



NEAR EAST SOUTH ASIA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

NESA Update

May 2021 – July 2021

NESA Region Trends – REGIONAL MARITIME ISSUES

- **Iran remains a concern as a disrupter of maritime trade.** All of the GCC are dependent upon sea trade for both exports (*energy*) and imports (*food and finished goods*). All but Saudi Arabia and Oman must transit the Strait of Hormuz. Recent reports are that Iran has been “spoofing” GPS signals to lure ships into their territorial waters, from where they can be seized. There are also reports of Iranian attacks on ships in the Indian ocean as well. While these attacks are not militarily significant, they do add to the cost of survival for the Gulf states, and also contribute to a sense of unease and insecurity which increasingly animates GCC discussions. Iranian tensions with Israel flare up routinely on water, particularly with the targeting of Israeli-flagged vessels. Iran is also continuing its efforts at updating and deepening commercial and strategic coastal infrastructure.
- **A secondary concern is illegal trafficking in the region.** While there are significant trafficking of narcotics and other contraband, human trafficking has eclipsed it as a concern because of the fear that migrants (*particularly from India*) are introducing/spreading new, more virulent strains of COVID which the region cannot cope with. Oman state television (*which normally focuses on the achievements and modernization initiatives of the state*) was unusually frank: much of the coverage was live footage from hospitals, showing the full-up state of medical response, and urging viewers to isolate and vaccinate. The arrival of unscreened illegal immigrants from a COVID hotspot region was thus unwelcome.

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Engagement • Education • Outreach

NESA Region Trends

- **In the IOR:** the status of Diego Garcia remains a thorn in U.S. engagement among IOR island states. The status of Diego Garcia and the Chagos in total has become a politicized issue in the United Kingdom, and thus, an alliance problem for the U.S. IOR regional perceptions center on the U.S. recognizing Mauritius' claim and accepting its 99 year lease offer. The Bay of Bengal region is becoming more tense with India emphasizing its BIMSTEC regional effort, while taking an increasingly hostile position towards China (*something other regional states are not keen to do*). Myanmar's coup hangs over the region with relations souring particularly with Bangladesh. Bangladesh's economic growth has now translated into greater regional status with a 200 million dollar currency swap providing to indebted Sri Lanka and coastal infrastructure being built and more modern military hardware being acquired. Comprehensively throughout the IOR, the strain on naval, coast guard, and maritime constabulary services due to COVID has led to an increase in criminality. Criminal groups have focused on the maritime domain due to impeded commercial air traffic and the greater gaps in security nets.

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

NESA Programs & Events

Silk Road Future Leaders Seminar: Strategic Leadership for Regional Security

On 25 May 2021, the NESA Center hosted an informative one-day Silk Road Future Leaders Seminar focused on the theme, “**Strategic Leadership for Regional Security.**” The virtual seminar welcomed diplomats and military officers from NESA countries across Central Asia and South Asia, including Tajikistan, India, Nepal, and Kazakhstan. The Silk Road Future Leaders Seminar was facilitated by **Professor Brianne Todd** and featured the **NESA Center Director LTG (ret) Terry Wolff**, **Academic Dean Dr. Roger Kangas**, and **Dr. Hassan Abbas**.

The seminar consisted of two distinct sessions, with the first session covering U.S. relations with South and Central Asia under the Biden administration and the second session exploring COVID-19’s impact on South and Central Asia. The Silk Road Future Leaders Seminar was conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation available in Russian, and it was held under the Chatham House Rule (“off-the-record”) to encourage open and frank discussion among faculty and participants. Moreover, the virtual format of the Silk Road Future Leaders Seminar provided an opportunity to re-engage NESA alumni who had previously attended an iteration of the seminar in Washington, DC. <https://nesa-center.org/silk-road-future-leaders-seminar-strategic-leadership-for-regional-security>

Silk Road Future Leaders Seminar “Strategic Leadership for Regional Security” 25 May 2021



Speakers from top left: Brianne Todd (Assistant Professor, NESA), Dr. Roger Kangas (Academic Dean, NESA), LTG (Ret) Terry Wolff (NESA Director), Dr. Hassan Abbas (Distinguished Professor of International Relations, NESA), Ms. Nigina Zardova (U.S. Desk Officer, Embassy of Tajikistan to Belgium), Dr. Rashmini Koparka (Assistant Professor, Center for Russian and Central Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University)

NESA Programs & Events

Maritime Security & Technology Applications Workshop

The Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies conducted a workshop that explored the trends existing between the maritime domain and developments in technology. Focusing on the components relevant to the Indo-Pacific region, the workshop discussed operational options available to littoral states, strategic concerns shaping the policies of major powers, and the ways in which new technologies are (and are not) changing how actors pursue maritime security. The workshop brought together participants who hailed from both within and outside of the Indo-Pacific region. <https://nesa-center.org/maritime-security-and-technology-applications-workshop>

Maritime Security & Technology Applications Workshop 14–17 June 2021



Speakers from top left: Mr. Jeffrey Payne (Manager of Academic Affairs, NESA), LTG (Ret) Terry Wolff (NESA Director), Professor Rory Medcalf (Head of the National Security College (NSC), Australian National University), Ms. Ainikki Riiikonen (Center for a New American Security), Mr. Agam Rafaeli-Farhadian (Executive Board Member at The Public Knowledge), Mr. Blake Herzinger (Pacific Forum), Mr. Abhijit Singh (Observer Research Foundation), Professor David Des Roches (Associate Professor, NESA), Mr. Martijn Rasser (Center for a New American Security), Ms. Rebecca Arcesati (Analyst, Mercator Institute for China Studies), Ms. Elsa Kania (Center for a New American Security), Ms. Schuyler Moore (Foreign Policy Advisor, Member of Congress), Mr. Gregory B. Poling (Senior Fellow for Southeast Asia and Director, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, CSIS), Dr. Andrew Erickson (Professor, Strategic and Operational Research Department, United States Naval War College), Ms. Darshana Baruah (Lead, Indian Ocean Initiative, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), Dr. Ian Ralby (I.R. Consilium), Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (Director-General, National Maritime Foundation), Dr. Jacquelyn Schneider (Hoover Fellow, Hoover Institution)

NESA Programs & Events

Air War College Virtual Visit

On 21 June 2021, the NESA Center virtually hosted the Air War College. NESA professors, **Dr. Gawdat Bahgat** and **Dr. Hassan Abbas**, discussed security challenges in the Middle East, North Africa, South and Central Asia. **Dr. Anouar Boukhars** from the Africa Center for Security Studies (ACSS) addressed recent development in Africa and **Dr. Boris Saavedra** from William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies (WJP) examined conflicts in Latin America. <https://nesa-center.org/air-war-college-virtual-visit>

Air War College Virtual Visit

21 June 2021



Speakers from top left: Dr. Gawdat Bahgat (Professor, NESA Center for Strategic Studies), Dr. Hassan Abbas (Distinguished Professor, NESA Center for Strategic Studies), Dr. Anouar Boukhars (Professor, Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)), Dr. Boris Saavedra (Professor, William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies (WJP))

NESA Programs & Events

NESA Center-Central Command Conference

The Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies, along with United States Central Command (CENTCOM), conducted a conference titled “**State-of-Play in and Around Iran**” that explored Iran’s domestic issues and challenges. The seminar had several panels focusing on; economy and military spending, political factions in Iran, defense security policy, regional security challenges and global powers competition (Russia and China, Europe and the United States), and wrapping up with the way forward. NESA’s Professors, **Dr. Richard Russell** and **Dr. Gawdat Bahgat** facilitated the 2-day digital conference that brought together 16 distinguished speakers from multiple academic and research backgrounds. The conference had 52 national and international participants. <https://nesa-center.org/nesa-center-central-command-conference>

NESA Center-Central Command Conference **State-of-Play in and Around Iran** 22–23 June 2021



Speakers from top left: Dr. Richard Russell, Dr. Gawdat Bahgat, Dr. Roger Kangas (Academic Dean), Lieutenant General Terry Wolff (USA, Ret.)(Director, NESA Center)

NESA Programs & Events

Strategic Competition in the Western Indian Ocean Region

The Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies hosted an event as part of its Indian Ocean Region focused series of engagements. This event centered on exploring strategic competition and its impact throughout the larger Western Indian Ocean Region. Specific themes of the event included the regional competition, global strategic competition, and non-traditional security challenges, illicit networks, climate change, and maritime security. The participants also provided key insights into methodologies by which to enhance regional cooperation.

The event had over 60 participants representing 17 different nation states from both within and outside the Indian Ocean Region. **NESA Director, LTG (ret) Terry Wolff**, and **DKI APCSS Director, RADM (ret) Pete Gumataotao**, kicked off the event. The course directors for this event were **Dr. Hassan Abbas of NESA**, **Mr. Jeff Payne of NESA**, **Professor Wade Turvold of DKI APCSS**, and **Dr. Srinivasan of DKI APCSS**. <https://nesa-center.org/strategic-competition-in-the-western-indian-ocean-region-crowded-waters-in-the-western-ior/>

Strategic Competition in the Western Indian Ocean Region “Crowded Waters in the Western IOR” 25–26 June 2021



NESA Faculty & Staff Engagement

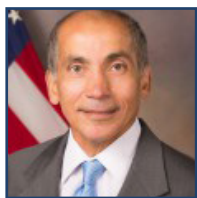
Dr. Hassan Abbas



27 June 2021 – Spoke at Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE) Global Conclave. The theme of the three-day conference was Connecting Nepal to the World.

The conclave hosted around 220 participants from 41 countries through 45 sessions. Dr. Abbas presented on Preventing Extremism and Building Resilient Society. <https://niice.org.np/events/niice-global-conclave-2021> View recording: <https://youtu.be/ti3K0hK8WT8>

Dr. Gawdat Bahgat



2021 – Published an article for the Orient, a German journal for politics, economics, and culture of the Middle East, titled “2017-2021 Gulf rift: Strategic implications and the way forward.”

<https://www.orient-online.com/Home/issues/ORIENT-III/2021>

8 July 2021 – Dr. Bahgat was a speaker at a virtual event organized by the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (GCMC) in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany titled “New Directions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Actors, Threats, and Alliances.” Alumni, experts, and scholars from over 20 countries attended the day-long event, where eight high-level speakers analyzed and assessed the region’s actors, threats, and alliances. <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/news-archive/marshall-center-hosts-virtual-outreach-event-new-directions-eastern-mediterranean-actors-threats-and>

16 July 2021 – Participated as one of the panelists in a short series of interviews after presenting at the recent Middle East Directions (MEDirections) annual conference titled, “Where Do We Start? Designing Steps Towards a Regional Security System in the Persian Gulf” in May 2021. <https://youtu.be/cJnXjqvRGe8>

David Des Roches



26 May 2021 – Professor Des Roches shared two perspectives on security in the Persian Gulf as part of a panel for the American Security Project’s virtual event to discuss the importance of remaining engaged with GCC states to meet the

shifting security challenges in the Middle East. <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/event-recap-maintaining-a-strategic-u-s-presence-in-the-persian-gulf>

View recording: <https://youtu.be/N4qysY3wu2k>

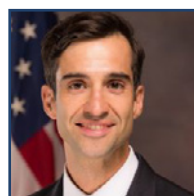
Ali Ahmad Jalali



27 May 2021 – Participated as panelist at a Friedrich Ebert Stiftung virtual Conference, titled “A Road untraveled II: Lessons learned and options for future stabilization efforts in Afghanistan.”

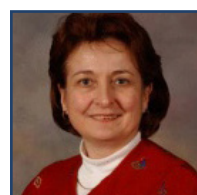
29 June 2021 – Interviewed by an Apple TV podcast for background information for a program on the origins of violent extremism in Afghan-Pakistan region and its relation to the 1993 New York trade center bombing.

Sam Marrero



8 May 2021 – NESA Executive Officer Sam Marrero spoke on an Al Araby TV (Doha, Qatar) panel for the program, “Taqrir Mawqif” (Evaluating Positions) assessing the Biden Administration’s announcement to withdraw American

troops from Afghanistan. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=468380657778014>



Anne Moisan

2 June 2021 – Created, planned, and organized a series of on-line, “Director’s Fireside Chats.” Professor Anne Moisan

NESA Faculty & Staff Engagement

created the series in an effort to remain engaged with NESA Center Tier-I Alumni from across the NESA region. The event was hosted by LTG (Ret) Terry Wolff who candidly and honestly addressed questions and comments from participants.

Jeffrey S. Payne



25 June 2021 – Spoke at Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE) Global Conclave. The theme of the three-day conference was Connecting Nepal to the World. The conclave hosted around 220 participants

from 41 countries through 45 sessions. Mr. Payne presented on the Future of Indo-Pacific Strategy. <https://niice.org.np/events/niice-global-conclave-2021> View recording: <https://youtu.be/B5wkdjxFZy8>

Michael Sharnoff



Summer 2021 – Published a journal article titled, “Nasser and the Palestinians” in Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 28, No. 3. <https://www.meforum.org/62399/nasser-and-the-palestinians> Link to PDF: <https://www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly/pdfs/62399.pdf>

NESA Alumni Activities & Contributions

01 June – **Mustafa Fetouri (Libya)** published an article for AI Monitor: [“United States Ramps Up Libyan Engagement.”](#)

14 June – **Matthew Woollen (United States)** wrote an article for the NESA website: [“Syria Next.”](#)

21 June – **Anas El Gomati (Libya)** co-authored an article for WINEP: [“Making Libya’s Berlin Process Work.”](#)

22 June – **Eman Ragab (Egypt)** contributed to a EuroMeSCo study: [“Thriving on Uncertainty: Covid-19-Related Opportunities for Terrorist Groups.”](#)

22 June – **Asanga Abeyagoonasekera (Sri Lanka)** published an Op-Ed for the Observer Research Foundation: [“How China won over local agency to shackle Sri Lanka using a port city.”](#)

23 June – **Udi Evental (Israel)** published an article for the Middle East Institute: [“Israel’s counter-Iran strategy: Significant accomplishments, but a negative trend.”](#)

24 June – **Antonia Dimou (Greece)** published an Op-Ed for

Modern Diplomacy: [“Intelligence and Evolution of Democracy in Jordan.”](#)

27 June – **Nasser bin Nasser (Jordan)** published an Op-Ed in Jordan News: [“Travel discrimination in the age of COVID-19.”](#)

NESA Upcoming Events

NESA WPS Pre-Seminar Dialogue Executive Seminar (03-21) | 23 July 2021 | Virtual

NESA Executive Seminar (03-21) | 26 July–5 August 2021 | Virtual

NESA/CENTCOM Strategic Survey | 27–29 July 2021 | Virtual

NESA Strengthen Israel-Jordan Trust to Enhance Defense & Security Cooperation Seminar | 9–12 August 2021 | Virtual

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