



NEAR EAST SOUTH ASIA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

NESA Update

July 2021 – September 2021

NESA Region Trends – AFGHANISTAN

- **The sudden fall of Kabul to the Taliban and the disintegration of the ANDSF and the government in Afghanistan overwhelmed the Afghan population** with shock, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Meanwhile, the situation sent regional countries and the international community scrambling to make sense of the situation and how to deal with the fallouts of the uncertain situation. The United States rushed to complete the withdrawal of the U.S. citizens and the Afghan allies before the August 31 deadline. The expedited operation with the deployment of about 6000 American troops to Kabul Airport became one of the largest evacuation operations conducted under the Taliban control of the Afghan capital. The terrorist attacks by the ISIS on the crowded airport in Kabul causing death to 13 American servicemen and scores of Afghan civilians exacerbated the already complicated international evacuation operation.
- **In Kabul, the political and ideological differences within the Taliban** that has impeded the formation of government so far seems to be a major factor with long-term impact on the future of Afghanistan and the region. The traditional Taliban's political and legal culture differs from that of the Haqqani network, which is a sophisticated Jihadi organization. The former is characterized by pursuing a strict Deobandi Sunni culture while the latter maintains wider links to other extremist groups, including al-Qaeda and Pakistani intelligence.
- **The two factions now compete for power**, but the competition may extend to a race for ideological domination as they establish themselves in Afghanistan. A byproduct of the diversity may lead to the emergence of splinter groups which the ISIS will target for recruitment. The United States has conditioned

IN THIS REPORT

1–3 NESA Region Trends

4–10 Programs & Events

11–12 Engagement

13 Alumni Contributions

13 Upcoming Events

Engagement • Education • Outreach

NESA Region Trends

Taliban government recognition on their respect international norms, inclusivity of their government and their respect of human rights including women's rights.

- **The victory of the Taliban has galvanized the global jihadist groups posing major security challenges** to the governments across the NESA region, particularly in Afghanistan's neighboring countries. The countries in the region and beyond are showing concerns that the reemergence of al Qaeda, Daesh/ISIS, and other violent extremist groups can pose threats to security in the region and beyond.
- **The collapse of the government in Afghanistan and the loose control of the Taliban across the country provided an opportunity for the ISKP to revitalize its terrorist operation.** The Taliban's releasing all prisoners in Kabul, Bagram, and other cities freed thousands of ISKP militants, including their hardcore members, leaders, master trainers, and bomb-makers. This has suddenly boosted the network's capacity to hit back. The August 26 terrorist attack on the airport in Kabul, with devastating losses, is a clear demonstration of their reinvigorated ability in a city controlled by the Taliban.
- In contacts with local sources and NESA alumni, the NESA Faculty participated in ongoing virtual meetings discussing the situation and how it affects U.S. interests and the dynamics of regional developments. NESA faculty were invited by domestic and international media for expert comments on different aspects of the situation.

VIEWS FROM ALUMNI

Israeli Attitudes toward Afghanistan

- Israel saw with great sadness and concern the rapid fall of Afghanistan by the Taliban. The pictures from Kabul airport were heartbreaking and reminiscent of the panic in Saigon when the American helicopter left the city, the northern forces moved in, and tens of thousands of people were left behind in chaos and despair. Too early to know how the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan will impact the NESA region. The main Israeli concern is the potential for increased radicalization in the region, which will harm stability and create more terrorism. Israelis are sympathetic to the U.S. decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and have learned from withdrawing in southern Lebanon in 2000 and from the Gaza Strip in 2005. Each Israeli withdrawal was met with increased terrorism and complicated the strategic situation. Another Israeli concern is the impact on Washington's international political status, particularly in Asia and the Pacific region. How will China respond to the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan?
- U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and Taliban takeover will also strengthen regional spoilers,

NESA Region Trends

and the “patience pays” strategy adopted by Sunni and Shia Islamists. The impact will be felt in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The situation in Afghanistan bolsters Qatar and the MB-Political Islam axis led by Turkey and Qatar, impacting Jordan and Egypt, and Israel internally. It may have a negative impact on Iran’s willingness to compromise over its nuclear program.

Lebanese Attitudes toward Afghanistan

- Lebanese reactions differ based on the acute polarization and sectarian strife in the country but generally fall under two categories: (1) that the U.S. entered and withdrew from Afghanistan based on pure interest - with no regard for human rights or democratization, and (2) that the U.S. should not have been in Afghanistan in the first place, and that while the retreat was indeed “messy,” in the long-term, it is pivotal for the U.S. to decrease its involvement in the internal affairs of states in the region. More broadly, pro-U.S. sentiments have generally decreased in Lebanon and the region because of USD shortages in Lebanon and the resulting economic crisis.

Jordanian Attitudes toward Afghanistan

- The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has saved the U.S. Army a great deal in terms of cost in various sectors and has transformed the equation in the military presence from physical occupation to the political equation, very similar to the GCC situation after they obtained their independence. Thus, the U.S., in close collaboration with Pakistan, has reached an agreement with the Taliban to rule the country with a modest new form of Islamic governance. The new government will be financed by GCC and receive political support from Pakistan and the United States. Currently, the U.S. is racing the clock to evacuate as many Afghan agents as possible who later will be settled in the U.S. and trained and redeployed at a later stage. The Taliban takeover should come as little surprise because the movement understands the Afghan region better than the Western-backed government in Kabul. Taliban gained the loyalty of 90% in the rural areas because it supported these Afghans more than the central government did; therefore, the Taliban created a populist base among locals and developed this base which helped facilitate dominance over the country.

NESA Programs & Events

Professional Military Education Workshops

NESA conducted two faculty development workshops for the Saudi Armed Forces Staff College War Course, 26–29 July in Riyadh, KSA, and 31 August–3 September in Washington, DC. A teaching team headed by Dr. Michael Bell led twelve Saudi instructors through a program focused on senior professional military education lesson development and curriculum design. The NESA teaching team conducted the in-person and virtual program, including four colleagues from the United Kingdom, Professors: Mark Bibbey, Justin Boston, Andrea Brewington, and Tom Wagstaff. NESA faculty members Chuck Marks, Wayne Clark, and Richard Wiersema shared course director responsibilities.



NESA Programs & Events

Strategic Survey Seminar: The Middle East and U.S. National Security

The Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies hosted a three-day webinar series to explore key political, military, and socio-economic dynamics impacting the wider Middle East and U.S. security policy. The webinar was joined by various internationally recognized scholar-practitioners, primarily intended for both U.S. and foreign military officers, as well as civilians working in U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) to enhance their situational awareness.

The webinar complements the preceding conference titled “State-of-Play in and Around Iran” by examining the region writ large. Dr. Richard Russell facilitated the virtual conference that brought together 34 participants, ranging from CENTCOM, SOCOM, the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Army Central, Army Corps of Engineers, Defense Threat Reduction Agency, to the Singapore Armed Forces. <https://nesa-center.org/strategic-survey-seminar-the-middle-east-and-u-s-national-security/>



Speakers from top left: Dr. Richard Russell (Professor, NESA Center), Dr. Aaron David Miller (Senior Fellow, Geo-economics and Strategy, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), Mr. Michael Eisenstadt (Director, Military & Security Studies Program, Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Dr. Steven Cook (Senior Fellow for Middle East and African Studies, Council on Foreign Relations), Dr. Natan Sachs (Director, Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution), Dr. F. Gregory Gause (Head of the Department of International Affairs, Bush School of Government & Public Affairs, Texas A&M University), Dr. Michael Knights, (Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy)

NESA Programs & Events

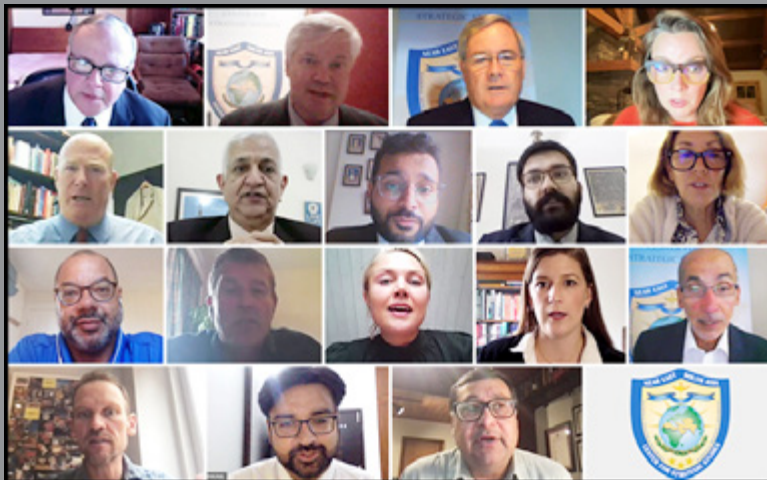
Executive Seminar (ES 03-21): Climate Change

The NESA Center conducted a two-week seminar focused on the security implications related to climate change. Col. Daniel Curfiss (Ret.), Dr. Gawdat Bahgat, and Mr. David Des Roches moderated roundtable discussions with senior climate experts, current and former intelligence officers, and leaders in the private sector and academia to facilitate dialogue to combat the climate crisis. The seminar examined climate change from a security perspective and how different regions are thinking about climate risks. Climate change is impacting and exacerbating risks to security at home and abroad. <https://nesa-center.org/executive-seminar-es-03-21-climate-change/>

Executive Seminar (ES 03-21)

Climate Change

26 July – 05 August 2021



Speakers from top left: Col. Daniel Curfiss, USMC (Ret.) (Professor, NESA), Dr. Roger Kangas (Academic Dean, NESA), LTG Terry A. Wolff, USA (Ret.) (Director, NESA), Dr. Karen Young (Senior Fellow & Founding Director of the Program on Economics & Energy, Middle East Institute), Mr. David Des Roches (Professor, NESA), Dr. David Roberts (Associate Professor, King's College, School of Security Studies), Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (Director General, National Maritime Foundation), Dr. Oliver Nelson Gonsalves, PhD (Associate Fellow, National Maritime Foundation), Mr. Saurabh Thakur (Associate Fellow, National Maritime Foundation), Ms. Amy Jaffe (Research Professor and Managing Director of the Climate Policy Lab, Tufts University), Dr. Marcus King (Director of the Master of Arts in International Affairs Program, Elliott School of International Affairs), Mr. Antony Froggatt (Senior Research Fellow & Deputy Director, Energy, Environment, and Resources Programme, Chatham House), Ms. Anna Aberg (Research Analyst, Chatham House), Ms. Rebecca Peters (Research Fellow, Chatham House), Dr. Gawdat Bahgat (Professor, NESA), Mr. Oli Brown (Associate Fellow, Chatham House), Dr. Pushp Bajaj, PhD (Research Fellow, National Maritime Foundation), Dr. Adil Najam (Dean, Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies)

NESA Programs & Events

Senior Leader Engagement with the Rasanah Institute

On Tuesday, representatives from the Saudi Arabia National Defense University Strategic Implementation Office (SANDU SIO) and from the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA Center) conducted a Senior Leader Engagement with the Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies (Rasanah IIIS) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. SANDU SIO Provost and NESA Distinguished Professor, Dr. Michael Bell, Kelly Rosenberger (NESA Associate Dean and SANDU SIO Program Manager), and Richard Wiersema (NESA Professor) participated in the event where the potential for future collaboration and support was discussed. <https://nesa-center.org/senior-leader-engagement-with-the-rasanah-institute/>

Senior Leader Engagement with the Rasanah Institute 3 August 2021



NESA Programs & Events

Arab-Israeli Conflict: Israel/Jordan Trust to Enhance Defense and Security Cooperation Seminar

The Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies conducted a four-day seminar to assess ways to establish peace and security cooperation between Israel and Jordan. The seminar was designed to offer a unique forum for discussing strategic issues directly with Israeli and Jordanian counterparts from the NESA Region, U.S. government officials, subject-matter experts, scholars, and advisors. The seminar consisted of eight distinct sessions. Specific themes of the event included countering violent extremist organizations, drones, and border security, maritime and water security, and cyber security and artificial intelligence. <https://nesa-center.org/arab-israeli-conflict-israel-jordan-trust-to-enhance-defense-and-security-cooperation-seminar/>

Arab-Israeli Conflict: Israel/Jordan Trust To Enhance Defense & Security Cooperation Seminar 9–12 August 2021



Speakers from top left: Dr. Michael Sharnoff (Associate Professor, NESA), Dr. Roger Kangas (Academic Dean, NESA), LTG Terry A. Wolff, USA (Ret.)(Director, NESA), Dr. Asher Susser (Professor Emeritus of Middle Eastern History, Tel Aviv University), Professor David Des Roches (Associate Professor, NESA Center for Strategic Studies), Dr. David Katz (Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at University of Haifa), Dr. Ian Ralby (Founder and CEO, I.R. Consilium), Mr. Simon Handler (Assistant Director of the Cyber Statecraft Initiative, Atlantic Council), Mr. Wyatt Hoffman (Research Fellow, Center for Security and Emerging Technology, Georgetown), Mr. Michael Sexton (Senior Editorial Strategist, Synack)

NESA Programs & Events

Omani Diplomatic Institute Seminar

Experts from the Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies arranged a three-day virtual seminar with 23 distinguished Omani diplomats to exchange their perspectives of the ongoing opportunities and challenges in the Middle East writ large. The overarching objective of this seminar was to promote mutual cooperation and shared perspectives of the emerging strategic landscape.

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the United States' closest partners in the Middle East. The two countries signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1833 and established diplomatic relations in 1972. In 2009, the United States and Oman signed a free trade agreement, which has further expanded economic and political partnerships between the two nations. <https://nesa-center.org/omani-diplomatic-institute-seminar-2/>

Omani Diplomatic Institute Seminar

16–18 August 2021



Speakers from top left: LTG Terry A. Wolff, USA (Ret.) (Director, NESA), Dr. Hanan Al-Shahi (Chief of North America Dept, MFA), Dr. Gawdat Bahgat (Professor, NESA), Dr. Hassan Abbas (Distinguished Professor, NESA), Dr. Roger Kangas (Academic Dean, NESA), Minister. Ali Jalali (Distinguished Professor, NESA), COL (Ret.) David Lamm (Deputy Director, NESA), Dr. Richard Russell (Professor, NESA)

NESA Programs & Events

Dynamics of Countering Human Trafficking in South Asia and the Gulf

The Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies arranged a virtual seminar to help participants assess, analyze, and identify opportunities to effectively counter human trafficking in South Asia and the Gulf and improve regional coordination and cooperation to dismantle illicit networks in the area. The seminar focused on the creation, dissemination, and use of standard operating procedures (SOPS) for victim identification and referral to rehabilitation services. <https://nesa-center.org/dynamics-of-countering-human-trafficking-in-south-asia-and-the-gulf/>

Dynamics of Countering Human Trafficking in South Asia & the Gulf 30 August–1 September 2021



Speakers from top left: Dr. Hassan Abbas (Course Director and Distinguished Professor, NESA), Dr. Roger Kangas (Academic Dean, NESA), LTG Terry A. Wolff, USA (Ret.) (Director, NESA), Mr. Victor Vartanian (Special Agent (Ret), Department of Homeland Security), Dr. Davina Durgana (Adjunct Faculty, College of International Security Affairs (CISA)), Ms. Carolina Holderness (Chief, Human Trafficking Response Unit & Deputy Chief, Special Victims Bureau, Manhattan District Attorney's Office), Ms. Humaira Masihuddin, (Visiting Faculty and Trainer, Police College Sihala, Judicial Academy Islamabad), Mr. Sanjeev Pandey (Military Program Management Specialist, Office of Defense Cooperation, Embassy of United States in Nepal), Ms. Lindsey Robinson (Director of Legal Engagement, Human Trafficking Institute), Dr. Al Naqvi (CEO, American Institute of Artificial Intelligence), Deputy Chief David Weiss (Deputy Chief, Human Trafficking Unit, Kings County District Attorney's Office, Brooklyn, NY), Ms. Anila Duro (Adjunct Professor, Department of Law, Police Science and Criminal Justice Administration, John Jay College)

NESA Faculty & Staff Engagement

Dr. Hassan Abbas



27 July 2021 – Gave a keynote talk at Baghdad’s Barauloom Forum discussing my recent book “The Prophet’s Heir” (Yale University Press, 2021). The in-person event was attended by 35–40 people, including members of the Iraqi

parliament, cabinet insurers, and the former Prime Minister of Iraq. Former Iraqi Oil Minister, Dr. Ibrahim Bahraloom, introduced and presented an award to Dr. Abbas.

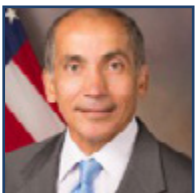


28 August 2021 – Was a guest speaker along with two others on Al Jazeera English: Inside Story, titled, “How should social

media companies handle the Taliban?” The interview focused on how tech giants face challenges over disseminating Taliban content as the group prepares to form a new government in Afghanistan. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dt0JRh5gVc>

1 September 2021 – Interviewed for an article that was the top story of the day with the most website hits, titled “The Taliban are back in power. But how will they govern?” by The Christian Science Monitor. <https://www.csmonitor.com/Daily/2021/20210901>

Dr. Gawdat Bahgat



10 August 2021 – Published a piece regarding regional powers do not need to be bystanders as tensions persist between Washington and Tehran, titled “Tensions between Washington & Tehran are adding fuel to Middle East crises”

in Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/us-iran-middle-east-tensions-nuclear-deal>

10 August 2021 – Wrote an article for the Saudi magazine, Araa (Opinions). The magazine issue was celebrating the 31st anniversary of the first Gulf War (i.e. the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the U.S. efforts to liberate it). The article highlighted the joint efforts by U.S. & Arab partners to build a security architecture in the Middle East. [Arabic] https://araa.sa/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5741:2021-08-10-11-36-26&catid=4471&Itemid=172

David Des Roches



20–23 July 2021 – Co-chaired a small group virtual meeting of the Gulf Research Meeting, which is an annual academic event held at Cambridge University. We reviewed various academic papers

submitted on the topic of the U.S. and the Gulf with an eye towards eventual publication. Our interested publisher is Gerlach AG of Berlin, a specialized Middle East publisher, which has published Mr. Des Roches’ work in the past.



22 July 2021 – Participated in a forum on women and conflict lessons learned convened by the Missing Peace Initiative of the U.S. Institute of Peace. This was a presentation of various lessons learned in conflict with an emphasis on gender violence. Mr. Des Roches participated as part of NESA’s WPS efforts.

3 August 2021– Delivered remarks on the future of the Carter Doctrine as part of a public event at the Middle East Institute of the National University of Singapore. Other panelists were Elena DeLozier of WINEP and Ken Katzmann of CRS. This is one of the top Middle East think tanks in Asia. <https://mei.nus.edu.sg/event/between-co-operation-confrontation-has-the-us-re-nounced-the-carter-doctrine/>

NESA Faculty & Staff Engagement

5 August 2021 – Participated in a meeting hosted by the College of International Security Affairs (CISA) with the Saudi Ministry of Defense Director General of Religious Affairs and his delegation. David Des Roches took the Saudi delegation on a short tour of the National Defense University (NDU) campus and planned to meet again on his next visit to the Kingdom.

John H. Gill



13 July 2021 – Spoke on the topic of India as a panelist in a webinar entitled “Recalibrating Geopolitical Relations in the Indo-Pacific” for The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR). The webinar provided a virtual discussion on the challenges of navigating the current geopolitical environment for Japan, Australia, India, and Taiwan. <https://www.nbr.org/event/recalibrating-geopolitical-relations-in-the-indo-pacific>

Ali Ahmad Jalali

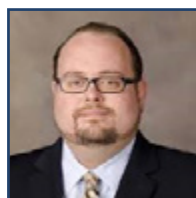


17 August 2021 – Interviewed by PBS News Hour on whether the Taliban are changed, or they pretend to this to win international recognition. The interview titled, “Can the Taliban be trusted to keep their promise of reasonable rule? Two experts weigh in” can be accessed via video, audio, or transcript here: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/can-the-taliban-be-trusted-to-keep-their-promise-of-reasonable-rule-two-experts-weigh-in>



18 August 2021 – Guest speaker at the Westminster Institute for a discussion of Afghanistan’s development and outlook. The video titled “The Strategic Consequences of the Failure in Afghanistan” can be viewed here and currently has 1,355 views. <https://youtu.be/f5PIPFQysyg>

Jeffrey S. Payne



July 2021 – Published the Final Report/ Executive Summary for the NESA Center and DKI APCSS Strategic Competition in the Indian Ocean Region Workshop (Part II). The workshop was from 28–30 June 2021 and centered on exploring strategic competition and its impact throughout the larger Western Indian Ocean Region. Read the report here. <https://nesa-center.org/strategic-competition-in-the-western-indian-ocean-region-crowded-waters-in-the-western-ior/>

12 August 2021 – Presented on China’s Engagement in the Western Indian Ocean for the United States Air Force Special Operations School. The one-hour presentation was part of an Africa-focused regional course.

NESA Alumni Activities & Contributions

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

20 July – **Arslan Chikhaoui (Algeria)** published an article for the NESA website: [“Algeria: A New Challenging Era.”](#)

21 July – **Shanthie D’Souza (India)** published an Op-Ed for *The Hindustan Times*: [“In Afghanistan, how India missed the bus.”](#)

23 July – **Antonia Dimou (Greece)** published an article for *Modern Diplomacy*: [“A New Era in US-Jordan Relations.”](#)

27 July – **Sanam Vakil and Neil Quilliam (United Kingdom)** published an Op-Ed for *Foreign Policy*: [“The Rocky New Era of the Saudi-Emirati Relationship.”](#)

10 August – **Asanga Abeyagoonasekera (Sri Lanka)** published an Op-Ed for *ORF Online*: [“The Rajapaksa triumvirate and the CCP backdoor in Sri Lanka.”](#)

17 August – **Shanthie D’Souza (India)** published an Op-Ed for *The Hindustan Times*: [“Why India must not abandon Afghanistan again.”](#)

18 August – **Antonia Dimou (Greece)** published an article for *Modern Diplomacy*: [“Trilateral Partnerships drive East Mediterranean security and prosperity.”](#)

20 August – **Arslan Chikhaoui (Algeria)** wrote an article for the NESA website: [“Algerian Foreign Policy in the Post-Pandemic Era.”](#)

25 August – **Uttam Kumar Sinha (India)** published an Op-Ed for *The Hindustan Times*: [“Devise a new water governance plan to deal with the future of the Indus basin.”](#)

26 August – **Mustafa Fetouri (Libya)** published an Op-Ed for *Middle East Monitor*: [“Are the people of Libya ready to decide their future?”](#)

NESA Upcoming Events

Iraq Capstone Program | 13–17 September 2021 | Washington DC

MENA Regional Waters: Red Sea Smuggling Part 2 | 14–15 September 2021 | Virtual

Iraq National Defence College Visit | 20–24 September 2021 | Washington DC

Combating Transnational Threats Senior Executive Seminar | 20–24 September 2021 | Virtual

Washington Embassy Orientation | 18–22 October 2021 | Washington DC

Washington Seminar | 22 October 2021 | Washington DC

**Near East South Asia (NESA)
Center for Strategic Studies**

Fort Lesley J. McNair
National Defense University
Abraham Lincoln Hall
300 5th Ave SW
Washington, DC 20319-5066

Phone: (202) 685-4131
Fax: (202) 685-4999

NESA-Center.org

Building Relationships



Enhancing Security

 NESACenter

 @TheNESACenter

 Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies

 GlobalNETPlatform.org/NESA

 Communications@NESA-Center.org