalifa, Leader of Bahrain's Government, Dies at 84," *The New York Times*, Nov 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/11/world/middleeast/khalifa-bin-salman-al-khalifa-bahrain-dead.html> (accessed Jan 30, 2021).

¹⁹⁹ Al Sherbini, Ramadan, "Bahrain allows private hospitals to do COVID-19 tests," *Gulf News*, May 14, 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-allows-private-hospitals-to-do-covid-19-tests-1.71494376> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

2.8 EGYPT

Head of State	President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi	Population	103,417,236
Head of Government			
Minister of Defense	Gen. Mohammed Zaki	Religion	Muslim 90%
Chief of Defense	Lt. Gen. Mohammed Hagazy		Christian 10%
Type of Government	Unicameral Parliamentary	Ethnicity	Egyptian 91%
			Turk, Greek, Abaza, and Bedouin Arab tribes 9%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$361.88 B (+3.5%)	Military Personnel	Active 450,000 Reserve 480,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strong historic national identity b. Geopolitical importance and strong alliances c. Sectarian unity d. Balanced relations with competing powers e. Strong Allies f. Powerful, well-trained and equipped armed forces g. Large natural gas reserves h. Large population i. Rich tourism industry 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Economy heavily relies on tourism and energy sectors b. Poverty and unemployment rate along with youth bulge c. Terrorism Threats d. Lack of national political parties e. Relative weakness in government health sector (number of doctors and nurses) f. Reliant on food imports
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. New natural gas fields in the Mediterranean b. Rapidly growing population c. Economy growth d. Suez Canal e. Modernization of the economy f. Availability of lands for agriculture 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Terrorist activities in Sinai b. Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (Water Supply) c. Dispute with Turkey regarding gas exploration in the Mediterranean d. Muslim Brotherhood e. Unrest on borders with Libya f. Smuggling activities across the borders g. Uncontrolled COVID-19 pandemic
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

Egypt has been keen to restore its balanced relations in both international and regional environments ever since President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi took office in 2014. Closer and pragmatic ties have been restored and strengthened with Arab and African states. Egypt succeeded in reasserting ties with global actors, especially the US, Europe,

and Japan. Egyptian diplomats are increasingly engaged with other global actors, such as China and Russia. Furthermore, Egypt proved to have a balanced and responsible foreign policy by pursuing a good-neighborliness policy to deal with regional tensions, such as the crisis situation in Libya and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

President Al-Sisi has worked hard to overcome numerous internal economic, security, and political divisions. Al-Sisi has promoted long-term economic programs seeking to achieve key structural reforms to address the economy's main problems. As a result of these reforms, the Egyptian economy maintains positive economic growth despite the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the reallocation of resources towards Egypt's most pandemic-affected citizens impacted that growth. The tourism industry is one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic. This industry is considered one of Egypt's major sources of income and directly impacts millions of citizens who depend on tourism to make a living. Beyond stabilizing individual economic sectors, Egypt's economic strategy includes social justice issues and protecting the most disadvantaged citizens.

Regarding security, Egypt's government is dealing effectively with extremism and has succeeded in toning down radical ideology. These efforts can be considered partially aligned with the CENTCOM Commander's third priority "Maintaining Defeat-ISIS Campaign in Syria and Iraq." Even though progress is being made, terrorist activities, especially insurgencies in Sinai and Libya, continue to pose difficult challenges. Similarly, Egypt's efforts to counter these insurgent threats help achieve the Commander's fifth priority "Weaponization of IDPs and Refugees." President Al-Sisi has done a significant job to stabilize the country after years of instability resulting from the so-called 'Arab Spring.' Al-Sisi has gained the Egyptian people's trust as they witness tremendous improvements in their country's stability, economy and society.

Foreign Policy/Security

Since President Al-Sisi was elected as the President of Egypt in May 2014, Egypt has been determined to fix and restore its external relations with neighbors and regional and international powers. Ties with some of Egypt's strategic regional allies deteriorated after the so-called 'Arab Spring.' Relationships with the United States and European countries had withered while Morsi was leader. Most of the ties with regional allies were immediately restored following the removal of Morsi and the appointment of the interim government. It did not take long for President Al-Sisi to reassert Egypt's relationships with global actors, especially the US, Europe, and Japan. Egypt's diplomatic efforts have fostered better relations with Russia and China.

Egypt's foreign policy has achieved breakthroughs in international forums such as: a non-permanent seat on the Security Council; the presidency of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee; the presidency of the Arab summit; the presidency of the African Union Peace and Security Council; chairing the African Heads of States and Government Committee on Climate Change; and chairing the African Union²⁰⁰.

Addressing the Libyan crisis is one of Egypt's most important priorities as it is considered a direct and immediate threat to Egypt's national security. Libyan based threats include the following: armed militias and internationally backed mercenaries; cross border smuggling of weapons, cultural property, and other commodities; and Turkish plans to expand its Libyan presence via direct and indirect military involvement. Egypt has expressed its firm position on the Libyan situation with three principles: respecting Libya's unity, sovereignty, and integrity; preserving its political independence; and not interfering in Libya's internal affairs. Egypt also made commitments to have comprehensive dialogue and rejects the violence in Libya.

In June 2020, Egypt launched the 'Cairo Initiative' to restore stability and peace in Libya. Egypt has hosted meetings with Libyan parties including Libyan parliamentarians. Furthermore, the Libyan Parliament

²⁰⁰ Staff, "إنجازات السياسة الخارجية في عهد الرئيس السيسي" [Foreign Policy achievements during the era of President Al-Sisi], *State Information Service*, Jul 9, 2020, <https://sis.gov.eg/Story/204544/> (accessed 19 Jan, 2021).

(Commander Haftar allied Parliament) asked Egypt to intervene in Libya to assist in countering the Turkish-backed militias.²⁰¹ President Al-Sisi sent a strong message to Turkey in Libya. He threatened direct military intervention supported by an international consensus.²⁰² President Al-Sisi drew a line between Al-Jufra and Sirte, and warned the Turkish backed mercenaries not to cross it. He declared it a 'red line' for Egypt that would directly threaten Egypt's national security.²⁰³

Egypt is neither bent on waging war nor has ambitious plans to intervene in Libyan internal affairs, President Al-Sisi's statements send a clear message that Egypt is determined to protect its borders from terrorist threats and to counter Turkey-backed mercenaries. The message is clear that Egypt does not want to, but is ready to participate or lead any efforts to restore Libya's stability.

Egypt is aligned with CENTCOM commander's third and sixth priorities- "Maintaining Defeat-ISIS Campaign in Syria and Iraq" and "Weaponization of IDPs and Refugees." Egypt is countering terrorism activities internally and across the borders in Libya and putting concerted efforts to tone down radical ideology. ISIS has been present in Libya since the uprising against Al-Qaddafi in 2011 and is affiliated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria.²⁰⁴ DoD's Inspector General concluded that Turkey sent between 3,500 and 3,800 paid Syrian mercenaries to Libya.²⁰⁵ Even though the report stated there was no evidence the mercenaries were affiliated with ISIS, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, along with other international reports have accused Turkey of exporting large numbers of Jihadist fighters from Syria to Libya.²⁰⁶ Egyptian efforts have assisted in mitigating the effects of ISIS's presence in Libya, especially near the Egyptian borders. Egypt also continues to attempt to bring the disputed parties in Libya together to get them to commit to a ceasefire.

Another significant foreign policy and security challenge for Egypt is the dispute with Ethiopia regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The GERD crisis poses a serious challenge to Egypt as it threatens the country's main source of freshwater. Despite mediation efforts by the US, the African Union, and the World Bank, there was no agreement reached between the three parties (Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia). Egypt believes that the filling and operation of the dam unilaterally by Ethiopia without an agreement protecting the rights of Egypt and Sudan will increase tensions and could lead to conflict.²⁰⁷ Egypt does not oppose the project outright and understands how it supports hydroelectric power generation for the Ethiopian people. Egypt's concern is that their nation's freshwater supply depends on Ethiopian decisions.

As Ethiopia is preparing to move to the second phase of filling the dam, there are three possible scenarios for the GERD dispute. The first scenario is linked to the continuation of negotiations under the African Union

²⁰¹ Reuters Staff, "Egypt's Sisi meets Libyan tribesmen after eastern call to intervene," *Reuters*, Jul 16, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/libya-security/egypts-sisi-meets-libyan-tribesmen-after-eastern-call-to-intervene-idINL5N2EN4F7?edition-redirect=ca> (accessed Jan 20, 2021).

²⁰² El-Menawy, Abdellatif, "El-Sisi sends sharp, clear message to Turkey on Libya," *Arab News*, Jun 26, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1695876> (accessed Jan 20, 2021).

²⁰³ CNN, "السيسي: تجاوز سرت والجفرة خط أحمر لمصر وأي تدخل لنا في ليبيا تتوافر له شرعية دولية" [Al-Sisi: crossing Aljufra and Sirte is a red line for Egypt and any intervention from Egypt in Libya has international legitimacy], Jul 20, 2020, <https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2020/06/20/sis-egypt-libya-sirte-gna-lna> (accessed Jan 20, 2021).

²⁰⁴ Reuters Staff, "Eastern Libyan Forces say they killed Islamic State Leader," *Reuters*, Sep 23, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/eastern-libyan-forces-say-they-killed-islamic-state-leader-idUSKCN26E3BW> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²⁰⁵ Debre, Isabel, "Pentagon report: Turkey sent up to 3,800 fighters to Libya," *Washington Post*, Jul 17, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/pentagon-report-turkey-sent-up-to-3800-fighters-to-libya/2020/07/17/0736c972-c86d-11ea-a825-8722004e4150_story.html (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²⁰⁶ BNE IntelliNews Staff, 'Macron accuses Erdogan of massively importing Jihadists into Libya,' *BNE IntelliNews*, Jun 30, 2020, <https://www.intellinews.com/macron-accuses-erdogan-of-massively-importing-jihadists-into-libya-186531/> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²⁰⁷ BBC Staff, "سد النهضة: مصر ترفض تهديد أمنها المائي وإثيوبيا تقول إن المفاوضات لم تنته بعد," [GERD: Egypt rejects the threat to its water security, and Ethiopia says the negotiations are not over yet], *BBC*, Jun 30, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-53230173> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

mediation. The second scenario is stopping negotiation under the African Union umbrella and returning to the Security Council under the Seventh Chapter of the UN Charter. This would authorize the Council to take stronger measures considering that conflict represents a direct threat to peace and security in the Horn of Africa. The third scenario is to take the entire GERD issue to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This could take the precautionary measure of stopping Ethiopia from filling the dam until the dispute is settled. However, the third scenario requires the approval of all three parties before it can be taken to the ICJ.²⁰⁸

Egypt gives the utmost importance to its foreign ties with the Arab countries. President Al-Sisi succeeded in restoring and strengthening Egypt's historic ties with the GCC countries after those ties were weakened by the Arab Spring. Egypt's relations with Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain have transformed to more of a strategic regional alliance. Egypt also signed the Al-Ula agreement for Arab reconciliation with Qatar. Egypt's foreign minister affirmed the need to build on this agreement to enhance joint Arab work and improve relations between Arabic countries based on goodwill and not interfering in internal affairs.²⁰⁹ Moreover, President Al-Sisi described the Ibrahim Accords as a step towards Palestinian-Israeli peace.²¹⁰ President Al-Sisi also described the normalization agreement between Sudan and Israel as efforts toward peace and prosperity in the region. However, the Sudan-Israel agreement could cost Egypt some influence in Sudan and make it more likely that Israel would pursue water-projects in Sudan as it has in Ethiopia. Egypt has also strengthened its relations with Iraq and Jordan by launching the Tripartite Cooperation Mechanism in 2019.

Regarding the Yemeni crisis, Egypt has always affirmed its support for Yemen's legitimate government and President Hadi. Egypt has pledged support for Saudi Arabia in its stand-off with Iran and that it would mobilize Egyptian forces to protect the Kingdom. This pledge means that Egypt is helping to deter Iran from any violent escalation which is aligned with CENTCOM's priority number one: deterring Iran.²¹¹

President Al-Sisi prioritized Egyptian relations with Asian countries. He has visited more Asian countries than any previous Egyptian president. Al-Sisi traveled to Singapore, China, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam. These trips have resulted in signed agreements and memorandums of understanding in the fields of energy, education, industries, transportation, economy and have attracted new investments.²¹² Particularly, President Al-Sisi has visited China more than six times since he took office and pledged to cooperate in the BRI. However, President Al-Sisi prefers "no pressure" ties with China. In return, Egypt is taking a similar approach regarding the Uyghur Muslims in China. One of Egypt's main interests regarding ties with China is to avoid becoming dependent on one geopolitical axis and to diversify Egypt's foreign policy and military options.²¹³

Egyptian ties with Russia are growing as Egypt aims to win back its role as a regional powerhouse. Egypt and Russia recently celebrated the 77th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This comes as the US is planning to reduce its military footprint and involvement in the region.²¹⁴

²⁰⁸ Faraj, Mohammed, "ثلاث خيارات أمام مصر والسودان لحسم أزمة سد النهضة" [Three options for Egypt and Sudan to resolve the GERD crisis], *Sky News Arabic*, Jan 7, 2021, <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1405319> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²⁰⁹ Ahram Online, "Egypt signs al-Ula agreement for Arab reconciliation with Qatar at GCC summit," *Ahram Online*, Jan 5, 2021, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/398187/Egypt/Politics-/UPDATED-Egypt-signs-alUla-agreement-for-Arab-recon.aspx> (accessed Feb 19, 2021).

²¹⁰ DW Staff, "الاتفاق الإسرائيلي.. الإماراتي.. عباس يرفض والسيسي يرحب" [The Israeli-Emirati Agreement: Abbas Rejects and Sisi Welcomes], *DW*, 13 Aug, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/ar/a-54559978> (accessed Feb 19, 2021).

²¹¹ Rogan, Tom, "Egypt has an excellent new pledge to deter Iran," *Washington Examiner*, Nov 7, 2017, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/egypt-has-an-excellent-new-pledge-to-deter-iran> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²¹² Staff, "إنجازات السياسة الخارجية في عهد الرئيس السيسي" [Foreign Policy achievements during the era of President Al-Sisi], *State Information Service*, Jul 9, 2020, <https://sis.gov.eg/Story/204544/> (accessed 19 Jan, 2021).

²¹³ Hassanein, Haisam, "Egypt takes another step toward China," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Aug 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/egypt-takes-another-step-toward-china> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²¹⁴ Hamza, Youssef, "Russia and Egypt grow closer as Kremlin asserts regional influence," *The National News*, Oct 21, 2018, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/russia-and-egypt-grow-closer-as-kremlin-asserts-regional-influence-1.782848> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

President Al-Sisi has visited Russia five times since he took office. Russia is one of Egypt's largest trading partners and a large investor in the Suez Canal Economic Zone among other projects in Egypt. However, the ties between the two countries face many challenges as there are indications of a lack of confidence due to regional developments and mutual interests. For example: Russia is working closely with Turkey on issues against Egypt's interests in the region. However, Russia supported the recent Cairo declaration regarding Libya. Russia did make efforts to avoid the red line announced by President Al-Sisi by conducting continuous consultations with Turkey on reaching a permanent ceasefire in Libya. There are unconfirmed reports state that Egypt received the first five of 20 SU-35SE Super Flankers jets despite warnings from the US that sanctions would be imposed if they proceeded on the deal with Russia.²¹⁵ Egypt hopes its relations with Russia will help to diversify its military hardware in order to be less reliant on one geopolitical axis.

In 2020, Egyptian relations with Europe witnessed a substantial boost on both the bilateral and multilateral levels. Several visits at the presidential and ministerial levels were conducted with European countries to explore mutual interests. They included the following engagements: President Al-Sisi participated in the Berlin Summit on Libya; the UK Africa Investment Summit, the Global Vaccine Summit hosted by Britain (via video communications), a visit to Cyprus within the framework of the tripartite cooperation mechanism between Egypt, Cyprus and Greece, and bilateral visits to Greece and France. In addition to political issues, these meetings included in depth discussions on enhancing trade relations, increasing European investments in Egypt, and transferring advanced European technology to Egypt. In the military domain, Egypt purchased two Mistral-class amphibious assault ships and a fleet of Rafale fighter jets from France.²¹⁶

Egypt's ties with Turkey remain tense. There were no signs of resolving issues between the two countries on key issues such as internal interferences from the Muslim Brotherhood, deploying foreign mercenaries in Libya, and gas exploration in the Mediterranean Sea.

With regards to relations with the US, President Al-Sisi's visit to Washington in 2017 heralded a new era in Egypt-US relations after years of turbulence during the Obama administration. After the visit, the US pledged assistance to Egypt to fight terrorism, stabilize the economy, and resume weapon shipments to the Egyptian Army.²¹⁷ During the absence of US support from the Obama administration, Egypt increased the number of arms purchases from Russia. Egypt is facing the challenge on how to balance relations between the US and Russia. The President Biden administration has agreed to sell military equipment to Egypt including tactical missiles (RAM Block 2 and related equipment). The deal is estimated to be worth around (\$197 M) and provide improved capabilities to defend Egypt's coast and the Suez Canal.²¹⁸ Egypt's foreign minister has stated that his country's relations with the US will continue regardless of the countries differing visions, because in the end an agreement will be found.²¹⁹

With regard to Egypt's security and military forces, Egypt initiated a plan to modernize and develop its forces by implementing a strategy to diversify their sources of arms. In recent years Egypt's military incorporated new weapon systems to include: two French Mistral helicopter carriers, French Rafale jets, German S-43 submarines, and SU-35SE Super Flankers from Russia. Egypt has become the third-largest importer of weapons in the world.

²¹⁵ Iddon, Paul, "Why are Egypt and Turkey risking US sanctions for these Russian weapons systems," *Forbes*, Aug 5, 2002, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2020/08/05/why-are-egypt-and-turkey-risking-us-sanctions-for-these-russian-weapons-systems/?sh=27a28507220f> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ GIS staff, "GIS Dossier: Al-Sisi's Egypt," *Geopolitical Intelligence Services*, Jun 5, 2019, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/gis-dossier-el-sisi-egypt-politics,2893.html> (accessed Jan 24, 2021).

²¹⁸ Sky Staff, "إدارة بايدن توافق على صفقة صواريخ تكتيكية نوعية إلى مصر" [The Biden administration approves a qualitative tactical missile deal to Egypt], *Sky News Arabia*, Feb 17, 2021, <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1415746> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

²¹⁹ RT Staff, "مصر تنتظر توضيح مواقف إدارة بايدن من قضايا الإقليم" [Egypt is awaiting clarification of the Biden administration's positions on the issues of the region], *Russia Today Arabic*, Feb 13, 2021, https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/1201998- (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

They are raising its army readiness, intensifying their army maneuvers, and conducting large-scale exercises simulating encountering provocations on its western borders with Libya and with terrorist groups in the Sinai.

Internal Politics

To bring back stability and security to the country after years of riots, chaos, and political instability, President Al-Sisi made immediate strategic decisions to rescue Egypt from the turmoil the country precipitated by the Muslim Brotherhood. The most important issue he addressed was the separation of religion and politics. Morsi's efforts to merge the two caused disruption for Egypt's entire political system. There was growing dismay at the government's actions among most Egyptians, but especially among the secularists, liberals, and Coptic Christians.²²⁰ The Egyptian constitution states that the principles of Islamic law are the main source of legislation and no political activity may be based on religion, or be discriminated against on the basis of religion or gender.²²¹

Initially, President Al-Sisi chose to stay out of foreign entanglements and focus on internal matters. Most importantly he chose to focus on Egypt's economic development and immediate security threats since these are keys for stability in the country.²²² Egypt established long-term economic reform programs and a legislative committee to issue anti-terrorism laws. The anti-terrorism laws stipulate the freezing of terrorists' assets and not allowing them to participate in political activities. Egypt also launched large-scale operations in 2018 to fight terrorism and eliminate the Islamic State in the Sinai Peninsula. These operations are on-going and have succeeded in diminishing the pace of ISIS attacks in the Sinai.

In 2019, the Egyptian Parliament approved the formation of the House of Senate in accordance with 2019 constitutional amendments to enhance political participation. The Senate is the upper chamber of the parliament and replaces the Shura Council that was dissolved in 2014.²²³ The Senate law divided the country into 27 constituencies devoted to the individual system, and four constituencies to the state system. The Senate contains 300 members, two thirds are elected and the remaining are appointed by the president.²²⁴ In 2020, the Senate election had a participation rate of 14.23% for a total of 6 M votes and about 11 political parties.²²⁵ In late 2020, the parliamentary elections took place and the Mostaqbal Watan (Nation's Future) party secured nearly 55% of the contested seats.

After Brotherhood rule, Egypt needed a strong leader to pull the country from turmoil, consolidate political control, bring back stability and order, and improve the economy. Egyptians were troubled by the high rates of crime, violence, and social instability. The government has been criticized over its record on human rights while it has worked to create a level of political and social stability. Egypt's Senate specified such accusations towards Egypt's human rights record are just a pretext to intervene in Egypt's internal affairs. The Senate affirmed the constitution's separation of powers as follows: the judiciary is an independent that does not answer to executive

²²⁰ Bahgat, Gawdat, "Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab Spring," *Accord*, Jan 2015, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/egypt-aftermath-arab-spring/> (accessed Jan 24 2021).

²²¹ Rageb, Marwa, "سياسات مصر الداخلية في تحسين استثمارات الغاز والنفط بمصر" [Improvements in Egypt's internal politics], *State Information Service*, Jan 20, 2018, <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/157464?lang=ar> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²²² GIS staff, "GIS Dossier: Al-Sisi's Egypt," *Geopolitical Intelligence Services*, Jun 5, 2019, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/gis-dossier-el-sisis-egypt-politics,2893.html> (accessed Jan 24, 2021).

²²³ Staff, "2020 Senate elections' participation rate reaches 14.23%, with 8M voters: Egypt's NEA," *Egypt Today*, Aug 19,2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/91022/2020-Senate-elections-participation-rate-reaches-14-23-with-8M> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

²²⁴ State Information Service, "Senate elections," <https://www.sis.gov.eg/section/228/9467?lang=en-us> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

²²⁵ Staff, "2020 Senate elections' participation rate reaches 14.23%, with 8M voters: Egypt's NEA," *Egypt Today*, Aug 19,2020, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/91022/2020-Senate-elections-participation-rate-reaches-14-23-with-8M> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

authority. Egypt's Senate also specified that the statement issued by the European Parliament regarding human rights in Egypt is opaque and a superficial view that does not exist on ground.²²⁶

Besides, Egypt faces different types of challenges. Water security is considered one of the most critical challenges facing Egypt. The hydroelectric dam in Ethiopia is directly threatening the water supply in Egypt and could lead to water shortages in 2025. Egypt will need to use less water for agriculture, but produce more food to decrease food insecurity and poverty. COVID-19 is still a challenge for Egypt as it is for the entire world. However, due to the high population and the high rate of emigration among doctors and nurses to look for jobs abroad, the government health care system in Egypt is facing real challenges.

Economy

President Al-Sisi has chosen a strategy that focuses on the economy as the key to maintaining stability and security. Egypt has made remarkable economic progress and is expected to maintain its growth for the next five years. Despite the international media's attacks and human rights organizations' accusations, Egypt's economy is not only recovering, it is growing. The unemployment rate is decreasing and public service performance is increasing. President Al-Sisi's long-term reform programs, which seek to exploit Egypt's geographical location, are key for the country's economic development. Egypt's economic vision targets key structural reforms to address core economic issues. The government is trying to tackle the most disadvantaged sectors by achieving macroeconomic stabilization, employment, reduce debt, and social protections. In addition, spending policies have been reformed and have greater focus on infrastructure projects.²²⁷

One of the projects for the economic development of Egypt's Vision 2030, is the new administrative capital. This new capital is an extremely large-scale project to the east of Cairo being built to provide a thriving economic environment with smart infrastructure that forms the nucleus of living standards and sustainable development.²²⁸ However, Egypt's vision of economic development is not only about economic growth, but social justice and protection of the most disadvantaged citizens. Therefore, large investments were made toward education, health, new housing projects for the most disadvantaged, and rehousing for those living in irregular settlements.²²⁹

When it comes to the economy, it is not difficult to quantify the outcomes of President Al-Sisi's policies and reform programs. The outcomes are tangible and typically numbers don't lie. Indicators and official reports from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other agencies have emphasized the remarkable economic and social improvements due to the reform programs. Egypt's official unemployment rate has decreased to 8.3%, a record low with further decreases projected in the future. It is noteworthy to mention that the impact of reforming the tax system and spending policies are increasing public revenue and reducing foreign debt. Furthermore, the attraction of new large foreign investments, especially in the Suez Canal, have helped the economy increase foreign currency reserves and decrease inflation.

Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the entire global economy and Egypt is also affected. The pandemic has posed new difficulties to Egypt's economy and might slow the pace of the economic reforms. Significant resources have been allocated to support the health sector and the most affected citizens, and to

²²⁶ Lashin, Samih, "مجلس الشيوخ يرفض ادعاءات البرلمان الأوروبي حول حقوق الإنسان في مصر" [The Senate rejects the claim of the European Parliament about human rights in Egypt], *Ahram Gate*, Dec 19, 2020, <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2545790.aspx> (accessed Jan 23, 2020).

²²⁷ Altayar Staff, "Egypt celebrates its economic achievements despite the pandemic," *Altayar*, Nov 4, 2020, <https://atalayar.com/en/content/egypt-celebrates-its-economic-achievements-despite-pandemic> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²²⁸ New Urban Communities Authorities, "العاصمة الإدارية الجديدة" [The new administrative capital], http://www.newcities.gov.eg/know_cities/NewCapital/default.aspx (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

²²⁹ Altayar Staff, "Egypt celebrates its economic achievements despite the pandemic," *Altayar*, Nov 4, 2020, <https://atalayar.com/en/content/egypt-celebrates-its-economic-achievements-despite-pandemic> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

support the substantial reduction in tourism and the decline in the Suez Canal revenue. Consequently, there is a risk of interrupting the recent economic successes.²³⁰ The government enforced health measures to control the spread of the pandemic. Yet measures such as social distancing and suspension of air traffic had negative impacts on the economy and caused economic activities to slow. According to the World Bank about 2.7 M jobs were lost in Egypt. The government allocated an emergency response package that was equal to 1.7% of the GDP and Egypt's central bank slashed interest rates to ease liquidity. As a result of those government measures, inflation decreased and was contained.²³¹ Despite these interruptions, Egypt is expected to maintain economic growth. Based on Goldman Sachs Investment Banking Group analysis, Egypt can withstand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, meet its responsibilities, and recover the foreign investments.²³² Tourism industries are strongly recovering as many international air carriers have resumed flights to multiple destinations in Egypt.

Society

Egypt is one of the earliest and greatest civilizations of the world. Its location has made it a center of culture and trade. It is considered the heart for culture in the region, especially music, art, and movie making. Egyptians are known for their sense of humor, generosity, and hard work. The population is over 100 M people, with a growth rate of 1.94%, and a median age of 24 years old. According to the World Population Review, it is estimated that the population in Egypt will double by 2078, with about 2 M people added to the population every year.²³³ This growth will have a direct impact on natural resources, such as food, water, and energy. It also poses significant challenges in regard of unemployment, poverty, and literacy. However, the country has succeeded so far in making improvements to mitigate the effects of economic reforms on the most disadvantaged groups by implementing a wide-range of social protection programs, which are considered the largest in history.

According to the Income and Expenditure Research, for the first time in twenty years, indicators showed a decline in the poverty rate to 29.7% in 2020 compared to 32.5% in 2018. It also reported an increase in the family average annual net income nationwide from 60,400 Egyptian pounds in 2018 to 69,100 Egyptian pounds in 2020, an increase of 15%. In the country's urban areas the rate increased 16.3%, and in the countryside the rate increased 13.3%.

One of the all-time challenges that faces Egypt's society is the unemployment rate. Unemployment has always been a cause of social unrest. As a result, the Egyptian people periodically demonstrate and protest about their living conditions. However, by containing the inflation rate and the government's efforts to decrease unemployment, it seems that Egypt is making positive and sustained progress for improving societal living conditions. According to The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt, the unemployment rate decreased to 7.3% in the third quarter of 2020, compared to 7.8% a year ago. The agency attributed the decline to a return to normal daily activities, after the gradual easing of the state's COVID-19 measures. The agency stated that in the third quarter of 2020 the number of unemployed was 2.061 M, or 7.3% of the total workforce, compared to 2.574 M in the second quarter of 2020, a decrease of 513,000 or 19.9%, and a decrease of 151,000 unemployed from the same quarter of the previous year.²³⁴

²³⁰ Clemens, Breisinger et al., "COVID-19 and the Egyptian Economy," International Food Policy Research Institute, 2020, <https://ebrary.ifpri.org/digital/collection/p15738coll2/id/133663> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

²³¹ World Bank. "The World Bank in Egypt," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/egypt/overview> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

²³² Altayar Staff, "Egypt celebrates its economic achievements despite the pandemic," *Altayar*, Nov 4, 2020, <https://atalayar.com/en/content/egypt-celebrates-its-economic-achievements-despite-pandemic> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²³³ World Population Review, "Egypt Population," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/egypt-population> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

²³⁴ *AlSharq Alawsat*, "7.3 تراوح معدل البطالة في مصر إلى 7.3%" [The unemployment rate in Egypt fell to 7.3%], <https://aawsat.com/home/article/2627396> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Continue conducting security cooperation activities with Egypt's Armed Forces to strengthen joint counter-terrorism efforts, especially in the Sinai and on the Libyan borders.
- Improve intelligence sharing mechanism between CENTCOM and Egyptian Armed Forces.
- Enhance Egypt's capabilities in regards to reconnaissance and surveillance to be able to counter the flow of terrorists and weapon smuggling operations across Libyan borders.
- Continue providing military assistance to Egypt so they can fight terrorism, protect the Suez Canal, and secure international energy routes.
- Bolster coordination mechanisms between EUCOM, AFRICOM, and INDO-PACOM to address terrorist groups' movements throughout the AORs.

References and Readings

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- b. *CSAG TC4 Model 2020*
- c. *CSAG Strategy Paper 2021-09, "President Al-Sisi Puts Egypt Back on its Feet"*

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2.9 IRAN

Head of State	Supreme Leader Ayatollah	Population	84,623,463
Head of Government	Ali Khamenei President Hassan Rouhani		
Minister of Defense	BrigGen Amir Hatami Artesh	Religion	Muslim 99%
Chief of Defense	MajGen Hossein Salami Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)		-Shia 90% -Sunni 10%
			Christian, Zoroastrian, Baha'i and Jew 1%
Type of Government	Theocratic with limited democracy	Ethnicity	Persian 61%
			Azerbaijani 16%
			Kurd 10%
			Lur 6%
			Arab 2%
			Baloch 2%
			Turkmen 2%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$651.71 B (-3.7 %)	Military Personnel	Active 525,000 Reserve 350,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	"Current Situation"	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strategic geography, "Iran as a fortress," and position on Arabian Gulf and "Silk Road" b. Ability to exert soft power due to ancient cultural heritage and global champion of Shia Muslim faith c. Nationalistic population with strong desire for independence fortifies resilience against foreign intervention d. Iran's geopolitical importance increases due to China and India's growth of power, encouraging Russia towards closer cooperation e. The second largest population in the Middle East with a large female representation f. Energy reserves provide great economic potential and self-sufficiency g. Relatively well-diversified economy that makes Iran somehow resistant to economic shocks 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Negative international image as a disruptive force in the region with a deplorable human rights record b. Multiple centers of power lead to complicated decision-making processes c. Anti-American rhetoric limits options for cooperation with many Western or US allied countries d. Water scarcity and poor water management threaten guaranteed availability, constituting a primary source of social discontent e. Regime bureaucracy interference, corruption, and a disconnected banking sector results in uninviting environment for investments f. Government faces longstanding demands from most of the population for economic and social reforms g. Limited conventional offensive military

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. Hybrid military with conventional, unconventional, cyber and A2/AD capabilities provide offensive, defensive, and deterrent options i. Ability to control internal threats j. Ballistic Missile program 	<p>capability with extremely limited air power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. US sanctions increase the vulnerability to internal threats i.e. COVID-19, constrains activities in the region, and obstructs economic development 	
Opportunities	"Future Outlook"	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Great power competition limits the effects of US sanctions and facilitates Iranian countermeasures b. Abrasive US posturing against Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian groups and Israel recently included in CENTCOM AOR creates openings for Iran c. American policy alienates many traditional allies and allows Iran to pursue multilateral engagements d. Long term agreement with China e. The crisis stemming from the US' sanctions incentivizes radicals close to establishment to seize power f. Purchase of S400 AD system from Russia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Abraham accords and accordingly buildup of military power in and coordination between Gulf States and overflight rights (for Israel) b. Israel's attacks, and financial restrictions in proxy states decreases Iranian influence in the region c. Developing government and declining popular support in Iraq undermines political influence d. The end of conflicts diminishes the importance of the armed militias; This compels Iran to compete in economic and political domains where it is much less competitive 	
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>		

Executive Summary

The Sanctions imposed on Iran have impacted both its economy and people, but the regime has not yielded to US demands. The new Biden administration inherited the situation from the Trump administration's strategic approach. The Abraham Accords have caused Iran to struggle with diplomatic and military challenges. The accords have caused Iran an increased threat perception, with the possibility of Israeli action against their nuclear program. A slight misjudgment on either side of this situation could create a total war in the region. There is more at stake than just the Iranian nuclear threat. GPC in the CENTCOM AOR is likely to center on Iran. Russia's presence in the Caucasus and China's deal with Iran has shifted the power balance in the AOR. The current economic situation in Iran has caused the country to move closer to Russia and China. If Iran is lost to 'Sino influence' a new spectrum of threats is created for Iran and for the AOR. From these threats and power shifts, the US could lose their ability to deter Iran. Influencing the system from inside Iran via moderates has become very difficult. Khamenei will try to continue to maintain control on the process going forward with negotiations between Iran and the US. Khamenei is clear about his intention to continue his hardline Islamist vision and maintain the presence of an ideologically hardline president. The Iranian presidential election in June 2021 is likely to be a major influence on nuclear program negotiations. According to the IMF, Iran's GDP shrank by approximately 5% in the past year. Iran fared better than other countries in the region regarding the impact of the shrinking oil sector and non-oil sector. The economic future of Iran remains uncertain, given the COVID-19 pandemic and possibility of continued US sanctions. The US sanctions could result in international condemnation, if Iran suffers a humanitarian crisis. Iran is reported to have 1M positive cases of COVID-19 and approximately 50,000 deaths. After years of recession placing strain and severely impacting the Iranian people, reforms are needed. Protests against the regime are rare, mainly due to the control over the population by the government. Human rights, specifically freedom of speech and women's rights, are still violated in Iran. The younger generations will strive to achieve more freedom of movement and democracy. The Iranian youth are becoming increasingly distant from Islam, which is concern for the Iranian revolutionary regime.

Foreign Policy/Security

Sanctions clearly influenced Iran's economy and people, but the country has not changed its way of acting or even thinking. The hardliners, on the contrary, have become more insistent and persistent in their behavior. Over the last year, the three elements of the Maximum Pressure Campaign (i.e., support for proxies, ballistic missiles and development of nuclear capacity), have been pushed without much gain. There are indicators that attacks by proxies on Israel declined in large numbers. This decrease could be due to a successful Israeli Air Force campaign on Iranian hubs in Syria.²³⁵ This, and the Iranian regime's desire to not provoke the US prior to US elections, may have influenced Iranian proxies in Iraq to stand down as well. One can speculate that Iran wanted to get rid of President Trump, who some saw as very impulsive and unpredictable towards Iran. The Maximum Pressure Campaign was intended to limit Iran's support to its proxies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. In general, the proxies' effects in these countries have not decreased (see Strategic Estimate sections: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen for the proxies' effect).

The world and especially the region is watching to see how the face-off between Iran and the new US administration evolves. Due to flawed and missing US strategies on Iran, opportunities for building US-Iran trust were scattered. The current diplomatic and military face-offs were created to gain the best starting position for negotiations and deterrence. As one person's deterrence is the other's provocation, risks grow for a military confrontation between Iran and the US. The slightest misjudgment between parties can easily create a total war. Although Iran nor any of the US regional partners are seeking an open conflict, there is still an expectation that Iran will retaliate for the killing of Maj Gen Qassem Soleimani and nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrazadehs. During the remembrance service for Soleimani, the head of Iran's judiciary stated the US had violated Iraqi sovereignty, international law, and the United Nations charter. He also stated that the US will not escape law and justice in this case.²³⁶

The actions taken by the Iranian government, in the weeks following the US elections, were designed to deter President Trump from taking aggressive action towards Iran. The secondary intent of Iran's actions was to create maneuver space for negotiations on sanction relief and JCPOA. The Iranian regime has experience in dealing with new US administrations. The Iranians see the success of the Abraham accords as a diplomatic and military challenge to their country. Iran should have been aware that the Arab-Israeli détente was already going on, and therefore not been surprised. The enhancing of regional armed forces, with systems like the F-35 and Iron Dome (ongoing evaluation by KSA and UAE), is planned to shift the balance of power in the region. These technological advances may only have a limited effect on countering the threat of Iranian ballistic missiles. The Iranian ballistic missile program is a reaction to Israeli and Saudi ballistic missile development in the nineties. The Abraham Accords create a perception of an increased threat against Iran's nuclear program. Israel could potentially use the accords to gain overflight rights and organize support with the countries in the flight path to Iran. These steps make it easier for Israel to conduct a preemptive strike against Iran without violating national sovereignty. The likelihood of a preemptive air strike is increasing. US Secretary of State Blinken assisted in increasing this risk by stating Iran could have enough nuclear material to develop a weapon in weeks.²³⁷ This estimate contradicts Israeli nuclear experts' statements. Scientists reported it will take Iran approximately 6

²³⁵ Yaniv Friedman and Lazar Berman, "Reclaiming the Initiative: Proxy Warfare in the Middle East," undated, <https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/dado-center/research-1/reclaiming-the-initiative-proxy-warfare-in-the-middle-east/> (accessed Apr 20, 2021).

²³⁶ Radio Free Europe, "Iran Says Soleimani's Killers Are Not 'Immune From Justice'," *Radio Free Europe*, Jan 1, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-soleimani-anniversary-retaliation/31029538.html> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

²³⁷ Gustaf Kilander, "Blinken warns Iran could be on course to have enough fuel for nuclear weapon within 'weeks,'" Feb 1, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/antony-blinken-iran-nuclear-weapon-b1795801.html> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

months and the IDF claims it will take at least 2 years.²³⁸ These claims have raised tensions around the issue in Iran. Recently, Majles passed a law to purify uranium up to 20%. The big question remains: are these steps designed to improve the Iranian negotiating position, or are they really moving towards a nuclear weapon? The latter is supported by the comments of the Iranian Director of the Iranian Atomic Energy Agency, who opposed purifying uranium to 20% purity. Under pressure from the Supreme Leader, this law was passed by a majority. This shows that Khamenei is taking the lead. It is questionable if the Israeli leadership and security forces feel an increasing tension in this area. If Israel does see a real threat, then Israel will not be prevented by the US from carrying out a preemptive air strike. The perceived threat on Iran will not only provoke missile attacks on Israel, but also on the Gulf States. It is questionable if the Iranians are secretly working towards this to gain international support against Israeli aggression. Iran has attempted this same type of action in the past, during the Iran-Iraq war with the tanker war (1984-1988).

The only solution to the nuclear issue is a more stable, democratic, and transparent political system in Iran. This will allow the world to believe in Iran's word. Yet there is little consensus inside the foreign-policy establishment about what the US should do next.²³⁹ Similar to how one cannot eat an elephant in one bite, long-term peace and security with Iran can only be achieved in small steps. A new JCPOA could be the start of an incremental process to regain trust. The US should be careful not to bite too large of a piece because that could choke the process. The first set of expectations need to be realistic. This process is challenging and precarious. Therefore, deterring Iran should remain as part of the equation. The US must mitigate the perception of deterrence as an instrument of provocation. Foremost in the strategy for Iran should be the Iranian people and taking a bi-partisan US approach. This will help to prevent shocks to any fragile confidence between the US and Iran. A perceived trust between the two nations could strip the regime of its internally stabilizing message: the US is the enemy.

It remains to be seen whether Iran or the US will make positive steps out to negotiate a new JCPOA type agreement. At this point either side will need the support of other JCPOA signatories. It is completely understandable that the countries of the region should be part of the negotiations with Iran. The regional partners have made it clear that any attempt to leave them out would be a red line. Iran is now the country where GPC is the most prevalent in CENTCOM AOR. GPC efforts can be seen in the Russian 'peacekeepers' in Nagorno Karabakh, and a 25-year deal with China. Because of the recent developments in Caucasus, Moscow now has greater direct access and more opportunities to interact with Iran. From the strategic perspective, Iran has "moved closer" into Russia's near neighborhood. This creates a buffer between growing Sino influence in Iran, and Russia keeping the Sino threat at a distance. The development of the Chabahar Port, which includes A2AD capacity, opens China's gateway for the BRI towards Europe. Chinese presence provides legitimacy for Iran, and this will challenge other nations from deterring Iran. Iran's success to end the UN arms embargo, with the support of the UN SC members, created, if deemed necessary, the option for Russia and China to start delivering weapons to Iran. This will also affect the region's power balance together with the re-arming of Gulf countries. Altogether, these new dynamics tend to show the start of a new era of power competition in the Middle East. Nonetheless, Iran still relies on its ballistic missile capabilities and proxies (e.g., Hezbollah, Houthis), to reinforce its influence and control over its hard-won Shia crescent. It is difficult to say that the new alliance between China and Iran will only be a temporary anti-American tandem, for their survival. A new US approach to Iran could create ways to counter the Sino influence on Iran. Since regime change is still a red line for Iran, this might become an obstacle. Solving the Palestinian issue with Israel is a huge bargaining chip that might create space for building mutual trust, and at the same time neutralize Iran's objectives in Syria and Lebanon.

²³⁸ Shaham, Udi, "IDF intelligence: Iran at least two years from nuclear bomb," *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb 9, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/idf-intelligence-iran-at-least-two-years-from-nuclear-bomb-658355> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

²³⁹ Ratnesar, Romesh, "The Iranian Optimist," *Stanford Magazine*, Jul/Aug 2010, <https://stanfordmag.org/contents/the-iranian-optimist> (accessed Feb 5, 2021).

In general Iranians are fond of American culture, but there is mistrust in future US administration proposals. This forces Iran into relations with China, but they are unsure if they want to sell their soul just yet. Therefore, it seems there is more at stake than just the Iranian nuclear threat. Losing Iran to the Sino influence sphere would create a whole new spectrum of threats and possibilities in the CENTCOM AOR.

Internal Politics

Since the last Strategic Estimate in May 2020, the situation in Iran has gone as predicted in the following CSAG products: CSAG's Strategic Estimate 2020, CSAG's June, 2020 C3F, and the Iran Strategy Paper, "Reassessing the US Approach to Iran."²⁴⁰ As stated in previous CSAG analysis, Iranian hardliners were the winners of the parliamentary elections as a result of the constant pressure of the Maximum Pressure Campaign. It seems Iran has become more steadfast in their approach to dealing with the US, and their allies. There is no question that the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has absolute power. In the Iranian governmental system, as in every non-democratic system, the leader is advised by people with great knowledge and wisdom. During 2020, the ring of trusted people around the Ayatollah became more conservative. This is critical as Iran is preparing for presidential elections in 2021. The process of succession for the Supreme Leader is evolving. The system is currently being pushed in a direction that gives hardliners more influence over the supreme leader. President Rouhani lost influence with Khamenei because of his choice on the JCPOA which did not work out well for Iran. The Majles have begun to pull their support for Rouhani based on his handling of the Maximum Pressure Campaign, and COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴¹ Influencing the Iranian system from within using moderates' voices has become difficult. Khamenei is expected to retain more control over any future negotiations with the US, his first priority being to end sanctions.

The Guardian Council's choice for Iran's next Presidential candidates must be seen in the light of the succession of the Supreme Leader. Ayatollah Khamenei's age, 82 as of this year, combined with his health, makes the chance of his death and succession a greater concern. Khamenei has been clear about his intent to continue his hardline Islamist vision. For this reason, it is imperative to Khamenei that Iran select an ideologically hardline president to cure Iran's problems. To secure his legacy, Khamenei, has drawn himself closer to Hossein Dehghan. Hossein Dehghan is a former IRGC commander who served as Ruhani's Defense Minister and is currently the military advisor to Khamenei. His strengths are; non-partisan, devoted to clerical guardianship, potential to gain cross-factional support and has the ability to present himself as the clerical regime's 'unity candidate'.²⁴² If Dehghan is selected by Khamenei, the IRGC is likely to gain power in the regime. If this becomes a reality, it could create a rise in domestic and regional tensions, especially with the US. The Iranian presidential elections will, for these reasons, become a major event in the dynamics of future negotiations on Iran's nuclear program.

Economy

According to the IMF the GDP in Iran has been reduced by approximately 5% in the last year. Iran has done better during COVID-19 than other regional countries. The reductions in oil prices, and the losses Iran took in the non-oil revenue, were not as severe as was expected. Many experts believe that US sanctions had already impacted the GDP. COVID-19, US sanctions, and the collapse of the oil market, resulted in the third straight year of recession in Iran. Despite the expansion of US sanctions to other key industries, non-oil GDP grew in Iran. The rise in GDP was mainly driven by agriculture and manufacturing. The US has attempted to use sanctions and

²⁴⁰ Strategy Paper 2020-17; "Reassessing the US Approach to Iran," released 01 Jul 2020.

²⁴¹ Kulsoom Belal, "Emerging Politics in Iran: Last Year of Rouhani's Term and the New Conservative," *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2020), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/polipers.17.1.0105> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

²⁴² Aarabi, Kasra, "The Militarisation of Iran's Presidency: The IRGC and the 2021 Elections," *Royal United Services Institute*, Oct 1, 2020, <https://www.rusi.org/commentary/militarisation-iran-presidency-irgc-and-2021-elections> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

isolation against Iran for more than 40 years; the only impact being the Iranian people and economy.²⁴³ With the high inflation rate in Iran and the currency depreciation, the lower income bracket has been impacted the most. The Iranian regime was forced to sell assets on the Iranian stock market in order deal with revenue declination, but Khamenei's wealth was not impacted.²⁴⁴

At the end of March 2020, President Rouhani announced that over 10% of Iran's GDP would be used for COVID-19 relief and recovery measures. Iran received a \$50M loan from the World Bank in July for the purposes of importing medicine and medical equipment from the WHO. There was a second surge in COVID-19 cases in November of 2020. In response to this surge, the Iranian government unveiled another round of relief measures totaling 1% of the country's GDP.²⁴⁵

The economic future of Iran in the near term is uncertain. The main causes of uncertainty are the possibility of US sanctions continuing and how COVID-19 will develop in the country. If COVID-19 requires another round of lockdowns, or if the vaccine is not distributed soon, the economy will be affected significantly. The US Maximum Pressure Campaign has significantly depleted Iran's financial reserves. This may create a humanitarian crisis in the long term. The volatile Iranian currency could plunge further, thereby impoverishing ordinary citizens.²⁴⁶

Iran might recover quickly if sanctions are lifted, and the demand for oil from China and other countries returns. The stakes are high for China in their new 25-year deal with Iran. For this reason, we can expect China to put pressure on the Biden Administration to lift the sanctions. The economic loss in Iran, combined with pressure from the region in the security domain, is driving Iran further into isolation. Iran moving further into isolation is not helpful for China's long-term development of the BRI. The economic situation has caused Iran to move closer to Russia and China, a move that is detrimental to a Western vision of the Middle East.

Society

The COVID-19 virus has spread across Iran with more than 1M positive cases and approximately 50,000 deaths. The government has implemented stricter protective measures in the last quarter of 2020 and social assistance programs for lower income groups. Reforms are urgently needed after multiple years of recession that have severely undermined the welfare of the Iranians. Mitigation measures have offset these pressures, but mismanagement made these measures insufficient. This mismanagement gave the opportunity for hardliners in the Majles to blame President Rouhani.²⁴⁷

Wealth has never been evenly distributed in Iran. Despite the revolution, the regime has not fully succeeded in its goal of generating an inclusive society. It is a painful time for the population of Iran with COVID-19 infections. What makes this worse is the children of the mullahs continue to be corrupted, much like in the Shah era. More than 60% of the Iranian population is under the age of 30 and they face major socio-economic problems such as unemployment, high rents, and strict social rules imposed by the religious regime. Many well-educated young people perform jobs below their status. This is because the young people do not want to support the regime.

²⁴³ Rouhi, Mahsa, "The JCPOA at 5: How the U.S. squandered an unprecedented diplomatic opening with Iran," *Responsible Statecraft*, Jul 19, 2020, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/07/19/the-jcpoa-at-5/> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

²⁴⁴ Najaf Abadi, Kazemi, 'World Bank, Iran Economic Monitor, weathering the triple shock' *The Worldbank*, Dec 3, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/publication/iran-economic-monitor-fall-2020> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

²⁴⁵ International Monetary Fund, "Policy responses to COVID-19," Last updated on Feb 5, 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

²⁴⁶ Najaf Abadi, Kazemi, 'World Bank, Iran Economic Monitor, weathering the triple shock,' *The Worldbank*, Dec 3, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/publication/iran-economic-monitor-fall-2020> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

²⁴⁷ Najaf Abadi, Kazemi, 'World Bank, Iran Economic Monitor, weathering the triple shock' *The Worldbank*, Dec 3, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/publication/iran-economic-monitor-fall-2020> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

International Monetary Fund, "Policy responses to COVID-19," Last updated on Feb 5, 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

Together this leads to destruction of capital and a knowledge drain.²⁴⁸ The Iranian regime will seek to exploit every opportunity to hold the US responsible for their misfortune, by linking it to economic sanctions.

Protests against the regime are rare, due to the control and repressive rules of the regime. The IRGC support to the COVID-19 pandemic is also a way to control the people. During these times, where an upset population could be ignited by their dire existence, the regime must maintain strict control. Reports of protests are limited and they did not have any effect on the regime. However, among the younger generations, just as in Western countries, there is no uniform picture of the future and the choices that must be made. For example, in rural areas, there is more support for conservative hardliners among young, educated women than in the cities. In the cities the young women have more progressive ideas based on Western ways of life. More than 75% of the Iranian population lives in the conservative lower educated countryside. This group is very important in elections.

Many human rights that we take for granted such as freedom of speech and women's rights are violated by extremely religiously conservative beliefs and laws. There are rare exceptions, but Islamic law often gets in the way of women's freedom. Internet censorship is commonplace in Iran. The highly educated Iranian youth have found ways to circumvent the countries ban on websites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Prior to the advent of social media, it was easy for the Iranian regime to hold back the influences of the West. The Iranian government has generally looked the other way on illegal use of Western websites and apps in Iran, except during times of unrest. Despite the steps the regime has taken in improving their relationship with the West, criticism of Iran remains strong. Since the election of Rouhani in 2013, the hunt for human rights defenders has increased enormously. Activists inside Iran have been demonized, arrested, and prosecuted by the security forces and the judiciary.²⁴⁹

Iranians have learned through experience that revolutions do not always lead to positive changes. It is for this reason many chose to make small changes. The people of Iran have the desire to join the Western world and share in its prosperity. This desire has been a powerful influence, driving liberal thinking about conservative ideas such as women's freedoms. The results of this liberal thinking are more progressive behavior among the population. The quiet, slow revolution in Iran cannot be stopped by anyone but the US, if it evokes an antagonistic reaction. Opinions by Iranian spiritual leaders are divided on this slow revolution.²⁵⁰

As President Rouhani comes to the end of his second term, many of his promises seem unfulfilled to the Iranian people. The most critical topic is who will succeed Khamenei as the next Supreme Leader. It is important to create support for a more liberal candidate. A more liberal Supreme Leader will help sustain long term domestic support for the regime and prevent an uprising. The younger Iranian generations will continue to pursue freedom of movement and democracy. Changes in this direction will more than likely be a long time coming. A possible ray of light for the slow silent revolution is the growth of Christianity in Iran. The Iranian youth are becoming increasingly distant from Islam, and this has become a great concern for the Iranian government.^{251 252}

²⁴⁸ Heusinkveld, Joline, "Jong in Iran, niets mag maar alles kan," *One World*, Jul 14, 2016, <https://www.oneworld.nl/lezen/achtergrond/jong-iran-niets-mag-maar-alles-kan/> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

²⁴⁹ Amnesty International, "Iran," *Amnesty International*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

²⁵⁰ Ratnesar, Romesh, "The Iranian Optimist," *Stanford Magazine*, Jul/Aug 2010, <https://stanfordmag.org/contents/the-iranian-optimist> (accessed February 5, 2021).

²⁵¹ Andros, Dan, "Christianity Rapidly Growing in Oppressive Iran," *CBN News*, Jul 6, 2020, <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/cwn/2020/june/christianity-rapidly-growing-in-oppressive-iran> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

²⁵² Ibid.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Prevent miscalculations which can escalate conflict to war.
- Create an incremental solution with international partners, Russia, and China to get out of the current face-off created by the US presidential shift.
- Deterring Iran should remain at the forefront of CENTCOM strategy while ensuring that the deterrence does not become perceived as or used as provocation.
- Neutralizing Iran's proxy forces in Syria should become a strategy to prevent Iranian support.
- Include Russo and Sino influence in long-term strategy on Iran in the regional power-equation.

References and Readings

- a. *CSAG Strategic Estimate 2020*
- b. *CSAG TC4 Model 2020*
- c. *CSAG Strategy Paper 2020-17, "Reassessing US Approach to Iran"*
- d. *CSAG Strategy Paper 2021-05, "The Consequences of Israeli Intervention in Syria"*
- e. *CSAG Strategy Paper 2021-06, "Post Maximum Pressure Campaign Rapprochement towards Iran"*

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2.10 IRAQ

Head of State	Barham Salih	Population	40,771,853
Head of Government	Mustafa Al Khadimi		
Minister of Defense	Juma Inad	Religion	Muslim 95%
Chief of Defense	Lieutenant General Abdul Rashid Yarallah Al - Lami		- Sunni 35%
			- Shia 65%
			Christian and Other 5%
Type of Government	Federal Parliamentary Republic	Ethnicity	Arab 75%
			Kurd 17%
			Turkmen 3%
			Assyrian 2%
			Persian 2%
			Other 1%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$196. 27 B (+2.5%)	Military Personnel	Active 165,000
			Reserve 0 ²⁵³
			Paramilitary 145,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Capable, battle-hardened, and confident security forces b. International support in different areas of security, governance, and reconstruction c. World’s fourth largest proven crude oil reserve, second largest OPEC producer d. Low oil extraction costs e. Strong growth in labor force 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lack of stable government b. Tensions with autonomous Kurdistan, which is a major contributor to the oil sector c. Severe tensions between the ruling Shia majority and the rest of the country d. Foreign influence over Parliament, political parties and PMF e. Weak and limited banking sector f. Daesh sleeper cells still capable of inflicting heavy casualties and damages to ISF, population and infrastructure g. Widespread corruption h. Under-diversified economy, highly dependent on the oil sector i. Low share of non-oil and gas private sector GDP j. Deficiencies in institutions as well as in education, health and welfare systems k. Seriously damaged and neglected infrastructure

²⁵³ In 2021, Reserve totals no longer include Paramilitary forces as these values are given their own listing.

Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Renewal of the political elite b. Reformation and establishment of more inclusive and capable security institutions c. Modernization of infrastructure through international support d. Economic diversification through foreign investment e. Balanced and pragmatic foreign policy seeking to reassert Iraq’s regional and independent role 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The US withdrawal could bring consequences that could destroy Iraq’s hard-won gains b. Political rifts between sectarian coalitions impeding the formation of a government c. Caught in crossfire, becoming a battleground for greater regional and global powers d. Ongoing oil price war e. Limited capacity to contain the spread of the COVID-19 f. Daesh reconsolidation and intensification of assassination and extortion practices g. Increased assertiveness and impunity in PMF actions h. Iran’s proxies joined to ongoing military campaign against Saudi Arabia i. Mismanagement of oil revenues and external reconstruction funding j. Water scarcity, lack of basic services, and infrastructure for public needs and IDPs
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG’s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>		

Executive Summary

The year 2020 has brought a new political climate to Iraq. This is marked by a growing sensitivity to foreign intervention. The popular demonstrations that have swept Iraq since October 2019 have continued into 2020. Protesters demand an end to Iranian interference, to US intervention as well as an end to sectarian politics. As a result of Turkey’s major offensive in the northern Iraqi territory, Iraq has become a new front in the war of influence between Turkey and its Arab opponents. The major challenges for Al-Kadhimi were to achieve harmony, balance, and independence between Iraq's interests, US aspirations, and the reality of the Iranian influence. Iranian leaders continued to seek to maximize their influence over Iraq’s parliament, Prime Minister, and cabinet. Iran has reaped economic benefits from Iraq’s oil revenue, domestic economy, and dominates Iraq’s security sector through the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).²⁵⁴

Increasing Iranian influence in Iraq is affecting negatively the Commander’s first priority. Although, the number of US troops in Iraq had dropped to 2,500 in January 15, 2021, the US needs to maintain a capable military posture in the Middle East. The US military posture is designed to deter adversaries, support allies, sustain freedom of military and commercial movement, counter terrorism, and, if necessary, fight wars. Any US military withdrawal from Iraq could cause a ripple effect that weakens US regional power projection. The reduction of the military footprint appears to be a negative factor in the effective fight against a reinvigorated Daesh. A reduced US footprint also impacts the ability to counter growing Iranian influence. For these reasons, the US decision to reduce its footprint could have a negative impact on CENTCOM priorities. While media exposure has been focused on Iranian influence and Daesh, China and Russia have accelerated their investments across the region, specifically in Iraq. China is principally using its economic might to establish a long-term strategy in Iraq, while Russia seeks to dominate Iraqi arms purchases in order to increase its revenues and its national

²⁵⁴ Falk, Thomas O, “What the US troop withdrawal means for Iraq,” *Aljazeera*, Nov 22, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/22/what-the-us-troop-withdrawal-means-for-iraq> (accessed Jan 7, 2021).

influence. In response to protesters' demands, Kadhimi's first promise was to hold early parliamentary elections and to reform the electoral law. More important than setting early elections is that the elections are free and fair. On the security front, Prime Minister Kadhimi's attempts to bring Iranian backed militia under greater state control have increased the risk of fighting between the militia and ISF. For the last six months, Daesh has been reinvigorating, and according to some commentators is now able to plan and conduct coordinated large-scale attacks.²⁵⁵ Efforts to improve relations between the Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government continued. These improved relations are despite the ongoing disagreements over oil revenue sharing and security arrangements. A lack of discussions could also affect the Iraqi economy and security by lacking military cooperation between the ISF and the Peshmerga. When the ISF and Peshmerga are not in sync they are paving the way for Daesh activities in the Kurdistan border area. The rate of COVID-19 infections is increasing rapidly and by the end of 2020 cases exceeded 600,000.²⁵⁶ Iraq's dilapidated health system has limited capacity to contain the virus spread or to treat those affected. All of these factors will drag down Iraq's GDP growth. Based on the low economic capacity of the Iraqi government, they have started closing camps housing tens of thousands of people. These camps housed many who fled their homes during the final battles against Daesh. Aid groups warn that this could create a second wave of displacement with dire consequences.²⁵⁷ Iraq has closed approximately 62% of its remaining camps for internally displaced persons over the past six months, and is planning to close all of them this year. Around 100,000 people are at risk of becoming homeless as the closures were not properly planned or coordinated. The ill planned closures will impact negatively Commander's fifth priority.

Foreign Policy/Security

A new political climate, marked by growing sensitivity to foreign intervention, dominates Iraq. After years of challenges posed by the Islamic State, sectarian struggles, and US occupation Iraqis have grown tired. Last year Iraq became the new front in the war of influence between Turkey and its Arab opponents.²⁵⁸ Iraqi foreign ministers summoned the Turkish ambassador to protest Ankara's attack on Iraq's sovereignty and territorial sanctity. Turkey launched a major offensive in Iraq's northern territory on the pretext of fighting Kurdish groups. Erdogan's military adventurism in Iraq is perplexing, especially when it seems to be in coordination with Iran.²⁵⁹ Iran for a long time used the same aggressive tactics in Iraq. What is clear though is that both countries are undermining Iraqi national security.

Besides the Turkish incursions, Iraq has experienced competing pressure from both Iran and the US. There are two main sources of Iranian influence in Iraq Shiite militias, and Shiite political parties. The Shiite militias have been sponsored by Iran and brought together under the rubric of the PMF. Iran has also used politicians from various Shiite parties which have appointed successive prime ministers. Both these bases of Iranian influence are now under stress from protesters. These proxies are playing a dual role, one as an integral part of the society they penetrate, and the other as contingents of the IRGC. There are four main groups acting in Iraq currently: the US and coalition forces, Iraqi Security Forces, Peshmerga and PMF. While these are the main players there are also unknown organizations under different names. Fragmentation also makes the dual role of the militias

²⁵⁵ Al Sharif, Osama, "Biden should step up US support for Iraq's Al Khadimi," *Arabnews.com*, Jan 26, 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1798391> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

²⁵⁶ World Health Organization, Jan 27, 2021, <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/iq> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

²⁵⁷ Rashid, Abdullah, "Nowhere to go: displaced Iraqis desperate as camps close," *Reuters*, Nov 12, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-refugees-closures/nowhere-to-go-displaced-iraqis-desperate-as-camps-close-idUSKBN27S1GU> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

²⁵⁸ USCENTCOM, CSAG, TC-4, "Iraq," 2020, p. 34-36.

²⁵⁹ Lauren Holtmeier and Tommy Hilton, "Iran, Turkey likely coordinating attacks on Kurdish areas, say experts," *Al-Arabiya*, Jun 18, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2020/06/18/Iran-Turkey-likely-coordinating-attacks-on-Kurdish-areas-say-experts-mayor> (accessed Feb 5, 2021).

difficult to pin down. This gives Iran and the IRGC plausible deniability about their role in the various conflicts in Iraq.²⁶⁰ The PMF has begun to splinter, with some militias distancing themselves from Iran and affirming their loyalty to the Najaf-based Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani.²⁶¹ The popular demonstrations that have swept Iraq since October 2019 specifically demanded the end of Iran's interference and of sectarian politics in Iraq.

The US presence has also been questioned in Iraq after the January 2020 killing of Soleimani in Baghdad. This killing has led to demands from Iraq's parliament for the departure of all foreign military forces in the country. When Al-Kadhimi won support for the government's formation on May 7, 2020, he was forced to immediately negotiate the future of relations with the US. President Trump announced his intention to reduce US troops in Iraq. The former president and Al-Kadhimi hoped their August 20, 2020, meeting in Washington would be a comfortable way to shrink the US military presence in Iraq. However, harassment over the US presence on Iraqi soil continued to force the issue until early 2021. While, Al-Kadhimi remained vulnerable to US pressure to increase security of US forces in the country.²⁶² The biggest challenge for Al-Kadhimi was to achieve harmony, balance, and independence, between Iraq's interests, American aspirations, and the reality of the Iranian influence. By the time President Trump left office the number of US troops in Iraq had dropped to 2,500. The drawdown took place at a critical time for Al-Kadhimi. The Prime Minister's main focus was to reduce the PMF in Iraq, stamp out corruption, and lead the country toward free and fair elections.

The previous US administration viewed Iraq from one angle only: its confrontation with Iran. But the reality is very different. One of the most prominent events in Iraq during 2020 was the re-emergence of Daesh. One day after President Biden was sworn into office, there were two suicide bombings in a busy Baghdad area. These attacks left more than 30 dead and 100 injured. It was the worst attack of its kind in more than three years. The massacre was claimed by Daesh. This attack was followed two days later by an ambush north of Baghdad killing eleven members of the PMF. The message was clear: Daesh has been reinvigorated, and they are able to plan and conduct coordinated large-scale attacks.²⁶³ The terrorist organization has succeeded in exploiting security gaps, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Daesh has been able to enter into sensitive areas, and take advantage of a lack of coordination between the Peshmerga and the Iraqi Security Forces. During last year, there have also been terrorist attacks in Diyala, Saladin, Al-Anbar, Nineveh, and Kirkuk. **Therefore, even a limited and controlled withdrawing could impact negatively on USCENTCOM commander's first and third priorities.**

During the US election and since the new US President Joe Biden has hardly mentioned Iraq. President Biden's choice for Secretary of State and Defense of Secretary are well versed in Iraq. As of today, there is little known about President Biden's vision for US' relations with Iraq. The Biden administration should put Iraq at the top of its Middle Eastern agenda. Currently Iraq is going through a critical phase with the resurgence of Daesh, and growing Iranian influence which could result in it becoming a failed state.

China and Russia have accelerated their investments across the Middle East and specifically in Iraq. Russia seeks to dominate the Iraqi arms sales market, in order to increase its revenues and its national influence in Iraq.²⁶⁴ China depends on a steady supply of Iraqi Basra Light Crude oil. On January 2, 2021, the director general of Iraq's state oil announced that Iraq had signed a \$2 B oil supply contract with China. China

²⁶⁰ Shehadi, Nadim, "Iran's regional chess game exposes US confusion," *Arab News*, Jan 27, 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1799591> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

²⁶¹ Ahmed, Omar, "Pro Sistani factions leave Shia forces, but Iraq's PM signals they are here to stay," *MiddleEastmonitor.com*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200518-pro-sistani-factions-leave-shia-forces-but-iraqs-pm-signals-they-are-here-to-stay/> (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

²⁶² *Shafaq news*, "Iraq's extraordinary 2020. Started with an earthquake and ended with a storm," Dec 29, 2020, <https://shafaq.com/en/Report/Iraq-s-Extraordinary-2020-Started-with-an-earthquake-and-ended-with-a-storm> (accessed Jan 5, 2021).

²⁶³ Al Sharif, Osama, "Biden should step up US support for Iraq's Al Khadimi," *Arabnews.com*, Jan 26, 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1798391> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

²⁶⁴ Ben Connable and James Dobins, "Competition in Iraq," *Rand.org*, Jun 5, 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/06/competition-in-iraq.html> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

has already made partial prepayment on the contract.²⁶⁵ Chinese leaders also view Iraq as part of the BRI. In June 2020, the Commander of US Central Command, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie Jr., described the region as a ‘Wild West’ for Great Power Competition. China is principally using its economic might to establish a long-term strategic ‘beachhead.’ Russia is using ‘high-intensity’ deployments of military assets ‘to throw sand in [America’s] gears.’ It appears Russia is a player on the global stage when it comes to Middle Eastern issues.²⁶⁶ A US withdrawal or footprint reduction from Iraq likely leaves opportunities for China and Russia and could place at risk other US interests in the Middle East. To mitigate these risks the US and its partners should collectively build strong, fully functioning and democratic institutions. These institutions can also be pathways for increased Gulf investments and support for Iraq. With US support and leadership, Iraq is likely to reintegrate into the Arab world and reinvigorate a relationship with the Gulf that is based on mutual interests. Helping to revive the Iraqi economy, and reduce its dependence on Iran in the process²⁶⁷ **will impact positively USCENTCOM commander’s first priority.**

An Important issue to follow in Iraq was the visit of Pope Francis in March 2021. Pope Francis visited Iraq March 5 to 8, 2021 in what would be the first-ever papal trip to the country. Pope Francis met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and President Barham Salih in Baghdad. The trip was aimed primarily at encouraging the country’s Christians, who faced decades of discrimination by Iraq’s Muslim majority. Most recently the Christians in Iraq were targeted relentlessly by Daesh group militants starting in 2014. According to Iraq’s top Catholic official, Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako, Pope Francis also met with the Iraq’s top Shiite cleric, Ali al Sistani, in a significant highlight of the trip.²⁶⁸

Internal Politics

The current situation in Iraq seems to be a ‘perfect storm’ of unprecedented proportions. Iraq is facing a multitude of issues such as; continued political division, widespread civil unrest and protest (albeit currently at reduced level), US-Iranian tension, and the resurgence of the Islamic State. The current COVID-19 pandemic and the global decline in oil prices set the backdrop for an economic crisis and, potentially, magnifying Iraq’s problem.

The nomination of Al Khadimi as Prime Minister ended five months of political gab and raising hopes that his government would immediately try to address the deteriorating political, economic, security, and health situations. Upon taking office, Al-Khadimi promised reforms and to restore the state’s authority. Although Al-Khadimi is not the first Iraqi Prime Minister to have promised reforms, he is the first to prioritize the country’s sovereignty in order to achieve stability. Khadimi’s actions were led by the need to change the country’s stagnant and dysfunctional political system. Iraq’s internal politics have been taken hostage by external and internal actors with self-serving agendas.²⁶⁹ Prime Minister Kadhimi laid out nine priorities for his government, the top six are: early elections, electoral reform, combating COVID-19, maintaining state control over arms, fighting against corruption, and addressing violence against protesters. Given these goals, how has Kadhimi performed? Since

²⁶⁵ Saadi, Dania, “Iraq awards \$2 bn. Oil deal to Chinese buyer,” *Spglobal.com*, Jan 2, 2021, <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/010321-iraq-awards-2-bil-oil-deal-to-chinese-buyer-without-destination-restrictions-somo> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

²⁶⁶ Middle East Institute, “CENTCOM and the shifting sands of the Middle East: a conversation with CENTCOM commander Gen Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.,” Jun 10, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/events/centcom-and-shifting-sands-middle-east-conversation-centcom-commander-gen-kenneth-f-mckenzie> (accessed Jan 21, 2021).

²⁶⁷ Alaalain, Rani, “Iraq best hope is developing stronger ties to the Gulf – with US help,” *Brookings.edu*, Aug 19, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/19/iraqs-best-hope-is-developing-stronger-ties-to-the-gulf-with-us-help/> (accessed Jan 13, 2021).

²⁶⁸ Winfield, Nicole, “Pope on Iraq trip: Worthwhile even if most watch him on TV,” *Usnews.com*, Feb 1, 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-02-01/pope-on-iraq-trip-worthwhile-even-if-most-watch-him-on-tv> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

²⁶⁹ Nasrawi, Salah, “Iraq’s mortgaged sovereignty,” *AhramOnline*, Aug 4, 2020, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1203/375970/AIAhram-Weekly/World/Iraq%E2%80%99s-mortgaged-sovereignty.aspx> (accessed Jan 11, 2021).

the beginning of his government, Khadimi wanted to purge corrupt and disloyal military and security officials. Among the changes he has made were naming a new head of the National Security Agency and a new national security adviser. The removal of Faleh Al-Fayadh, head of the Iraqi PMF and one of Iran's most influential allies in Iraq, will have an impact.²⁷⁰ **These actions impacted positively USCENTCOM commander's first and third priorities.**

As a response to protesters' demands, Kadhim's first promise was to hold early parliamentary elections and to reform the electoral law. In 2020, Khadimi first proposed an election date of June 6, 2021, but later changed the date to October 10, 2021. The official government reason for the postponement was that the Independent High Electoral Commission asked for more time to organize polls and to ensure a day free of suspicions of fraud.²⁷¹ An analyst with ties to the Iraqi government said leaders pushed to postpone parliamentary elections fearing public discontent would lead to their removal.²⁷² More important than setting a date is ensuring the elections are free and fair. Protesters and civil society activists have long called for electoral reform, and specifically for smaller electoral districts. In late October the Council of Representatives voted on smaller electoral districts which would ensure better representation.

The current system of allocation remains crippled by the fact that Iraq's last credible census was in 1957. Since then, the country has seen massive demographic change. Analysts believe that by postponing the elections Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi has an opportunity to build alliances. The alliances Kadhim is able to build will help him remain on the political forefront even if the parties representing political Islam are on the decline. Election officials told the local media that 260 political parties had registered to compete in the upcoming elections, and around 60 of them were new.²⁷³ Younger Iraqis who took part in anti-government protests have formed one of these new parties. Alaa al-Rikabi, a prominent activist in the DhiQar protests, said during the news conference that he would lead the new bloc of the 'Imtidad Movement.' He added that the movement "will serve as the voice of popular protests and intends to run in the upcoming early parliamentary elections." The bloc, he added, "will face the current corrupt system in the country ... and will seek to obtain the parliamentary majority, otherwise it will join the opposition in the next parliament."²⁷⁴ There are millions of Iraqis that have not been involved in criminal activity and are not agents of foreign powers. These Iraqis are eager to end illegal weapons, and achieve security and stability while restoring the rule of law. This portion of the populace can make a broad popular front emerge that is strong and effective. This front must have an effective role in any upcoming elections in order to shape an influential parliamentary change. With influence in parliament the force is capable of imposing change on its leaders.²⁷⁵ Compared to the larger, long-established parties in Iraq, these new entrants are small, inexperienced, and underfunded. Nevertheless, thanks to a change in Iraq's electoral rules, they may have a chance. This early election will probably be a powerful hit against Shia barons, the Iranian backed parties or militia and the other terror groups whose existence depends on the continuation of the corruption. **Organizing free and fair elections should positively impact USCENTCOM commander's first priority.**

²⁷⁰ Michael Knights and Alex Almeida, "Kadhimi's rolling reshuffle, part 1 military command changes," Washingtoninstitute.org, Sep 14, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/kadhimis-rolling-reshuffle-part-1-military-command-changes> (accessed Jan 10, 2021).

²⁷¹ Himenez, Daniel Gonzales, "New election in Iraq from chaos to bloody civil protests," *atalayar.com*, Jan 22, 2021, <https://atalayar.com/en/content/new-elections-iraq-chaos-bloody-civil-protests> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

²⁷² Menmy, Dana Taib, "Iraqi anger grows after election postponement," *Al Jazeera*, Jan 30, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/30/iraqi-anger-grows-after-election-postponement> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

²⁷³ Latif, Hammam, "Postponing Iraqi elections seen as an opportunity for Khadimi to boost political fortunes," *theArabweekly.com*, Jan 16, 2021, <https://theArabweekly.com/postponing-iraqi-elections-seen-opportunity-kadhimi-boost-political-fortunes> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

²⁷⁴ Schaer, Cathrin, "Iraq's new protester parties plan to change the country," *Dw.com*, Jan 22, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/iraqs-new-protester-parties-plan-to-change-the-country/a-56312305> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

²⁷⁵ al Zobedi, Ibrahim, "Free and fair early election are Iraq's last chance," *The Arab Weekly*, Jan 7, 2021, <https://theArabweekly.com/free-and-fair-early-elections-are-iraqs-last-chance> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

Another key mission of Al-Khadimi was to fight against corruption. In a bold step to recover billions of dollars in tax revenues lost to bribery, Al-Khadimi sent counter-terrorism troops along with Iraqi security forces to supervise the Iraqi borders. These borders are widely seen as a way to provide kickbacks and embezzlement opportunities for officials linked to armed groups. An official report stated 500 B Iraqi dinars were recovered from customs revenues in one month under the Army's control.²⁷⁶

One of the final steps taken by Kadhimi was to limit violence, by seeking justice for the murdered protesters along with stopping the subversive actions of paramilitary groups. These groups include Iranian back militias operating in Iraq. Kadhimi has repeatedly promised justice for the hundreds of protesters who have lost their lives in the past year. It was not until October 2020 that Kadhimi formed an official committee to investigate the crimes. In private interviews, activists expressed skepticism about the government's ability to implement reforms and seek justice for the protesters. They also expressed concern about Kadhimi's inability to stop Iranian backed Shia militias who have killed and abducted Iraqi civil activists. The killings and abductions continue to take place under the Kadhimi's government. An example is the killing of security researcher Dr. Husham Al- Hashimian and Basra activist Dr. Riham Yaqoob.²⁷⁷ **Continuation of these activities will impact negatively USCENTCOM commander's first priority.**

Efforts to improve relations between the Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government continue. These relations are strained due to ongoing disagreements over oil revenue sharing, and security arrangements. On June 20, Kurdistan's President Nechirvan Barzani paid an important visit to Baghdad to reinforce Erbil and Baghdad's relations. After the meeting, Barzani tweeted that he had discussed with the three presidencies, "[t]he relations between Erbil and Baghdad, and the dialogues to address problems and meet challenges at this stage."²⁷⁸ Two days later on June 22, Kurdistan's Regional Government's Chief, Masrour Barzani announced his government was ready to radically resolve differences with Baghdad. This formed additional support for Al-Kadhimi just days after his election. The mutual political openness between Erbil and Baghdad has contributed to an effective military coordination, for the first time in years. The Iraqi army and the Peshmerga forces can now focus on defeating Daesh. Daesh has taken over areas bordering Kurdistan, by exploiting the lack of security and the political distance between the two capitals. A major event between the two governments was the announcement of the 'Sinjar Agreement' in October 2020.²⁷⁹ This agreement was signed by the Iraqi federal and Kurdistan regional government representatives. The agreement calls for normalizing the situation in Sinjar, departure of all armed groups and militias - including the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and the return of displaced people. **Continuation and improvement of relations between KRG and GoI probably will have a positively impact on USCENTCOM commander's third priority.**

In the weeks leading up to the end of 2020, Iraq witnessed a remarkable political issue. An attempt was made by the Iraqi front bloc to dismiss the speaker of parliament. The speaker Mohammed Al-Halbousi survived and made a broad political-popular attempt to resolve the battle for the Sunni house's leadership. On December 2, 2020, Muqtada Al-Sadr took to Twitter to call for "restoration of the Shiite house," a call that has drawn much speculation about its significance. This could be an attempt to assert his leadership of the Shiite forces or to re-establish an election position ahead of elections in October 2021. **All these internal struggles for political power,**

²⁷⁶ *Shafaq News*, "Border crossing register 500 bn. dinar's one month after army took control," Aug 17, 2020, <https://shafaq.com/en/Economy/Border-Crossings-register-500-bn-dinars-one-month-after-the-army-took-control> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

²⁷⁷ *Shafaq News*, "Six months in his premiership, what has Al Khadimi done for Iraq?" Nov 11, 2020, <https://shafaq.com/en/Report/Six-months-into-his-preiership-what-has-al-Kadhimi-done-for-Iraq> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

²⁷⁸ Shilani, Hiwa, "Kurdistan President meets top Iraqi officials," *Kurdistan24.net*, Jun 20, 2020, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/22647-Kurdistan-President-meets-top-Iraqi-officials> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

²⁷⁹ *News.un.org*, "New agreement in Iraq signals' a first and important step toward a better future," Oct 9, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1075102> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

given the involvement of Iran and Iranian backed politicians and militia could have a negative impact on commander's first priority.

Economy

Iraq relies on oil exports to fund 95% of the state's revenues. In 2020, Iraq borrowed approximately 81 T dinars from the World Bank as well as from local banks. These loans were designed to secure the employees' salaries following the fall in oil prices due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The delay in salaries has caused a severe recession in the Iraqi markets. The recession was exacerbated by several factors: collapse of oil revenues, the oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia, lockdown from COVID-19 pandemic and failure of the government and parliament to prepare for the financial crisis. A recent report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace states that Iraq's financial crisis has short-term and long-term repercussions. In the short term, Baghdad is finding it difficult to pay the public sector's employees, requiring the state to borrow money from the central bank during the summer. With the decline in oil revenues, the state's monthly income now covers only 55% of government expenditures. The country is finding it difficult to cover its monthly expenses.²⁸⁰ In the longer term, Iraq is facing a total financial collapse, which is likely to occur next year. A financial collapse in Iraq will lead to a repeat of the employees' salaries' delay unless other sources of revenue can be found to save a country. The parliament has agreed to continue borrowing to pay employees' salaries. Concerns have grown in a country with millions of employees and which is almost entirely dependent on the price of oil. The Iraqi parliament also lacks support for the government's White Paper reform plan. Dr. Nasir Al-Kinani, an expert and economic consultant, in a statement to Shafaq News agency said "Iraq has a deficit of 81 T dinars, in addition to the previous debt of \$200 B. It is a major problem, which may take many years for Iraq to pay off."²⁸¹ He also said that the issue of employees' salaries disrupted had created setbacks throughout the market and criticized the idea of unpaid salaries because of a rivalry between branches of government.

Despite all the challenges facing Iraq, the Khadimi government still has a chance to succeed. However, mitigating economic difficulties will not be easy. The way will be fraught with widespread interconnected issues. There are hopes, which were seen after the Khadimi-Trump meeting, where agreements were signed with various American companies worth more than \$8 B. These deals could support US strategic goals and reduce Iraqi dependence on Iranian energy. Another brilliant move of Khadimi was his participation in the Iraq, Jordan, and Egyptian summit. The Khadimi government partnered with both Egypt and Jordan to tie Iraq to greater markets. The Khadimi government had a meeting with Saudi foreign ministry officials to open a new opportunity for Iraq to build upon Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council committees. The Iraqi-Saudi coordination council seeks to improve bilateral relations on areas including energy, security, and finance. There is a deal supported by the US that would accelerate the connection of Iraq's electricity grid to those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This agreement would also develop energy cooperation in the gas sector, according to the Wall Street Journal. Connecting Iraq to the Gulf grids would help Baghdad out of the multiple problems the country faces on the power supply front. With US support, Iraq can also further develop trade, technology, and energy cooperation with the UAE, which over the past few years has strategically invested in Iraq. The latest project amounts to over \$3 B to develop the gas sector in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq. **If these actions continue, it will affect positively USCENTCOM commander's first, third, and sixth priorities.**

Many of Iraq's resource issues relate to water scarcity. This is an odd fact since the two biggest rivers in Middle East flow through Iraqi territory, but water management and hydro-politics still affect Iraq. With Iraq's

²⁸⁰ *Shafaq News*, "Carnegie Endowment for international Peace expects a financial collapse in Iraq in 2021," Nov 11, 2020, <https://shafaq.com/en/Economy/Carnegie-Endowment-for-International-Peace-expects-a-financial-collapse-in-Iraq-in-2021> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

²⁸¹ *Shafaq news*, "Iraq drifts into total chaos," Nov 15, 2020, <https://shafaq.com/en/Report/Iraq-drifts-deep-into-total-chaos> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

neighbors activating new dams,²⁸² the historic twin rivers could run dry. As regional desertification and the population increases, Turkey and Iran are keener than ever to keep precious water resources for themselves. Their new dams on the Tigris and Euphrates have reduced water flows into Iraq by half.²⁸³ According to Baghdad's Water Minister Mehdi al-Hamdani there are plans to build a reservoir in Makhoul. This project would allow Iraq to store more water, generate electricity and protect Baghdad in case of floods. The Iraqi government should plan to rehabilitate dilapidated power grids, water networks, and roads which have been regularly impacted by warfare.

Society

Iraq's vulnerable society has been experiencing a huge impact because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, Iraq has registered over 600,000 cases of infected people and nearly 13,000 deaths. These numbers indicate that Iraq has been one of the hardest hit countries in the Middle East. Iraq was expecting its first doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in February, 2021.²⁸⁴ According to the Iraq's Health Minister's announcement made on December 20, 2020, Iraq had signed a preliminary deal with Pfizer to import 1.5 M doses in early 2021.²⁸⁵ According to the WHO, Iraq committed \$170 M to receive more vaccines through COVAX. COVAX is an international organization that promotes global access to vaccines for those in the greatest need. The World Bank created a \$12 B fund²⁸⁶ to assist countries in financing the purchase and distribution of the vaccines. Iraq will be one of the countries to receive that assistance.

Iraq is currently struggling to manage its bloated public pay following slashed oil prices that significantly dried the state's coffers. A World Bank study sounded the alarm over the scale at which Iraq's children were being affected by the crisis. The poverty rate in Iraq has increased by 11.7% making the current poverty rate 31.7%. This is a significant increase, compared to 20% in 2017-2018. The poverty rate for children under the age of 18 is 15.8%, bringing the poverty rate to 37.9% under the baseline scenario.²⁸⁷ Iraq is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which forbids children from "performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education." But most children in Iraq left school or intended to quit in order to continue working.

Last year, Iraq started closing camps housing tens of thousands of people. These camps include many people who fled their homes during the final battle against Daesh. Aid groups warn this could create a second wave of displacement with dire consequences.²⁸⁸ Over the last six months Iraq has closed around 62% of its IDP camps and is planning to close all of them this year. According to Faiek Jabru, Minister of Migration and Displacement, "out of 76 displacement camps before the formation of this government, only 29 are still open."²⁸⁹ Approximately 100,000 people are at risk of becoming homeless as the closures were not properly planned and coordinated.

²⁸² *Gulfnews.com*, "As Turkey and Iran build dams Iraqis watch twin rivers dry up," Aug 26, 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/as-turkey-and-iran-build-dams-iraqis-watch-twin-rivers-dry-up-1.73433995> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

²⁸³ *Ibid*.

²⁸⁴ Snell, Joe, "First doses of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine to hit Iraq by February," *Al-Monitor*, Jan 11, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/iraq-baghdad-coronavirus-vaccine-covax.html> (accessed on Feb 3, 2021).

²⁸⁵ *Reuters*, "Iraq agrees with Pfizer to import 1.5 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine," Dec 21, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccine-iraq/iraq-agrees-with-pfizer-to-import-1-5-million-doses-of-covid-19-vaccine-idUSKBN28V2G1> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

²⁸⁶ *Worldbank.org*, "World Bank approves \$12 billion for Covid-19 vaccines," Oct 13, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/13/world-bank-approves-12-billion-for-covid-19-vaccines> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

²⁸⁷ *Worldbank.org*, "Iraq overview," Oct 1, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iraq/overview> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

²⁸⁸ Rashid, Abdullah, "Nowhere to go: displaced Iraqis desperate as camps close," *Reuters*, Nov 12, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-refugees-closures/nowhere-to-go-displaced-iraqis-desperate-as-camps-close-idUSKBN27S1GU> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

²⁸⁹ Nabeel, Gilgamesh, "Iraq makes major progress in closing camps for displaced," *Al Monitor*, Jan 12, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/01/iraq-displaced-camps.html> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

Given the precarious conditions and lack of jobs in Iraq, there is the risk that many of young Iraqis and displaced people could be radicalized and/or recruited by Daesh. **That will likely affect negatively USCENTCOM commander's third and sixth priorities.**

Recommendations for the US/ for USCENTCOM:

- Support Iraqi economy and seek new ways to increase Gulf investments into Iraq's economy.
- Support COVID-19 crisis management using US leverage to speed up the delivery of vaccines and test kits to Iraq and also through direct humanitarian support.
- Engage the UN, EU, and individual nations to support the appointment of an independent Higher Electoral Commission in Iraq, while continuing to support good governance, delivery of basic services, anti-corruption measures, and private-sector growth.
- Continue supporting the ISF and the Peshmerga in their fight against Daesh, while advocating for the need for enhanced coordination, cooperation, and unification against common threats.
- Continue urging Iraq to restrain from surrendering to malign influence and to remain fully committed to the security of Coalition forces and its people. Avoid mixed messages regarding the perceived use of OIR as a means to counter Iran's forward defense policy.
- Increase collaboration with Coalition allies. Seek to accelerate collaboration with NATO and non-NATO coalition allies in Iraq and sustain or increase funding to coalition advisory activities.

References and Readings

- a. *CSAG Strategic Estimate 2020*
- b. *CSAG TC4 Model 2020*
- c. *CSAG Strategy Paper 2021 –07, "What Are the Implications of US Forces Withdrawal from Iraq for Deterring Iran and Countering Terrorism?"*

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2.11 ISRAEL

Head of State	President: Reuven Rivlin	Population	8,519,000	
Head of Government	Prime Minister: Benjamin Netanyahu			
Minister of Defense	Benny Gantz	Religion	Jewish	78%
Chief of Defense	LTG Aviv Kochavi		Muslim	18%
			Christian	2%
			Druze	2%
Type of Government	Parliamentary democracy	Ethnicity	Jewish	73,9%
			Arab	21.1%
			Others	5%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$408.51 B (+4.9%)	Military Personnel	Active	170,000
			Reserve	465,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.			
Strengths	“Current Situation”		Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Growing labor force b. Professional, well-developed military system (incl regional air supremacy) c. Israelis are socially and individually resilient d. High Tech Industry complex (incl Defense) e. Nuclear (delivery) capability (wide international speculation) f. Western, Russian and Sino support g. Cyber capabilities h. International media support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Military strategic position (lack of strategic depth) b. Unsolved disputes on territory with neighbors and itself (Palestine) c. Short domestic history limits sense of connection d. Not enough military resources to fight on more than one front e. Flawed democracy f. Class distinction and different cultural, religious backgrounds/religious backgrounds threaten domestic unity g. Low investment and high cost of living 		
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”		Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Abraham accords and solving the Palestinian issue b. Changing Access Basing Overflight rights in the region c. Iran as common enemy in order to create regional alliances d. Integration into USCENTCOM e. Peace agreement with Syria about borders f. Global war on terrorism (common goal) allows Israel to execute attacks outside its national borders g. Gas discoveries and cooperation with Egypt and Cyprus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Zionism is blocking / frustrating international regional cooperation b. Iranian nuclear and Ballistic Missile development c. Political and armed factions supported by Iran operating in Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinian territory to undermine Israel d. Possibility of Russia selling S400 to Iran e. China developing Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capacity in Iran/Chabahar port 		

This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.

Executive Summary

Israel is a relatively young country that was built on the post-Holocaust idea of the survival of the Jewish people and securing territorial integrity. For these reasons Israel has had to develop a comprehensive defense strategy based on a proven and efficient military apparatus. From the international perspective, Israel is perceived as aligned with CENTCOM's first priority and should eventually affect it positively, especially in Syria. However, inside Israel there is no consensus on how to address the perceived Iranian threat. Normalization of relationships offers preconditions to arrange a better security position for the country. It is the opinion of the Middle East Branch of CSAG that Israel will not fight to defend the Gulf States or on behalf of them, it will use the Gulf States and their capabilities to defend themselves against the Iranian threat. The momentum of these agreements may diminish when they are proven unable to achieve their desired goals or when the preconditions for them disappear. The Peace and Prosperity concept will not be realized with Normalization agreements between Arab countries and Israel. These agreements cannot replace negotiations on the Palestinian's issue as it will remain the key factor in stability for the region. Inclusion of Israel into the CENTCOM AOR could improve coordination on security issues in the region. This move could also support the defense of Israel from possible malign activities. However, this renewal of US-Israel connections will certainly draw some questions from countries in the region. If addressed carefully, the creation of a security alliance has the potential of deterring Iran and supporting the US in GPC. The creation of the Jewish state has created domestic issues such as a resolution for the Palestinian matter, but has strongly polarized the political system resulting in a flawed democracy. A strong Israeli economy allows the country to fulfill its Security Strategy. The Israeli population has confidence in their governance, but solidarity in Israeli society is weakening.

Foreign Policy/Security

In Israel's short history it has been faced with many wars for survival against Arab countries. During these wars, Israel was dependent on others such as the UK and the USA. Israel's foremost goal is to defend itself against anyone who wants to destroy it. This history connected with its geography, which lacks the depth to defend itself, requires a professional security apparatus costing a large percentage of Israel's yearly budget. Israel faces the threat of total annihilation by Iran which makes Israeli leaders eager to prevent the advent of a nuclear Iran. Israel is seeking US and international support to eliminate the Iranian threat. There is a possibility that Israel would also make the decision to unilaterally eliminate the Iranian threat (with shadow support for long distance air attacks). The Israeli intelligence agencies are very reliable and capable of hitting countries wherever they presume it necessary. The assumed nuclear arsenal of Israel has not protected them from asymmetric threats in the region. The eventual use of nuclear missiles as first strike or as a defense capability would certainly provoke a regional war against Israel. This first strike concept could threaten the existence of the Israeli state, and is therefore not an option. Because of its geography, Israel has to defend itself in depth by conducting surgical airstrikes to disrupt Iranian-backed proxy forces in Syria and restrict the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah. For successful deterrence of Iran and its proxies, the IDF requires access, basing, and overflight. If they are able to achieve these requirements, Israel will have a greater chance of projecting its forces. Therefore, Israel needs open channels with Russia in Syria to avoid an unintentional conflict.²⁹⁰

There is no unified view in Israel on how to address the perceived threat from Iran. Israeli nuclear and security experts disagree with Prime Minister Netanyahu's position stating that the US should leave the JCPOA. Some experts are convinced that the JCPOA agreement serves Israel's best interests as it convincingly stopped

²⁹⁰ Skelin, LCDR Stipe, "The Consequences of Israeli Intervention in Syria," *USCENTCOM CSAG Strategy Paper* (2021).

the Iranians' urge to acquire a bomb.²⁹¹ The JCPOA also provides a mechanism for a diplomatic process to address new issues or refine the approach to old ones.²⁹² The Biden administration will need time to determine how they will deal with Israel. They are expected to consult Israel prior to re-entry into the Iran nuclear deal.²⁹³ Israel might not want to be so dependent on a Super Power, but it is questionable if they could exist without the US support. The US must not only consider Israel's official position, but also analyze how the Israeli people perceive security policy.

Normalization of relations between the Arab states, without any Israeli movement toward the establishment of a Palestinian state will not bring Israel the chance of a broader peace in the ME. Israel has, however, rallied supporters for containing the power of external adversaries, particularly Iran. These agreements between Arab countries and Israel could assist in gaining overflight and basing (for naval forces) arrangements in support of a possible pre-emptive strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, despite the inevitable backlash of such an operation. It is the opinion of the Middle East Branch of CSAG that Israel will never defend the Gulf States or fight on their behalf, but it will use the Gulf States, and their capabilities to defend Israel or deploy their forces against Iran. The Gulf states' normalization of relations with Israel will raise the pressure on Iran or, specifically, the threat on the Gulf States. The normalization of relations between some of the Arab countries and Israel will lead to new regional alliances and complicated conflicts due to the involvement of regional and international powers. It is expected that the threat of war will not be limited to the region.²⁹⁴ Analysts call these normalization agreements a "commercial deal" and not a deliberate political process.²⁹⁵ The question remains what normalization with the Arab states will bring for the Palestinians. There has never been a better time to solve the issue with support and pressure from the region. Normalization deals between several Arab countries and Israel cannot replace peace negotiations with the Palestinians, which remains the key factor in real regional stability. This part of the peace process needs to be accelerated, because it will deprive Iran from a reason for interfering in Syria and Lebanon. Therefore, the legalization of Jewish settlements in the West Bank should be opposed. However, this acceleration is doubtful after the new Israeli elections if there is a gain by right-wing forces. The marginalization of the Jordanian role in support of the Palestinians and the two-state solution, eliminates the Jordanian option as an alternative homeland. This could transform of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a Jordanian-Palestinian one, returning to the situation prior to the civil war in 1970.

Inclusion of Israel in the CENTCOM AOR could improve coordination on all security matters regarding the region. It will also improve the defense of Israel from possible malign activities. There is the possibility of creating a NATO like regional alliance. This security mechanism might be successful in deterring Iran, and also in support of countering GPC influence. The analysis discussed indicates that the inclusion of Israel into the CENTCOM AOR is likely to greatly affect military dynamics in the region. Despite China's support to Iran, China is Israel's third largest trading partner after the US and the UK. Although Israel is India's top defense suppliers, this will not limit Israeli support to India given the India-China border-crisis. It seems that Israel is not aligned with the US on China and develops its own relations on its own merit.

²⁹¹ Avishai, Bernard, "Why Israeli Nuclear Experts Disagree with Netanyahu About the Iran Deal," *The New Yorker*, Oct 24, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/why-israeli-nuclear-experts-disagree-with-netanyahu-about-the-iran-deal> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Samuels, Ben, "First Contact Made Between Biden Administration and Israeli Government," *Haaretz*, Jan 24, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-first-contact-made-between-biden-administration-and-israeli-government-1.9477974> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

²⁹⁴ See Section 2.2 The Middle East Peace Process.

²⁹⁵ Krasna, Dr. Joshua, "Understanding the Wave of Normalization in the Middle East," *The New Yorker*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/why-israeli-nuclear-experts-disagree-with-netanyahu-about-the-iran-deal> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

Internal Politics

Dominated by Zionist parties, Israeli politics are once again in turmoil. After the parliament was dissolved in January 2021, Israel had its fourth national elections in two years. Polarization in the population is seen as the main cause of turmoil in Israeli politics.²⁹⁶ The public considered the government dysfunctional. Many citizens of Israel believed Netanyahu would seek another term rather than let Defense Minister Gantz take his agreed upon turn as PM. Israeli citizens also believe the political crisis supports PM Netanyahu interest to stay in power and that his efforts to stir this controversy allow the PM to dodge corruption charges.²⁹⁷ Political mistrust fueled Defense Minister Benny Gantz's fears that Netanyahu was going to make decisions on his own concerning the country's security. In Israel there are two security establishments, which normally are working in parallel, but currently they are acting without any communication. These dynamics could lead to miscalculations, with damaging effects on Israel, its relation with the US, and peace in the Middle East.²⁹⁸

The Israeli political system seems to be broken, and there is a desperate need for reform. According to The Economist's 2019 global Democracy Index, Israel ranks 28th in the world, making Israel a 'flawed democracy.' It is likely Israel's 'democracy score' will decline sharply in 2020 and 2021.²⁹⁹

COVID-19 infection rates in Israel are showing a positive trend as of December 2020 amid a third national lockdown. The country is currently conducting an ambitious vaccination campaign. Meanwhile, Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip await vaccines. This delay could take several months. Infection rates in both territories, however, are being kept relatively low.³⁰⁰

Economy

Israel is Ranked 22nd on the UN Human Development Index, which categorizes them as a very highly developed country with high living standards. Israel is a 'welfare state' using the European definition with a free-market system and a knowledge base economy, and a well-developed high-technology sector.³⁰¹

Israel is a young country, surrounded by security threats with a frontiersman state of mind made. This mentality has made it possible to create a highly motivated and educated populace that is responsible for triggering the high-tech boom and economic development.³⁰² These developments created a market in Israel that is able to compete with Silicon Valley, in which many investors see an opportunity to make a profit.

In order to fuel high-tech industry, Israel relies on the following imports: petroleum, raw materials, wheat, motor vehicles, uncut diamonds, and production inputs. Israel's leadership position in the solar energy industry may diminish its dependence on oil-imports. Discoveries of natural gas reserves off its coast, together with those of Egypt and Cyprus, minimizes Israel's reliance on energy imports. These discoveries could also act as an

²⁹⁶ Estrin, Daniel, "Israel To Hold 4th Election In 2 Years As Coalition Fails To Pass Budget," *NPR*, Dec 22, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/22/949253408/israel-to-hold-4th-election-in-2-years-as-coalition-fails-to-pass-budget> (accessed Jan 22, 2021).

²⁹⁷ Harkov, Lahav, "Cabinet kept in the dark as PM directs Biden-era Iran policy," *The Jerusalem Post*, Jan 24, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/cabinet-kept-in-the-dark-as-pm-directs-biden-era-iran-policy-656529> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Prof. Shlomo Maital and Ella Barzani, "Build Back Better: Toward a Visual Strategic Plan for Successful Emergence from COVID-19 The Case of Israel Part II SWOT Analysis: A Global Benchmarking Study of Israel," Samuel Neaman Institute for National Policy Research, Sep 2020, <http://neaman.org.il/EN/Build-Back-Better-Toward-a-Visual-Strategic-Plan-for-Successful-Emergence-from-COVID-19-The-Case-of-Israel-Part-II-SWOT-Analysis-A-Global-Benchmarking-Study-of-Israel> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

³⁰⁰ *Haaretz*, "Coronavirus Israel Live: Death Toll Hits 4,500 as Cabinet Mulls Longer Lockdown," Jan 26, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/coronavirus-israel-live-four-cops-wounded-as-police-clash-with-ultra-orthodox-1.9475784> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

³⁰¹ Chua, Amy, *World On Fire*, (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 219–220.

³⁰² Reuben, Rabbi Steven Carr, Ph.D., "Imagine a World Without Israel," *Huffpost*, Aug 26, 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/imagine-a-world-without-i_1_b_5706935 (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

incentive for multi-lateral cooperation for the countries. This multi-lateral cooperation could give Israel a better relative strategic position over Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey and create the necessary revenue for their costly defense purposes.³⁰³

Israel has Free Trade Agreements with the US, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Mexico, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Turkey, the EU, and EFTA (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland). In 2011, a trade agreement was signed with the MERCOSUR countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela), and agreements with India and China are under discussion. Israel also has a preferential trade arrangement with Jordan and maintains a customs union with the Palestinian Authority.³⁰⁴

Israel's economy also has another side. Poverty and income disparity in Israel are among the highest in the developed world. Half of Israel's population does not even reach the bottom of the income tax scale and pays no income tax at all. Nearly 90% of Israel's total tax revenue is earned by just 20% of the population resulting in economic inequality. Approximately 60% of the poor households in Israel are of the Haredi Jews and the Israeli Arabs. Both groups represent 25–28% of the Israeli population.³⁰⁵ In addition, the growing poverty amongst the Ultra-Orthodox, who in general have a low level of official labor force participation, is hurting the Israeli economy in the long term because of their higher dependence of state support. Although the population of the country has more than doubled to over 8.5 M since the early 1980s, infrastructure has not been keeping up and, for decades, little was invested in education at a time when rents in the cities are becoming unaffordable.³⁰⁶

Society

Israel officially wants to be an inclusive country where everyone has the right to be different and coexist in harmony. While the majority of Israelis adopt a secular lifestyle, both amongst Jews and Arabs, freedom of faith and worship constitute a cornerstone of Israeli democracy. Israel is home to a variety of thriving religious communities.³⁰⁷

The Israeli people, in general, are confident of the state's ability to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. This is influenced in part by the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine in Israel in December 2020, likely making Israel one of the first nations to have vaccinated its people.

Most Israelis have a high sense of confidence regarding the state's ability to cope with threats. People are more worried about internal threats than external threats. This is due to a decline in internal relations in the last few years. The state's ability to cope with corruption in the governmental system and with polarization between different sectors of society are the root cause for this decline. The majority of the people want the state's agenda to shift focus from the defense budget to economic and societal issues.³⁰⁸

³⁰³ Markind, Daniel, "Will Natural Gas Isolate Turkey and Integrate Israel In The Eastern Mediterranean?," *Forbes*, Oct 22, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielmarkind/2020/10/22/will-natural-gas-isolate-turkey-and-integrate-israel-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/?sh=59ea37c37209> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

³⁰⁴ International Trade Administration: Israel - Country Commercial Guide, Web site, <https://www.trade.gov/knowledge-product/israel-trade-agreements#:~:text=Israel%20has%20adopted%20a%20liberal,%2C%20Norway%2C%20and%20Switzerland> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

³⁰⁵ *Haaretz*, "Bol Chief: Haredi Unemployment Is Hurting Israel's Economy," Jul 22, 2010, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5151647> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

³⁰⁶ Kohlmann, Thomas, "The problems with Israel's economic miracle," *Deutsche Welle*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-problems-with-israels-economic-miracle/a-43775723#:~:text=%22Poverty%20and%20income%20disparity%20in,20%20percent%20of%20the%20population.%22> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

³⁰⁷ Consulate of Israel in San Francisco: The People of Israel, Web site, <https://embassies.gov.il/san-francisco/AboutIsrael/People/Pages/PEOPLE-The%20People%20of%20Israel.aspx> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

³⁰⁸ Prof. Shlomo Maital and Ella Barzani, "Build Back Better: Toward a Visual Strategic Plan for Successful Emergence from COVID-19 The Case of Israel Part II SWOT Analysis: A Global Benchmarking Study of Israel," Samuel Neaman Institute for National Policy Research, Sep

There is a common perception that solidarity in the Israeli society is weakening. The main cause for this is the tension between the political wings. Other sources of tension – between ultra-Orthodox and secular Jewish Israelis, between rich and poor, and between Jews and Arabs in Israel – are not considered the main causes of the decline in solidarity. Palestinians live under a different form of Israeli control in the occupied West Bank, blockaded Gaza, annexed east Jerusalem and within Israel itself, with fewer rights than Jews.³⁰⁹

Israel's economy has a high-tech, innovative backbone relying on good education. However, the social inequality and lack of good education for all members of society are triggers for unrest. This inequality and unrest could harm Israel's further development and make it more dependent on well-educated immigrants.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Affirm US support for Israeli security if possible, through integration after inclusion.
- The US should not only consider Israel's official position, but also analyze how the Israeli people perceive security policy.
- Monitor the process of polarization regarding the forming of the new government and PM Netanyahu's private role in this.
- Use normalization to gradually solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict towards a two-state solution.
- Help the Palestinians to ensure they can hold their election to select legitimate leaders who might build a peace agreement by taking advantage of the momentum of the normalization process.
- Ensure that Jordan's role in the Palestine case is not marginalized to preserve the vital relationship.
- Consider putting pressure on Israel to stop settlements and alleviate its demands for a two-state-solution.
- Encourage inclusiveness and equality in the Israeli society in support of the democratic process and international support for Israel.
- Facilitate and set the conditions to welcome an Israeli SNR and/or LNO supported by Coalition and Partner countries representatives.
- Monitor Israel's relation with China and India.

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³⁰⁹ Associated Press, "Israel moves to rein in rights group over 'apartheid' use," *Independent*, Jan 18, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/israel-moves-to-rein-in-rights-group-over-apartheid-use-israel-palestinian-btselem-soldiers-apartheid-b1788762.html> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

2.12 JORDAN

Head of State	King Abdullah II	Population	10,272,893
Head of Government	Prime Minister Dr. Bisher Al-Khasawnah		
Minister of Defense	Prime Minister Dr. Bisher Al-Khasawnah	Religion	Muslim 95%
Chief of Defense	Maj. Gen. Yousef Huneiti		Christian 4%
			Other 1%
Type of Government	Constitutional Monarchy	Ethnicity	Arab 98%
			Armenian 1%
			Circassian 1%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$ 44.86 B (-3.4%)	Military Personnel	Active 100,000 Reserve 65,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	"Current Situation"	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Geographic location in center of Arab countries b. Quality work force c. Deeply rooted legitimacy and popularity of King Abdullah II, ensuring Jordan's economic resilience and political stability d. Good infrastructure in majority of the country e. Efficiency of the security and armed forces f. US decision to resume UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Large number of Syrian, Iraqi and Palestinian refugees negatively affecting the demographic distribution b. Over-dependence on international aid/foreign capital c. Decline of both remittances and tourism revenue due to COVID-19 pandemic d. Tribalism and limited role of public opinion in governance e. High youth unemployment (40%) and high taxes f. Decreased direct foreign grants from GCC particularly Saudi Arabia g. Lack of natural resources (oil, water) 	
Opportunities	"Future Outlook"	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Culture, art, history and wonderful sites for tourism b. Exploitation of uranium reserves, oil, shale and alternative energy projects c. International hub for rebuilding Syria and Iraq d. Central role as a mediator in MEPP e. Integrating Jordan in a possible normalization process between Saudi Arabia and Israel f. Expected good relations with the new US administration, compared with the previous administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dire economic conditions possibly weakening government legitimacy in long term b. Escalating rate of brain drain c. Regional conditions greatly influencing the political decision-making process d. Possible Israeli annexation of West Bank could weaken Jordan-US relations further and sever relations with Israel e. Drugs have become one of the biggest threats to national stability and security 	

This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.

Executive Summary

Jordan's situation is complicated by its challenging neighborhood. Some regional issues are the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, threats posed by extremist actors in the region, and the impact of the GCC's blockade of Qatar. These are on top of Jordan's other growing risks from economic hardship for which the government lacks the necessary strategies. The Trump administration marginalized Jordan's role in the region by taking one of the US's most reliable allies in the Middle East for granted. While many Middle Eastern leaders are wary of the new US administration, Jordan's King Abdullah is pleased to see the end of the Trump administration and welcomes President Biden. President Biden is well-known entity in the Hashemite Kingdom, but the relationship will need mending. Jordan has a major role in the peace process and has the qualifications to play an even greater role in the rapprochement of the Gulf states with Israel. This is likely to positively affect CENTCOM's first priority "Deterring Iran." Jordan is also a crucial ally in the fight against ISIS. The best way for the US to show solidarity with Jordan is to help the Hashemite kingdom manage one of the war's major side effects: the influx of Syrian refugees.

Foreign Policy/Security

Jordan is deeply concerned that the Trump administration marginalized its role in the region by prioritizing relationships with Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt. These emerging alliances between are diminishing Jordan's role in the region and intensifying the cold peace with Israel. This marginalization also extended to the normalization agreements between Israel and other regional actors. Jordan did not oppose these agreements nor did they show support for them. Jordan has had a "peace treaty" with Israel since 1994 and this is why the Jordanians have been careful not to criticize their Gulf allies. At the same time, Jordan appeared to be upset that the Gulf allies had abandoned the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative by striking separate deals without resolving the core Palestinian issue of establishing a Palestinian state. Jordan is in full support of a Palestinian state due to the fact that the majority of Jordanians are of Palestinian origin. Therefore, all Palestinian issues are both an external and internal policy issue for Amman. Jordan is looking forward to the resumption of US dialogue with the Palestinian Authorities and discussing plans for the upcoming Palestinian elections. Jordan is a major non-NATO US ally; over 3,000 US troops are based inside its borders. Such a partnership grants Jordan access to more sophisticated defense technologies. While many Middle Eastern leaders are wary of the new US administration, King Abdullah II welcomed the inauguration of President Biden. King Abdullah appears to have strong personal ties with President Biden. This relationship could benefit Jordan's role as a regional player for at least the next four years.³¹⁰ King Abdullah is seeking a more coherent approach from the US to the crisis in Syria. More than 600,000 Syrian refugees remain in Jordan and the war has placed Russian and Iranian forces along Jordan's northern security border. The ISIS terrorist group has carried out attacks in Jordan, including against US forces. Although diminished (thanks to Jordan's effective security), ISIS remains a threat.³¹¹

³¹⁰ Riedel, Bruce, "Facing a multitude of challenges of its own, Jordan welcomes Biden," *Brookings*, Jan 21, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/01/21/facing-a-multitude-of-challenges-of-its-own-jordan-welcomes-biden> (accessed Feb 03, 2021).

³¹¹ *Ammon News*, "Former CIA officer: Biden should invite King Abdullah for an early meeting in the White House," Jan 23, 2021, <https://en.ammonnews.net/article/46217> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

Jordan welcomed the rapprochement between the GCC states. At a time when the Jordanian economy is suffering greatly, the presence of stable GCC states is appreciated. A stable GCC increases aid and Gulf investments in the Kingdom, as well as improving job opportunities for Jordanians in the Gulf.³¹²

Russian-Jordanian ties have reached a new high thanks to cooperation over the Syrian conflict. An even stronger partnership between the countries is unlikely as Jordan's foreign policy is mostly influenced by those who provide the state with financial assistance. Such an opening could become beneficial to China's expansion of its BRI.³¹³

Internal Politics

At the beginning of 2021, the new Jordanian government obtained a vote of confidence from 88 of 130 MPs in the National House of Representatives. From tenuous discussions prior to the vote, criticisms arouse on stalled political and economic reform, and a decline in public freedoms. The first priority for political reform is to introduce a modern election law that meets the needs and aspirations of Jordanians. Another priority is a law delegating service powers to provincial councils.

Parliamentarians are calling for public freedoms, social justice, a stop to arresting journalists, and an increase in salaries for civil and military workers and retirees. While these are goals that the MPs have set out, the Parliament and the government have an understanding that the current most pressing priority on the ministerial agenda is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and its economic implications.

Political reform is an issue that has been a basic requirement of the political forces over the previous years. It was never implemented due to what appeared to be the absence of actual will to go down that path. Forming parliamentary governments requires the establishment of strong party forces. Nationalist and leftist parties are absent from the scene because they are weak and ineffective.³¹⁴ The same applies to Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm: the Islamic Action Front. The Islamic Action Front lost about two-thirds of its seats in the previous parliamentary elections. The partisan results of the last election were poor and the dominance of clans was cemented due to mostly the current electoral law. Observers believe that any actual political reform is not possible.³¹⁵ The real challenge of Bishr Al-Khasawneh's government is to restore popular confidence in the state. There is a lot of frustration among many Jordanians because the government contains the same old names from previous governments.³¹⁶

Economy

COVID-19 has devastated the Jordanian economy and a projected growth in 2021 turned into a projected contraction of around 5%. There are fewer jobs for Jordanians in the Gulf countries, which are normally a major source of remittances. Vital economic sectors such as tourism and industry have diminished. Unemployment is at 23%. Although the debt to GDP ratio exceeds 111%, Jordan plans to borrow about \$9 B in 2021. Even more worrying is that poverty has increased by 38% since the start of the pandemic. The government took some measures to improve the situation. In the annual Ease of Doing Business report, Jordan is acting to improve credit availability.

³¹² Kilani, Abdulaziz, "What does GCC rapprochement mean for Jordan?" *Responsible Statecraft*, Jan 23, 2021, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/01/23/what-does-gcc-rapprochement-mean-for-jordan/> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

³¹³ Dubovikova, Maria, "A shift in Jordanian-Russian relations," *Arab News*, Jul 27, 2018, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1346651> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

³¹⁴ Ayyash, Hayel, "الإصلاح السياسي عبارة فقدت سحرها في الأردن" [Political reform is a phrase that has lost its charm in Jordan], *Al Arab*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://alarab.co.uk/الإصلاح-السياسي-عبارة-فقدت-سحرها-في-الأردن/> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

Any conversation about a future Saudi-Israeli deal should include a significant support package to Jordan. It should include a mixture of job guarantees, investments, debt relief, and direct budget support. To alleviate past concerns about Jordan's use of budget support, Saudi or Emirati contributions could be included in a US or internationally monitored investment program.³¹⁷

The shared border with Syria could become an economic advantage rather than a disadvantage. In the long-term Syria needs rebuilding and this will be an opportunity for Jordan to play a key role or be an international hub for those efforts. Similar opportunities exist with Iraq, so restoring those relations should be a high priority as well.

Society

Jordan's population is approximately 10.5 M. It has a population growth rate of 2% with a workforce of 2.3 M. Of the population, more than 70% of Jordanians are under the age of 30 and hundreds of thousands will enter the labor market every year. Unemployment is 18.3%, youth (15-24 years old) unemployment is at 40% and unemployment for women is at 49%. An influx of Syrian refugees creates stressors on an already weakened labor market.

Jordan needs to invest substantial resources to ensure employment opportunity for graduates. Jordan had 61,000 university graduates in the year 2017, but only 48,000 jobs were created. Only 34% of graduates find jobs within the first six months. This contributes to chronic unemployment among tertiary-educated youth. With the economy in such a poor state, the brain-drain is escalating as youth seek better opportunities away from nepotism and bigotry.

Jordan has traditionally hosted a large number of expatriate workers. Many educated citizens took well-paying jobs in the Gulf while domestic construction and agricultural work was done by Egyptians and South Asian workers. Currently, there are over 300,000 registered and around 500,000 (30% of the total workforce) unregistered foreign laborers in Jordan. The manufacturing facilities in Jordan's Qualifying Industrial Zones are mostly staffed by foreign workers. Many workers become undocumented when they leave their original job to work for another position. Similar to Saudi Arabia, Jordan has introduced fees and limited new visas to free up those jobs for Jordanians.

Jordan has a legacy of hosting refugees. Several waves of Palestinians in 1967 and 1974 are still considered displaced. Several hundred thousand Iraqis arrived in Jordan as "guests" with limited visas. The Syrian civil war has created the greatest impact. The UNHCR estimates about 660,000 Syrians reside in Jordan, but censuses estimate the real number is 1.3 M. As the refugee crisis unfolded, the government broke from the past and started restricting refugees to camps to insulate the weakened job market. Nevertheless, the vast majority of refugees live in Jordanian cities and compete with foreigners for lower-skilled jobs, which the government is increasingly holding for Jordanians. In January 2016, Jordan was granted World Bank financing to begin offering work permits to Syrians and by October 2018, 122,224 were issued.³¹⁸

Within Jordan, drugs have become one of the biggest threats to stability and security. Drug trafficking has reached a new level and is now well structured and organized. This is threatening the economy because of its potential devastating financial impacts.

³¹⁷ Fishman, Ben, "Jordan Must Be Included in Future Israeli-Arab Normalization Deals," *The Washington Institute*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/jordan-must-be-included-future-israeli-arab-normalization-deals> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

³¹⁸ MENA Workforce Development Initiative, "Case Study: The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," Oct 24, 2020, Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/case-study-the-hashemite-kingdom-jordan> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Ensure that Jordan's role in the Palestine issue is not marginalized to preserve the vital relationship and discourage King Abdullah from turning to Russia or China.
- Ensure that any rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Israel includes a significant support package to Jordan.
- Continue supporting Jordan economically and politically as well as militarily to maintain a stable ally in a highly sensitive region.
- Ensure that Jordan is a main participant in the expected reconstruction operation in Syria and Iraq.
- Encourage foreign aid and investment in Jordan to ease its refugee crisis and ultimately create job opportunities to revitalize the economy.
- Expand Security and intelligence cooperation with Jordanian security services to capitalize on their remarkable reach in the region.

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2.13 KAZAKHSTAN

Head of State Head of Government	Kassym-Jomart, Tokaev, President Askar, Mamin, Prime Minister	Population	18,902,000
Minister of Defense Chief of Defense	Nurlan Ermekbaev, Minister of Defense Lieutenant General Murat Bektanov, Chief of Staff	Religion	Muslim 70% Christian 26% Atheist 3% Other 1%
Type of Government	Democratic, secular, constitutional unitary republic	Ethnicity	Kazakh 66% Russian 21% Uzbek 3% Ukrainian 2% Other 8%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$180.72 B (3.0%)	Military Personnel	Active 135,000 Reserve 0 ³¹⁹

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Abundant natural resources b. Strongest Economy in Central Asia c. "Multi-vector," diverse foreign policy d. Geography: location, size, transit routes e. Stable political situation 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dependence on commodity exports (oil, gas, uranium, and iron) b. Low transparency in important industries and public procurement leading to environment hazards, corruption and little economic gain for the people c. Economy reliant on natural resources d. Weak legal and court system e. Corrupt government officials f. Soviet era environmental damage
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. High degree of modernization b. Diversification of economy c. Transit corridor between Asia and Europe d. Large consumer market of the <i>Eurasian Economic Union</i> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Tendency towards protectionism b. Anxiety due to increased influence from Russia and China c. No progress in fighting corruption d. Underdeveloped manufacturing base e. Fragile banking system³²⁰

³¹⁹ GlobalFirepower, “2021 Kazakhstan Military Strength,” www.Globalfirepower.com (accessed Apr 2, 2021).

³²⁰ globalEDGE, Kazakhstan, US Commercial Service, <https://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/kazakhstan/memo> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

e. Measures to improve the investment climate in the country	
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.	

Executive Summary

Kazakhstan celebrates the 30th anniversary of its independence this year. Since achieving its independence after the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has maintained warm relations with the United States. Kazakhstan continues to pursue its multi-vector foreign policy and remains one of the most stable countries in Central Asia. Internal politics are influenced by the dominance of the ruling party, the absence of a real opposition, restrictions on freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and access to information. The Kazakhstani government continues to restrict civic activity and Kazakhstan is rated 'Not Free' in the Freedom in the World 2020 assessment.³²¹

Foreign Policy/Security

In 2020, Kazakhstan approved its new foreign policy concept for 2020-2030. According to the updated concept, Kazakhstan will continue to implement its multi-vector foreign policy, placing relationships with the Russian Federation and China at the top, then with the US, followed by Central Asian countries, the EU, and lastly the Eurasian Economic Union.³²² The former president and the current head of the Security Council of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, believes this policy concept is challenged by recent changes in world politics and that the world is moving towards a new bipolarity, a new cold war.³²³

Kazakhstan is expanding military cooperation with the Russian Federation and China within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. At the same time, it is seeking to maintain a balance by strengthening military cooperation with NATO countries, particularly with the US.³²⁴ Nur-Sultan is implementing non-military initiatives to assist Afghanistan and keenly addressing the problem of violent extremism within its own borders. Based on these initiatives Kazakhstan is an ideal partner for the US in the Central Asian region.³²⁵

In 2020 Kazakhstan increased investments in defense and public administration by almost 70%.³²⁶ Kazakhstan is improving its surveillance capability with \$128 M of ISR planes acquired from the US via foreign military sales. This capability will help Kazakhstan enhance its deterrence, protecting the country from existing and future threats.³²⁷

³²¹ *Freedom House*, "Freedom in the Word – Kazakhstan," <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2020> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³²² Official site of the president of the republic of Kazakhstan, "On the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030," Mar 6, 2020, https://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-koncepcii-vneshnei-politiki-respubliki-kazahstan-na-2020-2030-gody (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³²³ *EurAsiaDaily*, "Назарбаев о ситуации в мире: Мы возвращаемся к холодной войне [Nazarbayev on the situation in the world: We return to the Cold War]," Feb 4, 2021, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/02/04/nazarbaev-o-situacii-v-mire-my-vozvrashchaemysya-k-holodnoy-voyne> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³²⁴ Stefanovich, Dmitry, "Евразийская безопасность: на какие угрозы ответит ОДКБ в 2020 году [Eurasian security: what threats will the CSTO respond in 2020]," *Eurasia expert*, Feb 19, 2020, <https://eurasia.expert/evraziyskaya-bezopasnost-na-kakie-ugrozy-otvetit-odkb-v-2020-godu/> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³²⁵ Sanchez Wilder, Alejandro, "The Future of US-Kazakhstan Relations," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, May 28, 2020, <https://gija.georgetown.edu/2020/05/28/the-future-of-us-kazakhstan-relations/> (accessed Feb 17, 2021).

³²⁶ Военное обозрение [Military Review], Казахстан планирует выпуск новых видов вооружений [Kazakhstan plans to release new types of weapons], Jan 19, 2021, <https://topwar.ru/179156-kazahstan-planiruet-vypusk-novyh-vidov-vooruzhenij.html> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³²⁷ *Airforce Technology*, "Kazakhstan seeks sale of King Air B300ER Scorpion ISR aircraft from US," Dec 24, 2020, <https://www.airforce-technology.com/news/kazakhstan-seeks-sale-of-king-air-b300er-scorpion-isr-aircraft-from-us/> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

President Tokayev has said he will deploy additional Kazakhstani military personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations.³²⁸ It has not been decided where troops will be deployed.

Internal Politics

Kazakhstan was rated the second best in state of democratic freedoms in Central Asia (128th out of 167 countries).³²⁹ Despite Nursultan Nazarbayev's resignation as president in 2019, he remains chairman of the Kazakhstan's Security Council and is the chairman of Kazakhstan's leading Nur Otan party. Nazarbayev continues to have significant influence in the country and plays an important role shaping Kazakhstan's domestic and foreign policy.³³⁰

In the last lower house of Parliament's election in January, Nazarbayev's party won and retained the majority. There was almost no change in political leadership. The opposition boycotted the elections, so only pro-government parties took part. The Nur Otan party had 71.09% of the votes, the right-wing Ak Zhol had 10.95% and the left-wing People's Party of Kazakhstan entered the parliament with 9.10%. Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe stated that preparations for the parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan were carried out efficiently, but non-competitive campaigning and restrictions on constitutionally guaranteed fundamental freedoms deprived voters of a genuine choice. Observers also noted the dominance of the ruling party, the absence of real opposition, and restrictions on freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and access to information.³³¹

Ex-speaker of the Senate Dariga Nazarbayeva, and daughter of the first president, returned to politics as a lower house representative of Nur Otan party. In 2020, Nazarbayeva had been stripped of Senate deputy status by President Tokayev without any official explanation.³³²

Economy

Kazakhstan has the largest economy in Central Asia. Their large hydrocarbon and mineral reserves are at the center of its economy. They are the world's largest producer of uranium and have an agricultural sector focused around livestock and grain.³³³ Like many other countries Kazakhstan's economy continued to suffer in the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures. The government imposed a lockdown lasting from early July to late August. However, GDP is projected to expand 4.0% this year.³³⁴

³²⁸ Sanchez Wilder, Alejandro, "Kazakhstan Aims to Increase Participation in UN Peacekeeping Missions," *The Diplomat*, Dec 8, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/kazakhstan-aims-to-increase-participation-in-un-peacekeeping-missions/> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

³²⁹ *The Economist*, "Global Democracy has a very bad year," Feb 2, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

³³⁰ Lahanuli, Nurtok, "«Рычаги в его руках». Ожидания и реальность через год после «ухода» Назарбаева [The levers in his hands. Expectations and reality a year after Nazarbayev's "departure"]," *Radio Liberty*, Mar 20, 2020, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-one-year-after-nazarbayev-expectations-and-reality/30494206.html> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³³¹ *EurAsiaDaily*, "ОБСЕ: Подлинного выбора на голосовании в Казахстане не было [OSCE: There was no real choice in the voting in Kazakhstan]," Jan 11, 2021, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/01/11/obse-podlinnogo-vybora-na-golosovanii-v-kazahstane-ne-bylo> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³³² *EurAsiaDaily*, "Дарига Назарбаева возвращается в большую политику [Dariga Nazarbayeva returns to big politics]," Jan 12, 2021, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/01/12/dariga-nazarbaeva-vozvraschaetsya-v-bolshuyu-politiku> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³³³ Heritage, 2020 Index of Economic Freedom, <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/kazakhstan> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³³⁴ *FocusEconomics*, Kazakhstan Economic Outlook, Nov 3, 2020, <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/kazakhstan> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

The total value of Kazakhstan's exports and imports of goods and services equals 60.6% of its GDP. Kazakhstan's main trading partners are the EU, China, and Russia.³³⁵ Last year the government's debt was about 21% of the country's Nominal GDP.³³⁶

Society

Like most countries, Kazakhstan has had to impose more restrictions due to COVID-19.³³⁷ Civil society organizations and independent media outlets struggled before COVID-19 with financial stability and now face an increasingly difficult operating environment. The Kazakhstani government continues to restrict civic activity such as suspending several human rights organizations over their funding sources. Kazakhstan is rated 'Not Free' in Freedom in the World 2020.³³⁸ A big change in society is its language reform that is moving forward including a transition to the Latin alphabet gradually through 2031.³³⁹

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Leverage Kazakhstan's multi-vector needs-based approach to increase Kazakhstan's involvement in providing security in the AOR.
- Monitor Kazakhstan's cooperation with Russia and China.
- Monitor the development of the domestic political situation in the country.
- Expand participation to military exercises in Kazakhstan like Steppe Eagle.
- Increase cooperation in peacekeeping missions based on Kazakhstan increased participation.

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³³⁵ Heritage, 2020 Index of Economic Freedom (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³³⁶ CEIC, "Kazakhstan Government Debt: % of GDP," <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/kazakhstan/government-debt--of-nominal-gdp> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³³⁷ Satubaldina, Assel, "Almaty Tightens COVID-19 Restrictions as Cases Continue to Surge," *The Astana Times*, Jan 28, 2021, <https://astanatimes.com/2021/01/almaty-tightens-covid-19-restrictions-as-cases-continue-to-surge/> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³³⁸ *Freedom House*, "Kazakhstan: Government Suspends Key Human Rights Organizations," Jan 27, 2021,

<https://freedomhouse.org/article/kazakhstan-government-suspends-key-human-rights-organizations> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³³⁹ Satubaldina, Assel, "Kazakhstan Presents New Latin Alphabet, Plans Gradual Transition Through 2031," *The Astana Times*, Feb 1, 2021, <https://astanatimes.com/2021/02/kazakhstan-presents-new-latin-alphabet-plans-gradual-transition-through-2031/> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

2.14 KUWAIT

Head of State Head of Government	Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khalid al-Sabah	Population	4,304,301
Minister of Defense Chief of Defense	Sheikh Hmad Jaber Alali Al-Sabbah Lt. Gen. Khalid Saleh Al-Sabbah	Religion	Muslim 85% – Sunni 70% – Shia 30% Other 15%
Type of Government	Hereditary Constitutional Monarchy	Ethnicity	Arab 59% Asian 38% African 2% Other 1%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$108.66 B (-8.1%)	Military Personnel	Active 15,500 Reserve 24,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	"Current Situation"	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Smooth transition of power inside the ruling family b. Political parliamentary system unique in GCC c. Good infrastructure in most of the country d. Increasing military capabilities and strong cooperation with the US and strong security backing from the US e. Large oil reserves, especially within the Saudi-Kuwait neutral zone f. Efforts implemented to diversify economy away from oil g. Regional neutrality and political stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Modern armed forces, but still reliant on GCC nations for support b. High dependence on foreign labor c. Socio-political challenges such as the high level of corruption and nepotism d. Internal political divisions e. Lack of stable government f. Still high dependence on oil, with lower oil revenues weighing on the budget deficit reaches \$ 40 B g. Terrorism in the neighboring nations such as Iraq h. Nationwide criticism of the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan 	
Opportunities	"Future Outlook"	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Endeavors towards further diversification of income sources to reduce oil dependence and expand heavy industries, banking, communications, construction and tourism b. Adopting a more inclusive internal political architecture with Renewal of the political elite c. Modernization of infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Instability in the government may discourage foreign investments b. Any regional conflict with Iran may jeopardize the country's security and stability, dragging Kuwait into an unsustainable war because of alliances c. Political rifts between Members of National Assembly impeding the formation of a 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Economic diversification through foreign investment e. Balanced and pragmatic foreign policy seeking to reassert Kuwait’s regional and independent role f. Cooperate/participate in regional alliances g. Continue solving border issues with Iraq 	<p>government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Ongoing oil price war with poor management of oil resources to achieve future development plans e. Strong governmental and popular rejection of normalization with Israel
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG’s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>	

Executive Summary

The seamless transfer of power in Kuwait, just two days after the death of the Emir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah is a testament to the country’s deep-rooted constitutional principles. Wedged between Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran, Kuwait’s geographic location is critical to the stability of the region. Kuwait’s precarious location and relative size, leaves little choice but to adopt a balanced foreign policy. After the recent national elections, it is expected the government will enact laws to increase the nation’s economic footing. Kuwait enjoys cordial relations among its neighbors while excluding Israel. Assisting in brokering the crisis between Qatar and other GCC countries in early 2021, Kuwait cannot be underestimated as far as its role in the region. It has enacted policies that are neutral to neighboring nations. Out of the six GCC monarchies, Kuwait is regarded as the most internally politically active country. This is because Kuwait holds parliamentary elections that are normally contested. Kuwait hosts important US military troops and bases. The ongoing Access, Basing, and Overflight granted to the US is positively affecting the Commander’s first priority. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the diversification of the Kuwaiti economy. Kuwait is the seventh largest oil producer in the world. The global volatility of oil prices and the general oil price slump has played a key role in the country’s lack of accelerated economic growth.

Foreign Policy/Security

Kuwait is strategically located between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Due to this geographical location, and its small size, Kuwait has enacted lenient foreign policies between Kuwait and its regional neighbors.³⁴⁰ Amidst an unprecedented polarizing crisis in the region, COVID-19 pandemic, and plunging oil price the new Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah will face numerous challenges. However, regarding foreign affairs, he is expected to uphold the country’s policy of good relations with neighbors. Al Sheikh Nawaf has confirmed this stance openly.

Former Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah was often praised for his neutral foreign policy and the regional mediating role throughout his reign. This policy has continued with the current Emir, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah who was the crown prince during Sheikh Sabah’s tenure. Sheikh Sabah’s understanding of cultural, political, and economic relations with regional and global actors pushed Kuwait to the forefront of international negotiations. Kuwait was also in a position to, when necessary, provide back channels to warring parties. As a regional actor capable of bridging diplomatic divisions, Kuwait has already managed to mediate and resolve the Gulf dispute with Qatar.

The longstanding foreign policy of Kuwait is officially based on the values of national identity and the respect of different civilizations and cultures. As such, it translates into a balanced diplomatic approach and flexible policies to cope with difficult challenges. The country’s foreign policy is intended to build relationships and networks of alliances that protect the rights and interests of the Kuwaitis. A policy of good neighborliness is

³⁴⁰ Poister, Theodore H., "The future of strategic planning in the public sector: Linking strategic management and performance," Public Administration Review 70 (2010).

therefore Kuwait's official priority regarding bilateral and multilateral relations. The Saudi Arabian King received a letter from Kuwait's emir in early 2021.³⁴¹ The letter discussed building strong and solid bilateral links that would see Kuwait and Saudi Arabia working together. Both have worked together on various issues and regional developments. Kuwait joined the Saudi-led coalition that intervened to restore the Hadi government. In 2016, Kuwait hosted UN mediated talks between the warring sides in Yemen. The new US administration announced the following policy changes which, to date, have not been commented on by Kuwait: arms sales review to KSA and UAE and the stop of US support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Regardless of the current US position, the State Department has approved arms sales to Kuwait worth a total of more than \$4.2 B.³⁴²

Kuwait clutches to its alliance with the US and remains a stalwart ally continuing to participate in many international exercises. While Kuwait hosts the US headquarters for operations against the Islamic State, they have also hosted other coalition partners participating in the campaign. The current US military footprint in Kuwait is about one-third of the total US forces deployed in the Gulf. Kuwait and its foreign relationship with the US are safe from any radical changes that may occur. The Kuwaiti policy of neutrality has kept the country balanced, so therefore, allowing them to fare better with the new US administration. Kuwait has a long history of cooperation with the US as well as its allies and the other GCC states. Currently Kuwait is pursuing stronger economic ties with China and other investing countries in order to hedge its geopolitical position. China and Kuwait have built a stronger bond and is expected to grow in the near future. Despite the geopolitical differences between the two nations, their partnership has enabled Kuwait to achieve some rapid developments. Kuwait is an open country, and has accommodated various nations' ideologies and beliefs.

The increased tensions in the region and the escalation of terrorist threats in Iraq have revived Kuwait's concerns over security. Kuwait previously faced threats from elements related to Iran, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, and ISIS. In 2015, ISIS carried out an attack in a mosque in the Kuwaiti capital. Dozens were killed or injured, and the Kuwaiti authorities have thwarted many other attacks since.³⁴³ There are sensitivities to the situation regarding the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border crossing point utilized by US forces. Despite concerns about increased friction between Washington and Tehran, Kuwait's policy toward Iran consists of high-level engagement with Iran. This high-level of engagement between the two nations is unlikely to change under Amir Nawaf. Kuwait's substantial Shia community has pushed the emirate to have a relationship with Iran. Kuwait has publicly expressed support for Iran's right to maintain a peaceful nuclear program. Despite Kuwait's stance on Iran's nuclear program, they have agreed to comply with all sanctions the US, and the UN Security Council have levied.

Kuwait's parliament and civil society both disagree with the Abraham Accords. Kuwait appears to stick to its conventional stance of refusing normalization of relations with Israel. Kuwaiti authorities have satisfied powerful political currents by sticking to their traditional position, primarily as Islamists and nationalists. Kuwait has not shown that it will normalize ties with Israel even after UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco have. Kuwait has benefited from the position of its major Gulf neighbor, Saudi Arabia, who links progress in its relations with Israel, to progress in the peace process. These steps are in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative that Riyadh proposed in 2002, and was approved as an Arab framework for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

³⁴¹ Poister, Theodore H. "The future of strategic planning in the public sector: Linking strategic management and performance." *Public Administration Review* 70 (2010).

³⁴² Dima, Abumaria, "Washington Approves Massive Arms Deals for Arab States," *The Media Line*, Dec 31, 2020, <https://themedialine.org/by-region/washington-approves-massive-arms-deals-for-arab-states> (accessed Dec 31, 2020).

³⁴³ Cengiz, Sinem, "Kuwaiti concern about border security," *Arab News*, Jan 23, 2021, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1390646> (accessed Jan 23, 2021).

Internal Politics

The death of Prince Sabbah led to the appointment of the new Emir Sheikh Nawaf. The appointment resulted in an internal misunderstanding between the opponents of the new emir. Prince Sabbah was praised for using his influence to avert a conflict between Saudi Arabia and Qatar.² The new government is the 37th in the history of Kuwait, since their independence from United Kingdom in 1962. This is the second government headed by Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, and it includes fifteen ministers, including ten new ministers. Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah is the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense. Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah was previously the ambassador of Kuwait to Saudi Arabia. The return of the Interior Ministry portfolio to the ruling family is a major change under the Nawaf government. Five Ministers from the previous government have returned to include Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, who is the Prime Minister. Two of the branches of the Kuwaiti government are headed by the same figures, despite a turnover rate exceeding 60%. The return of a majority of ministers and parliamentarians, who were part of the issues inside Kuwait, make change hard.

Kuwait is led by an emir who has the ultimate authority, including power over the parliament and ability to dissolve it. In the current Kuwaiti government, the Emir incorporates senior royal family members in the government.³⁴⁴ The hierarchy in Kuwait is the cabinet selected by the Emir, and a parliament elected by the citizens of Kuwait. Thirty lawmakers handed a motion of no confidence to the Kuwaiti cabinet. This standoff between the parliament and the cabinet are a result of the Cabinet questioning the emir. After the elections in 2020, Kuwait has a new face, more than 60% of elected lawmakers are new to parliament.³⁴⁵ When questioned about the decision to oust the cabinet, parliament cited the imposition of an unqualified and provocative cabinet. With the ongoing political debates between the parliament and the Emir's cabinet, Kuwait's economy is not expected to grow on a rapid scale. The new emir will face a difficult challenge with the leadership changes in parliament, and more confrontational and aggressive leaders.³⁴⁶ The emir was forced to dissolve parliament in the wake of deputies criticizing the Ministry of Health.

Since the parliament was dissolved, the Emir has directly re-appointed Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid al-Sabah to be the Prime Minister. The newly-appointed Prime Minister is the caretaker of the government since there is no cabinet. To avoid further embarrassment, the emir has directed that Sheikh Sabah nominate a fresh cabinet.

Kuwait's domestic and regional politics are the factors that lead to deterioration rather than economic progression. The government in Kuwait exhibits monarchical governance with an elected parliament. The new emir is expected to face a turbulent time, while dealing with growing public debt and fiscal pressure. His ability to handle these two areas will completely determine the future of Kuwait and its residents. One of the biggest questions facing the new emir is whether or not he will establish diplomatic ties between Kuwait and Israel. This is a contentious issue as members of Parliament and the majority of the Kuwaiti people have rejected this idea.

Economy

Kuwait has a small economy that is petroleum-based, but the nation is extremely wealthy. Thanks to their blossoming petroleum industry, refineries, and infrastructure Kuwaiti citizens enjoy a high per capita income. It is important to note that Kuwait has a stockpile of natural resources that play a key role in their economy. Kuwait plans to develop the northern part of the country, also known as the Northern Region Economic Project "Silk

³⁴⁴ Smith, Ronald D., Strategic planning for public relations. Routledge, 2013.

³⁴⁵ Reuters, "Kuwait's emir accepts resignation of cabinet," Jan 21, 2021, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/399063/World/Region/Kuwaits-emir-accepts-resignation-of-cabinet-.aspx> (accessed Jan 18, 2021).

³⁴⁶ Smith, Ronald D. Strategic planning for public relations. Routledge, 2013.

City.” The project aims to transform Kuwait into an international trade and financial hub by attracting foreign investments and boosting the tourism sector.³⁴⁷

As a step to reduce COVID-19 in Kuwait, the government has reduced the number of international flights. In August of 2020, under a very controlled system, flights resumed. Based on the recommendations of the airport management authorities, the government has limited the capacity to 30%. The economic growth rate in Kuwait has fell to approximately 1.1% last year.³⁴⁸ It is believed that COVID-19 is the major factor in the reduction of growth. As of February 2021, Kuwait has yet to lift the travel bans, lockdowns, and curfews that are negatively affecting the state's economic growth. The government has designated the year of 2021 as the year of economic recovery. Kuwait expects to have an economic growth rate of 0.65% [IMF, 2020]. This target is a considerable challenge in light of the ongoing global health crisis.

The greatest strength of Kuwait is their financial resources. However, the country is currently running out of money. Kuwait is using its General Reserve Fund (GRF) to support state functions. The country also has the Kuwait Future Generations Fund (FGF). The Kuwait Investment Authority is assigned the role of managing both FGF and GRF. However, the cash available in the reserves is depleting due to various internal factors. Lawmakers have passed a law halting the transfer of 10% of Kuwait's annual revenue to the FGF. The 10% figure will lead to a substantial loss in income for future generations.³⁴⁹

After the economic decline of o last year, Kuwait is expected to make economic recovery in 2021. The improvement in the oil sector will account for approximately a 40% increase in Kuwait's GDP.³⁵⁰ In addition to Kuwait's oil income, the country has a substantial refinery infrastructure. A boost in the oil sector will have a positive correlation to its oil refinery business. This increase will allow Kuwait to exhibit significant growth in a short period of time. The implementation of a Value Added Tax law implementation could affect the demand for workers in the country. As of this publication, the government of Kuwait has not taken an interest in cutting the workers' subsidies or workers' benefits.

Society

Kuwait recognizes human rights such as peaceful assembly, demonstration rights, freedom of the press, and restriction on human trafficking. The Kuwaiti government upholds every citizen's basic rights and the rule of governance is restricted. No individual or government agencies are above the laws of the nation.³⁵¹ Similarly, the country's system of governance also puts the emir under the law.

Corruption is rampant in Kuwait like other Gulf regional states. Due to the political scheme and the ruling class, corruption has become a challenge requiring radical solutions. Corrupt governments affect not only society, but also the economy. Corruption is a serious crime inside of Kuwait and the Gulf countries.

Kuwaiti women enjoy a considerable number of legal rights, but traditions and culture do not regard them fairly. An example of this is Kuwaiti women who marry non-Kuwaiti men cannot give Kuwaiti citizenship to their spouses or children. This differs from Kuwaiti men who may give citizenship to their foreign spouses and their

³⁴⁷ Hamad H. Albloshi, "Kuwait's New Leadership: Between Governance and Expectations," Jan, 26, 2021, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/kuwaits-new-leadership-between-governance-and-expectations-28993> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

³⁴⁸ Reuters, "Kuwait Will Keep Airport At 30% Of Capacity Until Further Notice - Region – World," Jan 25, 2021, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/399612/World/Region/Kuwait-will-keep-airport-at--of-capacity-until-fur.aspx> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Reuters, "Kuwait Will Keep Airport At 30% Of Capacity Until Further Notice - Region – World," Jan,25,2021, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/399612/World/Region/Kuwait-will-keep-airport-at--of-capacity-until-fur.aspx> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

³⁵¹ Paul A. Spee and Paula Jarzabkowski, "Strategic planning as communicative process," *Organization Studies* 32, no. 9 (2011): 1220.

children. Women are able to serve in national level appointed positions and since 2006, they have been able to run and vote in national elections. The number of women elected to the National Assembly has been small. An estimated 16% of the oil sector workforce is female.³⁵² Women run several Kuwaiti organizations dedicated to women's rights, such as the Kuwait Women's Cultural and Social Society.

Kuwait has an ethnically diverse population and migrant workers make up approximately 60% of the country's total population. These workers are mostly employees in domestic work and other sectors requiring low-skill sets. Most of the migrants are unaccompanied by their families in the country and tend to live in poor housing conditions due to their low wages.³⁵³ Migrant workers continue to face exploitation and abuse because of the shortcomings of Kuwaiti labor laws and the restrictive kafala (sponsorship) system that ties them to their employers.

According to Transparency International, Kuwait ranks 78th out of a total of 180 countries worldwide. Kuwait is considered the worst among GCC countries in government transparency. The Chairman of Kuwait's Transparency Society Majed al-Mutairi noted that the anti-corruption measures taken by the government in the last three years fell below expectations.

The cases of COVID-19 inside Kuwait have been on the rise since 2021 began. Kuwait authorities have developed a plan that would prohibit foreigners entering the country for a two-week period. With the cases of COVID-19 on the rise, Kuwait has closed clubs, gyms, and banned national events. The Kuwaiti health minister emphasizes that non-compliance would result in an unprecedented loss of lives. There have been nearly 181,484 positive cases and 1027 deaths reported through February 18, 2021. COVID-19 restrictions have led to an increase in unemployment, along with a sharp decline in retail sales, reduced manufacturing activities, and a decline in the service industry.³⁵⁴ Currently in Kuwait almost 80% of the positive COVID-19 cases are of non-Kuwaiti nationals. An uncontrolled outbreak might lead to disastrous outcomes with significant, damaging losses to the economy and an overwhelmed system of healthcare.³⁵⁵

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Continue to support Kuwaiti mediation efforts to end the Gulf crisis and restore political relations between the Gulf States.
- Continue developing US-Kuwait relations with regard to Kuwait's neutral foreign policy, and consider developing initiatives that could maintain cooperation on enduring mutual interests.
- Engage Kuwait as a potential future mediator to deal with rebel groups like the Houthis in Yemen, under the UN collective security mechanism along with Saudi Arabia.
- Cultivate stronger Kuwait-Iraq and GCC-Iraq relations to counter Iran's influence and malign activities.
- Support Kuwait's attempts to diversify its economy through involvement in viable projects.
- Support Kuwait's regional security initiatives.
- Support and motivate Kuwait to normalize relations with Israel.

³⁵² Hasan, Ali, "A study on women's rights in Kuwait resulted in a conflict between legislation and the constitution," Aug 2020, <https://annasnews.com/lifestyle/society/2020/08/01> (accessed Aug 1, 2020).

³⁵³ Paital B. (2020), "Nurture to nature via COVID-19, a self-regenerating environmental strategy of environment in global context," *Sci Total Environ*; 729:139-88.

³⁵⁴ Liem A. Wang and C. Wariyanti, et al. (2020), "The neglected health of international migrant workers in the COVID-19 epidemic," *Lancet Psychiatry*; 7:20.

³⁵⁵ Chan JF-W and Yuan S Kok K-H, et al, (2020), "A familial cluster of pneumonia associated with the 2019 novel coronavirus indicating person to-person transmission: a study of a family cluster," *Lancet*, 395:514-23.

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- b. *CSAG Strategy Paper 2020-19, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Kuwait and Its Ripple Effects on Migrant Workers"*
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2.15 KYRGYZSTAN

Head of State	Sadyr, Japarov, President	Population	6,415,000
Head of Government	Ulukbek Maripov, Prime minister		
Minister of Defense	Taalaibek, Omuraliev, Major General, Minister of Defense	Religion	Muslim 87.6% Russian Orthodoxy 9.4% Other 3%
Chief of Defense			
Type of Government	Unitary Parliamentary Republic	Ethnicity	Kyrgyz 75.3% Uzbek 12.3% Russian 5.6% Dungans 1.1% Uyghur 0.9% Tajik 0.8% Kazakh 0.5%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$8.45 B (9.8%)	Military Personnel	Active 11,000 Reserve 0

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Political parliamentary system, unique to Central Asia b. Natural resources (gold, hydropower capabilities) c. Potential for tourism d. High level of remittances (Money sent from Kyrgyz expats to family in Kyrgyzstan) e. Host Russian military base and increased Russian presence f. Member of WTO, EEAU, CIS, SCO, CSTO, OSCE, UN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Corruption b. Low GDP even with high % increase last year c. High unemployment d. Exposure to neighboring China e. Tendency to change government via “revolution” 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Cooperate/participate in regional alliances b. Continue solving border issues with neighbors c. Participate in China’s BRI d. Promote tourism, development of respective infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Terrorism and extremism (against China) b. Chinese overwhelming “economic penetration” c. Chinese “Debt Trap” d. China reacts more forcefully to acts of violence against its nationals 	
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

The Kyrgyz Republic had a revolutionary change of political leadership. This caused concerns in Russia and China. Kyrgyzstan's new president Sadyr Japarov is not an experienced politician and needs to re-assure economic partners of Kyrgyzstan's reliability. Since the advent of COVID-19, Kyrgyzstan's economy has significantly decreased and external debts are now over 60% of GDP. Kyrgyzstan is going to have parliamentary elections in June 2021, which may again shift the political balance in the country.

Foreign Policy/Security

Newly elected President Sadyr Japarov has been attempting to consolidate power amongst different political groups and foster foreign relationships. While Japarov has worked in previous administrations, he is not an experienced politician and must convince other countries he can be an effective and reliable leader and quickly develop diplomatic relations.³⁵⁶

As Kyrgyzstan's top trading partners, Russia and China remain concerned about the recent developments in the country. President Japarov must prove that Bishkek can be a dependable partner. To demonstrate that Kyrgyzstan understands the importance of the relationships, President Japarov announced his first foreign visit would be to Russia.³⁵⁷ President Japarov also signed a decree "[o]n the protection of property and support for entrepreneurs and investors" guaranteeing the safety of Chinese companies and citizens working in Kyrgyzstan.³⁵⁸

As for international organizations, Kyrgyzstan participates in military cooperation and information exchanges within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan cooperates closely within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Internal Politics

Kyrgyzstan's government has been the closest to a parliamentary democracy in the region. Unfortunately, Kyrgyzstan tends to have revolutions leading to changes in power instead of peaceful transfers of power,³⁵⁹ as demonstrated by the failed 2020 parliamentary elections, and 2021 presidential elections, when former prisoner, Sadyr Japarov, was elevated to President, initially in an acting role then an elected role.³⁶⁰

Scheduled Parliamentary elections were held in Kyrgyzstan on October 4, 2020. Based on the results, pro-government parties won a supermajority of seats. This caused large protests forcing the election to be annulled by the Central Election Commission.³⁶¹ Following continued protests, the Prime Minister and the Parliament Speaker resigned on October 6, 2020. The parliament announced opposition figure Sadyr Japarov, of the

³⁵⁶ Cesare, Matt, "Event Report on the Situation in Kyrgyzstan and its Implications," Foreign Policy Research Institute, Oct 20, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/10/event-report-on-the-situation-in-kyrgyzstan-and-its-implications/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁵⁷ TASS, Первый зарубежный визит избранный президент Киргизии Жапаров намерен совершить в Россию [President-elect of Kyrgyzstan Japarov intends to make his first foreign visit to Russia], Jan 25, 2021 <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/10536583> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁵⁸ *EurAsia Daily*, "Китай пообещал Киргизии бесплатную вакцину [China pledges free vaccine to Kyrgyzstan]," Feb 5, 2021 <https://easaily.com/ru/news/2021/02/05/kitay-poobeshchal-kirgizii-besplatnuyu-vakcinu> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

³⁵⁹ *BBC News*, "Kyrgyzstan election: Sunday's results annulled after mass protests," Oct 6, 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54432030> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁶⁰ Anghelescu, Ana-Maria, "Should Europe Worry About Kyrgyzstan?" *The Diplomat*, Jan 16, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/should-europe-worry-about-kyrgyzstan/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁶¹ Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili and Colleen Wood, "Election officials annulled Kyrgyzstan's October election. Here's why," *The Washington Post*, Oct 10, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/10/10/election-officials-annulled-kyrgyzstans-october-election-heres-why/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

nationalist Patriotic party, as acting Prime Minister and later as acting president, after then President Jeenbekov resigned on October 15. Japarov then resigned on November 14 to run for the presidency, because the sitting president cannot be nominated. New parliamentary elections were initially scheduled for December 20,³⁶² but were delayed until June 2021 allowing for constitutional reforms to be enacted. To ensure the next Supreme Council included more former opposition parties, the national electoral threshold for parties was lowered from 7% to 3% of the votes.³⁶³

Seventeen candidates (of 80 who applied) ran in the presidential election that Sadyr Japarov won with about 80% of the votes. In the same election, more than 80% of voters chose to increase the powers that the president had in government, a reform proposed by Japarov when he was acting president.³⁶⁴ According to OSCE observers the elections were fair, but the campaign conditions heavily favored Japarov.³⁶⁵ The new Parliament is changing the composition of the government. The posts of three vice prime ministers were removed and the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Energy and Industry will be reestablished.³⁶⁶

Kyrgyzstan was the top rated Central Asian nation in an assessment of democratic freedoms (107th of 167 nations).³⁶⁷ Corruption still exists in Kyrgyzstan. The country's long tradition of high-level officials enriching themselves via public office is hard to change, and the previous leadership's anti-corruption purges achieved only minor successes. For example, in January 2021 the former Kyrgyz Prime Minister Mukhammedkalyi Abylgaziev was arrested on corruption charges.³⁶⁸

³⁶² Osmonalieva. Baktygul, "Repeat parliamentary elections could be held on December 20 in Kyrgyzstan" *24KG*, Oct 16, 2020, https://24.kg/english/169562_Repeat_parliamentary_elections_could_be_held_on_December_20_in_Kyrgyzstan/ (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁶³ Putz, Catherine, "Kyrgyzstan Punts on Elections to Pursue Constitutional Reforms" *The Diplomat*, Oct 22, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/kyrgyzstan-punts-on-elections-to-pursue-constitutional-reforms/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁶⁴ *EurAsia Daily*, "Выборы в Киргизии: соперники Жапарова не признают его победу
Подробнее [Elections in Kyrgyzstan: Japarov's rivals do not recognize his victory], Jan 10, 2021, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/01/10/vybory-v-kirgizii-soperniki-zhaparova-ne-priznayut-ego-pobedu> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁶⁵ *EurAsia Daily*, "Во время предвыборной кампании в Киргизии доминировал один кандидат — ОБСЕ
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³⁶⁶ *Kabar*, "Ministries of Defense, Energy and Industry to be re-established in Kyrgyzstan," Feb 2, 2021, <http://en.kabar.kg/news/ministries-of-defense-energy-and-industry-to-be-re-established-in-kyrgyzstan/> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

³⁶⁷ *The Economist*, "Global Democracy has a very bad year," Feb 2, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

³⁶⁸ *RadioFreeEurope - RadioLiberty*, "Former Kyrgyz Prime Minister Abylgaziev Arrested On Corruption Charges," Jan 27, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/former-kyrgyz-prime-minister-abylgaziev-arrested-on-corruption-charges/31071427.html> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

Economy

Kyrgyzstan's economy is highly dependent on the export of gold and other precious metals and minerals. Kyrgyzstan is in the top five countries with remittances as a share of GDP, and the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan reported a 1.2% increase in remittances from 2019 to 2020.³⁶⁹

The COVID-19 crisis severely impacted the Kyrgyzstan economy. During the first three quarters of 2020 Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade turnover decreased more than 22%.³⁷⁰ At the same time, Kyrgyzstan's public debt increased from \$4.5 B to \$4.8 B.^{371 372} The external debt increased from 54% to 68%, forcing the parliament to increase the debt threshold to 70%.^{373 374} China owns over 43% of Kyrgyzstan's total public debt, most is owed to Chinese Eximbank. Despite concerns in recent years that Kyrgyzstan was falling into a Chinese debt trap, through the first half of 2020 Bishkek had been able to meet its commitments to Beijing. Nevertheless, due to the COVID-19 outbreak Bishkek had publicly requested Beijing's forbearance and took emergency loans from the IMF in March and May 2020.³⁷⁵

Society

The COVID-19 crisis impacted the population growth of Kyrgyzstan. The birth rate decreased by 9% from 2019 to 2020, and there was a 20% increase in deaths.³⁷⁶ As the population struggled to cope with COVID-19 marriage rates and divorce registrations significantly declined in 2020.³⁷⁷ Russia has provided a lot of humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan to combat COVID-19. This will uphold the people's favorable attitude towards Russia.³⁷⁸ The Kyrgyz people consider Russia to be Kyrgyzstan's most important economic partner. This is even though the US is providing more than \$5 M in support from USAID, CDC, and the US State Department, including high-capacity oxygen concentrators, masks and epidemiological analysis software.³⁷⁹

³⁶⁹ *Kabar*, "In 2020, remittances to Kyrgyzstan increased by 1.2%," Jan 26, 2021, <http://en.kabar.kg/news/in-2020-remittances-to-kyrgyzstan-increased-by-1.2/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁷⁰ *Kabar*, "Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade turnover down by 22.1%," Oct 15, 2020, <http://en.kabar.kg/news/kyrgyzstans-foreign-trade-turnover-down-by-22.1/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁷¹ *Kabar*, "Kyrgyzstan's public debt reaches USD 4 bln 887.46 mln," Jan 14, 2021, <http://en.kabar.kg/news/kyrgyzstans-public-debt-reaches-usd-4-bln-887.46-mln/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁷² *CountryEconomy*, "Kyrgyzstan National Debt," <https://countryeconomy.com/national-debt/kyrgyzstan/> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

³⁷³ *Kabar*, "External debt of Kyrgyzstan exceeds 60% of GDP," Dec 24, 2020, <http://en.kabar.kg/news/external-debt-of-kyrgyzstan-exceeds-60-of-gdp/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁷⁴ *IMF*, "Kyrgyz Republic and the IMF – General government gross debt," <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/KGZ#countrydata> (accessed Apr 1, 2021).

³⁷⁵ Van der Kley, Dirk, "COVID and the new debt dynamics of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *eurasianet*, Oct 2, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/covid-and-the-new-debt-dynamics-of-kyrgyzstan-and-tajikistan> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁷⁶ *Kabar*, "Fertility in Kyrgyzstan dropped last year; mortality on contrary, rose," Jan 22, 2021, <http://en.kabar.kg/news/fertility-in-kyrgyzstan-dropped-last-year-mortality-on-contrary-rose/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁷⁷ *Kabar*, "In 2020, fewer marriages and divorces registered in Kyrgyzstan compared to 2019," Jan 19, 2021, <http://en.kabar.kg/news/in-2020-fewer-marriages-and-divorces-registered-in-kyrgyzstan-compared-to-2019/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁷⁸ *Kabar*, "Russia provides another humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan for combating coronavirus," Dec 25, 2021, <http://en.kabar.kg/news/russia-provides-another-humanitarian-aid-to-kyrgyzstan-for-combating-coronavirus/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁷⁹ U.S. Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic, "U.S. Support for Kyrgyzstan's COVID Response – More than Masks," Nov 25, 2020, <https://kg.usembassy.gov/u-s-support-for-kyrgyzstans-covid-response-more-than-masks/> (accessed Feb 18, 2021).

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Monitor Kyrgyzstan leadership to determine if new leadership is more willing to cooperate with the US. This can be executed via humanitarian/financial support to combat COVID-19 or economic cooperation to help strengthen Kyrgyzstan's economy.
- Conduct Regional Cooperation exercises with Kyrgyzstan, similar to Steppe Eagle training, to deter China's influence and promote Kyrgyzstan's participation in the safety and security of the region.

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2.16 LEBANON

Head of State	Michael Aoun	Population	6,780,850
Head of Government	Saad Hariri		
Minister of Defense	Zeina Akar	Religion	Muslim 61.1%
Chief of Defense	Gen. Joseph Aoun		-Sunni 50%
			-Shia 50%
			Christian 33.7%
			Druze: 5.2% ³⁸⁰
Type of Government	Public Parliamentary Republic	Ethnicity	Arab: 95%
			Armenian: 4%
			Other: 1%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	18.73 B (-25%)	Military Personnel	Active: 75,000
			Reserve: 0

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strategic geographic location b. Vibrant national identity c. Social diversity d. Well-educated population e. Reputation of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) f. Remittances from large diaspora 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Political class corruption b. Sectarianism c. Armed Hezbollah militia not under government control d. Highly susceptible to regional tensions e. Large refugee population f. National debt and weak fiscal position g. Emigration of the educated class h. External meddling by foreign powers i. Unstable internal politics 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The French initiative b. International financial cooperation and support to alleviate the refugee and economic crises c. Further international and regional isolation d. International commitment to strengthen the (LAF) e. Return of tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Further deterioration of political and economic conditions that could threaten another civil war b. Battleground for Iran’s future retaliation operations c. Collapsing into Iran’s control d. Further regional and international isolation e. Mounting debt and degraded economy f. Enduring effects of the refugee crisis g. Implications of COVID-19 on health care system and societal conditions 	
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

³⁸⁰ CIA World Factbook, “Lebanon,” <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/lebanon/> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

Executive Summary

Lebanon has a long history of turmoil and crises that have crippled the country for decades. It has been exposed to numerous wars, frequent political conflicts, poor economic conditions, and societal unrest. All these threats could trigger another civil war and endanger Lebanon's existence.

The year 2020 was catastrophic for Lebanon's economy and the current economic situation is the worst since the 1975-1990 civil war. The economy was hit by multiple disasters of the COVID-19 pandemic, Beirut's explosion, and the subsequent political and social crises. These crises introduced new challenges and an increase of the already high national debt. Lebanon requires an effective foreign policy to help pull the country out of this critical situation.

Currently, there are no signs that suggest international assistance will be forthcoming. This is due to the Lebanese government's lack of willingness to demonstrate a desire for necessary changes in policy and leadership. Lebanon is heading further into Iran's regional axis. This counters CENTCOM's first priority of "detering Iran." The government does not make its own political decisions, but is forced to implement the will of certain political parties, particularly Hezbollah and its allies.

Lebanon remains the country hosting the largest number of refugees per capita in the world. The economic crisis hit the refugees hard, and they are the most affected group in Lebanon. Consequently, the refugee population is now more at risk of being exploited by terrorists and extremist groups. This situation has a direct impact on CENTCOM's sixth priority, "ISIS Detainees & Radicalization of IDPs."

Lebanon's internal politics are complicated by pronounced sectarian divisions and the massive explosion in Beirut opened the door for more external influences. France drafted a proposal for Lebanon's political blocs to follow to make much needed changes. Nevertheless, the French initiative seems to be heading towards a dead end. Lebanon must return to the more neutral and stand-off policies of the past to protect Lebanon from regional conflicts and rivalries. They need to reimplement the "No West, No East" National Pact, carry out necessary reforms, and utilize its foreign relations to serve the state, not the interests of parties or individuals.

Foreign Policy/Security

Lebanon needs an exceptional foreign policy to help pull it out of its current crisis. The majority of Lebanon's foreign policy is practiced through official meetings with ambassadors, foreign representatives of countries, and international organizations and all take place in Lebanon.³⁸¹ In Lebanon's current socio-economic and financial situation, the government has not made adequate diplomatic efforts to get international assistance through its bilateral or multilateral relationships. It is not just the government's ineptitude. Elite Lebanese officials have not used their personal connections to garner any support or assistance for Lebanon. Failures to secure aid has led to its citizens living under enormous pressure and to a crisis in the health system.

Currently, there are no signs that any international assistance, particularly from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, will be available to Lebanon in the near future. It is near impossible to end Lebanon's current isolation quickly to restore historic relationships. Even with the massive burden of displaced persons and refugees,³⁸² Lebanon has not succeeded in getting substantial international aid and financial assistance to help.³⁸³

³⁸¹ Areq, Rakeh, "عزلة لبنان.. من يملك مفتاح فكها" [Lebanon's isolation .. who owns the key to decipher it], *Al-Arabiya*, Jul 4, 2020, <https://www.alarabiya.net/politics/2020/07/04/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁸² Sleiman, Dana, "Debt a growing burden for Syrian refugees in Lebanon," *The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR*, Nov 20, 2015, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2015/11/564f1baa6/debt-growing-burden-syrian-refugees-lebanon.html> - :~:text=Nearly%2090%20percent%20of%20more,by%20UNHCR%2C%20UNICEF%20and%20WFP (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁸³ Holmes, Oliver, "Syrian refugees burden and benefit for Lebanese economy," *Reuters*, Apr 17, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-crisis-lebanon-refugees-idUSBRE93G0MW20130417> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

Hezbollah's intervention in Lebanese foreign policy is the main reason for Lebanon's isolation and poor relations with international and regional actors. Beyond issues with Hezbollah, there are other reasons for failures in foreign policy, including having a corrupt political system and possessing an unwillingness to implement reforms or abide by international commitments. The country's stubbornness in refusing to reform its political system and to address its failures has created a cycle of instability. External support alone cannot stabilize Lebanon. It must first address internal core issues before outside actors can have a lasting and positive effect.³⁸⁴

The government is not in full control of its political decisions. It is forced to implement the decisions of political parties, particularly those of Hezbollah and its allies. Most international funders, including the GCC countries and the US, confirmed there will be no support for Lebanon while it is under Hezbollah's control. Lebanon has not shown any serious efforts to make changes. On the contrary, Lebanon has further attached itself to Iran during the past few years.³⁸⁵ The consequence of greater alignment with Iran has increased Lebanon's disengagement from Arab and international communities. This will also lead to additional deviation from Lebanon's "No West, No East" National Pact policy of coexistence between Muslims and Christians.³⁸⁶ The pact has ensured neutrality by refraining from seeking the guardianship of any western or eastern actors. Nevertheless, recent events confirm that Lebanon is straying from the National Pact and being used by Iran as a battleground for its regional conflicts. Iran is also using the Lebanese issue as leverage for Iran's future negotiations. Iranian officials recently stated that Iran owns the Lebanese missile capabilities that sit on the front line against Israel.³⁸⁷ The unveiling of a Qassem Soliemani monument in Lebanon with Lebanese flags in the background also gave a clear image of how much Lebanon has fallen into Iran's embrace.

Beirut's explosion had a devastating impact on the nation. The explosion opened the door for more external influence. After the explosion, French President, Emmanuel Macron, visited Lebanon twice in a short period. Lebanon has a long history with France. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and at the end of the First World War, France was handed a mandate by the League of Nations to administer Lebanon's infrastructure.³⁸⁸ During his visits, President Macron met with the leaders of major political parties, including the president of Hezbollah's political wing, the Loyalty for Resistance bloc, in the Lebanese parliament.³⁸⁹ President Macron's meeting with a member of Hezbollah faced significant criticism. It was the first time in history that a French president talked directly with a member of Hezbollah. Some analysts considered it an international recognition of a terrorist group.³⁹⁰ However, President Macron described the meeting as a discussion over Hezbollah's weapons and the existing problem of articulation between the military presence and the political representation. President Macron stressed this topic needed to be discussed even though it is not a part of the three months reform program.³⁹¹ The former US Secretary of State Pompeo criticized France for their policy on Hezbollah and

³⁸⁴ Areq, Rakeh, "عزلة لبنان... من يملك مفتاح فكها" [Lebanon's isolation .. who owns the key to decipher it], *Al-Arabiya*, Jul 4, 2020, <https://www.alarabiya.net/politics/2020/07/04/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁸⁵ Hashim, Ali, "The United States Is Pushing Lebanon Further Into Iran's Embrace," *Foreign Policy*, Jul 16, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/16/the-united-states-is-pushing-lebanon-further-into-irans-embrace/> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁸⁶ Staff, "Adopt policy of No West, no East," *The Daily Star Lebanon*, Aug 30, 2013, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Aug-31/229450-rai-adopt-policy-of-no-west-no-east.ashx> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁸⁷ Houssari, Najia, "Lebanon bridles at Iranian air chief's remarks on missiles and sovereignty," *Arab News*, Jan 4, 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1786826/middle-east> (accessed Jan 28, 2021).

³⁸⁸ Tiegert, Bernd, "Emmanuel Macron visits Beirut: Can there be a 'French solution' for Lebanon?," *DW*, Aug 8, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/emmanuel-macron-visits-beirut-can-there-be-a-french-solution-for-lebanon/a-54491898> (accessed Jan 29, 2021).

³⁸⁹ Qabesi, Kamal, "ماكرون أمطر ممثل حزب الله بكلام محرج طوال 8 دقائق" [Macron sprayed the Hezbollah representative with embarrassing words for eight minutes], *Al-Arabiya*, Sep 1, 2020, <https://www.alarabiya.net/last-page/2020/09/01/> (accessed Jan 30, 2021).

³⁹⁰ Malbrono, George, "لقاء ماكرون بمحمد رعد اعتراف دولي بحزب الله" [Macron's meeting with Muhammad Raad International recognition of Hezbollah], *Almayadeen*, Sep 1, 2020, [https://www.almayadeen.net/press/foreignpress/1419988/-](https://www.almayadeen.net/press/foreignpress/1419988/) (accessed Jan 30, 2021).

³⁹¹ Momtaz, Rym, "French president's expectations clash with reality as Lebanon commits to reforms," *Politico*, Sep 1, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/01/lebanon-france-macron-407444> (accessed Jan 30, 2021).

questioned how France could vote against extending the UN arms embargo on Iran while having its President meet with a Hezbollah official in Beirut.³⁹²

France created a specific proposal for Lebanon's political blocs to follow. The French proposal included the following priorities: COVID-19 response, the humanitarian situation, reconstruction of Beirut, political reforms, and new elections.³⁹³ However, Prime Minister Mustafa Adib's failure to form a new government led to his ousting and thereby thwarted the French-led efforts. President Macron described this as a "collective betrayal" and accused the political leaders of favoring their partisan and personal interests.

President Macron's visits to Lebanon was very well received by many Lebanese who were frustrated with the Lebanese political elites. Macron was criticized by domestic political opponents. They accused him of creeping neocolonialism and extracting political concessions from Lebanon in exchange for aid.³⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the French initiative is heading to a dead end unless France can bring in international and regional actors that have influence in Lebanon. It also appears there is a lack of coordination between France and the US. While France was urging political parties to form a new government, the US introduced sanctions that targeted the head of the Free Patriotic Movement and other former ministers, hindering the formation of the government.³⁹⁵ Iran seems unwilling to cooperate or make President Macron's mission in Lebanon any easier as it prefers to use Lebanon as leverage in future negotiations.

Above all, Lebanon's domestic decisions have had a significant impact on Lebanon's external relations. Lebanon must return to the policy of self-distancing to protect itself against entanglement in regional conflicts. In addition, Lebanon must reimplement its "No West, No East" National Pact and prove its determination to carry out reforms. Lebanon must reassert its foreign relations to serve the state's interest, not the interests of individual parties or people. Additionally, Lebanon needs to exploit the international momentum triggered by the Beirut explosion and take advantage of the French initiative to enact reform and increase pressure on those trying to hinder international financial assistance.

Internal Politics

Lebanon's internal politics are complicated due to pronounced sectarian divisions. The country has been in continuous unrest and intense political conflicts since Rafiq Al-Hariri's assassination in 2015.³⁹⁶ One common factor delaying reforms is Lebanon's political system. The political system is a form of confessionalism in which the highest offices are reserved for representatives from different religious groups.³⁹⁷ The government must give political representation to all religions in the country. The current political system has contributed to Lebanon's instability through manipulation of demographics, where each ethnic and religious group tries to increase its representational weight to gain more political power. The system also creates tensions and division between

³⁹² Judd, Emily, "US Secretary Pompeo criticizes France for policy on Iran, Hezbollah," *Al-Arabiya*, Sept 15, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2020/09/15/US-Secretary-Pompeo-criticizes-France-for-policy-on-Iran-Hezbollah> (accessed Jan 30, 2021).

³⁹³ Staff, "In full: France's draft proposal for a new Lebanese government," *France 24 News*, Sep 3, 2020, <https://www.fr24news.com/a/2020/09/in-full-frances-draft-proposal-for-a-new-lebanese-government-news.html> (accessed Jan 30, 2021).

³⁹⁴ Nikolic, Isabella, "Emmanuel Macron is accused of trying to reconquer Lebanon rather than help it in the wake of the devastating explosion at its capital which has killed 150 as country is set to refuse aid from Israel," *Daily Mail*, Aug 8, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8606933/Emmanuel-Macron-accused-trying-reconquer-Lebanon-help-it.html> (accessed Jan 30, 2021).

³⁹⁵ Shukair, Mohammed, "French Initiative Under Political Lockdown," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Jan 17, 2021, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2747166/lebanon-french-initiative-under-political-lockdown> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

³⁹⁶ Staff, "Saad Hariri named new Lebanese prime minister amid growing crisis," *DW*, Oct 22, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/saad-hariri-named-new-lebanese-prime-minister-amid-growing-crisis/a-55358678> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

³⁹⁷ Leiden University, *Consociational democracy: what was driving Lebanon's sectarian strife between 2006 and early 2016*, Students' Thesis, Jan 12, 2016, <https://studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2659169/view> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

ethnic and religious groups and ignites sectarianism in the country. Hezbollah is the only armed militia in Lebanon that solely belongs to one religious group. The relative military capability between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Hezbollah is a problem that always leads to instability.

The 2019 protests that led to the resignation of PM Saad Al-Hariri created a more extreme political crisis in Lebanon. The primary demand of the 2019 demonstrations was the overthrow of all the political elites in Lebanon. Those in the streets were chanting the famous Lebanese protestors' chant 'All of them, means all of them, and Naser Allah is one of them'. Contrary to the protestors demand, a new government headed by Hassan Diab, supported by Hezbollah, came out of the womb of the corrupted deep state. Hassan Diab's government lacked the trust of the people. It also lacked a national strategy to effectively address the evolving threats, the popular demands for improved conditions and consequently failed to placate the anger. Furthermore, PM Diab's government failed to create an economy to meet the basic needs of the population. The PM also failed to adequately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by not ensuring the provision of sufficient health supplies.

The August 2020 Beirut explosion changed the rules and disrupted all Lebanon's political components. According to Lebanese officials, the blast killed around 180 people, wounded more than 6000, left about 300,000 residents homeless, and caused almost \$5 B damage in infrastructure.³⁹⁸ Widespread anger returned to the streets, with demonstrations against the political class accusing them of negligence and bad governance. As a result, PM Hassan Diab announced his resignation and accused the political class of trading Lebanese blood and being the cause of Lebanon's chronic corruption. However, PM Diab's resignation did not sate the protestors' demands. Protestors were determined to overthrow the entire political class and fight against the corrupted deep state. Fragments of protestors also directed their anger against Hezbollah for interfering in political decisions and for their role in the explosion.

Lebanon gained tremendous international attention in the aftermath of the Beirut explosion. President Macron's demands collided with the resignation of PM Diab. A new wave of protests are taking place in Lebanon. Protestors are demanding the political class be held responsible for the collapsed economy, the high exchange rate, and poor living conditions. The protestors stress that the political class is not qualified to restore the economy or persecute the corrupt.

Economy

The economic situation in Lebanon is disastrous and is considered the worst since the civil war. However, 2020 was especially catastrophic for Lebanon's economy. The economy was hit by multiple crises; the COVID-19 pandemic, Beirut's explosion, and the political and social crises that followed. These crises introduced new levels of challenges. The national debt is now equivalent to nearly 170% of the country's gross domestic product and is projected to reach 185% by the end of the year 2021.³⁹⁹ The debt has constrained the government's response to any economic downturns. During the past year Lebanon faced a sudden stop in capital inflows. They defaulted on the Eurobond for the first time in their history and the dollar reserves dropped to a critical level. The failures of banking and Beirut explosion are considered as the 'straw that broke the camel's back'.⁴⁰⁰

The government's decision to default on debt was not voluntary. The government needed money to import essential goods. Former PM Diab justified the decision by arguing that the government could not pay external

³⁹⁸ Alfaissal, Leen, "Cost of damages to exceed \$5 billion, Beirut governor reveals as Lebanon grieves," *Al-Arabiya*, Aug 5, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2020/08/05/Beirut-blast-damages-value-ranges-between-3-5-billion-Governor> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

³⁹⁹ *Trading Economics*, "Lebanon government debt to GDP," <https://tradingeconomics.com/lebanon/government-debt-to-gdp> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

⁴⁰⁰ World Bank, "The World Bank in Lebanon," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

lenders when people in Lebanon could not afford to pay for bread.⁴⁰¹ Therefore, the Lebanese are living under tremendous pressure, and their resilience has been severely tested. The unemployment rate is going up, poverty is getting out of control, and the cost of living is overwhelming. Moreover, remittances from the diaspora, estimated to be almost three times the size of Lebanon's population, have fallen drastically. In addition, banks have imposed emergency steps, putting restrictions on incoming foreign transfers, limiting withdrawals and transfers of funds out of the country.⁴⁰²

The government's response to the crisis has been extremely inefficient.⁴⁰³ The government failed to respond to international donors' prerequisites to resume providing financial aid to Lebanon. Indeed, the government and the entire political system is to blame. The system frequently fails to reach consensus on critical matters. Political elites realize that the first step towards rescuing the country from a financial disaster is to overcome political and sectarian rivalries. However, it does not seem likely that there will be any cooperative solution to the crises in the near future. Nevertheless, if the government succeeds in reaching consensus among political rivalries, an immediate emergency plan to start performing necessary reforms can be executed. This will regain the international community's trust and reopen doors for international financial assistance. The economy could be an attractive motive to bring all rivalries back to the table and agree on shared economic goals. Economic reforms must be accompanied by political and societal reforms that aim to put Lebanon's interest in front of all political and individual interests.

Society

Lebanon used to be identified as the link between the east and the west. It is ideologically and culturally linked to both. Although most of the population are Arabs and share many characteristics with the Arab world, they also have many similar characteristics with South Europe, especially France. Traditionally, the Lebanese society functioned as a heterogeneous nation with several ethnic, religious and kinship groups.⁴⁰⁴ In recent years this has fundamentally changed. Lebanon's society is divided into several sects and each of those sects are geographically separated. Sectarianism and external agendas have weakened national loyalty bonds. Thus, the feeling of belonging to one society is starting to disappear.⁴⁰⁵ Sectarianism is in the constitution and Lebanese society has existed since the founding of Great Lebanon in 1920. It has managed for a long time to live with coexistence between all sects. However, since Rafiq Al-Hariri's assassination, Lebanese society has been exposed to continuous unrest plus frequent and intense political conflicts.

Religion is the defining feature for society in Lebanon, as it determines the social identity. Around 61% of the population identify as Muslims, 33% as Christian, and 5% as Druze. The Muslim population is split evenly into Sunni and Shia. The Christian population includes Maronite Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, and Protestant Churches.⁴⁰⁶ There are also other religious minorities, including Judaism, Baha'i, Buddhism, and Hinduism. However, religion in Lebanon has a significant role in politics, society, and the legal system. Membership of Lebanon's Parliament is allocated to representatives from the

⁴⁰¹ Sewell, Abby, "Lebanon's dollar reserves critically low: Economists," *Al-Arabiya*, Mar 10, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/business/economy/2020/03/10/Lebanon-s-dollar-reserves-critically-low-Economists> - :~:text=Lebanon%20may%20not%20have%20been,economists%20tell%20Al%20Arabiya%20English (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

⁴⁰² Khraiche, Dana, "Lebanon's Banks Set Limits They Won't Call Capital Controls," *Bloomberg*, Nov 17, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-17/lebanese-banks-to-impose-first-joint-measures-in-face-of-crisis> (accessed Feb 1, 2021).

⁴⁰³ Khallouf, Jad, "Resolving Lebanon's financial crisis," *Le Commerce*, Jan 22, 2020, <https://translate.google.com/?sl=auto&tl=en&text=22%20janvier%202020&op=translate> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

⁴⁰⁴ *Britannica*, "Lebanon," <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lebanon/Climate> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

⁴⁰⁵ US Library of Congress, "The Society," <http://countrystudies.us/lebanon/33.htm> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

⁴⁰⁶ *Cultural Atlas*, "Lebanese Culture," <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/lebanese-culture/lebanese-culture-religion> (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

different religious groups. Moreover, in the legal system, there are different types of courts based on religion and these courts have different standards and proceedings.

Lebanon's population is over 6 M, with a growth rate of 1%. However, Lebanon has had many waves of emigration resulting in a substantial diaspora. It is estimated that the diaspora is equal to three times the population of Lebanon.⁴⁰⁷ Economic difficulties and the domestic and international conflicts are the main motives for emigration. The diaspora population has supported Lebanon's economy through remittances and providing a layer of social protection for many citizens.⁴⁰⁸

With Lebanon's continued fast-paced economic deterioration, the society lives under extreme pressure. Half of Lebanon's population is currently suffering from poverty, the unemployment rate is approaching 50%, the currency value continues to depreciate, and the basic price of food has increased nearly four times.⁴⁰⁹ People in Lebanon are fighting on a daily basis to provide enough food for their families. The pandemic has worsened the situation in the country. The hospitals and the health care system are overwhelmed due to the massive climb in infections. On the positive side, the government did succeed in finalizing a deal with Pfizer to provide over 2 M doses of vaccine. The government announced that an additional 2.7 M doses of the vaccine would be provided through the UN COVAX program to provide vaccination for countries in need.⁴¹⁰

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Provide support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to effectively protect the country and control its borders and ports. Enhance the LAF's reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities to block the flow of terrorist movement along the Syrian borders.
- Provide military assistance to the LAF to enable it to address Hezbollah's growing military capabilities, to mitigate any internal and external threats, and monitor Iranian shipments of missiles to Lebanon.
- Strengthen MIL/MIL joint counterterrorism efforts with the LAF and improve intelligence sharing mechanism between CENTCOM and LAF.
- Facilitate any required security coordination between the LAF and Israel to prevent Hezbollah from dragging Lebanon into a confrontation with Israel on behalf of Iran.
- Utilize Key Leader Engagement to put maximum pressure on the LAF leadership to use its capabilities to protect Lebanon's sovereignty and make efforts to stop Hezbollah's influence in the LAF and counter its malign activities.
- Support and facilitate the preparation of an executable plan for the disarmament of Hezbollah as a prerequisite for any future support to Lebanon.

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⁴⁰⁸ Paul Tabar and Andrew Denison, "Diaspora Policies, Consular Services and Social Protection for Lebanese Citizens Abroad," *Springer*, Nov 13, 2020, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-51237-8_11 (accessed Feb 2, 2021).

⁴⁰⁹ Allinson, Tom, "Can things get any worse for the people of Lebanon," *Qantara*, Aug 5, 2020, <https://en.qantara.de/content/beirut-in-crisis-can-things-get-any-worse-for-the-people-of-lebanon> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

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c. *CSAG TC4 Model 2020*

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2.17 OMAN

Head of State	Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said	Population	4,974,000
Head of Government			
Minister of Defense	Shihab bin Tariq al-Said	Religion	Muslim 86 % (Ibadism)
Chief of Defense	Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi		Christian 7 % Hindu 6 % Buddhist 1 %
Type of Government	Absolute Monarchy	Ethnicity	Arab 65 % Baluchi 16 % South Asian and African 19 %
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$65.3 B (-0.04 %)	Military Personnel	Active 42,500

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Favorable business environment; Oman performs better than its neighbors in registering property and paying tax to boost FDI and private sector development b. Transport (air, sea, & rail) and telecommunication (4G & 5G) infrastructure development c. Oman`s stable monarchy and peaceful society favors investment in the country d. Omani literacy rate is over 95%, both adults and youths, supporting development of human capital h. Digital transformation to raise productivity and efficiency in the private and public sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. High dependence on oil accompanied by decreasing oil reserves threatens revenue streams b. Low incentive for the private sector; Omanis prefer working in the government/public sector c. Engineering and IT sector technology and skilled workforce lags behind neighboring countries d. Government bureaucracy hinders foreign investment and potential projects h. Oman development lags behind UAE marine trading activity and KSA development towards 2030 vision 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Oman holds future energy prospects by diversifying to renewable energy, mainly solar and hydropower b. Foreign policy attracts investors and Foreign Direct Investment c. Rapid adoption of technology in businesses and government entities holds vast scope in technology-based transactions d. Omani government initiatives to boost best private business practices like Oman Business Forum, Five-year Development Plan (2016-2020), vision2040 and broadening focus towards non-oil sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. COVID-19 impacts global and regional growth b. Business, transport, and tourism sectors face competition from Qatar and UAE c. Calamities like cyclone, flooding, and high temperature are dangerous to health and damage property, while sand and dust storms impair air and ground traffic d. Heavy dependence on hydrocarbons is the main economic risk since oil and gas are vulnerable to volatile global energy markets 	

	e. Insecurity in region, especially the risk of an Iran-US war and Yemen civil wars pose threat to Omani security
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.	

Executive Summary

Under Sultan Haitham's leadership, Oman maintains a balanced foreign policy through skillful mediation and conflict resolution, making it unique among Arab countries. However, a profound fiscal and economic crisis has increased Oman's overreliance on the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This crisis will likely affect that unique and balanced foreign policy. Oman's major strengths are its favorable business environment, infrastructure development, stable government, high literacy rates, and digital transformation. Its weaknesses include high oil dependence, low private sector incentive, and burdensome government bureaucracy. Oman's opportunities lie in future prospects on renewable energy, favorable foreign policy, government initiatives, and rapid business technology adoption. However, COVID-19 impacts, natural calamities, excessive hydrocarbon dependence, and competition from neighboring territories are major threats. Oman maintains neutrality amid regional conflicts and promotes cooperation with other countries to ease political pressure, maintain peace, and boost its economy. The monarchy is supported by Cabinet Ministers, Secretaries of State, Special Advisory Councils and governors (walis). Even though Oman has rich oil resources, debts due to neighboring countries still pose economic challenges. Moreover, Omani society faces human rights, immigration, and freedom of expression issues.

Foreign Policy/Security

In early 2020, Oman's new leader, Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said announced the country would maintain a foreign policy that enhances neutrality amid regional conflicts. Here, Oman continues former Sultan Qaboos' foreign policy to mediate regional conflict resolutions without involving Oman's military.⁴¹¹ As a result, the balanced foreign policy, skillful mediation, and conflict resolution uniquely positions Oman among its Arab neighbors.⁴¹² However, some speculate Sultan Haitham's inexperience leading the country, and Oman's weak financial position, leave the country vulnerable to UAE and Saudi Arabian influence.⁴¹³

Oman currently faces a substantial fiscal and economic crisis which could impact its foreign policy. Therefore, the country requires financial help from neighboring UAE and Saudi Arabia, who contribute about three-quarters of the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) GDP.⁴¹⁴ For instance, in August 2020, Oman reportedly secured a \$2 B bridge loan coordinated by Bank Muscat and First Abu Dhabi Bank.⁴¹⁵ This indicates a renewed interrelation and interdependence between Abu Dhabi and Muscat, a trend that may adversely affect Oman's role as a regional mediator. Despite improving Oman's economy, this large-scale assistance from the neighboring countries will deteriorate Omani foreign policy's neutrality and independence.

Oman recently reshuffled its cabinet to strengthen its foreign policy. On August 18, 2020, Sultan Haitham named Badr al-Busaidi as the new foreign minister, in a change to the arrangements in Sultan Qaboos's

⁴¹¹ Katzman, Kenneth, "Oman: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy," *United States: Congressional Research Service*, Jun 17, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21534.pdf> (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

⁴¹² Winder, Bayly, "Oman's Regional Role in a Time of Challenge and Change," *Middle East Institute*, Aug 26, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/omans-regional-role-time-challenge-and-change> (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

⁴¹³ Katzman, Kenneth, "Oman: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy," at page 8 (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

⁴¹⁴ Winder, "Oman's Regional Role in a Time of Challenge and Change."

⁴¹⁵ Saba, Yousef, "Oman Secures \$2 Billion Bridge Loan: Sources," *Reuters.com*, Aug 12, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oman-loans/oman-secures> (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

government, where the Sultan personally led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴¹⁶ Due to Sultan Haitham's inexperience leading the country, he may employ this decentralization to help maintain Oman's balanced foreign policy. According to former US Ambassador to Oman, Gary Grappo, the government changes are unlikely to change the relationship with the US, which was a fundamental aspect in Qaboos's national security and foreign policies.⁴¹⁷ Al-Busaidi has outstanding long-term ties to the US, UK, and other countries. The strong ties with the US will help Sultan Haitham reduce the political pressure from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.⁴¹⁸

Internal Politics

Oman is an absolute monarchy headed by a hereditary Sultan. Oman has no political parties or legislature; the Sultan is head of state, judiciary, and government. Oman's judicial system is organized into three levels: elementary, appellate, and supreme court. Its court system is regulated by Royal Decree 90/99 amended to Royal Decree 5/2002.⁴¹⁹ Notably, Oman is an Arab and Islamic state; therefore, the Koran governs everyday life, and laws derive from Sharia. The Sultan also has executive powers and directly appoints all Cabinet Ministers, Secretaries of State, and Special Advisory Councils (peoples' legislative representatives). Oman is further organized into small administrative structures composed of 59 districts (wilayats) headed by governors (walis), who collect taxes and settle local disputes.⁴²⁰ The Dhofar wilayat is special as it is large, holds cabinet rank, and is guided by the Ministry of Interior. The Consultative Assembly is made up of 84 elected members who have legislative powers. In contrast, the Council of State is made up of 83 appointed members aimed at enhancing cooperation between the people and the government. The Omani Constitution regulates state function and throne succession, while also guaranteeing citizens' rights and freedom.⁴²¹

Economy

Oman's main economic activity is oil and gas export. Therefore, 2020's sharp decrease in oil prices decreased the country's GDP expansion and current account balances. Coupled with the low oil prices, COVID-19 impacts exacerbated Oman's economic crisis. For instance, in 2020, the country's GDP declined by 18.7% and will likely decline by 16.8% in 2021.⁴²² As a result, expenditures are set to decline by 14% from 2020, reflecting 10.8 B rials. Further, 2021 revenue will likely decline by 19%, while the budget deficit in 2021 will be 8% of the GDP (2.2 B rials).⁴²³ These financial woes will likely force Oman to incur debt and increase its reliance on its neighbors.

Oman has taken several fiscal and financial measures to mitigate economic crises. For instance, the country has reduced spending and plans to impose a 5% value-added tax in 2021. The country will also implement development projects to redirect resources towards national priorities.⁴²⁴ Oman is also set to borrow 73% of its budget deficit and use its reserves to cover the balance.⁴²⁵ This year Oman will be removing subsidies for water and electricity valued at \$1.95 B in the 2020 budget.⁴²⁶

⁴¹⁶ Winder, "Oman's Regional Role in a Time of Challenge and Change."

⁴¹⁷ Kilani, Abdulaziz, "Oman's Sultan Haitham Implements Sweeping Government Changes," Inside Arabia, Sep 9, 2020, <https://insidearabia.com/omans-sultan-haitham-implements-sweeping-government-changes/> (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

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⁴²¹ Al-Kiyumi, Basmah. "The Omani Constitution: A Critical Analysis," PhD diss., The University of Manchester (United Kingdom), 2012.

⁴²² Reema Al Othman and Abeer A. Omar, "Oman to start removing utility subsidies from January 2021," Bloomberg, Jan 1, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-01/oman-plans-2021-borrowing-as-low-oil-price-virus-batter-economy> (accessed Jan 19, 2021).

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Al Othman and Omar, "Oman to start removing utility subsidies from January 2021."

Society

Oman has a total population of around 5 M residents, and projects 8.2% growth in 2021.⁴²⁷ The most populous age group is that between 15 and 64 years, while below 15 is second, and above 65 is third. The country's largest religion is Islam, which makes up approximately 86% of the population, followed by Christianity, at only 6.5%. Other religions include Hinduism and Buddhism.⁴²⁸

Omani society faces current issues such as freedom of expression, human rights, and immigration. For instance, under Sultan Haitham, freedom of expression is dampened by security agencies targeting citizens and activists. Various journalists, bloggers, and activists such as Awadh al-Sawafi, journalist Adel al-Kasbi, and Shura Council member Salem al-Awfi, have been arrested and prosecuted.⁴²⁹ Further, there remains a degree of gender inequality, disadvantaging women in areas such as divorce, inheritance, marriage, domestic responsibility, nationality, and public office representation. For instance, no woman in Oman's history has ever been appointed as a judge.⁴³⁰

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Assist Oman to diversify its economic system through potential military to military development projects.
- Continue growing US-Oman relationships in line with the Sultanate's impartial overseas policy.
- Monitor undue Chinese influence at key ports.

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2.18 PAKISTAN

Head of State	President Arif Alvi	Population	216,565,000
Head of Government	Prime Minister Imran Khan		
Minister of Defense	Pervez Khan Khattak	Religion	Muslim 96% – Sunni 85-90% – Shia 10-15% Hindu, Christian, and Other 4%
Chief of Defense	Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa		
Type of Government	Federal Parliamentary Republic	Ethnicity	Punjabi 45% Pashtun (Pathan) 15% Sindhi 14% Saraiki 8% Muhajir 8% Balochi 4% Other 6%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$276 B (+1%)	Military Personnel	Active 654,000 Reserve 550,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Islam is a cohesive force in the country b. Pakistan’s strategic location in the region facilitates regional trade c. Armed Forces capable of maintaining stability in multi-ethnic Pakistan d. Influence on Afghanistan Peace Process in bringing Taliban to negotiation table e. Security and economic cooperation with Western and International communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The long India-Pakistan confrontation over Kashmir and regional instability b. Financial difficulties in government c. Widespread Corruption d. The stigma of sponsoring terrorist groups e. Underdeveloped public health care system against highly contagious disease f. Human right, freedom of speech/religion 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Opportunities provided by grand economic projects, like CPEC and the TAPI pipeline b. Restoring the relationship with the US for further trade c. Playing major role as mediator or facilitator for regional peace and stability d. Strong potential in abundant and young workforce. e. Political and Economic reform to attract foreign investment, like getting out of FATF (Financial Action Task Force) gray list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Escalating conflict with India over Kashmir issue b. Increasing dependency on China in economic domain c. Worsening financial situation and economic challenges due to nation’s debt and trade deficit d. Malign activities by domestic terrorist elements, although sporadic and specific areas e. Negative impacts on prolonged strained economy due to COVID-19 pandemic f. Favoritism toward China’s policies 	

This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.

Executive Summary

Pakistan is applying significant effort to improve both its internal and external situation. The country has recently achieved meaningful progress in security, economic, and foreign policy. Pakistan's extreme poverty rate is declining, and its domestic terrorism problem is improving despite sporadic attacks in certain regions. In particular, the country has significantly improved its estranged relations with the US by facilitating the ongoing Afghanistan Peace Process. Despite such improvement, Pakistan must continue working to address the following remaining challenges: longstanding and growing tension with India over Kashmir, heightened competition between the US and China, a stagnating economy exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability from broad and long-rooted corruption, and domestic terrorism.

Foreign Policy/Security

Pakistan's domestic and international security posture hinges on its dynamic relations with four key countries. India has been Pakistan's long-term rival since its inception in 1947. Pakistan's highest security priorities are defending against Indian threats and waging the Kashmir dispute. Pakistan is growing its relationship with China in multiple domains. While its relations with the US were recently strained, Pakistan is working to rebuild that relationship, particularly through Afghan peace negotiations. Further, Pakistan seeks to grow and improve its relations with Afghanistan to reduce conflict and instability flowing into Pakistan.

India continues to pose a dangerous challenge for Pakistan. Kashmir tensions have escalated with India's recent decision to revoke its Constitution Article 370 and implement a new Citizenship Amendment Act which will grant Indian citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim religious minorities.⁴³¹ The two countries appear unable to resolve this conflict. Pakistan has requested that the US and UN mediate on the Kashmir issue, while India insists that Kashmir is just a bilateral issue.⁴³² Further, the US and China's escalating confrontation aggravates India-Pakistan conflicts. The US is growing its alliance with India to counter China, while China is expanding its economic and military cooperation with Pakistan.⁴³³

China has been a strong ally to Pakistan for decades. This relationship has recently strengthened through close economic cooperation via the China and Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and through military partnership, including the JF-17 fighter jet program and joint exercises.⁴³⁴ China's COVID-19 vaccine donation to Pakistan further builds the relationship during a critical time for Pakistan. China pledged to donate 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine, made by the Chinese firm SinoPharm,⁴³⁵ and Pakistan has already started vaccination with this vaccine.

⁴³¹ *BBC News*, "Citizenship Amendment Act: Court refuses to put controversial law on hold," Jan 22, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-51203104> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

⁴³² Goel, Vinu, "What is Article 370, and why does it matter in Kashmir," *The New York Times*, Aug 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/world/asia/india-pakistan-crisis.html> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

⁴³³ Ali, Syed Mohammad, "The US-China strategic rivalry and its implication for Pakistan," *STIMSON*, Dec 1, 2020, <https://www.stimson.org/2020/the-u-s-china-strategic-rivalry-and-its-implications-for-pakistan/> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

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Pakistan's relationship with the US is also critical, particularly due to Pakistan's stagnating economy. Relations between the two countries deteriorated when the US entered Pakistan to remove Osama Bin Laden, and when former President Trump accused Pakistan of providing safe haven for terrorists.⁴³⁶ However, their relations began to improve when PM Imran Khan visited the US to support the ongoing Afghanistan Peace Process.⁴³⁷ Pakistan needs critical financial and economic support from the US. Therefore, Pakistan will seek to help the new Biden Administration by mediating the Afghanistan peace deal, and likely remain neutral regarding US and China competition.

For decades, Afghanistan and Pakistan's relationship has been volatile. However, the two countries are moving toward reconciliation. For instance, both countries' foreign ministers vowed to boost local trade and economic activity by establishing trade markets along the border.⁴³⁸ Pakistan believes an unstable Afghanistan threatens Pakistan's security and stability. Such instability in Afghanistan provides an opportunity for India to engage and support anti-Pakistan elements in Pakistan's western neighbor. Thus, Pakistan continues work to strengthen Afghanistan ties though small border confrontations and Pashtun ethnic issues remain.

Internal Politics

Pakistan's government is plagued by political instability and corruption. Despite substantial national potential, these problems hamper efforts to increase Pakistan's prosperity. Since taking office in 2018, PM Imran Khan has worked to boost Pakistan's stagnating economy, reform governance, and improve the country's international reputation.⁴³⁹ However, political uncertainty and COVID-19 pandemic challenges have slowed his administration's progress.⁴⁴⁰ Domestic political stability is a key requirement to achieve sustainable development in any country, so Pakistan continues to struggle.

PM Imran Khan and the ruling Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) party face strong resistance from the opposition party. The PTI's opposition, the Pakistan Democracy Movement (PDM), has led mass protests and sit-ins to oust PM Khan and his government.⁴⁴¹ PDM leaders claim that the 2018 general election was rigged by Pakistan's military to place the PTI in power.⁴⁴² This Internal political unrest will likely continue as joint opposition leaders vow continuous protest until PM Imran Khan steps down. Experts doubt the opposition can dislodge the PM and ruling party, but they predict political party confrontation will likely remain heated through March's senate elections.⁴⁴³

Corruption significantly threatens Pakistan's future. Many perceive Pakistan's corruption is widespread and infects every level and department of government.⁴⁴⁴ The global corruption perception index recently ranked

⁴³⁶ Gul, Ayaz, "Khan slams Trump's denunciation of Pakistan's Anti-terror efforts," *Voice of America*, Nov 19, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/khan-slams-trumps-denunciation-pakistans-anti-terror-efforts> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

⁴³⁷ Shaiq Hussain and Jon Gerberg, "Imran Khan visited Trump's White House amid hopes for a reset in US-Pakistan ties," *The Washington Post*, Jul 20, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/imran-khan-visits-trumps-white-house-amid-hopes-for-a-reset-in-us-pakistan-ties/2019/07/19/fe1ac542-a93b-11e9-ac16-90dd7e5716bc_story.html (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

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⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴⁴³ *US News*, "Pakistan Senate election kicks off as ruling party looks for majority," Mar 3, 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-03-03/pakistan-senate-election-kicks-off-as-ruling-party-looks-for-majority> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

⁴⁴⁴ Rana, Shahbaz, "Pakistan sinks four notches on TI's corruption index," *The Express Tribune*, Jan 29, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2281797/pakistan-sinks-four-notches-on-tis-corruption-index> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

Pakistan 124th out of 180 nations, its worst ranking in six years. Alleged corruption at all tiers of the state suggests that the government has not improved on this issue despite making anti-corruption its top priority.⁴⁴⁵ During a public health emergency of COVID-19 pandemic, such corruption poses a critical threat to citizens' lives and livelihoods.⁴⁴⁶ When sworn in, PM Imran Khan pledged to eradicate corruption from the country. However, Pakistan has a long way to go and must increase its efforts, to achieve this goal.

Economy

Pakistan's government has been trying to rehabilitate its prolonged stagnating economy. Despite some chronic vulnerabilities and decades of struggle, Pakistan has substantial economic potential. Pakistan has the world's 5th largest population and is also one of the youngest. Thus, Pakistan has advantages over more developed countries which face harmful consequences of their aging populations.⁴⁴⁷ Pakistan's increasingly young labor force provides opportunity to develop if the country can improve education and economic opportunity. PM Imran Khan's administration prioritizes economic development by seeking to shift the national paradigm from a national security dominated focus to an economic security focus.⁴⁴⁸ Foreign investment is one of the most significant requirements needed to boost Pakistan's vulnerable economy. The China and Pakistan Economic Corridor, a \$60 B grand infrastructure development project, is the most substantial foreign investment in Pakistan, and considered a flagship project of China's strategic BRI.⁴⁴⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit Pakistan in two major ways. The government has struggled to manage the public health care issues while trying to improve Pakistan's already stagnant economy. Analysts estimate the COVID-19 pandemic caused Pakistan's real GDP growth to decline from 1.9% in FY 19 to -1.5% in FY 20. This is the first such decline in two decades.⁴⁵⁰ On the positive side, Pakistan's young population provides great economic potential. Younger workers are less vulnerable to COVID-19 effects as they have stronger immune systems. While COVID-19 has taken its toll on Pakistan's economy, the total number of COVID-19 cases and fatalities are much less than its neighbors Iran and India.⁴⁵¹ This phenomenon may help the Pakistani government's efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

China and the US provide critical foreign investment contributions toward Pakistan's economic rehabilitation. CPEC is the landmark project through which China plans to invest \$60 B to connect western China to Pakistan and beyond. Experts provide differing opinions on this grand economic project. Some assess CPEC as not just an economic cooperation plan to improve both countries' infrastructure and trade, but as part of China's grand strategic scheme to be the premier Great Power.⁴⁵² Regardless of such an assessment, CPEC is undoubtedly Pakistan's largest foreign investment.

The US is also a critical economic and security partner with Pakistan. For example, the USAID coordination with the Pakistani government and UN Industrial Development Organization launched private sector energy

⁴⁴⁵ *The Express Tribune*, "Pakistan sinks four notched on TI's corruption index," Jan 29, 2021,

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⁴⁴⁶ *Transparency International*, "2020 Corruption Perceptions Index reveals widespread corruption is weakening COVID-19 response, threatening global recovery," Jan 28, 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/press/2020-corruption-perceptions-index-reveals-widespread-corruption-is-weakening-covid-19-response-threatening-global-recovery> (accessed Jan 29, 2021).

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⁴⁴⁹ Wolf, Siegfried O., *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative*, Contemporary South Asian Studies, (Springer Nature Switzerland 2020).

⁴⁵⁰ The World Bank, Web site, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview> (accessed Feb 7, 2021).

⁴⁵¹ Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, Web site, <http://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (accessed Feb 7, 2021).

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

projects to increase private investment.⁴⁵³ These investments benefitted more than 47 M Pakistanis, reduced costs for energy distribution companies by over \$400 M, and leveraged more than \$2.3 B in private investments.⁴⁵⁴ Further, US influence with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) (an international watch dog for illegal money laundering and terrorist transactions) will likely support Pakistan to work its way off the FATF gray list and attract more foreign investment. Therefore, Pakistan will likely continue to restore its relationship with the US and maintain economic neutrality among China and the US.

Society

Pakistan society currently suffers from poor education and public health care. Improving these two vulnerabilities is critical to Pakistan successfully rebuilding its economy and mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic impacts. The primary problem with Pakistan's education system is the deep divide between social classes. Impoverished children receive significantly lower quality public education opportunities while wealthy children enjoy high quality education.⁴⁵⁵ World-wide, Pakistan has the second-highest number of out-of-school children with an estimated 22.8 M (44%) children ages of 5-16 not enrolled.⁴⁵⁶ Pakistan's 58% literacy rate is also lower than the neighboring countries of China 80%, India 74%, and Iran 85%.⁴⁵⁷ Female literacy is even worse than males because of Pakistan's patriarchal culture.⁴⁵⁸ An ineffective government education policy and lack of political will are the primary reasons for Pakistan's education problems. Government education funding is quite low, only 1.5 - 2.0% of Pakistan's total GDP.⁴⁵⁹ Further, the educational disparity among different classes became aggravated during the pandemic when many schools shifted to remote learning dependent on internet connectivity.⁴⁶⁰ Pakistan's younger population can provide the nation a great benefit if education improves. Currently, 64% of Pakistani's are younger than 30 and 29% of Pakistanis are between 15 - 27. Pakistan now has more younger people than ever and analysts expect their numbers to increase until at least 2050.⁴⁶¹ However, if such a significant number of young people don't receive proper education, they could actually impede rather than support national development.

Pakistan has the fifth largest population in the world. In large cities like Karachi and Lahore, population density is quite high. Therefore, providing an effective public healthcare system is essential to prevent and manage contagious diseases. Pakistan has lifted its nationwide COVID-19 lockdown and implemented a "smart lockdown" to restore its economy.⁴⁶² Despite some successes slowing the virus' spread, some key indicators show Pakistan still faces many challenges. With inadequate healthcare facilities, few government hospitals, poor infrastructure, and a lack of professional doctors and nurses, Pakistan's overall health status is below average.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ *The Nation*, "US, Pakistan to enhance partnership: Embassy," Feb 4, 2021, <https://nation.com.pk/04-Feb-2021/us-pakistan-to-enhance-partnership-embassy> (accessed Feb 7, 2021).

⁴⁵⁵ LaVopa, Jessica, "The fight against education inequality in Pakistan," *The Borgen Project*, Oct 20, 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/education-inequality-in-pakistan/> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

⁴⁵⁶ *The Nation*, "Literacy rate," Aug 4, 2020, <http://nation.com.pk/04-Aug-2020/literacy-rate> (accessed Feb 7, 2021).

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ *Pakistan Today*, "Major education problems of Pakistan," Apr 12, 2020, <https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/04/12/major-education-problems-pakistan/> (accessed Feb 7, 2021).

⁴⁶⁰ George, Susannah, "In the world's fifth most-populous country, distance learning is a single television channel," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pakistan-coronavirus-education-teleschool/2020/05/18/9ee159a8-8eee-11ea-9322-a29e75effc93_story.html (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

⁴⁶¹ UNDP, Web site, "Unleashing the potential of young Pakistan," <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/unleashing-potential-young-pakistan> (accessed Feb 7, 2021).

⁴⁶² Hashim, Asad, "Smart lockdown in Pakistan to target 500 Coronavirus hotspots," *Aljazeera*, Jun 23, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/23/smart-lockdown-in-pakistan-to-target-500-coronavirus-hotspots> (accessed Mar 31, 2021).

⁴⁶³ Bano, Sheher, "They deserve fair treatment," *International the News*, Feb 2, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/magazine/you/782420-they-deserve-fair-treatment> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

For instance, Pakistan's under-five mortality remains the highest among South Asian countries.⁴⁶⁴ To address COVID-19, Pakistan plans a mass vaccination campaign using a vaccine produced and donated by China.⁴⁶⁵ However, Pakistan's mass vaccination plan depends on its largely ineffective public healthcare system, which will particularly struggle to deliver the vaccine to rural areas where public healthcare is even worse than cities. For example, Pakistan still runs one of the largest Polio vaccination programs despite Polio being eradicated around the world.⁴⁶⁶ Polio vaccination teams across Pakistan were forced to stop work because of COVID-19 causing a polio resurgence. Polio has now been detected in samples taken from sewers in 74% of Pakistan in late 2020, up from 13% in early 2018.⁴⁶⁷

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Maintain cooperation with Pakistan's military to contribute to better national relations. For instance, International Military Education & Training programs and Military officer exchanges, such as the Pakistani officer in CSAG, provide strong relationship building opportunities.
- Remain impartial regarding India and Pakistan disputes. Any perception of favoritism may trigger conflict by the other side. Consider how partnering with India to compete with China may prompt Pakistan to partner more closely with China.⁴⁶⁸

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- b. *CSAG TC4 Model 2020*
- c. *CSAG Strategy Paper 2020-12: "China and Pakistan relations via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor"*
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⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Siddiqui, Naveed, "China donates Covid-19 vaccine for Pakistan's armed forces," *DAWN*, Feb 8, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1606192> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

⁴⁶⁶ Saeed Shah and Besty Mckay, "The World is still battling Polio. What that warning means for Covid-19," *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb 9, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-deals-blow-to-polio-eradication-effort-11612888012> (accessed Feb 11, 2021).

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ *CNBC*, "Biden says there will be extreme competition with China, but won't take Trump approach," Feb 7, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/07/bide-will-compete-with-china-but-wont-take-trump-approach.html> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

2.19 QATAR

Head of State Head of Government	Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz al-Thani	Population	2,479,995
Minister of Defense Chief of Defense	Khalid bin Mohammad al-Attiyah Lt. Gen. Ghanem bin Shaheen al-Ghanim	Religion	Muslim 68% Christian 14% Hindu 14% Buddhist 3% Other 1%
Type of Government	Hereditary Monarchy	Ethnicity	Qatari 12% Expatriates 88%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$147.79 B (-3.6%)	Military Personnel	Active 12,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	"Current Situation"	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Smooth transition of power to a younger generation is evidence of stable regime b. Third largest gas reserves in the world c. World leading exporter of liquefied natural gas d. Development of non-oil sector e. Hosting of World Cup 2022 that sustains infrastructure and construction activities f. Internationally recognized information outlet Al-Jazeera g. Increasing military capabilities and strong cooperation with US and Turkey h. Has ties with sensitive Islamic groups that are often part of the solution 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Small geographical area b. Small population of native Qataris and dependence on foreign labor c. Current narrow economic base due to high reliance on hydrocarbon resources d. More work that still needs to be done in building trust between Qatar and its neighbors in the Gulf and Egypt after the end of the Gulf crisis e. The need to bolster government revenue f. Alleged foreign labor right abuses (described by some as modern-day slavery)⁴⁶⁹ g. Qatar maintains amicable relationships with groups conventionally opposed to US interests
Opportunities	"Future Outlook"	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increase of ties with new partners and highlighting Qatar's independent and pragmatic foreign policy b. Self-sustainment and reforms, which benefits Qatar 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fear of straining relations with the Gulf States and being besieged again b. Regional instability could affect progress and hamper World Cup preparations

⁴⁶⁹ Pattison, Pete, "Revealed: Qatar's World Cup 'slaves,'" *The Guardian*, Sep 25, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/25/revealed-qatars-world-cup-slaves> (accessed Apr 20, 2021).

<p>c. Small geographic size allows quick response to domestic challenges</p> <p>d. Has ties with sensitive Islamic groups that make them part of the solution</p>	<p>c. The dual consequences of COVID-19 (oil prices, health crisis)</p> <p>d. The Kafala system continues to provoke international outrage⁴⁷⁰</p> <p>e. Maintained ties to a wide range of actors who are often at odds with each other⁴⁷¹</p>
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>	

Executive Summary

Qatar consistently pursues an inclusive and pragmatic foreign policy. Qatar has gambled on influential countries, navigating political currents and various actors to accomplish this objective. After a nearly three-and-a-half-year blockade, the Arab Gulf States finally agreed to end their Qatar blockade. This agreement significantly impacts the region, particularly considering Qatar’s initiative to open talks between Iran and Gulf States. Qatar is one of the wealthiest countries in the world measured by GDP per capita. Qatar's economy is highly dependent on oil and gas extraction which accounts for more than 50% of GDP, 85% of export earnings, and 70% of government revenues. Since proven oil and gas reserves are estimated to sustain current production levels only for the medium term, Qatar’s government is working to diversify the economy into a sustainable long-term income model. This includes petrochemical sector investments, business tourism sector promotion, and financial sector reforms.

Foreign Policy/Security

During the January 5, 2020 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in Saudi Arabia, Gulf leaders signed a "solidarity and stability" agreement to end a three-and-a-half-year-long blockade against Qatar.⁴⁷² The deal marks the end of a profoundly disruptive political rift that lasted longer than anyone anticipated in the region. Qatar endured debilitating economic pressures caused by the blockade and the blockading nations' repeated attempts to undermine its sovereignty and destabilize its monarchy. Qatar seized this opportunity and called on the Arab Gulf states to enter talks with Iran. Iran welcomed Qatar's invitation enter dialogue and mediate the negotiations. "As we have consistently emphasized, the solution to our challenges lies in cooperating to jointly form a 'strong region': peaceful, stable, prosperous, and free from global or regional hegemony," Iran’s Foreign Minister Zarif said on Twitter.⁴⁷³ Many analysts interpret such Gulf reconciliation as a threat to Iran. However, reconciliation between Qatar and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) reduces the likelihood of confrontation between Iran and the Gulf States. To avoid similar crises, the GCC requires more transparency regarding Member States’ mutual obligations to prevent situations like blockades. Member States should avoid unduly intervening in other Gulf countries' affairs and focus on greater GCC organization and coordination. Saudi Arabia should take the lead in bringing the GCC states together, as the UAE is still less optimistic about reaching agreement with Qatar on various foreign policy issues (including Iran). Saudi Arabia will need to convince all Member States to accept the majority view that confrontation with Iran is not to the benefit of the GCC.

⁴⁷⁰ The kafala, or sponsorship, system gives private citizens and companies in Qatar almost total control over migrant workers’ employment and immigration status.

⁴⁷¹ Katzman, Kenneth, “Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*, Aug 31, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44533.pdf> (accessed Feb 22, 2021).

⁴⁷² Barakat, S., “Qatar-GCC agreement: A victory for measured diplomacy,” *Aljazeera*, Jan 8, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/8/qatar-gcc-agreement-a-victory-for-measured-diplomacy> (accessed Feb 22, 2021).

⁴⁷³ *Aljazeera*, “Iran welcomes Qatar’s call to resume diplomacy with Gulf states,” Jan 20, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/20/iran-welcomes-qatars-call-to-resume-diplomacy-with-gulf-states> (accessed Feb 22, 2021).

Qatar is upgrading its air power through new platforms and strategic structural projects. By early 2023, Qatar is due to receive 36 F-15QA combat aircraft. The US Air Force stated the construction of support facilities at Al Udeid Air Base must be completed in time for the new aircrafts' 'bed down' in 2022.⁴⁷⁴ Over the next two years, approximately 35 buildings will be installed on a campus planned by the US engineering firm AECOM.⁴⁷⁵ These will support three F-15QA squadrons with personnel who will train at the 650-acre complex. Additionally, the UK Royal Air Force and Qatar Emiri Air Force (QEAF) Joint Typhoon Squadron has launched flight operations. The initiative will provide the necessary training and experience for the QEAF crew to operate the Typhoon aircraft. Under an agreement with BAE Systems, QEAF is expected to receive 24 Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jets. QEAF anticipates deliveries will commence in 2022. Qatar will receive, in addition to Typhoon fighters, nine Hawk trainer aircraft from BAE systems.

Qatar also steadfastly supports the Palestinian cause, though Palestinian-Qatari relations generally move only one direction. Doha's Palestinian territories' support primarily focuses on providing financial aid to the Gaza Strip, reportedly exceeding \$1 B between 2012 and 2018.⁴⁷⁶ Hamas has become increasingly reliant on Qatar to stave off the humanitarian crisis and ensure its continued stranglehold on Gaza's population.⁴⁷⁷ This aid has assured thousands of Palestinian families for whom the Qataris have provided homes, enabled a continued education system function, maintained steady fuel supply, and distributed charity to families in need. Furthermore, Qatar's special relationship in Palestine enables Qatar to propose solutions and mediate the Palestinian-Israeli dispute.

Internal Politics

Qatar's Emir has appointed a new prime minister, choosing a close associate to ensure the Emir's controls runs throughout the Gulf State's administration. The change comes as Qatar gears up to host the 2022 World Cup which Qatar hopes will boost its economy and international influence, but also coincides with surging US-Iran tensions. Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdelaziz Al Thani will take on the role of prime minister after predecessor Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani, also Qatar's interior minister, resigned. The 51-year-old premier Sheikh Khalid, who will also serve as interior minister, previously led the Emir's administrative office, Amiri Diwan. Key cabinet positions such as foreign, energy, finance, defense, and trade ministries remained unchanged. The move does not seem to signal any major shift in Qatar's direction.

Economy

The blockade clearly harmed Qatar's economy. Qatar was forced to inject \$43 B from its sovereign funds into banks to stabilize its currency during the financial crisis triggered in the first few months of the blockade. Prior to the blockade, the economy was under pressure due to the massive development project to prepare for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The COVID-19 recession and related oil crisis further exacerbated the economic harm. Leading Qatari companies also suffered due to these crises, with Qatar Airways incurring a \$5 B loss. Despite these considerable losses, Qatar still managed to use the blockade as an opportunity to develop greater self-sufficiency which was long overdue given its vulnerable resource-based economy. During the blockade, the country made strides towards becoming more resilient in many areas, from food security to international policy. The blockade also reinforced Qatari social cohesion and resilience. In response to the blockade, Qataris rallied around the Emir and repeatedly demonstrated their support for the ruling monarchy. Meanwhile, authorities used the blockade as an opportunity to resolve societal problems that have long been attracting criticism from

⁴⁷⁴ Brackens, B., "AFSAC awards \$524 million construction contract," *Air Force Life Cycle Management Center Public Affairs*, Jun 19, 2020, <https://www.edwards.af.mil/News/article/2221430/afsac-awards-524-million-construction-contract/> (accessed Feb 22, 2021).

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Jesner, Shlomo Roiter, "Qatar Is Using the Palestinians to Assert Its Regional Influence," *Foreign Policy*, Jan 26, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/26/qatar-is-using-the-palestinians-to-assert-its-regional-influence> (accessed Feb 22, 2021).

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

both Qataris and the international community. Qatar partnered with the International Labor Organization to reform the Kafala system and pursue alternative methods of regulating foreign residency in the country. Qatar is even holding discussions about introducing an elected shura to the government system.⁴⁷⁸

Qatar is forging ahead with expanding the world's largest liquefied natural gas project, and eyeing investment opportunities overseas, despite a global energy demand slump and price collapse. However, Qatar will delay bids for the North Field project because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "The North Field expansion project is moving full steam ahead, no delay there. The only issue is because of COVID-19 and suppliers and so on."⁴⁷⁹ The project will increase Qatar's production capacity from 77 M tons of LNG per year to 110 M by 2025,⁴⁸⁰ which could rise to 126 M tons two years later. The move should help Qatar regain the title of the world's top LNG producer from Australia, while the pandemic casts doubt on other projects. Qatar Petroleum reached agreements on three blocks in the Campeche offshore basin in Mexico and signed a deal with Total, the French energy company, to acquire a 45% participating interest in two Ivory Coast offshore blocks.⁴⁸¹ The North Field expansion project has attracted massive interest from the world's energy majors including Total, Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon Mobil, Conoco Phillips, and others that see it as an opportunity to invest in a fuel expected to remain more resilient than oil due to lower emissions. The global LNG market has overgrown in recent years, spurred by new projects in Australia and Russia and the US' emergence as a significant exporter. However, it is also fiercely competitive, and many planned projects will likely struggle to succeed without a quick international price recovery.

A week after Saudi Arabia reinstated diplomatic ties with Qatar, the Qatar Financial Centre announced it was seeking \$25 B of foreign direct investment by 2022. The financial center's ambitious FDI target, along with creating 10,000 new jobs and more than 1,000 companies by 2022, will boost the GCC detente. According to the World Bank, Qatar's economy is expected to grow 3% in 2021 and is the best among GCC countries. On Jan 28, Qatar's Commercial Bank COMB.QA Chief Executive Joseph Abraham said it plans to raise at least \$1B through bond issues in the coming months, as the bank looks to take advantage of favorable market conditions to boost its capital. The bank reported a 35.6% annual drop in net profit for 2020 but expects business conditions to improve this year amid the vaccine roll out and an energy price rebound. Qatar, a top exporter of liquefied natural gas, has based its 2021 budget on an average oil price of \$40 per barrel, a conservative assumption that means revenues could be higher than forecast. Based on expectations that Qatar's economy will grow by 2.8%-3%, loan growth will likely be about 4%-6% this year.⁴⁸²

Turkey's central bank tripled its currency swap agreement with Qatar, securing Turkey's much-needed financial support.⁴⁸³ Turkey currently burns through its reserves and faces a widening fiscal deficit and year-long recession. The agreement raised the original \$5 B limit on the countries' 2018 swap agreement to \$15 B. "The core objectives of the agreement are to facilitate bilateral trade in respective local currencies and to support the financial stability of the two countries," the bank said. Banks perform the swaps in Turkish lira and Qatari riyal. A

⁴⁷⁸ Barakat, S., "Qatar-GCC agreement: A victory for measured diplomacy," *Aljazeera*, Jan 8, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/8/qatar-gcc-agreement-a-victory-for-measured-diplomacy> (accessed Feb 22, 2021).

⁴⁷⁹ Andrew England and David Sheppard, "Qatar pushing ahead with LNG expansion despite slumping demand," *Financial Times*, May 25, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/e34141cb-c487-4a72-aba6-2de6c041574f> (accessed Apr 20, 2021).

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Lepic, Bojan, "Qatar Petroleum enters two Total blocks off Ivory Coast - Offshore Energy," *Offshore Energy*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.offshore-energy.biz/qatar-petroleum-enters-two-total-blocks-off-ivory-coast/> (accessed Mar 11, 2021).

⁴⁸² Barbucchia, Davide, "Qatar's Commercial Bank plans to raise at least \$1 bn via bond sales – CEO," *Reuters*, Jan 28, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/qatar-cb-outlook/qatars-commercial-bank-plans-to-raise-at-least-1-bln-via-bond-sales-ceo-idUSL1N2K30MT> (accessed Feb 22, 2021).

⁴⁸³ Ali Kucukgocmen and Orhan Coskun, "Qatar offers Turkey relief by tripling FX swap line to \$15 billion," *Reuters*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-qatar-swap/qatar-offers-turkey-relief-by-tripling-fx-swap-line-to-15-billion-idUSKBN22W147> (accessed Apr 20, 2021).

currency swap line is an agreement between two central banks to exchange currencies, improve liquidity conditions, and provide foreign currency funding to domestic banks during periods of market stress⁴⁸⁴. Funding markets have deteriorated in Turkey, with the lira hitting its lowest point ever just this month amid investor concerns over the country's finances. In recent months, the Turkish central bank has drawn down millions of dollars from its foreign currency reserves to buy the lira and prop it up against the dollar. The expanded swap line with Qatar, which in recent years has strengthened its political and economic relationship with Ankara, enables Turkey's central bank to provide its domestic banks with the foreign liquidity they need without using foreign reserves.

Society

Qatar is increasing its sport portfolio. Qatar recently celebrated National Sports Day, a paid vacation during which the Ministries and other government agencies, public bodies, and institutions all organize sporting events for employees and their families to raise awareness of the importance of sports' role in people's lives and societies. The government stated that the second Tuesday of every February will be National Sports Day. Further, the nation is expected to host the 2022 World Cup and has sent a proposal to the International Olympic Committee to join the "continuous dialogue" on the future hosting of the 2032 Games.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Continue to enhance Qatar's defensive capabilities.
- Leverage Qatar as an important party for rapprochement with Iran and some regional Islamic groups.
- Help establish a military Gulf coalition capable of facing any internal or external threats without the help of international or regional allies.
- Maintain presence at Al-Udeid Air Base.

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⁴⁸⁴ Salah, Aya, "Turkish central bank triples Qatar currency support deal to \$15 billion," *Amwal Al Ghad*, May 20, 2020, <https://en.amwalalghad.com/turkish-central-bank-triples-qatar-currency-support-deal-to-15-billion/> (accessed Mar 11, 2021).

2.20 SAUDI ARABIA

Head of State	King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, King	Population	34,813,871
Head of Government			
Minister of Defense	Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud	Religion	Muslim 100%
Chief of Defense	Air Chief Marshal Fayyadh al-Ruwaili		–Sunni 85-90% –Shia 15-10%
Type of Government	Unitary Islamic Absolute Monarchy	Ethnicity	Arab 90% Afro-Arab 10%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$735.48 B (-6.1%)	Military Personnel	Active 480,000 Reserve 0 Paramilitary 25,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Regional leader among GCC states b. Custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques c. Vast oil/gas and financial resources d. Economy opened for diversification (Vision 2030) e. Excellent infrastructure f. Strong security backing from the US 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Absolute monarchy without free and elected government b. Modern armed forces, but still deeply reliant on other nations for support c. KSA maintains an aggressive stance, displaying zero tolerance for criticism on internal matters
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expanded investment opportunities within the tourism industry b. Diversification of oil resources for domestic purposes c. An appreciable effort to ceasefire in Yemen, and to stop the humanitarian crisis 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Costly and numerous public sector employment, still high-energy subsidies b. Socio-political challenges such as the high level of corruption and nepotism c. Possible open conflict with Iran d. UAS/BM Houthis attacks from Yemen e. Economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and slow oil price recovery
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

The Biden administration`s recent announcements on its relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has increased tension between the two countries. The new US administrations wants to pressure the Kingdom

to respect human rights and end the conflict in Yemen. President Biden has ended US military support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and suspended pending arms sales to the country. These steps taken by the Biden administration could negatively impact CENTCOM's first and fourth priorities in the short term. We can expect the US to pressure KSA to join other regional partners and normalize relations with Israel by signing the Abraham accords. Despite the pressure from the US, KSA remains a reliable US ally in the region. After four years of unsuccessful negotiations, KSA and other GCC countries were finally able to end the boycott of Qatar and normalize relations again.

Regional tensions are slowly rising, as Iran works to enrich uranium to the level required to make a nuclear warhead. Because of the tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Kingdom has faced an almost constant threat of ballistic missiles and drone attacks. Many of these attacks are carried out by the Iranian backed Houthis rebels in Yemen. These attacks are directly tied to CENTCOM's third priority, and the Kingdom has struggled with a lack of sufficient equipment to counter these attacks. In January of 2021 the outgoing US administration designated the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, with the intent of applying more pressure to the group. The new US administration has looked at reversing the decision. KSA also struggles in the southern region of the country with a large number of migrants from Yemen.

The economic situation inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has only slightly improved since the last strategic estimate. KSA successfully launched a COVID-19 vaccination campaign and has ample doses to vaccinate the population. The Kingdom implemented protective measures designed to slow the spread of the virus, these had a second order effect of also slowing the country's economy. As the kingdom turns the corner, in regards to the virus, they are gradually easing these restrictions. KSA's voluntary production cuts have allowed for the stabilization of oil prices. The kingdom has spent a considerable amount of national resources to fight COVID-19 and low oil prices. Even with the expenditure of national resources, the country has not shifted its goals as laid out in the Vision 2030. In the Vision 2030 the Kingdom laid out a goal to eradicate corruption. The Kingdom made significant progress in 2020 by arresting many people including members of the highest sphere of society.

Foreign Policy/Security

The US and KSA have continued to have a strong strategic partnership based on their shared mutual interests. The major shared interests are; concerns of Iran's malign influence, arms sales, and oil-related economic interests. There are concerns inside the KSA regarding the new US administration. These concerns relate to five major issues in the region; Iran, War in Yemen, arms sales, Human Rights, and the Abraham Accords.

During the election, President Biden signaled his desire to end the Maximum Pressure Campaign and return to the JCPOA. These issues would signal a shift from the last US administration's Iranian policy and could cause a security risk for the Kingdom. This directly impacts CENTCOM's first priority. This is also linked to the new administration's announcement that they will review all arms sales to the kingdom.⁴⁸⁵ These regional shifts, taken by the new US administration, have also ended US support to the Saudi led coalition on the war in Yemen.

In addition to the security shifts, the US has begun to put pressure on KSA over human rights. During the election last fall candidate Biden mentioned his intent to reopen the Khashoggi case.⁴⁸⁶ In early 2021, the Biden administration released the classified US findings regarding the death of Khashoggi.

While many regional US allies have signed the Abraham Accords and taken steps towards normalized relations with Israel, KSA has not. Due to KSA's influence in the Muslim world, the Kingdom will likely feel

⁴⁸⁵ Jennifer Hansler and Kylie Atwood, "Biden administration pauses arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE," *CNN Politics*, Jan 27, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/27/politics/us-pauses-saudi-uae-arms-sales/index.html> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

⁴⁸⁶ Northam, Jackie, "How US-Saudi Arabia Relations Could Change Under Biden Administration," *Texas Public Radio*, Feb 1, 2021, <https://www.tpr.org/2021-02-01/how-u-s-saudi-arabia-relations-could-change-under-biden-administration> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

increased US pressure to sign. Saudi Arabia has indicated that it will only normalize relations with Israel when a two-state solution in Palestine is implemented. KSA appears to be moving toward normalization as it recently consented to Bahrain signing a normalization agreement.⁴⁸⁷

The Biden administration has announced it will stop its support of the Saudi-led coalition in war against the Houthis in Yemen. This decision may appear as a rift between the US and KSA at first glance, which remains unclear, however provides hope for Yemen to resolve their long-standing conflict. Only time will tell if the push towards a diplomatic approach will be effective in this complex conflict. The KSA has invested a large amount of resources in order to fight the Houthi rebels in Yemen. KSA has made a series of attempts to end the conflict diplomatically and each have failed. At this point KSA will welcome any solutions to the long-standing conflict.⁴⁸⁸

The Iranian backed Houthi attacks in Saudi Arabia continued throughout 2020 on a weekly basis. The most significant Houthi attacks in 2020 were the Riyadh drone attack, and the Aden attack aimed at the recently established Yemeni government. The results of these attacks were more than 25 casualties and over 100 wounded.⁴⁸⁹ These attacks were the driving force behind US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo designating Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.⁴⁹⁰ Under the new US administration, this status as a Foreign Terrorist Organization has been revoked.⁴⁹¹ Discussions are being held, inside Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in regards to purchasing the Israeli Iron Dome Air Defense system. This may be another step toward the Kingdom normalizing ties with Israel.⁴⁹²

Along the KSA-Yemen border, there is an ever-increasing influx of African migrants. Many of these are being pushed by the Houthis to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has built detention centers for refugees, although these are struggling with limited capacity and with COVID-19 spreading among the refugees. This situation could negatively influence the CENTCOM's sixth priority.⁴⁹³ Saudi Arabia, together with other GCC countries, signed the Al-Ula agreement on January 5, 2021. This lifted the boycott on Qatar. This will be followed by a series of bilateral negotiations that will adjust the details of the cooperation between the countries. However, some experts believe that the lift of the boycott on Qatar has not removed the core problem that preceded the Gulf Rift.⁴⁹⁴

Relations between China and Saudi Arabia remain strong on trade. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the two nations have strengthened their relations, including China's provision of assistance in the form of medical and protective equipment. At the time of writing China is still the largest recipient of Saudi oil.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁸⁷ Fitzgerald, Hugh, "Imam of Great Mosque in Mecca Hints at Normalization with Israel," *Jihad Watch*, Sep 12, 2020, <https://www.jihadwatch.org/2020/09/imam-of-great-mosque-in-mecca-hints-at-normalization-with-israel> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

⁴⁸⁸ Smith, Saphora, "Biden decision to stop support of Saudi-led war in Yemen greeted with cautious relief," *NBC News*, Feb 5, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/biden-decision-stop-support-saudi-led-war-yemen-greeted-cautious-n1256868> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

⁴⁸⁹ McKernan, Bethan, "Aden airport blasts kill 26 in attack 'directed at Yemen government,'" *The Guardian*, Dec 30, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/30/aden-airport-blasts-kill-16-in-attack-directed-at-yemen-government> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

⁴⁹⁰ Besheer, Margaret, "WFP Chief: US Terrorist Designation of Yemen's Houthis 'Catastrophic,'" *The Voice of America*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/usa/wfp-chief-us-terrorist-designation-yemens-houthis-catastrophic> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

⁴⁹¹ Miller, Zeke, "Biden revokes terrorist designation for Yemen's Houthis," *thestar.com*, Feb 5, 2021, <https://www.thestar.com/news/world/us/2021/02/05/biden-revokes-terrorist-designation-for-yemens-houthis.html?rf> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

⁴⁹² Egozi, Arie, "Saudi & UAE Consider IRON DOME Purchase," *European Security and Defence*, Feb 16, 2021 <https://euro-sd.com/2021/01/articles/exclusive/20458/saudi-uae-iron-dome/> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁴⁹³ Meseret, Elias, "Ethiopian migrants held in Saudi Arabia call it 'hellish,'" *AP News*, Oct 2, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-africa-ethiopia-yemen-saudi-arabia-97aaf3ea856ea5458fa1c6fd12b695fd> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

⁴⁹⁴ Jacobs, Anna L., "Resolution of Gulf Rift Not Likely to Mend Fault Lines in North Africa," *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, Jan 21, 2021, <https://agsiw.org/resolution-of-gulf-rift-not-likely-to-mend-fault-lines-in-north-africa/> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

⁴⁹⁵ Xinhua, "China-Saudi Arabia ties make new progress amid COVID-19 pandemic: FM," *XINHUANET*, Feb 10, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/01/c_139713780.htm (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

Relations between KSA and Russia are comparable to that of KSA and China. As partners within the OPEC+, KSA and Russia both work to stabilize the oil market. Russia is a potential supplier of military equipment and cooperation in the CENTCOM AOR.⁴⁹⁶

Internal Politics

In 2020, there appeared to be many speculations around the health of King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud. The only known concern was the King undergoing gall bladder surgery in June. After a short convalescence stay, he left the hospital in good shape.⁴⁹⁷ There are recent reports that the King received a COVID-19 vaccine without any side effects.⁴⁹⁸ All current reports note the health of King Salman is appropriate for his age.

The Kingdom pledged “zero tolerance” for corruption as part of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 in 2016. In August 2020 Commander of the Joint Forces Fahad bin Turki bin Abdulaziz, and Deputy Prince of Al-Jouf region Abdulaziz bin Fahad bin Turki bin Abdulaziz, were both relieved of their duties. Both were referred to investigators over acts of corruption linked to the Ministry of Defense. Several high-ranking officers, and civilian employees, at the Ministry of Defense have been referred to the judiciary for investigations over corruption as well.⁴⁹⁹

In November 2020, the Anti-Corruption Authority arrested 226 people involved in 158 criminal corruption cases including Ministry of Defense employees, government employees, many businessmen, and others.⁵⁰⁰ At the beginning of this year, the Anti-Corruption Authority confirmed the arrest of several high-ranking military officers and government officials. Officials included; retired major general from the Presidency of State Security, a former advisor at the Ministry of Interior, and a retired brigadier general from the Ministry of Interior.⁵⁰¹

Economy

The year 2020 was economically crucial for the kingdom due to two major events. The global COVID-19 pandemic plunged many countries around the world into a total lockdown, including Saudi Arabia. It was the low price of oil as a raw material, on which Saudi Arabia is still 80% dependent, that was the main driver of the country's economic challenge. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and low oil prices, KSA announced a number of domestic support initiatives aimed at the private sector. The total cost of these initiatives was approximately \$61 B. These initiatives include exemptions and the postponement of some government dues (\$18.6 B), a \$13.3 B package to support the banking and small and medium enterprises sectors, a \$13.3 B allocation to ensure that government dues to the private sector are paid promptly, and a wage subsidy of 60% of Saudi employees’ salaries in the private sector. The Central Bank of Saudi Arabia will allocate the \$13.3 B into the banking sector in order to enhance banking liquidity and enable banks to continue providing credit to the

⁴⁹⁶ Krimly, Reem, “Saudi FM Faisal bin Farhan arrives in Moscow for official visit,” *Al Arabiya News*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/01/14/Saudi-FM-Faisal-bin-Farhan-arrives-in-Moscow-for-official-visit> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

⁴⁹⁷ Gambell, Jon, “Saudi Arabia’s King Salman undergoes surgery to remove gallbladder,” *The Globe and Mail*, Jul 23, 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-saudi-arabias-king-salman-undergoes-surgery-to-remove-gallbladder/> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

⁴⁹⁸ Web Desk, “Saudi’s King Salman receives COVID-19 vaccine,” *The Week*, Jan 9, 2021, <https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2021/01/09/saudis-king-salman-receives-covid-19-vaccine.html> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

⁴⁹⁹ Haboush, Joseph, “Saudi Arabia removes military commander, regional deputy prince over corruption,” *Al Arabiya English*, Sep 1, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2020/09/01/Saudi-royal-decree-orders-probe-of-suspects-in-corruption-cases> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

⁵⁰⁰ Serrieh, Joanne, “Saudi Arabia arrests 226 people involved in 158 criminal corruption cases,” *Al Arabiya English*, Nov 27, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2020/11/27/Vision-2030-Saudi-Arabia-arrests-226-people-involved-in-158-criminal-corruption-cases-> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

⁵⁰¹ Naar, Ismaeel, “Saudi anti-corruption body arrests several officers, officials over graft cases,” *Al Arabiya English*, Jan 1, 2021, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/01/01/Saudi-anti-corruption-body-arrests-several-officers-officials-over-graft-cases> (accessed Feb 8, 2021).

private sector.⁵⁰² Subsequently, KSA increased the value added tax (VAT) from 5% to 15% in July and removed the living allowance for public employees to offset costs. These moves will likely have a negative effect on the Kingdom's GDP. This analysis is based on the GDP reductions after the introduction of VAT in 2018.⁵⁰³ Saudi Arabia has made great progress in stabilizing the oil market since the beginning of the pandemic with associated lack of demand for oil. The oil market is slowly, but firmly recovering and a growth trend is expected.

The Tourism sector has also been heavily affected by the pandemic. The cancelation of the Umrah and Hajj pilgrimage cost the kingdom approximately 8 M in foreign, and 10 M domestic revenue. Tourism is one of the main pillars of the Kingdom's Vision of 2030, with a projected goal of hosting 100 M tourists a year. Assuming there is a rapid end to the COVID-19 pandemic, this goal is still be achievable. During the Future Investment Initiative Summit, the Saudi Crown Prince, announced that his goal was to make Riyadh one of the largest city economies in the world.⁵⁰⁴

KSA has an economic advantage over other GCC countries. These advantages are due to their large investments made abroad. The investments made by KSA are 70% controlled by Public investment funds (PIF) and represent more than \$400 B. The income from these investments is available to the Kingdom at this difficult time. In May 2020, the PIF purchased minority stakes in major US companies including Boeing, Facebook, Disney, Citigroup and Bank of America. The PIF, that KSA is invested in, has disclosed that it owns \$830 M shares in BP.⁵⁰⁵ These investments were purchased at a time when the world's markets were at the lowest level in decades. This wise investment plan will generate KSA profits for the state treasury. KSA remains a central power in the region, and strives to maintain regional and international stability. At the same time, KSA supports economic growth, limits conflict, and provides humanitarian aid to the region.⁵⁰⁶

Society

The Saudi population and the expatriates working in the Kingdom had a difficult 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Generally, the Kingdom's population complied with the protective measures. This level of compliance resulted in no critical pandemic out-breaks, therefore no extra tension was placed on the health care system.

The introduction of a three-fold increase of VAT on goods has been accepted without largescale complaints by the population. Many believe this is because it was announced as a temporary measure. Overall, Saudi society has become more modernized and liberalized.⁵⁰⁷ The main driver of these modernizations are the reforms instituted by the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. These modernizations were announced in the Vision 2030.

Currently, a majority of the problems in the Kingdom are attributed to the youth population. Two-thirds of the population of Saudi Arabia are under the age of 30 and increased numbers have a university degree. This makes the labor cost expensive inside of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has proclaimed a reduction in unemployment

⁵⁰² KPMG, "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Jul 22, 2020, <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/saudi-arabia-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html> (accessed Jan 26, 2021).

⁵⁰³ KPMG, "Saudi Arabia: VAT rate to increase to 15% (COVID-19)," May 11, 2020, <https://home.kpmg/us/en/home/insights/2020/05/tnf-saudi-arabia-vat-rate-to-increase-to-15-percent-covid-19.html> (accessed Jan 27, 2021).

⁵⁰⁴ Amlot, Matthew, "Saudi Crown Prince reveals plan for Riyadh to be top 10 largest city economy in world," *Al Arabiya English*, Jan 30, 2021, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/01/28/Vision-2030-Saudi-Arabia-s-Riyadh-will-be-one-of-largest-city-economies-Crown-Prince> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

⁵⁰⁵ Kamel, Deena, "Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund invests billions of dollars in Boeing, Disney and Facebook shares," *The National*, May 16, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/business/saudi-arabia-s-public-investment-fund-invests-billions-of-dollars-in-boeing-disney-and-facebook-shares-1.1020204> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

⁵⁰⁶ Alsubaie, Saad, "Saudi Arabia: 90 Years of Resilience," *Al Arabiya News*, Sep 23, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2020/09/23/Saudi-Arabia-90-Years-of-Resilience> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

⁵⁰⁷ Yee, Vivian, "Saudi Society Is Changing. Just Take a Look at These Coffeehouses," *The New York Times*, Jan 15, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/15/world/middleeast/saudi-women-coffee-shops.html> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

of Saudi nationals as a key element in the Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia has been dealing with issues regarding Saudi nationalization scheme, implemented by its Ministry of Labor and Social Development since 1985.⁵⁰⁸

There is fear that normalization of relations with Israel could polarize Saudi society. Despite the liberation of society in the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia is still one of the most conservative Muslim countries in the region. The minor steps made in the Kingdom, may suggest that Saudi society is being prepared for Israeli normalization.⁵⁰⁹

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Encourage KSA to support a new US diplomatic approach towards ending war in Yemen.
- Encourage KSA to continue pursuing Vision 2030.
- Encourage KSA to increase governmental accountability and transparency to benefit foreign investments in the country.
- Encourage the Kingdom to monitor Chinese and Russian activities in the region.
- Support the Kingdom's effort to get relevant assets to be able to counter Low, Small, Slow targets or ballistic missiles attacks.

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⁵⁰⁸ Khan, Mohsin, "Working Toward Vision 2030: Key Employment Considerations in Saudi Arabia," *SHRM*, Apr 20, 2020, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/global-vision-2030-saudi-arabia.aspx> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

⁵⁰⁹ Fitzgerald, Hugh, "Imam of Great Mosque in Mecca Hints at Normalization with Israel," *Jihad Watch*, Sep 12, 2020, <https://www.jihadwatch.org/2020/09/imam-of-great-mosque-in-mecca-hints-at-normalization-with-israel> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

2.21 SYRIA

Head of State Head of Government	President Bashar al Assad	Population	18,010,976
Minister of Defense Chief of Defense	Gen. Ali Abdullah Ayyoub	Religion	Muslim 87% - Sunni 85% - Shia, Alawi, and Ismaili 15% Christian 9% Druze 3% Other 1%
Type of Government	The Semi-Presidential Republic with Multi-Party Representation – in reality, Authoritarian Regime	Ethnicity	Arab 90% Kurd, Syrian Turkmen, and Assyrian 10%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$2.7 B (estimated)	Military Personnel	Active 142,000 (est.)

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. External Sponsors’ determination to preserve Syrian integrity b. Regime’s resiliency despite internal and international opposition c. Relative military superiority disunites opposing formations d. Increasingly advantageous position in the political settlement with the opposition e. Strategic location, useful coastal infrastructure, and vital land routes important for regional trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Highly dependent on external sponsors guided by their interests b. A sizeable part of the territory is out of governmental control, and despite recent gains, full reintegration is not in sight c. Weak economy d. Essential state functions further deteriorated e. Infrastructure destroyed by years of war f. The UN still does not recognize Syrian reconstruction as a nationwide political process g. The lingering refugee crisis, IDP, and depopulation of some areas h. Difficulty of providing basic needs for the local population 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Slow, reluctant, but steady international acceptance, at least until next elections b. Potential to gain political legitimacy: in the absence of viable political alternatives, the current government will have time for a favorable transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. International community led by the US are putting substantial effort into undermining the government (sanctions) b. Growing Israeli retaliatory measures against perceived Iranian or Hezbollah attempts to gain a foothold 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Former foes politically motivated to participate in reconstruction (Turkey, GCC); a weak Syria is not in the interest of the neighboring countries d. Potential investors in reconstruction arrangements; (China) e. Strong position to leverage in negotiating with Kurdish resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Russian-Iranian divergence may weaken government coherence and its military power d. Allied non-state actors (Hezbollah) operating with a high level of autonomy e. Unsolved grievances of the population (lack of food and fuel) are fostering instability f. Dependent on Russia and China for a donation of COVID-19 vaccines g. The impact of sanctions and the “Caesar Act” h. An uncontrolled outbreak of COVID-19, especially amongst the frail population within IDP and refugee camps i. Continuing ISIS ideology and radicalization of IDP’s j. Israeli Defense Force’s strikes on territory to deter Iran and proxy forces could destroy military infrastructure k. Risk of territorial losses due to occupation from Turkey or the Kurds
<p>This SWOT model follows CSAG’s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.</p>	

Executive Summary

With international forces’ support, the Syrian regime has successfully retaken most of its territories. However, the government is not yet able to avoid recurring territorial loss nor re-establish pre-war control of its borders. Iran is using Syrian territory to open a new low-intensity front against Israel who has responded using similar tactics. Israel is directly targeting Syrian armed forces. In line with the CENTCOM Commander's priorities, Israeli forces are currently taking actions in support of the commander's first priority to deter Iran. Reduced Syrian armed forces will likely invite increased Israeli attacks on Iranian supply lines in eastern Syria. This reduction will also allow ISIS greater freedom of maneuver to operate. Increased ISIS movement directly counters the Commander's third priority to defeat ISIS. The Russian Air Force, in coordination with regime forces, is conducting high intensity operations against ISIS in Syria. Russian operational objectives are not openly known, but their Syria operations currently indirectly support the Commander's third priority to defeat ISIS. Kurdish forces’ operations continue which, with the US forces' help, are acting against ISIS cells in their zone of operations. However, Kurdish ability to fight ISIS is limited due to the need for Kurds to defend themselves against Turkish forces in Syria. Israeli operations against Iranian targets indirectly support the Commander's fourth priority to counter unmanned aerial systems (UAS). Attacks on Iranian proxy forces and logistics support chains largely prevent UAS introduction into Syria. Due to announced force reductions, current forces are at risk of being cut-off financially and will become vulnerable to radicalization and could become extremist groups. The extremely unfavorable economic situation does not leave many opportunities for discharged soldiers who, due to their training and experience, are ideal for conducting proxy operations for anyone willing to pay.

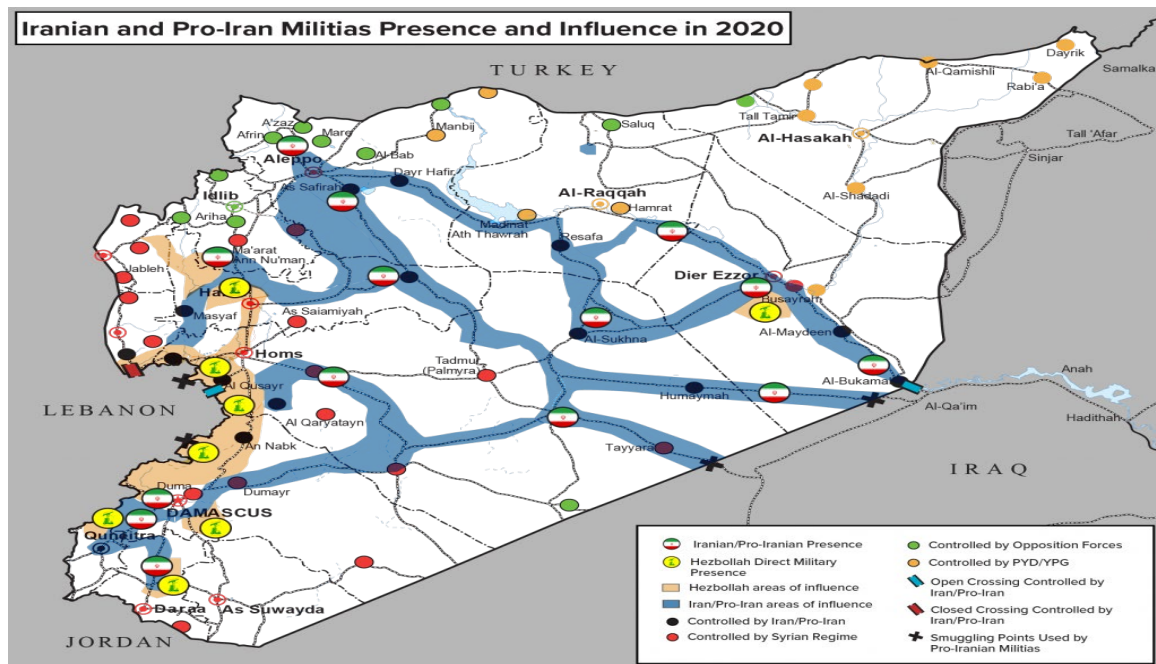
Foreign Policy/Security

During the civil war in Syria, the Syrian government’s main goal was regime survival. Other long-established plans, such as regaining the Golan Heights and increasing Syrian influence, were paused due to conflict. Near unanimous international condemnation of the Syrian government left the Assad regime exclusively relying on its

historical allies, Iran and Russia. Those allies' support proved so critical to the regime's survival that Syria's independence appears unrealistic. Today, Teheran's and Moscow's presence is palpable through state institutions and, consequently, they will significantly influence Syria's future. Syria's northern neighbor Turkey is another significant stakeholder in the Syrian security situation. Along with Russia and Iran, Turkey is part of the Astana agreement, but is the only active supporter of remaining regime opposition groups. Many Arab countries have now started to accept Assad and have initiated a tentative rapprochement with the regime.⁵¹⁰

Relations between Russia, Iran, and Turkey are crucial as they have significant influence over Syrian territories. The Syrian government understands that any further territorial gains depend upon Russian military and diplomatic support. Such reliance will cost Syria various concessions to Russia. Russia is monitoring current operations in northern Syria (Ain Issa region), where Turkey is conducting offensive actions against the Kurds. All participants seek Russian mediation⁵¹¹ to establish a truce.⁵¹² Russia will continue to advocate the Syrian government's interest, but not at the cost of disrupting relations with Turkey. The Syrian regime thus seems ready to gain concessions from Turkey at the Kurd's expense.⁵¹³

Iran is continuing its operations to establish strong presence and influence, as shown in the map below.⁵¹⁴



Iran uses proxy forces in Syria⁵¹⁵ to form a new front against Israel on Syria's southern border. Iranian actions are designed to provoke an Israeli reaction such as air operations targeting equipment and weapons convoys

⁵¹⁰ Mikhail, George, "Egypt mobilizes Gulf, Arab support to end Syrian crisis," *Al-Monitor*, Dec 09, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/egypt-jordan-saudi-arabia-uae-end-syria-war-turkey.html> (accessed Dec 15, 2020).

⁵¹¹ Reuters, Moscow, "Russia says it sent more officers to Syria where Turkish, Kurdish forces clashed," *Alarabiya News*, Dec 28, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2020/12/28/Russia-says-it-sent-more-officers-to-Syria-where-Turkish-Kurdish-forces-clashed> (accessed Dec 30, 2020).

⁵¹² Fox, Tessa, "Civilians flee Ain Issa, northeast Syria as clashes escalate," *Aljazeera*, Dec 27, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/27/civilians-flee-ain-issa-ne-syria-as-clashes-escalate> (accessed Dec 30, 2020).

⁵¹³ Sirwan, Dilan, "SDF commander slams Russian silence on Ain Issa attacks," *Rudaw*, Dec 22, 2020, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/22122020> (accessed Dec 25, 2020).

⁵¹⁴ Saban, Navvar, "Factbox: Iranian influence and presence in Syria," *Atlantic Council*, Nov 05, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/factbox-iranian-influence-and-presence-in-syria/> (accessed Dec 29, 2020).

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

enroute to those Iranian proxy forces that threaten Israeli territory. Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) recently struck Syrian military infrastructure. IDF considers these legitimate military targets as they are used to hit Israel in support of Iranian goals.⁵¹⁶ IDF air raids support the CENTCOM Commander's priorities to deter Iran and counter UAS. These conflict between Israel and Iran provoked a Russian reaction. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's stated, "[s]o, our dear Israeli colleagues, if you have facts that your state is facing threats from the Syrian territory report the facts urgently, and we will take every measure to neutralize the threat."⁵¹⁷ Israel seeks an opportunity to negotiate an end to the long-lasting Golan Heights dispute that could not be resolved under Syria's previous leadership because his authority was unquestioned.

Russian air forces conduct significant air operations against ISIS in Syria, mainly in the Aleppo-Raqqah-Hama triangle, in the Syrian Desert and near the border between Homs and Deir Ezzor. Searching to destroy ISIS cells, Palestinian al-Quds paramilitaries backed by Iran reportedly joined the Syrian troops.⁵¹⁸

The US remains diplomatically isolated, despite having hundreds of troops in the war-torn nation. For its part, the US has mostly stopped supporting anti-regime forces. As ISIS spread nationwide in Syria, former President Barack Obama shifted assistance to the mostly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). SDF spearheaded a US-led coalition-backed push to defeat the self-styled caliphate in a campaign inherited by former President Donald Trump. Trump took credit for the ISIS caliphate defeat, to which the pro-Syrian government axis also contributed. He assigned US forces to guard oil and gas resources in the country's northeast. Today, the SDF still control roughly a third of the divided country. As another US leader inherits the issue, President Joe Biden (who served as Obama's vice president during the initial intervention in Syria) faces lingering blowback from past Syria foreign policy decisions.⁵¹⁹ US forces actively support SDF in the fight against ISIS cells. Actions against ISIS leaders continue even though ISIS has lost territory in Syria. Attacks and other activities have intensified in recent months.⁵²⁰ These actions support the CENTCOM Commander's third priority, "maintaining D-ISIS campaign continuity in Syria and Iraq," especially because they are conducted alongside SDF forces. However, despite US forces efforts, some limited open-source information acknowledges US successes. Further, this lack of information could lead the international community to perceive that Russia is making the largest effort to fight ISIS in Syria.

Geneva talks on the new Syrian constitution ended without progress. UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen expressed disappointment after fruitless meetings between the Syrian government, opposition, and civil society groups aimed at resolving the issues of the war-torn country. Mr. Pedersen hinted the Syrian government delegation was to blame for the lack of progress. The UN envoy said the presented proposal was rejected by the government team and accepted by the opposition. The US and several Western allies accused Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad of deliberately stalling and delaying the constitution drafting process until after Syrian presidential elections to avoid a UN-supervised vote.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁶ Truzman, Joe, "Israel's Air Force attacks warehouses used to store and stage Iranian weapons' in Syria," *FDD's Long War Journal*, Jan 14, 2021, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/01/israels-air-force-attacks-warehouses-used-to-store-and-stage-iranian-weapons-in-syria.php> (accessed, Jan 15, 2021).

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⁵¹⁸ Greenlee, Kaylee, "Nearly 100 Russian Airstrikes Target ISIS Sleeper Cells IN 24-Hour Bombing Spree: Report," *Daily Caller*, Jan 28, 2021, <https://dailycaller.com/2021/01/28/russian-airstrikes-syrian-troops-isis/> (accessed Feb 01, 2021).

⁵¹⁹ O'Connor, Tom, "With US on the Sidelines, Russia, Iran and Turkey Seek Syria Solutions," *Newsweek*, Feb 01, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/us-sidelines-russia-iran-turkey-seek-syria-solution-1565488> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

⁵²⁰ Greenlee, Kaylee, "US-Backed Forces Raid ISIS Cells in Syria," *The Daily Signal*, Dec 28, 2020, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2020/12/28/us-backed-forces-raiding-isis-cells-in-syria/> (accessed, Jan 15, 2021).

⁵²¹ Associated Press, "Geneva talks on new Syrian constitution end without progress," *Washington's Top News*, Jan 29, 2021, <https://wtop.com/middle-east/2021/01/geneva-talks-on-new-syrian-constitution-end-without-progress/> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

Internal Politics

Many experts suggest that the Syrian government has won the war. However, after regaining large swaths of territories, its control and legitimacy outside Damascus remains questionable. To survive and continue, Syrian authorities are fixated on maintaining their patronage networks while failing to reestablish essential state institutions. The formal institutions, which should provide vital services to the population, have largely ceased under warlords and profiteers' practices. The lack of focus on protesters' core problems at the beginning of the civil war, coupled with the dire economic situation, will likely reignite violence by alienated communities in Daraa and Druze Suweida, where the 2011 revolution began.

The Syrian government believes it must strengthen its position on security reform and keep the judicial ministries and Baath party under full control. Contrary to what many believed, the 2019 summer reforms did not result from fierce competition between Iran and Russia to control the Syrian regime. The reform results were instead part of Bashar al-Assad's plans to curb external powers' influence. A complex system of security services is now centralized. The Syrian president managed to tighten his grip on power and block any external actors' attempts to change the Syrian government. Assad strives to balance Russian and Iranian influences as he is aware that both countries would not hesitate to replace him with an alternative.

The Syrian government's primary goal is to preserve its hold on power and be at the center of future peace talks. The regime made its objectives clear during UN talks in Geneva. These talks were intended to produce the Syrian constitution, precipitate a nationwide cease-fire, and lead to free and fair elections. Even when it was increasingly seen as the best and only chance to end the war and start reconstruction activities, the Syrian government delayed the process to reinforce its military positions and further weaken the opposition. The Kurds are also seeking to play a pivotal role in future talks. Still, if representatives from the strongest Kurdish party are not participating in discussions, there is little hope in addressing the more significant Kurdish population's core issues.

The Syrian regime's armed forces' reductions sent confusing messages, particularly due to the timing and current economic condition in Syria. On January 10, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad ordered the rollback of army mobilization to the pre-conflict levels maintained nine years ago.⁵²² Many experts suggest the primary reason is that the regime cannot afford the army's salary expenses.⁵²³ The downsizing is likely intended to encourage allies like Iran to resume their financial and military support for the regime's fight against ISIS. However, it seems that Iranian funding stopped due to economic conditions and sanctions imposed on the Iranian regime. The Syrian army may experience financial cutbacks plus a reduction in food, fuel, and other daily expenses. The Assad regime seeks to calm the anger of its Syrian supporters and allow soldiers and officers to visit their families.⁵²⁴ Finally, Russia may have influenced Syria's decision to reduce readiness because Russia wants to convey a message to the world that the war has ended, and to help entrench Assad's rule and preserve his regime. The decision will not have a noticeable effect on the Idlib fronts in northwestern Syria, for example, because it does not apply to the militias supported by Russia or Iran. The readiness of the regime's army will not be affected by the de-escalation. It can mobilize its forces in record time if there is a need to involve the forces in a battle against the FSA (Turkey's ally in Idlib) or the SDF.⁵²⁵

Syria's military drawdown conveys different messages to different parties. It conveys to Turkey that the regime will not launch a battle against the FSA. It conveys to the US that Syria will not launch attacks against the

⁵²² Khlebnikov, Alexey, "Evolution of the Syrian Military: Main Trends and Challenges," *Russian International Affairs Council*, Nov 19, 2018, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytcs-and-comments/analytcs/evolution-of-the-syrian-military-main-trends-and-challenges/> (accessed 15, Jan 2021).

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ al-Khateb, Khaled, "Why Assad is scaling down military readiness across Syria," *Al-Monitor*, Feb 01, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/syria-assad-reduce-military-readiness-iran-funding-elections.html> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

SDF in northeast Syria. Finally, it conveys to Israel the Assad regime is not disturbed by the airstrikes directed at Iranian forces in Syria. Through its messages to the three influential countries in Syrian affairs, the regime is seeking sympathy to mitigate the Caesar Act's effects⁵²⁶ and is preparing for the 2021 presidential elections. The Syrian regime never makes random decisions but plans them to obtain strategic objectives.^{527 528}

Syria must now look to rebuild its national infrastructure with major investments. This could allow Russia to receive some financial benefit from supporting Al-Assad, and even open the door for Chinese investment in Syria.⁵²⁹ The military readiness rollback generates a significant risk of radicalizing the now out of work forces. Due to Syria's complicated economic situation, and the military training that the deployed forces have completed, they represent an ideal base for extremist groups' recruitment. Thus, Iranian proxy forces could diversify their recruitment in Syria.⁵³⁰

Economy

The Syrian economy has completely collapsed during the civil war. On September 28, 2020, the Syrian government proposed the 2021 budget, capped at 8.5 T Syrian pounds (\$2.7 B). Due to the sharp depreciation of the Syrian pound and the accelerated economic slowdown over the past year, it is the smallest budget since 2011. Since 2010, calculations show that Syria's per capita budget has declined by 70%. To put this in perspective, the government will spend about three times less on its citizens in 2021 than it did in 2010, despite the fact there is only about half the number of people living in Syria. In addition to domestic debt, Syria borrowed massive amounts of money from foreign governments, mainly Iran.

Some analysts estimate Iran has lent Syria between \$30 to \$105 B throughout the war, the former is more than ten times Syria's 2021 budget. Much of Syria's debt to Iran is extended pursuant to a mysterious 'credit line.' Russia's support for the Syrian regime, though, is mostly political and military.

Damascus cannot begin to pay back its international creditors under the current circumstances. As for its domestically held debt extended by the private sector, Damascus will likely print more pounds to pay it off, further exacerbating the extreme inflation levels the currency experienced this year.⁵³¹

Since the Syrian war began, Lebanon has been the only outlet and main market for Syrian manufacturing plants, especially in Aleppo, the center of Syrian industry. Beirut's explosion has affected the Syrian economy, particularly in Aleppo. Syrian merchants' loss is estimated at \$1 B just for goods waiting to clear customs to ship to neighboring countries. Syrian economic experts propose the solution is to seek assistance from the ports of Latakia and Tartous if regional countries can waive Syrian sanctions.⁵³²

Pursuant to the Caesar Act, the US recently issued new sanctions against President Assad's wife and London-based family. The EU and US have already frozen Syrian state assets of hundreds of companies and individuals. Washington also banned exports to and investments in Syria, including oil and hydrocarbon transactions. The

⁵²⁶ Heydemann, Steven, "The Caesar Act and a pathway out of conflict in Syria," *Brookings*, Jun 19, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/06/19/the-caesar-act-and-a-pathway-out-of-conflict-in-syria/> (accessed May 10, 2021)

⁵²⁷ al-Khateb, Khaled, "Why Assad is scaling down military readiness across Syria," *Al-Monitor*, Feb 01, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/syria-assad-reduce-military-readiness-iran-funding-elections.html> (accessed Feb 02, 2021).

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Lyall, Nicholas, "China in Postwar Syria," *The Diplomat*, Mar 11, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/china-in-postwar-syria/> (accessed Jan 02, 2021).

⁵³⁰ Kajjo, Sirwan, "Iran Strengthens Military Presence in Eastern Syria," *VOA News*, Nov 23, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/iran-strengthens-military-presence-eastern-syria> (accessed Jan 07, 2021).

⁵³¹ William Christou and Karam Shaar, "2021 budget reveals the depth of Syria's economic woes," *Atlantic Council*, Dec 01, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/2021-budget-reveals-the-depth-of-syrias-economic-woes/> (accessed Dec 05, 2020).

⁵³² Kheir Ahmed, Mohamed, "Beirut explosion may suffocate Syrian economy-analysts," *North press agency*, Aug 16, 2020, <https://npasyria.com/en/45481/> (accessed Aug 20, 2020).

new Caesar Act sanctions cover more sectors and entail freezing assets of foreign actors dealing with entities from Russia and Iran.⁵³³ The sanctions do not directly target the Syrian currency. Still, fear of unknown Caesar Act effects led to a dramatic increase in the demand for the US dollar in Syria in May 2020. This had a catastrophic impact on the Syrian population. Between mid-May and mid-June, the Syrian pound lost 67% of its value. Sanctions target oil production in regime-controlled areas, in many ways similar to the sanctions on Iran, and have led to Syria's crippling shortages of fuel, gasoline, and gas since 2018. These shortages have proven to be opportunities for the enrichment of regime members. The Syrian people can see, "the sanctions are unlikely to affect the cohesiveness and loyalty of the regime's core structures. Instead of contributing to the hardship of millions of Syrians through sanctions, the US must find other means to exert pressure on the specific pillars that uphold the regime to compel Syria to begin an actual process of political transition. Otherwise, Syria is headed for a grim future."⁵³⁴ Assad and his insiders remain in power, taking the funds from population. Thus, keeping the current sanctions regime in place, including sanctions that harm the people, such as the energy-related sanctions, will merely be a form of collective punishment that US policymakers should reconsider.⁵³⁵

Society

Years of war, economic depression, and increasingly visible corruption drive unprecedented rebukes, even from within 'loyalist' communities. Across the country, state-subsidized bakeries face daunting lineups, queues at gas stations can extend for kilometers, and diesel for heat, cooking, and transportation is becoming virtually unaffordable. Moreover, wealthier people bypass wheat and fuel shortages through a thriving black-market economy, where subsidized commodities are often sold for higher prices, resulting in even less availability for ordinary Syrians.

While the regime does not care much about its people's well-being, it recognizes that the status quo is untenable. Given the depletion of state coffers, the government has used diversionary tactics to contain growing restlessness. Assad's failure to actively crackdown on its own clientele networks fuels resentment across Syrian society. Therefore, the regime will need to balance public resentment against the profiteers that mostly keep the regime afloat.

Against this backdrop of economic decline, the regime will encounter difficulties stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and the regime's cover-up. Initially embedded in hospitals, the secret police spearheaded efforts to artificially deflate numbers of positive cases. It monitored cases, interrogated patients, and coerced doctors into lying about the causes of death, all to project the illusion of control. Since then, Assad's predatory policies have systematically undermined the health system's pandemic response. The regime forced public sector employees and teachers to work, and nefariously diverted community-donated resources, such as oxygen cylinders, to the regime's favored networks. Though the affluent are better situated to survive, the Syrian state's broken health infrastructure means that no one is entirely immune. Damascus, Deir Ezzor, Sweida, Aleppo, Latakia, and Tartous all witnessed outbreaks throughout 2020. As journalist Lauren Wolfe notes, "There is no doubt that the COVID-19 cases and mortality rates for Syria are vastly undercounted and unreported."⁵³⁶ Syria has no organized independent data collection, and government propaganda tends to obscure the country's difficulties. For instance, The Syrian Ministry of Health reported 8,580 infections as of December 09, 2020, while the UN Security Council, relying on reports from inside Syria, counted at least 30,000 at the start of the month. Many say the true

⁵³³ MEE staff in Washington, "US sanctions London-based family of Assad's wife under Cesar Act," *Middle East Eye*, Dec 22, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-sanctions-family-syria-asma-assad-end-war> (accessed Dec 26, 2020).

⁵³⁴ Qussai Jukhadar and Elizabeth Tsurkov, "Cesar Act: The Syrian people are sapped while Assad grows stronger," *Atlantic Council*, Sep 02, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/caesar-act-the-syrian-people-are-sapped-while-assad-grows-stronger/> (accessed Jan 05, 2021).

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⁵³⁶ Wolfe, Lauren, "Coronavirus cases in Syria go uncounted amid shortages of critical supplies and medical personnel," *The New York Times*, Dec 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/19/world/covid-syria-surge-warning.html> (accessed Feb 08, 2021).

numbers are likely far greater.⁵³⁷ At the end of December last year, the Syrian health ministry reported over 10,000 cases of COVID-19 in regime-held areas, with public health indicators pointing to an incoming second wave. As the regime continues to prioritize the war and neglect the public health crisis, infection cases are likely to increase. Insufficient restrictions are in place to mitigate the spread of the virus, and the health care system's inadequacy and supply shortages will likely exacerbate the situation. While Damascus and Moscow discussed providing the Chinese and Russian-made⁵³⁸ COVID-19 vaccines to Syria, currently no immunization plan exists.⁵³⁹

The civil war has torn Syria apart and left more than half the population displaced. It has also crippled the centralized economy, increased unemployment, and raised inflation.⁵⁴⁰ Resettlement of IDPs and refugees will remain a crucial factor in any future peace talks. Even if political and security obstacles are removed, developing an effective social reconstruction and reconciliation strategy will be challenging. Regardless of external financing and public investments, the lack of a comprehensive approach will most likely re-trigger the conflict's causal factors. Finally, violent non-state actors, including Iranian proxies, Shiite militias, and a reinvigorated ISIS, could impede reconstruction and reconciliation.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Increase military footprint in Syria to protect oil fields and present commitment to the Kurds.
- Use CIMIC operations to rebuild infrastructure in northeastern Syria.
- STRATCOM: Use media to openly message that US forces are working with SDF to defeat ISIS.
- Provide vaccination support to control COVID-19 in Kurdish areas including by establishing vaccination posts.
- Establish a coordination center with Turkish forces to avoid accidental conflict.
- Establish a coordination center with Israeli and Russian air forces to manage air space for air operations.

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⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Asharq Al-Awsat, "Syria to Receive Russian, Chinese COVID-19 Vaccines in April," Jan 20, 2021, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2753616/syria-receive-russian-chinese-covid-19-vaccines-april> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).

⁵³⁹ Nizar Mohamed and Abdulrahman al-Masri, "The Assad regime faces a Rubik's Cube of challenges in 2021," *Atlantic Council*, Jan 11, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-assad-regime-faces-a-rubiks-cube-of-challenges-in-2021/> (accessed Jan 16, 2021).

⁵⁴⁰ El Deeb, Sarah, "Syria Temporarily Cuts Supplies of Fuel to Meet Shortages," *Associated Press*, Jan 10, 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-01-10/syria-temporarily-cuts-supplies-of-fuel-to-meet-shortages> (accessed Jan 15, 2021).

2.22 TAJIKISTAN

Head of State Head of Government	President Emomali Rahmon	Population	9,684,580
Minister of Defense Chief of Defense	Col Gen Sherali Mirzo Lt Gen Emomali Sobirzoda	Religion	Muslims 96% (Sunni 90.4% and Shia 5.6%) Eastern Orthodox 2.6% Others 1.4%
Type of Government	Unitary Dominant-Part Presidential Republic	Ethnicity	Tajiks 79.9% Uzbeks 15.3% Russians 1% Others 3.8%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$8.22 B (6%)	Military Personnel	Active 9,000 (paramilitary 7,500) Reserve 0

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Abundant natural resources (hydroelectric potential, metals, cotton) b. Agriculture c. Financial support from international donors and China (BRI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dependence on the Russian economy through remittances from expatriate workers b. Significant corruption based on governance of President Rahmon`s family c. Tightly controlled foreign exchange and trade market d. Challenging geography and inadequate infrastructure 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Participating in CASA-1000 project b. Development of transit abilities c. Untapped tourism potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proximity to Afghanistan, increased terrorist risk b. Social unrest c. Resurgence of domestic terrorism 	
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

Tajikistan's authoritarian system strengthened due to the re-election of President Emomali Rahmon. This has postponed the dynastic succession of power to his eldest son Rustam Emomali until a later date.

The economy remains in crisis. Despite the measures taken by the Tajik authorities, the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic will be significant to the economy. In particular, the inflow of remittances from Tajik workers in Russia has dropped significantly, regional trade has halted, and world commodity prices have fallen.

Foreign Policy/Security

Tajikistan's limited security capability provides an opportunity for Russia to inject support and further expand its military presence in the country. With a weak security apparatus, the former Soviet state is inherently dependent on external security providers, particularly Russia. Therefore, Dushanbe is constantly coordinating every action with Moscow when it comes to major international efforts involving Tajikistan. In this respect, Russia uses labor migrants as a political lever of influence. As a result, Tajikistan's dependence on Russia is linked to its inability to pursue a self-sufficient foreign policy.

China owns approximately 53% of Tajikistan's external debt. Dushanbe is at risk of falling into a debt trap set by Beijing. In order to mitigate risks and counterbalance China's growing influence, Tajikistan is seeking to diversify its list of international partners. With Russia and China expanding their presence in Central Asia, little attention has been paid to the South Asia region. The Tajik government is currently expanding cooperation with India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Dushanbe's multi-vector foreign policy is no longer considered as relevant, but nevertheless, Tajikistan's cooperation with its southern partners can still be called a priority.

As the security situation in Afghanistan stabilizes, Tajikistan will have more opportunities for partnerships and close relationships with South Asia. In the meantime, Tajikistan seeks to balance its foreign policy between China and Russia.⁵⁴¹

The one major issue remaining for Tajikistan in the foreign policy arena is their strained relationship with the fellow Persian-speaking country of Iran. Over the last few years, Dushanbe's actions have only increased tensions with Tehran. In September 2020, Tajik state television carried a sensationalist documentary that made accusations that Iran had funded militant activity in Tajikistan. On another occasion, the Tajik Supreme Court sentenced dozens of graduates of Iranian universities to lengthy prison terms.⁵⁴² There is speculation that Iran's arch-rival, Saudi Arabia, has embarked on a campaign to ally with Tajikistan to the detriment of the Islamic Republic.⁵⁴³

Internal Politics

The biggest event for Tajikistan's internal politics in 2020 was presidential elections in October. There was no surprise at the outcome of Tajik's election, President Emomali Rahmon officially won 90.92% of the vote. By winning this election President Rahmon has secured his fifth consecutive presidential term for another seven years ruling the poorest Central Asian state.

No genuine opposition figures were present on the ballot. Four other candidates — members of the docile lower House of Parliament — were officially running in the election. The competitors, however, have refrained from criticizing their president. With the official title of "Founder of Peace and National Unity — Leader of the Nation" — the election was considered almost a guaranteed victory for Rahmon in his presidential poll.⁵⁴⁴

Speculations that Rahmon might stand aside for his 33-year-old son Rustam Emomali proved unfounded. Some analysts concluded the elites regard him as too young. According to the exiled opposition leader, Muhiddin

⁵⁴¹ Arbobova, Madina, "Tajikistan and South Asia: How does the multi-vector foreign policy work?" *Institute for war & peace reporting*, Nov 11, 2020, <https://cabar.asia/en/tajikistan-and-south-asia-how-does-the-multi-vector-foreign-policy-work> (accessed Mar 3, 2021).

⁵⁴² *Eurasianet* "Tajikistan revives on-off dispute with Iran," Sep 30, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-revives-on-off-dispute-with-iran> (accessed Mar 5, 2021).

⁵⁴³ *BNE IntelliNews*, "Outlook 2021 Tajikistan," Jan 11, 2021, <https://www.intellinews.com/outlook-2021-tajikistan-199335/> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

⁵⁴⁴ *DW*, "Emomali Rakhmon wins Tajikistan election with more than 90% of vote," Oct 12, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/emomali-rakhmon-wins-tajikistan-election-with-more-than-90-of-vote/a-55238879> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

Kabiri, the personal qualities of his son coupled with a difficult socio-economic situation has forced the Tajik authorities to postpone the transition of power.⁵⁴⁵

Moscow, is not particularly enamored of Rahmon, who is often seen as an inflexible and incompetent dictator.⁵⁴⁶ His tense relationship with a population badly in need of economic development. Russia is compelled to deal with him for fear of allowing radical elements the opportunity to destabilize country bordering Afghanistan. In mid-December, Tajikistan deployed additional troops along its southern border with Afghanistan after the Afghan authorities claimed a group of militants from Tajikistan played a major role in the Taliban's capture of an Afghan district.

After the election, Tajik authorities began increasing pressure on opposition leaders inside and outside of the country. In late November 2020, Tajik authorities summoned, interrogated, and threatened family members of exiled activist, Fatkhuddin Saidmukhidinov. Tajik authorities wanted to force Saidmukhidinov to cease his online criticism of the government.⁵⁴⁷

In September 2020, Tajikistan experienced a one-hour internet outage coinciding with an attempted address to the country by an exiled opposition leader, Muhiddin Kabiri, from the US. The address was streamed live online. The opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) led by Kabiri was banned in Tajikistan in 2015 and labelled a “terrorist organization.”

One month later, the deputy head of Tajikistan’s only legally permitted opposition party (Social Democratic Party) Mahmurod Odinayev was been detained by the police on hooliganism charges. This came weeks after Odinayev called for demonstrations to complain about the soaring price for basic food. President Emomali Rahmon’s regime wields absolute power and does not allow dissent, or even mild criticism by the likes of the SDPT – a party with a minuscule following and negligible resources.⁵⁴⁸

Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significantly adverse impact on Tajikistan's economy and created major social and health sector pressures. Restrictions on labor mobility and economic activity at home and abroad have resulted in lower migrant remittances, weaker consumer demand, and reduced investments.

Although exports have enjoyed a record global demand for gold, the domestic market collapsed, suggesting a more severe impact of COVID-19 on domestic jobs and incomes. A growing share of the population have reported reducing their food consumption and the inability of previously returned migrants to travel abroad led to a significant increase in the unemployment rate.

The economy is expected to gradually bounce back once there is a restoration of remittances revenue flows and a growth of international trade. After the economy stabilizes, inflationary and exchange rate pressures are projected to decrease as key commodity prices subside and foreign exchange inflows edge up.

India, Pakistan and Afghanistan represent a huge market for Tajikistan. The demand from these three countries includes goods ranging from low and mid-range products to expensive luxury goods. Tajikistan can potentially access the customer bases of these countries to develop its domestic tourism sector.

⁵⁴⁵ *Eurasianet*, “Tajikistan: Would-be future president’s interview underwhelms,” Feb 11, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-would-be-future-presidents-interview-underwhelms> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

⁵⁴⁶ *BNE IntelliNews*, “Outlook 2021 Tajikistan,” Jan 11, 2021, <https://www.intellinews.com/outlook-2021-tajikistan-199335/> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

⁵⁴⁷ *Human Rights Watch*, “Tajikistan: Dissident’s Family Interrogated, Threatened,” Dec 4, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/04/tajikistan-dissidents-family-interrogated-threatened> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

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On the downside, intensification of the pandemic and prolonged restrictive measures will diminish growth potential. High dependence on commodity exports and remittances magnifies exposure to external risks. Domestic risks primarily reflect limited fiscal space, inefficient state-owned-enterprises, and challenges in the business environment.⁵⁴⁹

According to an Asian Development Bank (ADB) report, lower public investment, reduced remittances, and weak foreign direct investments are projected to slow down Tajikistan's economic growth in 2021. ADB anticipates 6% economic growth with an 8.5% inflation rates in 2021.⁵⁵⁰

Society

Tajikistan's human rights record continues to deteriorate amid an ongoing crackdown on freedom of expression and the political opposition, and the targeting of independent lawyers, journalists, and family members of opposition activists abroad. Authorities use of torture to obtain confessions remains a serious concern. The government activities include the following: block various websites reporting information critical of the government, target human rights groups, restrict media freedoms, and enforce restrictions on religious practice. Violence against women also continues to be a serious problem, despite the adoption of a law on domestic violence in 2013 that provided some human rights protections.⁵⁵¹

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Gradually increase CENTCOM military engagements and regional cooperation.
- Continue to engage the Chiefs of Defense (CHOD) of the Central Asian States through regular consultations with the CENTCOM commander.
- Focus on developing border troops and the national guard as the most combat-ready and technically equipped troops.

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⁵⁵¹ *Human Rights Watch*, Web site, "Tajikistan," <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/tajikistan> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

2.23 TURKMENISTAN

Head of State	President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov	Population	6,081,344
Head of Government			
Minister of Defense	Maj Gen Begench Gundogdyev	Religion	Muslims 89%
Chief of Defense	Lt Col Akmurad Anamedov		Eastern Orthodox 10%
			Others 1%
Type of Government	Presidential Republic	Ethnicity	Turkmen 85%
			Uzbeks 5%
			Russians 4%
			Others 6%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	53.27 B (4,6%)	Military Personnel	Active 22,000 (paramilitary 5,000) Reserve 0

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fourth largest natural gas reserves in the world (9.3%) b. The status of Permanent Neutrality c. Relatively small population d. Moderate level of debt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Weak governance (corruption, authoritarianism, repression, politicization of the judiciary, opacity of the statistics system) b. Energy market’s demand reduced due to COVID c. High economic dependence on the hydrocarbon sector (China imports almost all of these fuels) 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. TAPI pipeline b. Trans-Caspian pipeline c. Diversification of natural gas-based economy d. Foreign investment in economy e. Growing role of private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Instability in Afghanistan alongside limited military resources b. Social unrest c. Economic crisis due to reduced hydrocarbon income 	
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, falling gas prices, and increasing violence in neighboring Afghanistan are international threats that are forcing the Turkmen government to rethink its policy of neutrality. Resolving these problems and the country's unsettled economy will require stability, which the Turkmen authorities are beginning to realize is easier to achieve with international assistance.

In the meantime, the current Turkmen President has started the process of transferring power to his son Serdar. Serdar was given a major promotion in the form of three new jobs: Deputy Prime Minister, member of the State

Security Council, and Chair of the Supreme Control Chamber. Experts predict that this year he may be appointed as Speaker of the Senate.

Foreign Policy/Security

2020 proved extremely difficult for Turkmenistan. They were inflicted with a multitude of problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic, plummeting natural gas prices, and increasing concerns about the rising violence in neighboring Afghanistan. Complicating the Turkmen government's response to these crises is the country's relative isolation imposed by its policy of strict neutrality.⁵⁵² In November 2020, Turkmenistan celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of internationally recognized permanent neutrality.

Nevertheless, Ashgabat officially started to shift its foreign policy towards Russia. The first and most visible sign of Turkmenistan's shifting neutrality policy was its decision to participate in Russia's Kavkaz 2020 multinational military exercise. The exercise was held in the Russian Astrakhan region on September 15-26. Turkmen participation was limited to the contribution of a Caspian naval component. Second, Turkmenistan is set to modernize its marine fleet with Russian support. As part of an online meeting that took place in August, Russia's United Shipbuilding Corporation and Turkmenistan-based Balkan Shipyard agreed on industrial cooperation between the shipbuilders in both countries. The same month, representatives of Turkmen Sea and River Lines and St. Petersburg's Committee for External Relations tentatively agreed on the construction of ships for Turkmenistan in St. Petersburg.⁵⁵³ Third, after a 17-year wait, Ashgabat and Moscow signed a joint security cooperation agreement. Lawmakers in Turkmenistan and Russia ratified the agreement in October.⁵⁵⁴

Along with Turkmenistan's move towards Russia, Ashgabat made steps to strengthen its cooperation with neighboring countries. In January 2021, Turkmenistan signed a landmark agreement with Azerbaijan to jointly develop a long-disputed Caspian gas field. This development could pave the way for the transit of Turkmenistan's massive gas reserves to Europe.⁵⁵⁵ The agreement is expected to support progress for ongoing construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline. In October 2020, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan signed the ratification documents pertaining to the Strategic Partnership Agreement. The agreement aims to expand political, economic, and security relations between Kabul and Ashgabat.

Internal Politics

Despite the government's refusal to acknowledge that COVID-19 is present in the country, reports of cases were circulated in social media and by civil society organizations. The country notoriously maintains that it is entirely virus-free – and until recently, banned the word 'coronavirus' altogether and arrested people found wearing masks. Meanwhile, hospitals in the country have been overwhelmed with "pneumonia" victims.⁵⁵⁶

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Turkmen government pursued an initial policy of denial, followed by a growing awareness of the need for international assistance. The US government through USAID has committed

⁵⁵² Daly, John, "Amid Rising Crises, Turkmenistan Strengthens its Military and International Outreach," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute*, Nov 19, 2020, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13648-amid-rising-crises-turkmenistan-strengthens-its-military-and-international-outreach.html> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

⁵⁵³ Batyrov, Azamat, "Turkmenistan Set To Modernize Its Marine Fleet With Russian Support," Aug 15, 2020, *Caspian News*, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/turkmenistan-set-to-modernize-its-marine-fleet-with-russian-support-2020-8-15-0/> (accessed Mar 3, 2021).

⁵⁵⁴ *Eurasianet*, "Turkmenistan: Feeling insecure," Oct 27, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-feeling-insecure> (accessed Mar 3, 2021).

⁵⁵⁵ O'Byrne, David, "Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan agreement advances Caspian gas cooperation," *Eurasianet*, Jan 22, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-and-turkmenistan-agreement-advances-caspian-gas-cooperation> (accessed Mar 3, 2021).

⁵⁵⁶ Treloar, Iain, "'Covid-free' Turkmenistan to vaccinate riders against virus it won't acknowledge," *Cyclingtips*, Jan 25, 2021, <https://cyclingtips.com/2021/01/covid-free-turkmenistan-to-vaccinate-riders-against-virus-it-wont-acknowledge/> (accessed Mar 3, 2021).

an additional \$500,000 to support Turkmenistan's COVID-19 prevention efforts. This brought the total US foreign aid for Turkmenistan to \$1.42 M.⁵⁵⁷

According to the Russian Direct Investment Fund statement on January 18th, 2021, Turkmenistan has registered Russia's Sputnik-V vaccine against COVID-19, even though the country claims to have no cases of the COVID-19. Turkmenistan became the first country in Central Asia that officially approved the use of the Sputnik-V vaccine in its territory.

In November, Berdymukhamedov participated in an opening ceremony for a giant golden statue of an Alabay shepherd dog, the favorite Turkmen dog breed of the president. According to experts, despite the grandeur of the statue, much of Turkmenistan's population is impoverished.

Meanwhile the President has some officials secretly working on constitutional amendments. Critics say the 63-year-old plans to use the changes to secure himself a lifetime presidency and eventually allow his son Serdar to succeed him. The 39-year-old, who is widely tipped as a likely successor to his father, was given a major promotion in the form of three new jobs in February. He will serve as deputy prime minister, occupy a seat on the State Security Council and, the most important position, chair the Supreme Control Chamber, a body which oversees government spending. Serdar Berdymukhamedov will relinquish his post as Industry Minister.

Berdymukhamedov senior may wish to leave office before dying and it only makes sense in an unaccountable dictatorship that he hands over the reins to somebody he trusts absolutely. For this reason, there has been some speculation that Berdymukhamedov's son might be placed as speaker of the Senate this year.⁵⁵⁸

Government inaction in response to the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically exacerbated Turkmenistan's pre-existing food crisis. Turkmenistan's government denies the existence of poverty in the country and has failed to provide relief to economically vulnerable groups even as unemployment has skyrocketed during the pandemic.

Economy

The biggest issue affecting Turkmenistan's domestic policy is plummeting natural gas prices, as 91% of its income is derived from exports. In 2021, growth in price and volume are expected to be driven by the recovery in gas exports, which began in the second half of 2020 due to a rebound in Chinese purchases. The prices had plunged (down 44% year-on-year in January-July 2020) because of the combined effect of lower prices and Chinese demand. Gas exports to Russia will continue under the contract signed mid-2019 with Gazprom, although volumes are expected to be significantly lower than three years ago when trade was suspended (5.5 B cubic meters (BCM) per year in 2019-2024). Export growth, particularly to China, remains constrained because delivery of the fourth branch ("line D") of the Central Asia-China gas pipeline, which is expected to double export volumes (to 65 BCM per year), has been delayed until 2022.⁵⁵⁹

Turkmenistan's infrastructure plans, designed to reduce the country's isolation, remain expensive and problematic. These include building the Afghan section of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway, its new \$1.5 B Caspian Turkmenbashi Sea Port, and the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline. Compounding the problems of these projects are the following issues: neither pipeline has

⁵⁵⁷ USAID, "The U.S. supports Turkmenistan's response to covid-19 prevention efforts by providing additional funding for infection prevention and risk communication," Jun 1, 2020, <https://www.usaid.gov/turkmenistan/press-releases/jun-1-2020-us-supports-turkmenistan-covid-19-prevention-efforts#:~:text=June%201%2C%202020%2C%20Ashgabat%2C,available%20to%20all%20partners%20in> (accessed Mar 3, 2021).

⁵⁵⁸ *Eurasianet*, "Turkmenistan: Herald the son's rise," Feb 16, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-herald-the-sons-rise> (accessed Mar 3, 2021).

⁵⁵⁹ *Coface*, "Turkmenistan: major macro-economic indicators," Feb 2021, <https://www.coface.com/Economic-Studies-and-Country-Risks/Turkmenistan> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

attracted significant foreign investment, the railroad construction is stalled, and the port doesn't have any maritime traffic.

Turkmenistan's domestic food production only meets around 40% of its national demand. About 80% of imports come from Iran. In 2020, the supply of subsidized food began to falter to an even greater degree, in part due to the border closure with Iran. At the same time, the global economic downturn threw many Turkmen out of work and slashed the foreign remittance incomes upon which many Turkmen depend. COVID-19 travel restrictions also prevented people traveling abroad for work.⁵⁶⁰

Turkmenistan was granted observer status by the World Trade Organization in July, making it the last ex-Soviet country to establish formal ties with the trade body. Turkmenistan and Afghanistan are reportedly making progress in constructing a railway that would connect Turkmenistan and Tajikistan via Afghanistan. A \$21 M contract has been signed to build the 30 km-long Akina-Andkhoy link. The Asian Development Bank is anticipating Turkmen growth of 5.8% in 2021 after 3.2% in 2020 and 6.3% in 2019. The IMF reported growth 1.8% in 2020 and expects 4.6% in 2021.⁵⁶¹

Society

In November 2020, Turkmen authorities failed to assist its citizens in the eastern regions whose homes were destroyed by windstorms and torrential rains. The situation prompted rare street protests within the tightly controlled country.⁵⁶²

Amid broader relations with Russia, Turkmenistan closed Russian speaking classes at schools in the capital and other cities. The move was blamed on anti-COVID-19 measures. In reaction, Russia's Foreign Ministry stated the following to Ashgabat: "...request to clarify the situation in order to restore Russian-speaking classes." The ministry also cited unspecified "appeals" to Russian authorities and "public concerns about the situation."⁵⁶³ Turkmen authorities didn't reply.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Invite Turkmen service members to participate in CENTCOM-led exercises as observers and full participants.
- The Steppe Eagle and Regional Cooperation exercises can help address Turkmenistan's concerns about the future security situation in Afghanistan.
- Establish a naval cooperation initiative to promote interoperability with the Caspian basin countries – Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan.
- Allow Kazakh, Turkmen, and Azeri service members to serve a limited tour of duty onboard US Naval ships.
- Create naval symposiums for operational level leaders – deputy CNO, J3, etc.
- Continue to engage the Chiefs of Defense (CHOD) of the Central Asian states through regular consultations with the CENTCOM Commander.

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⁵⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan: Denial, Inaction Worsen Food Crisis," Sept 23, 2020,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/23/turkmenistan-denial-inaction-worsen-food-crisis#> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

⁵⁶¹ "Outlook 2021 Turkmenistan," *bne IntelliNews*, Jan 8, 2021, <https://www.intellinews.com/outlook-2021-turkmenistan-199381/> (accessed Mar 1, 2021).

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

⁵⁶³ Najibullah, Farangis, "'Distancing' Grounds Russian Learning In Turkmen Schools, Despite Parental Pushback," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Oct 21, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/distancing-grounds-russian-learning-in-turkmen-schools-despite-parental-pushback/30905262.html> (accessed Mar 3, 2021).

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2.24 UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Head of State Head of Government	Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan	Population	9,890,000
Minister of Defense Chief of Defense	Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum Lt. Gen. Hamad Mohammed Thani al-Rumaithi	Religion	Muslim 76% Christian 12.6% Other 11.4%
Type of Government	Federal Absolute Monarchy	Ethnicity	Emiratis 12% South Asian 60% Other 28%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$375 B (-3.5%)	Military Personnel	Active 64,000

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The eighth largest oil reserves in the world b. Influential lobby in the US and ability to shape regional cooperation and policies (GCC) c. Partnerships with Russia, China and the US d. Strong advanced and diversified economy e. The region's financial center f. Logistics and manufacturing hub and dominant commercial airlines g. Multiple sources of income (tourism industry) i. Political stability and stable society 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Overdependence on foreign labor b. Self-centered economy and politics driving diplomacy c. Lack of geographical diversification of projects amongst emirates – Dubai centered d. Monarchy still vulnerable to civil unrest e. Small geographic footprint vulnerable to regional instability
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Normalization of relations with Israeli b. Current plans to build infrastructure to interconnect all UAE major cities c. Wider role in regional politics due to greater leverages in the region (military presence in Yemen) and within the US d. New discoveries of hydrocarbon resources e. Space and defense programs, to include Edge, the newly created defense group 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Normalization of relations with Israel b. The difficulty of achieving political security cooperation between the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council c. Potential for American Iranian conflict d. The rise of AQAP/ Daesh in the region, especially in Yemen, which may affect UAE interests e. Growing though still friendly economic /political competition with KSA f. Strained relations with Turkey
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

Over the past decade, the UAE has evolved from a passive recipient of a US security to an interventionist regional actor. The UAE strongly seeks to shape the landscape in which it operates. While it remains dependent on the traditional security umbrella the US provides, its deepening ties with other larger actors reveals an ambition to secure a more independent role beyond a single superpower's shadow. The UAE is effectively diversifying its sources of cyber security, weaponry, and military capabilities to a range of actors, including US' foes and allies. It also seeks to strengthen its bargaining power vis-a-vis the US, by entertaining alternative sources of support and cooperation in an increasingly multipolar landscape. While the Trump administration proved to be a reliable partner, the UAE worries that the Biden administration will be less likely to protect its security interests, including rolling back of sanctions on Iran and restricting weapons sales. The Trump administration touted success when Israel and the UAE announced the Abraham accords deal. However, the event also marked the Emirates' subtle shift away from overreliance on the security umbrella of a superpower it no longer finds entirely reliable. The UAE's economic conditions suffered in 2020 due to the (COVID-19) pandemic, including lower oil prices which caused the UAE Cabinet to approve a smaller 2021 federal budget. Significantly, 2021 also marks 50 years of the UAE's existence.

Foreign Policy/Security

The US remains by far the central Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) security provider; however, the UAE is diversifying its security portfolio by deepening ties with Russia and China. This continues a broader UAE foreign policy shift, since the Arab Spring, from a conservative, insular approach towards greater activism. The UAE increasingly intervenes in regional conflicts primarily to counter its perceived most dangerous regional threat, the Muslim Brotherhood and its state supporters in Qatar and Turkey. This approach has at times aligned the UAE's interests with other powers including Russia and China.⁵⁶⁴

On August 13, 2020, The US brokered the Abraham accords, normalizing relations between the UAE and Israel. The UAE's decision to normalize ties with Israel is a natural extension of its goal to deepen strategic and economic ties with significant powers. However, this decision enraged Palestinians who fear the move will weaken long-standing pan-Arab positions calling for Israeli withdrawal from territories it claims are occupied illegally and requiring Palestinian statehood in return for regular ties with Arab countries. Normalization will likely deepen cooperation across various issues such as cybersecurity, intelligence-sharing, technology transfer, and missile defense, all of which the UAE views as essential to its national security. Further, the UAE cabinet agreed to establish an embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel, as Israel announced its embassy in Abu Dhabi. The Emirates' growing foreign policy activism reflects its converging interests with other significant players in an increasingly multipolar and fractured global landscape. It also reflects the UAE's concerns over the US' long-term reliability as the Emirates' main security guarantor.⁵⁶⁵

US President Joe Biden imposed a review and temporary freeze on \$23 B in UAE weapons sales including up to 50 F-35 aircraft valued at \$10.4 B, up to 18 MQ-9B drones valued at nearly \$3 B, and a package of air-to-air and air-to-ground munitions valued at \$10 B. Such acquisitions could weaken Israel and lead to an arms race in the region. This US decision came one week after President Biden (who promised to "reassess" Washington's relationship with Riyadh) was inaugurated. Since taking office, President Biden has signed several executive orders reversing many of President Trump's key policies.⁵⁶⁶ Further, the Australian Arms Control Coalition (AACC)

⁵⁶⁴ Fakhro, Elham, "What the Abraham Accords Reveal About the United Arab Emirates," *War on the Rocks*, Oct 30, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/what-the-abraham-accords-reveal-about-the-united-arab-emirates/> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Aljazeera, "US reviewing billions in arms sales to Saudi Arabia," *MSN*, Jan 27, 2021, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/us-reviewing-billions-in-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia-uae/ar-BB1d9a5y> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

urged the Australian government to end the export of military goods to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. A coalition of civil society groups is also calling on the Australian government to follow President Biden's Saudi and UAE arms sales suspense.

The UAE's willingness to grow ties with other global powers, particularly those gaining Middle East influence, has driven the UAE to extend its military and economic partnerships with Russia. Russia reportedly also offered to sell its S-400 air-defense system and Su-35 air defense fighter to the UAE, as an alternative to US systems, but the UAE has so far declined. For Abu Dhabi, the added benefit from arms purchased outside the US is the weapons lack the US required deployment and third-party transfer restrictions. They also come without Congressional demands to improve human rights performance.

The UAE has also forged closer ties with China. The UAE is China's second-largest Middle East trading partner and views Beijing's BRI as an opportunity to expand its international trade, shipping, and commerce hub capacity. The China North Industries Group Corporation plans to join forces with an Emirati defense company on a joint research venture. Under the agreement, the two companies will open a facility in Abu Dhabi, staffed by Chinese and Emirati engineers, and supported by universities from both states, to develop weapons and training in cooperation with the UAE armed forces. The center's first project will reportedly focus on developing surveillance and battle drones. The UAE also purchased military drones from China. This move was likely in response to the US refusal to sell armed drones due to the Missile Technology Control Regime and concerns that drones may end up in the wrong hands. The UAE currently possesses the Chinese Wing Loong II, intended for surveillance and capable of carrying missiles and laser-guided bombs, and the CH-4 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance drone.

Concurrent with its Israel rapprochement, the UAE recently began working to strengthen its relations with Iran. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the UAE has used the situation as an opportunity to continue its policy of peaceful de-escalation with its main regional rival: Iran. The UAE extended humanitarian medical aid to Tehran and hosted the Iranian and Emirati Coast Guard's joint meeting for the first time in six years. The two sides also discussed joint border cooperation, the influx of citizens of both countries, and the acceleration of intelligence information exchange. Likewise, in a call between UAE Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed and Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, the Crown Prince offered to dispatch aid to support Syria's efforts to cope with the virus outbreak. The call was the first publicized contact between an Arab leader and Al-Assad since most Arab states broke off Syria relations when civil war began.⁵⁶⁷ It was another step in the UAE's gradual efforts to thaw relations with the Syrian regime – which has fought Islamist rebels – as part of the UAE's broader strategy of countering political Islam in the region.

To support the Commander's first priority to deter Iran, the US Air Force deployed F-16 fighters, from the 480th Fighter Squadron, 52nd Fighter Wing, Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany, to the Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE.⁵⁶⁸ The aircraft and its crew arrived at the airbase to increase US Air Force Central's ability to deter aggression and enhance security and stability in the CENTCOM AOR. The unit conducts a wide range of missions, including combat operations and training with joint and regional partners. US Navy and Air Force units also joined with UAE pilots to conduct combined naval and air training operations in the southern Gulf. The training exercise, held in June 2020, included using the ship USS LEWIS B. PULLER as a staging platform to practice tracking and engaging simulated fast-attack craft. The UAE's Joint Aviation Command worked with CENTCOM Navy and Air Force assets, including the Navy's P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and reconnaissance aircraft assigned to AFCENT Air Warfare Center at Al Dhafra Air Base. UAE pilots also conducted day and night landings aboard the PULLER, using CH-47F Chinooks, AH-64 D Apaches, UH-60 M Black Hawks, and Bell 407 utility helicopters to complete deck-

⁵⁶⁷ Fakhro, Elham, "COVID and Gulf Foreign Policy," *Project on Middle East Political Science*, Apr 20, 2020, <https://pomeps.org/covid-and-gulf-foreign-policy> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁶⁸ Aljazeera, "US reviewing billions in arms sales to Saudi Arabia," *MSN*, Jan 27, 2021, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/us-reviewing-billions-in-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia-uae/ar-BB1d9a5y> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

landing qualifications. AS one observer stated "these training opportunities reinforce partnership commitments in the region, enhance interoperability, and demonstrate UAE and US resolve to respond to threats in the region."⁵⁶⁹

Internal Politics

The UAE leadership's evaluation of Muslim Brotherhood-linked organizations as regional and domestic threats is a significant factor in UAE policy. The UAE's stance on those groups contributed to a major rift with Qatar, another GCC member. Qatar supports Brotherhood-related groups as Islamists willing to work within the established political process. External actors (e.g., members of the US/European Parliament and Human Rights Watch) have increasingly criticized the UAE's lack of domestic political rights. However, the UAE largely ignores such criticism which does not impinge on the ruling families' ability to govern. Thus, the criticism fails to create any pressure on the government to change its current course.⁵⁷⁰

Economy

Economic conditions worsened in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic which, in addition to the global economic downturn, caused nearly 61,000 infections and 345 deaths in the UAE through July 2020. The US provided the UAE limited foreign assistance, mostly limited to training UAE authorities on counterterrorism, border security, and anti-proliferation operations.

The UAE Cabinet's approval of a smaller 2021 federal budget signaled that the country is curbing expenditures amid the COVID-19 pandemic's downturn and lower oil prices. Next year's budget was set at 58 B dirhams (\$15.8 B), down from this year's 61.35 B dirhams, the largest budget since the country's establishment.⁵⁷¹ The International Monetary Fund expects the UAE economy to shrink by 6.6% this year and swing back to modest 1.3% growth next year. It estimated the UAE government deficit - including consolidated accounts of the federal government and the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah - at 9.9% of GDP this year, up from a 2019 0.8% of GDP deficit.⁵⁷² However, this did not hinder the UAE from starting its Barakah nuclear energy plant, the first in the Arab world, and a significant step toward the country's emissions-free electricity goal. The plant makes the UAE the newest member of an exclusive 31-country club operating nuclear power. It's also the first new country to launch a nuclear power plant in three decades. The Barakah plant's Unit 1 is the first of the UAE's four planned reactors which, when complete, are expected to meet 25% of the country's electricity needs with zero carbon emissions.⁵⁷³ In addition, the UAE successfully launched its Mars probe, named Hope, making history as the Arab world's first interplanetary mission. Hope launched from the Japanese space center, reached Mars' orbit in February 2021, and will spend one Mars year (687 Earth days) studying and gathering data on the red planet's atmosphere.

⁵⁶⁹ Venhuizen, Harm, "Navy, Air Force troops train with UAE pilots to thwart fast-boat attacks in the Persian Gulf," *Navy Times*, Jul 9, 2020, <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2020/07/09/navy-air-force-troops-train-with-uae-pilots-to-thwart-fast-boat-attacks-in-the-persian-gulf/> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁷⁰ BTI Transformation Index: BTI 2020 United Arab Emirates Country Report, Web site, <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report-ARE.html> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁷¹ *Reuters*, "UAE cuts spending in 2021 federal budget," Nov 1, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/emirates-economy-budget-int-idUSKBN27H19W> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁷² *Reuters*, "UPDATE 1-UAE cuts spending in 2021 federal budget," Nov 1, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/emirates-economy-budget/update-1-uae-cuts-spending-in-2021-federal-budget-idUKL1N2HN068> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

⁵⁷³ Turak, Natasha, "The UAE becomes the first Arab country to launch its own nuclear energy program," *CNBC*, Aug 3, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/03/uae-becomes-first-arab-country-to-launch-local-nuclear-energy-program.html> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

Society

The UAE is an innovative social investor, seeking ways to expand its citizens' opportunities and help address regional and global challenges. Among top UAE priorities are educational reform, improving healthcare, expanding women's roles, and preserving the environment. The UAE has found a partner and ally in the US to accomplish these domestic goals.⁵⁷⁴ The UAE understands that ensuring a clean environment is critical to sustainable economic growth and intergenerational equity. With a long-standing commitment to sustainability and conservation, the UAE continues to strive to minimize the UAE's global environmental impact. In addition, the Government of Abu Dhabi created the Masdar Initiative, a \$15 B program that supports development and commercialization of clean energy technologies, a world-class research institute, and projects like Masdar City, the world's first zero-carbon, zero-waste green community.

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Continue counterterrorism operations with the UAE against AQAP and Daesh in Yemen.
- Advise UAE to lower its ongoing tensions with Turkey, especially regarding the Muslim Brotherhood.
- Consider using the UAE as a mediator with Iran.

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⁵⁷⁴ UAE Embassy: UAE-US Relations-Key Areas of Bilateral Cooperation-Social and Cultural, Web site, <https://www.uae-embassy.org/uae-us-relations/key-areas-bilateral-cooperation/social-and-cultural> (accessed Feb 16, 2021).

2.25 UZBEKISTAN

Head of State	President	Population	33,735,423 (Annual growth rate – 1.4%)
Head of Government	Shavkat Mirziyoyev		
Minister of Defense	Maj Gen Bakhodir Kurbanov	Religion	Muslim 88% - Majority Sunni
Chief of Defense	Maj Gen Pavel Ergashev		Orthodox Christian 9%
			Other 3%
Type of Government	Unitary Presidential Constitutional Republic	Ethnicity	Uzbek 80%
			Russian 5.5%
			Tajik 3%
			Karakalpak 2.5%
			Tatar 1.5%
			Other 7.5%
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	63.3 B (5%)	Military Personnel	Active 50,000
			Reserve 0

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Multi-vector foreign policy predicated on achieving economic growth and regional stability b. Quest and capacity for economic diversification c. Potential for human resource development d. Most capable armed forces in Central Asia e. Natural resources (gas, cotton, gold, uranium) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lack of political diversification b. Large informal (unregulated and untaxed) economy c. Inability to withstand Russian and Chinese influence d. Slow paced reforms in political and social sectors 	
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Willingness to cooperate in regional communication initiatives b. Capacity to join regional security cooperation forum c. Gradually improving image d. Quest for increased economic integration with US, West, and regional countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Regional instability b. Great Power Competition in Central Asia c. Digital radicalization and spillover of violent extremist organizations and illegal syndicates d. Trans-border disputes with neighbors e. Negative impact of COVID-19 on reforms especially on the economy and human rights 	
This SWOT model follows CSAG`s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		

Executive Summary

Uzbekistan has focused on economic prosperity by reaching out to its neighbors to improve communication links and trade projects both in South Asia and the Middle East. To advance this effort, Uzbekistan will likely adopt a more vibrant and dynamic approach to further the current foreign policy of broad engagement and a multi-

vector approach. The Uzbek armed forces need to be modernized due to the threats of online radicalization, drug and human trafficking, spillover of terrorist organizations, and decades old military hardware and redundant doctrine. Economic prosperity is the primary objective of all Uzbek policies and is the basis for all domestic and international engagements. To ensure continued growth the country is likely to explore regional and global opportunities. Political reforms are being undertaken, but real democracy is still out of reach. Uzbekistan is gradually moving to a more open and reformed society; however, expecting results in the short term is unrealistic. COVID-19 has impacted economic and social sectors across the globe and the Uzbek government faces the same challenges in continuing their reforms. Uzbekistan is moving in the correct strategic direction based on their improved transparency, enhanced accountability, reduced corruption, and improved human rights. These positive developments need support rather than an increase of pressure on the country to expedite its reforms. Cooperation and assistance in the mil-mil domain will assist in developing long-term leverage and help achieve the US goals in Afghanistan.

Foreign Policy/Security

Uzbekistan broadly follows the “Concept of Foreign Policy-2012”; a multi vector foreign policy of non-alignment and non-confrontation.⁵⁷⁵ The main priority of the Uzbek foreign policy remains Central Asia, while Afghanistan has started to play a more important role.⁵⁷⁶ The Concept of Foreign Policy-2012 has two important principles: neutrality and prioritizing Central Asia. Uzbekistan has remained neutral and maintained a balance between China, Russia, the US, and Central Asia. However, the policy of regional isolationism has gradually transformed into a more inclusive and integrated one, mainly on the desire for more economic development and regional stability.⁵⁷⁷

Uzbekistan needs to develop an integrated economic and diplomatic approach to utilize its natural resources; geographic location, and regional stability will play an important role. The threats that Uzbekistan perceives mainly involve instability in Afghanistan, human and drug trafficking, radicalization, and a growing number of domestic terrorists.^{578,579} In the past, Afghanistan was considered a threat to Uzbekistan; however, the country is now keenly interested in Afghanistan as a pathway to the sea and a conduit for Uzbek goods to access global markets.⁵⁸⁰ The US attempts to bring stability and the economic integration of Afghanistan is a common interest between the US and Uzbekistan. China’s major interests in Uzbekistan seem to be land access to Europe and Uzbek mineral resources. One major initiative is the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad project. After being delayed for years, the project remains in the negotiations phase. China is also a major importer of

⁵⁷⁵ Bekmurzaev, Nurbek, “What To Expect From Uzbekistan’s New Concept Of Foreign Policy?,” *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, Jun 2, 2019, <https://cabar.asia/en/what-to-expect-from-uzbekistan-s-new-concept-of-foreign-policy> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

⁵⁷⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan: Foreign Policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Web site, <https://mfa.uz/en/pages/vneshnaya-politika> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

⁵⁷⁷ Asiryan, Aleksey, “New Faces, Old Patterns in Uzbekistan’s Foreign Policy,” *The Diplomat*, Jan 19, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/new-faces-old-patterns-in-uzbekistans-foreign-policy/> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

⁵⁷⁸ US Mission Uzbekistan, “2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Uzbekistan,” US Embassy in Uzbekistan, Jul 30, 2020, <https://uz.usembassy.gov/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report-uzbekistan/> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

⁵⁷⁹ Pantucci, Raffaello, “Indians and Central Asians Are the New Face of the Islamic State,” *Foreign Policy*, Oct 8, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/08/isis-indian-kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-uzbekistan-central-asians-are-the-new-face-of-islamic-state/> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

⁵⁸⁰ Putz, Catherine, “US-Uzbekistan Relations Right on Track,” *The Diplomat*, Nov 25, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/us-uzbekistan-relations-right-on-track/> (accessed on Jan 19, 2020).

Uzbek natural gas.⁵⁸¹ Russia desires to maintain its influence in the country at a time that Uzbekistan has joined the Eurasian Economic Union.⁵⁸²

The country is seemingly following its Concept of Foreign Policy-2012 with only minor modifications. However, the changing dynamics in the region including great power competition, the evolving situation of Afghanistan, economic necessities, concerns of security, and domestic reforms demand a more dynamic foreign policy. Uzbekistan's outreach beyond the boundaries of Central Asia and Afghanistan is a result of a changing environment and domestic needs. Uzbek foreign policy has shifted towards US-Uzbek integration on Afghanistan, including through the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railroad.⁵⁸³

While addressing Oliy Majlis in December 2020, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, highlighted the adoption of a new concept of foreign policy which will consider an open, pragmatic, and practical foreign policy objective.⁵⁸⁴ Though no major shift in the policy is envisaged; it is believed that, given Uzbekistan's desire for greater integration, Uzbekistan may explore the opportunity to pursue a North-South Corridor with an India-Iran-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan railroad infrastructure project or may become more open to the BRI.

A cornerstone of Uzbek foreign policy has been resolution of disputes through negotiations which have allowed the country to resolve outstanding issues with its neighbors. The major security concerns for Uzbekistan are digital radicalization, re-location of terrorist groups in the bordering region, and human and drug trafficking.^{585,586,587} Uzbekistan faces no conventional military threats; however, it maintains a dominant military power in the region to be ready for emerging and evolving threats.⁵⁸⁸ Uzbekistan is continuing to modernize its military to address the security concerns, remain abreast of technological developments, and to meet the likely requirements of a new foreign policy concept. No new defense contracts have surfaced; however, the focus of modernization remains on improving doctrinal aspects and modes of thinking and learning through high quality military education.⁵⁸⁹

Uzbekistan is following a policy of non-alignment which led to the country to joining and then withdrawing from the Russian led CTSO and US led GUAM.⁵⁹⁰ Recently, Uzbekistan and Russia conducted military exercise in Termez, focusing on actions against illegal armed groups.⁵⁹¹ Having the exercise with Russia and focusing on

⁵⁸¹ Jalil Saparov and Bakyt Ibraimov, "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway remains uncertain," *The Third Pole*, Jan 13, 2021, <https://www.thethirdpole.net/2021/01/13/china-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-railway-remains-uncertain/> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

⁵⁸² Odintsov, Vladimir, "Uzbekistan to Throw in Its Lot with the EAEU," *New Eastern Outlook*, Sept 17, 2020, <https://journal-neo.org/2020/09/17/uzbekistan-to-throw-in-its-lot-with-the-eaeu/> (accessed on Jan 19, 2020).

⁵⁸³ *The Tashkent Times*, "Pakistan signs letter on trilateral railway project," Jan 3, 2021, <https://www.tashkenttimes.uz/economy/6162-pakistan-signs-letter-on-trilateral-railway-project> (accessed on Jan 19, 2020)

⁵⁸⁴ *Kun News*, "Uzbekistan's foreign policy concept may change," Jan 19, 2021, <https://m.kun.uz/en/news/2021/01/19/uzbekistans-foreign-policy-concept-may-change> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

⁵⁸⁵ Kumar Bekbolotov, Robert Muggah, and Rafal Rohozinski, "Jihadist Networks Dig In on Social Media Across Central Asia," *Foreign Policy*, Nov 11, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/11/online-extremism-central-asia-islamic-state-terrorism/> (accessed on Nov 18, 2020).

⁵⁸⁶ *Fergana News Agency*, "Russia's FSB films arrest of more than 20 members of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," Jul 23, 2020, <https://en.fergana.news/news/120447/> (accessed on Jan 24, 2021).

⁵⁸⁷ US Mission Uzbekistan, "2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Uzbekistan," US Embassy in Uzbekistan, Jul 30, 2020, <https://uz.usembassy.gov/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report-uzbekistan/> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

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⁵⁸⁹ Omelicheva, Mariya, "The United States and Uzbekistan: Military-to-Military Relations in a New Era of Strategic Partnership," *PONARS Eurasia*, Jul 31, 2019, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/united-states-and-uzbekistan-military-to-military-relations> (accessed Mar 13, 2020).

⁵⁹⁰ Asiryay, Aleksey, "New Faces, Old Patterns in Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy," *The Diplomat*, Jan 19, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/new-faces-old-patterns-in-uzbekistans-foreign-policy/> (accessed on Jan 19, 2021).

⁵⁹¹ Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "A joint exercise of the special forces of the Central Military District and the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan starts at the Termez training ground," Dec 12, 2020, https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12329444@egNews (accessed on Dec 14, 2020).

illegal armed groups shows that Uzbekistan is anticipating increased threats from terrorist networks and is open to shifting away from its policy of non-alignment. Continued US engagement with Uzbekistan is likely to keep the country open to further cooperation. However, a push in increasing mil-mil relations could be counterproductive. Mil-mil engagement with Uzbekistan is also critical if the US pursues a plan of regional military cooperation post Afghanistan withdrawal.

Internal Politics

Domestic politics in Uzbekistan are still evolving and there is much room for improving its democracy. Since President Shavkat Mirziyoyev won the 2016 election, numerous reforms have been introduced, including considerable reduction in targeting political opponents. However, true reforms are still not in sight.^{592,593,594} Presidential elections in Uzbekistan are scheduled for October 2021; however, no major opposition is expected to run against the incumbent.^{595,596} Political reforms in Uzbekistan can only be effective if genuine reform takes place, not through suppressing free thinkers and critics, but by encouraging and even embracing them. Pluralism lies in diverse ideas and opinions – not in opposition to them.⁵⁹⁷ Currently, Uzbekistan is way behind on achieving the mark; however, expecting such reforms in just half a decade is unrealistic.

Economy

Since 2017, Uzbekistan has opened up its economy by gradually dismantling protectionist policies, yet much remains under government control. Uzbekistan has opened its economy by introducing reforms and as a result The Economist declared Uzbekistan as “Country of the Year.”⁵⁹⁸ 2020 was marred by COVID-19 related restrictions, which impacted Uzbekistan’s growth. Uzbekistan was able to recover in the third quarter of 2020 as compared to the second quarter; however, the country is likely to achieve an overall growth of 0.7% for 2020.⁵⁹⁹ Despite the challenges, Tashkent is demonstrating the resolve to continue on its path of reforms and reach a growth rate of 5% in 2021.⁶⁰⁰ The macroeconomic indicators of Uzbekistan are stable; however, it is imperative for the country to tackle the issue of its informal economy, reduce the public sector’s role, and implement political diversification for a sustainable growth.⁶⁰¹ Uzbekistan is also looking to diversify its economy by improving its manufacturing and services industry through foreign investment in the fields of energy, IT, tourism, and textiles.⁶⁰² There is a huge demand for capital among Uzbekistan’s local businesses that the domestic capital

⁵⁹² *The Peninsula Qatar*, “Uzbekistan releases political prisoner after 8 years,” Oct 17, 2017,

<https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/17/10/2017/Uzbekistan-releases-political-prisoner-after-8-years> (accessed on Jan 20, 2021).

⁵⁹³ Williamson, Hugh, “Shuttering Notorious Jaslyk Prison A Victory for Human Rights in Uzbekistan,” *Human Rights Watch*, Aug 27, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/27/shuttering-notorious-jaslyk-prison-victory-human-rights-uzbekistan> (accessed on Jan 20, 2021).

⁵⁹⁴ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “Uzbekistan parliamentary elections 2019: ODIHR observation mission final report,” May 13, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/final-report> (accessed on Jan 20, 2021).

⁵⁹⁵ *AKI Press*, “Uzbekistan to have presidential elections in Oct 2021,” Feb 2, 2021,

https://akipress.com/news:654041:Uzbekistan_to_have_presidential_elections_in_October_2021/ (accessed on Feb 2, 2021).

⁵⁹⁶ Matyakubowa, Dilmira, “There Won’t be Political Reform in Uzbekistan. Here’s Why,” *The Diplomat*, Dec 21, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/there-wont-be-political-reform-in-uzbekistan-heres-why/> (accessed on Feb 2, 2021).

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ *Grata International*, “The Economist awarded Uzbekistan as the country of the year,” Dec 12, 2019, <https://gratanet.com/news/the-economist-awarded-uzbekistan-as-the-country-of-the-year> (accessed on Jan 20, 2021).

⁵⁹⁹ Alisher Kalandarov and Will Conroy, “Outlook 2021-Uzbekistan,” *BNE Intellinews*, Jan 5, 2021, <https://www.intellinews.com/index.php/outlook-2021-uzbekistan-198425/> (accessed on Jan 20, 2021).

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰¹ *BNE Intellinews*, “Uzbekistan remains one of most promising states in CIS+space says Renaissance Capital,” Oct 24, 2020, <https://pro.intellinews.com/uzbekistan-remains-one-of-most-promising-states-in-cis-space-says-renaissance-capital-194920/?source=uzbekistan> (accessed on Jan 20, 2021).

⁶⁰² Aris, Ben, “Uzbekistan 2.0 reforms making good progress,” *BNE Intellinews*, Sept 23, 2020, <https://pro.intellinews.com/uzbekistan-2-0-reforms-making-good-progress-192576/?source=uzbekistan> (accessed on Jan 20, 2021).

market is unable to provide.⁶⁰³ This supply and demand gap is an exploitable opportunity for China to create long-term leverage. Notwithstanding the need for further reforms and improving its human rights record, the endowment of Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus status to Uzbekistan is a welcome step. This will not only boost textiles exports to approximately 1.2B USD; it will also reduce the space for Chinese investment. On the other hand, regional connectivity initiatives incorporating Afghanistan are likely to be mutually beneficial; however, this will remain dependent on the security situation in Afghanistan.

Society

Uzbekistan remained under strict rule for decades, but this started to change when the current President introduced reforms.⁶⁰⁴ During the last few years, the efforts made by this government has brought positive results and has improved the image of Uzbekistan around the globe.⁶⁰⁵ Recently, the US State Department removed Uzbekistan from the special watch list for governments that engage or tolerate severe violations of religious freedom. This is testimony to the fact that Uzbekistan is on the right track to bring positive changes in society.⁶⁰⁶ Notwithstanding the positive developments, Western countries still maintain the need for continuous improvements especially in following areas: holding free and fair elections, political pluralism and participation, effective government, freedom of expression and belief, freedom to associate or organize, rule of law, personal autonomy, and individual rights.^{607,608} COVID-19 restrictions gave birth to a new phenomenon of democratic dictatorship, which is more likely to impact countries attempting to open their society; Uzbekistan is no exception.⁶⁰⁹

Although corruption and transparency remain an issue, Uzbekistan is still on track to reduce corrupt practices. The republic was able to improve its position on the Transparency International Report by seven places from 2019 to 2020 and is ranked 146 out of 179 countries.⁶¹⁰ With a population growth rate of 1.4%, the country is able to gradually reduce inflation and improve provisions of basic necessity to its population.⁶¹¹ The youth is around 40% of the population. Uzbekistan has an unemployment rate of 11.59%.^{612,613} Unemployed youth are

⁶⁰³ Preiss, Rainer Michael, "Uzbekistan Is The Hidden Gem In China's New Silk Road," *Forbes*, Sept 9, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rainermichaelpreiss/2019/09/09/uzbekistan-is-the-hidden-gem-in-chinas-new-silk-road/?sh=64862ffd3bd5> (accessed on Jan 20, 2021).

⁶⁰⁴ *Human Rights Watch*, "Uzbekistan Events of 2018," <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/uzbekistan> (accessed on Feb 4, 2021).

⁶⁰⁵ *Trend News Agency*, "Pompeo removes Uzbekistan from "Country of Particular Concern" list," Dec 12, 2018, <https://en.trend.az/casia/uzbekistan/2992819.html> (accessed on Feb 4, 2021).

⁶⁰⁶ *Global Engage*, "State Department Removes Uzbekistan from "Special Watch List" for Religious Freedom Violations, Institute of Global Engagement," Dec 8, 2020, <https://globalengage.org/updates/view/state-department-removes-uzbekistan-from-special-watch-list-for-religious-freedom-violations> (accessed on Dec 10, 2020).

⁶⁰⁷ Kirgizbaev, Nodirjon, "Can Uzbekistan Stay on Track in Improving its Human Rights Record?," *The Diplomat*, Dec 17, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/can-uzbekistan-stay-on-track-improving-its-human-rights-record/> (accessed Jan 10, 2021).

⁶⁰⁸ Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2020: Uzbekistan, Web site, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2020> (accessed on Feb 4, 2021).

⁶⁰⁹ Brown, Susan Stamper, "COVID-19 And the Rise of Diminutive Democrat Dictators," *Townhall*, Apr 24, 2020, <https://townhall.com/columnists/susanstamperbrown/2020/04/24/covid19-and-the-rise-of-diminutive-democrat-dictators-n2567545> (accessed on Feb 4, 2021).

⁶¹⁰ *KUN*, "Uzbekistan ranks 146th in Corruption Perceptions Index," Jan 28, 2021, <https://kun.uz/en/news/2021/01/28/uzbekistan-ranks-146th-in-corruption-perceptions-index> (accessed on Feb 4, 2021).

⁶¹¹ Macrotrends: Uzbekistan Population 1950-2021, Web site, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/UZB/uzbekistan/population> (accessed on Jan 4, 2021).

⁶¹² CIA World Factbook: Uzbekistan, Web site, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/uzbekistan/#people-and-society> (accessed on Jan 4, 2021).

⁶¹³ Macrotrends: Uzbekistan Youth Unemployment Rate 1991-2021, Web site, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/UZB/uzbekistan/youth-unemployment-rate> (accessed on Jan 4, 2021).

prone to radicalization and migration, which is likely to create security and diplomatic challenges for the government.^{614,615}

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Continue to provide diplomatic support and strengthen economic relations by improving business to business engagement.
- Utilize diplomatic influence to encourage continued reforms in social, economic and military domains.
- Keep Uzbekistan engaged with Afghanistan for connectivity, energy and security related projects
- Improve mil-mil engagement and security cooperation, especially: the formation of a regional cooperative alliance for Afghanistan, provisions of high-quality professional military education, and capacity building for counterterrorism and counter-extremism operations.

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⁶¹⁵ KUN, "More Uzbeks applying for Russian citizenship," Feb 2, 2021, <https://kun.uz/en/news/2021/02/02/more-uzbeks-applying-for-russian-citizenship> (accessed on Feb 2, 2021).

2.26 YEMEN

Head of State	President Abdrabbuh	Population	30,200,000
Head of Government	Mansur Hadi Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed		
Minister of Defense	Mohamed Ali Al Makedashi	Religion	Muslim 99%
Chief of Defense	Lt. General Sagheer bin Aziz		– Sunni 65% – Shia 35%
			Other 1% (includes Baha’il, Hindu, and Christian)
Type of Government	Democratic Republic	Ethnicity	Arab, Afro-Arab, South Asian
GDP in \$US (real GDP annual change)	\$19.06 B (-5%)	Military Personnel	Active 43,500

Synthesis of Background Analysis

This SWOT model follows CSAG’s stability assessment from the perspective of the country.		
Strengths	“Current Situation”	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strategic location between Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandab is of international importance b. Natural resources are available (crude oil, gas) c. International humanitarian assistance and peace efforts are ongoing 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dire humanitarian situation combined with COVID-19 pandemic b. Impotent legitimate government, ineffective law enforcement c. Corrupt, destroyed economy, devastated infrastructure d. Deep sectarian, tribal division across the country e. Lack of reliability even among actual allies f. Lack of governing creates loopholes for VEOs, such as AQAP g. All involved parties lack political vision/strategy
Opportunities	“Future Outlook”	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. One of the youngest medium-aged populations in the world b. GCC nations increasing security cooperation efforts c. Erect a coalition to provide a genuine multilateral approach towards peace d. Regain control over and the rebuild of state institutions to generate and distribute revenues e. New US administration’s approach towards Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition could present new rapprochement possibilities 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fatigue of international community risks becoming another forgotten war b. Toxic mixture of life-threatening challenges i.e., malnutrition, COVID-19, cholera and other contagious diseases c. Houthis’ physical and psychological suppression of entire generations of young people d. Enduring influence, support, and arms deliveries from Iran to the Houthis e. International community not keeping its pledges

f. Growing western media interest can drive away the forgotten war image	
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This SWOT model follows CSAG's stability assessment from the perspective of the country.

Executive Summary

While the US focuses on Great Power Competition, multilateralism versus unilateralism, attitudes to alliances, UN agencies and international agreements, and China's BRI, Yemen's situation seems less important. But a recent change in the US approach towards the war in Yemen and the support to the Saudi-led coalition may lead to substantial change.

In terms of COVID-19, the Arabian Peninsula is particularly affected as the dangers weigh heavier on nations with unstable governments and economies than with competent governments who enjoy solid economies. Yemen lacks both. Years of war and inconsistent international support did not benefit any Yemeni stakeholders. The Saudi-led coalition failed militarily. Yet, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are providing basic humanitarian support while the broader international community fails to keep its pledges. Further, the recent change of US administration conveyed confusing messages regarding how to deal with Houthis and coalition partners. Certainly, more stability and reliability are required. A contained Houthi movement, even if part of a future legitimate Yemeni government, is a lesser regional and transregional threat. Such a scenario would positively impact CENTCOM priority 1, "Deterring Iran."

Additionally, the Red Sea sits at the brink of an environmental catastrophe. The FSO SAFER is a ticking time bomb at the center of the Houthis' cat-and-mouse game with the UN. The rebels constantly hamper any maintenance attempts. They repeatedly postponed all offers of help. Further, the international community avoids involvement like a bystander. Should the aged supertanker suffer a hull fracture, this idleness will quickly turn catastrophic. A resulting oil spill will likely cause unprecedented harm to the food supply and living conditions for millions of people along potentially affected shorelines, and also for international navigation and military sea lines of communication. The disaster will also potentially aggravate the regional IDP situation and increase IDPs' susceptibility to VEO's influence. This negatively affects CENTCOM priority 6, "ISIS Detainees & Radicalization of IDPs."

Recently, Houthi advancement in UAS technology and weaponization of commercial drones increased the danger to the Saudi-led coalition and civilians. Increasingly skilled Houthi drone and UAS technology use is linked to Iran's strategy to project power across the region. At the same time, this technology allows Iran plausible deniability regarding Houthi attacks. The low technology actually makes the difference. With comparably low-scale technical support, Iran increases its proxy's capabilities disproportionately. The Saudi-led coalition, as well as the US intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support must be on high alert as the Houthis are about to develop a remarkable indigenous drone arsenal.⁶¹⁶ Here, CENTCOM priority 5, "Developing Counter-UAS Capabilities" is directly affected.

The major issue hindering lasting peace in Yemen is the international community's lack of a commonly shared political and diplomatic approach. Further, all relevant domestic and regional stakeholders have not unified around a consistent vision of what Yemen should look like in the future.

⁶¹⁶ Harding, Thomas, "The Houthis have built their own drone industry in Yemen," *The National News*, Jun 13, 2020, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/the-houthis-have-built-their-own-drone-industry-in-yemen-1.1032847> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

Foreign Policy/Security

The December 2018 Stockholm Agreement between the Hadi government and the rebels established a ceasefire along the Hodeidah front, between the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and the Houthi movement located along Yemen's western coast. Despite almost daily violence in Hodeidah City from both Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition, the Hodeidah ceasefire has largely held since its signing two years ago. However, several large-scale attacks in the first months of 2021 have shaken the Yemeni people and international community. The rebels who hold Hodeidah, Yemen's strategic Red Sea port, have attacked pro-government forces south of the city. January's fighting has killed about 150, and wounded 260, Yemeni pro-government soldiers and Houthi rebels.⁶¹⁷ These latest clashes were the most violent since the UN negotiated truce was executed, and neither side has gained territory.

The most egregious ceasefire breach was the Aden airport attack on December 30, 2020. Three precision-guided missiles struck Aden International Airport as the plane carrying the Yemeni government's new unity cabinet arrived from Saudi Arabia. The attack wounded more than 100 and killed 26, including government officials, journalists, and Red Cross workers.⁶¹⁸ The new cabinet members, all of whom were reportedly uninjured, were taken to safety in the city's Presidential Palace. A few hours later, pro-government forces intercepted a drone attack on the palace. The Yemeni government blames the Houthis for both attacks. The rebels publicly deny responsibility. The attack is yet another which mostly killed innocent victims. Additionally, it directly targeted the new internationally recognized government of Yemen (IRGoY), and the Southern Transition Council (STC). Finally, this attack targeted hopes for peace and safety.

In previous months, fierce but low-level clashes occurred mostly along and south of the Hodeidah front. More frequently, Houthis employed low-tech drones which now seriously threaten Yemen and neighboring Saudi Arabia. Alternating between fighting and ceasefires is Yemen's "normal" status. This is a tense and incomprehensive political and security situation. The Redeployment Coordination Committee head, Lt. General Abhijit Guha, clearly voiced concern about the permanent escalation of violence, initiated by both sides, in the Hodeidah Governorate.⁶¹⁹

Yemen's fragile security situation is overshadowed by Iran's seemingly illegitimate diplomatic moves. Hassan Eyrrou's appointment as ambassador to the Houthi de facto government in Sanaa is a blatant violation of international norms. With Eyrrou, Iran is sending an al-Quds Force officer who was close to General Qassem Soleimani and is recognized as a militia training specialist. Thus, Iran is the only country with diplomatic relations to the Houthis.⁶²⁰ This appointment sends an unambiguous message to the world. Teheran openly recognizes Houthis as Yemen's legitimate authority and confirms Iran's overt support.⁶²¹ Further, the Houthi modeled its militia after Hezbollah. The two Iran-backed para-military organizations are both present in Lebanon's and Yemen's (*de facto*) governments. This demonstrates how Yemen's situation mirrors Lebanon's.

⁶¹⁷ Staff writer with AFP, "Yemen Clashes Near Hodeida Kill 150 in a Week: Military Sources," *The Defense Post*, Jan 18, 2021, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/01/18/yemen-hodeida-clashes-kill-150/> (accessed Jan 21, 2021).

⁶¹⁸ McKernan, Bethan, "Aden airport attack targeting Yemeni cabinet kills 26," *The Guardian*, Dec 30, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2020/dec/30/aden-airport-attack-targeting-yemeni-cabinet-kills-26-video> (accessed Jan 7, 2021).

⁶¹⁹ Barada, Ali, "Guterres Urges Yemeni Parties to Engage in 'Good Faith' With Special Envoy," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Dec 15, 2020, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2684356/guterres-urges-yemeni-parties-engage-'good-faith'-special-envoy> (accessed Dec 21, 2020).

⁶²⁰ Al-Ghabiri, Asmaa, "Yemen denounces appointment of Iranian 'military ruler' in Sanaa," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Oct 19, 2020, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2573361/yemen-denounces-appointment-iranian-'military-ruler'-sanaa> (accessed Dec 13, 2020).

⁶²¹ Al-Batati, Saeed, "US slams Iran for 'smuggling' envoy into Yemen," *Arab News*, Oct 22, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1752651/middle-east> (accessed Oct 24, 2020).

Houthis, a Foreign Terrorist Organization?

In January 2021, the US Trump administration officially designated the Houthis a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Shortly after, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) claimed the designation caused Yemen's humanitarian situation to noticeably deteriorate. NGOs feared the Houthi's FTO status would hamper NGO's independent efforts to protect and improve Yemeni's human rights and welfare. However, as one of his first foreign policy actions, President Biden rescinded the Houthis FTO designation.⁶²² NGOs believe that rescission was required to enable vital humanitarian assistance to millions of Yemenis.

The international community has a duty to ensure governments, politicians, and NGOs work towards a common goal. But for several years, the legitimate Yemeni government's impotence, and allies' recurring discord has caused this to fail on all levels. More than ever Yemen needs joint consensus regarding its future. Allies should combine this consensus with actions to empower the Yemeni government to fully execute its responsibilities. Saudi Arabia certainly plays a prominent role in this endeavor. But even Saudi Arabia requires international funding and assistance countering arms smuggling through Yemen's porous borders. Only a broad international community diplomatic approach can ensure assistance efforts succeed.

Whether justified or not, the FTO designation is not as important or effective as international partners taking politically sustainable action. Allies must employ a holistic approach to address the Yemen conflict and its devastating effects. To make real progress, the international community must first act collectively to remove Iranian involvement from the equation.

The GCC should also take on a more substantial role in Yemen. Considering Yemen is in the GCC's backyard, all GCC members have sufficient incentive to contribute to avoiding a spill-over of the conflict in Yemen. The GCC should collectively enhance security cooperation and stop arms smuggling and trafficking via sea and land routes into Yemen.

FSO SAFER

The nearly fifty-year-old FSO SAFER holds more than 1 M barrels of oil and has been abandoned off the coast of Hodeidah since 2015. In May 2020, the tanker sprang a leak, and the region increasingly feared an impending environmental disaster. After the Houthis granted the UN permission to assess FSO SAFER in November 2020, the UN planned a maintenance operation for early February 2021.⁶²³ The UN planned to assess the vessel's leak, corroding hull, and dangerous explosive gases. But in early 2021, administrative delays pushed the UN inspection to March. Further, the Houthis failed to guarantee the salvage team's safety in writing. Eventually, this prompted the UN to delay the maintenance expedition indefinitely.

The FSO SAFER needs immediate attention, inspection, and maintenance to prevent an avoidable disaster. However, such action to prevent a catastrophic spill depends on several factors. Some of these factors are the availability of required equipment and experts, shipping times and routes, weather conditions, and funding. Continued stakeholders' cooperation, particularly with the de-facto authorities in Sana'a, is crucial for timely deployment and general mission success. Currently the Houthi rebels appear unconcerned about the potential impact of an ecological disaster. Yet, any kind of inspection depends on Houthis' cooperation. Though identifying appropriate incentives to gain Houthi engagement is difficult, failure will likely devastate the people of Yemen and any riparian Red Sea country.⁶²⁴

⁶²² Hansler, Jennifer, "Biden administration to remove Houthis from terrorist list, reversing Trump's decision," *CNN*, Feb 5, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/05/politics/us-houthis-terrorist-list/index.html> (accessed Feb 9, 2021).

⁶²³ *International Maritime Organization*, "FSO Safer: contingency planning progresses as UN assessment mission gets green light," Dec 18, 2020, <https://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/Pages/WhatsNew-1575.aspx> (accessed Jan 25, 2020).

⁶²⁴ Von Normann, LtCol Michael, "The Ticking Time Bomb FSO SAFER – An Imminent but Preventable Environmental Disaster," *USCENTCOM CSAG Snapshot Paper 2020-10* (2020).

USCENTCOM must maintain sufficient regional footprint to positively affect the CENTCOM Commander's priority 1, "deter Iran." Further, the US requires strong and reliable allies and partners, including European nations, to synchronize efforts towards a common goal. GCC participation will bolster the partnership and clearly communicate a combined approach to Teheran. Though countering Iran's destabilizing effects in Yemen requires an international diplomatic strategy, CENTCOM can coordinate the essential joint and combined military capabilities necessary to support it. Until the US and allies fully implement a collective approach, Yemen remains open for Iran to both harass its rival Saudi Arabia, and maintain its influential Middle East role.

Surprisingly, the new US administration appears to have elevated the Yemen conflict to a higher national priority. However, Yemen policy remains linked to US Iran policy. Further, the Biden administration announced it would no longer support the Saudi-led coalition's military operations in Yemen. This change could prove a real game changer the US and allies promote a lasting ceasefire that brings all stakeholders back to the negotiating table. Most important though, is that Yemenis must participate in developing common goals and a clear vision for Yemen's future. This vision must guide all international political and diplomatic efforts.⁶²⁵

Internal Politics

The IRGoY and STC both struggle to execute the Riyadh Agreement. The agreement provides commitments to defuse current tensions between the IRGoY and the STC and to include them in a new government. In exchange, the STC agrees to withdraw from Aden and Abyan and allow the government to return to Aden. However, the Aden airport attack raised tremendous doubts about the agreement's successful implementation.⁶²⁶

Generally, the coalition does not demonstrate unity. For example, in January 2021, Yemeni President Hadi issued appointments for government positions. In response, the governing STC condemned and rejected Hadi's unilateral appointments claiming it was contrary to the power sharing deal, he accused the President of acting against the IRGoY-STC unity cabinet. The two governing partners, both critical elements of a future of Yemen and counterweights to the Houthis, repeatedly show no unity. This projects weakness and foreshadows failure of any improvement efforts.⁶²⁷

The government and the Houthis have shown some positive signs. Three months ago, the Yemeni government and the Houthis conducted the largest UN-sponsored prisoner swap in the conflict's history.⁶²⁸ The parties exchanged nearly 680 Houthi rebel prisoners for 400 pro-government fighters. Since then, both sides resumed talks in Jordan. The government and Houthis are currently planning another prisoner exchange. This second planned exchange may include high profile IRGoY prisoners like President Hadi's brother, Nasser Mansur Hadi, and former Minister of Defense, Mahmud al-Subayhi.

Without sustained substantial international backing, it is highly unlikely the Yemenis will establish a stable government. To effectively govern, the IRGoY and STC must be on the same page. Without executing this basic requirement, the government has little hope of outlasting the Houthi movement.

⁶²⁵ Strobel, Warren P., "Biden launches fresh effort to end civil war in Yemen, halting 'offensive' aid to Saudis, naming envoy," *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb 4, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-to-name-special-envoy-to-yemen-launching-fresh-effort-to-end-the-fighting-11612450815> (accessed Feb 10, 2021).

⁶²⁶ Radman, Hussam, "The Riyadh Agreement One Year On," *Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, Nov 13, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/11905> (accessed Mar 23, 2021).

⁶²⁷ Al Sherbini, Ramadan, "Yemen: New official sworn in despite STC opposition," *Gulf News*, Jan 20, 2021, <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/yemen/yemen-new-officials-sworn-in-despite-stc-opposition-1.76616590> (accessed Mar 10, 2021).

⁶²⁸ Aldroubi, Mina, "Yemen: New round of prisoner exchange talks possibly by the end of the year," *The National*, Oct 27, 2020, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/yemen-new-round-of-prisoner-exchange-talks-possibly-by-end-of-the-year-1.1100574> (accessed Jan 4, 2021).

Economy

Yemen's weak rule of law, fractured security situation, and geographical position between the Horn of Africa and wealthier Arabian Peninsula states all contribute to illicit commerce. Illicit trafficking existed prior to the Houthis' advance in 2015. While the Houthis do not cause illicit trafficking, they are exploiting it. Significant cross-border drug shipments occur throughout Houthi-controlled territory. Additionally, the ongoing conflict contributes to an increased illicit arms flow via land and sea to different belligerent parties. Further, coalition partners have interdicted arms shipments between Oman and Houthi-controlled areas. Oman's involvement in such illegal trafficking, unwittingly or otherwise, undermines ambitions to achieve a lasting peace in Yemen.⁶²⁹

After six years of war, the Yemeni currency lost at least 75% of its value. Large scale currency printing in areas controlled by the Yemeni government increased the money supply by 50%, but plunged the riyal's value to almost 20%. Therefore, the government printed new riyals which the Houthis then banned. Thus, Yemen is now divided into two monetary blocks. This makes daily life and trade especially difficult for people living under Houthi rule. For example, the World Food Program reported in 2020 that throughout the conflict, Yemen's basic food prices increased by 140%. However, the likely permanent Yemen currency drop shows not only a Houthi problem, but a significant Central Bank and government wide failure. As a result, the Yemeni people's daily misery and danger increases.⁶³⁰

The international community must pressure the IRGoY and the Houthis to end fighting over the country's banking system. While military fighting has destroyed significant infrastructure and killed thousands of Yemenis, the banking fight may cause even greater harm. Thus, Yemeni stakeholders must increase their coordination and focus on Yemen's economy to prevent further devastating economic impacts on the population.⁶³²

Society

Yemen's overall humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. According to the UN, almost half of Yemen's population faces severe food insecurity. One third of the population is in crisis, and more than 16,000 people face a catastrophic, famine-like situation. With COVID-19, this year's outlook is even worse. Between January and June 2021, 16.2 M people are likely to experience high levels of acute food insecurity. The number of people facing catastrophe will likely triple.⁶³³

Throughout Yemen, 24 M people, 80% of the population, require some form of humanitarian assistance. Two out of three Yemenis cannot afford to buy food, and 50% of the country is on the brink of starvation. Six years of war forced 3.6 M people to flee their homes. Yemen also experienced more than 1 M cholera cases, and

⁶²⁹ Lederer, Edith M., "UN experts: Yemen is getting weapons similar to Iran's," *Associated Press*, Jan 31, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/39d6a94b2baf1dbb753f5e1b85ac7d88> (accessed Jan 31, 2021).

⁶³⁰ Bradley Bowman and Katherine Zimmerman, "Biden Can't Bring Peace to Yemen While Iran Keeps Sending Weapons," *Foreign Policy*, Mar 4, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/04/biden-yemen-peace-saudi-arabia-houthis-iran-weapons/> (accessed Mar 23, 2021).

⁶³¹ Al-Batati, Saeed, "Yemen central bank shuts firms linked to currency crash," *Arab News*, Dec 2, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1771656/business-economy> (accessed Feb 3, 2021).

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Reuters, "Almost Half of Yemenis in Acute Food Insecurity, New Data Shows," *US News*, Dec 3, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-12-03/almost-half-of-yemenis-in-acute-food-insecurity-new-data-shows> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

more than half of the country's health facilities are destroyed. Therefore, in Yemen, normally easily treatable diseases are often deadly because of malnutrition, poor hygiene, lack of drinking water and basic health.^{634 635}

COVID-19 is taking an additional toll, though still to a lesser extent than expected. In January 2021, the government reported 2,122 COVID-19 cases including 615 deaths.⁶³⁶ The likely reasons for such low infection rates are a combination of Houthis not publishing accurate data, limited testing, damaged healthcare infrastructure, and hampered humanitarian aid especially in areas under rebel control. Even though the official numbers are low, the government of Yemen applied to the COVAX initiative. The initiative will provide 14 M doses to immunize one fourth of the population. Vaccination was scheduled to begin in March. The IRGoY's health ministry "applied to Saudi Arabia's King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) for it to [ultimately] finance vaccines for 50% of the population." While the IRGoY intends to distribute vaccines nationwide, the Houthis stated there is neither the finance nor the plans to provide vaccines.⁶³⁷

The Yemen IDP situation has also worsened. During recent months, Houthi militia attacks displaced an additional one thousand people per month. More than 90,000 people have been displaced just in Marib province throughout 2020, making it Yemen's IDP hotspot.⁶³⁸ Despite deteriorating conditions, and with COVID-19 sealing borders, still more than 34,000 migrants tried to cross Yemen in 2020.⁶³⁹

Yemen requires vital humanitarian aid. International donors must fulfil their pledges. But donation is only the beginning. Parties within Yemen must efficiently deliver the aid to the people. While the IRGoY is too weak and incapable to provide a safe and secure environment, and deliver transparent assistance without unnecessary bureaucratic delays, accountable international actors must fill the void. Western countries, influential neighbors, and NGOs must develop specific plans to efficiently deliver what the people of Yemen need to survive.⁶⁴⁰

Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM:

- Strive for consensus with international community partners and allies on political goals, and substantial diplomatic efforts to increase security cooperation.
- Raise partners' and humanitarian assistance providers' awareness that malign Houthi actions can quickly sabotage the already precarious humanitarian situation.
- Encourage GCC nations and more distant allies to enhance security cooperation in Yemen and the region.
- Increase UN and international community's awareness to together swiftly eliminate FSO SAFER danger.
- Develop TTPs to counter the Houthis' imminent UAS threat within Yemen and across the border into Saudi Arabia in a common approach alongside partners and allies.

⁶³⁴ Hagedorn, Elizabeth, "Aid groups in Yemen say Houthi terror designation would deepen crisis," *Al Monitor*, Nov 18, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/11/yemen-houthis-trump-terrorist-designation-aid-delivery-fto.html> (accessed Jan 4, 2021).

⁶³⁵ Adel Al-Khadir and Ahmed al-Ansi, "Displaced and scared: Yemenis still in limbo after almost five years of war," *Reuters*, Jan 15, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/displaced-and-scared-yemenis-still-in-limbo-after-almost-five-years-of-war-idUSKBN1ZE0RO> (accessed Jan 4, 2021).

⁶³⁶ Lisa Barrington and Mohamed Ghobari, "Yemen to get first COVID-19 shots by March through COVAX, Saudi could pay for others," *Reuters*, Feb 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-yemen/yemen-to-get-first-covid-19-shots-by-march-through-covax-saudi-could-pay-for-others-idUSL8N2KA0TC> (accessed Feb 5, 2021).

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ AFP, "Over 90,000 displaced in north of Yemen battle zone: UN," *France24*, Oct 10, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20201006-over-90-000-displaced-in-north-yemen-battle-zone-un> (accessed Dec 13, 2020).

⁶³⁹ Bulos, Nabi, "'We're not alive, we're not dead': Thousands of migrants are trapped in war-torn Yemen," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 1, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-12-01/migrants-trapped-in-limbo-yemen-saudi-arabia> (accessed Feb 4, 2021).

⁶⁴⁰ Karahan, Hatice, "It is time to rethink international development cooperation," *Al Jazeera*, Jan 23, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/23/its-time-to-rethink-international-development-cooperation> (accessed Jan 24, 2021).

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