

# JEMEAA

The Air Force Journal of  
European, Middle Eastern,  
& African Affairs

VOL. 2 NO. 1

SPRING 2020



The Air Force

# Journal of European, Middle Eastern, & African Affairs

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ISSN 2639-6351 (print) ISSN 2639-636X (online)

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**COMMAND LEVEL PERSPECTIVE****4 Generals Testify at Senate Hearing on FY 2021 Defense Budget**

General Tod D. Wolters, USAF

General Stephen R. Lyons, USA

**FEATURES****31 The US Withdrawal and the Scramble for Syria**

Dr. Wojciech Michnik

Dr. Spyridon Plakoudas

**40 The *Contract* Broken, and Restored****Air Rescue in Operation Inherent Resolve, 2014–2017 (Part 2 of 2)**

Dr. Forrest L. Marion

**57 Why Are Warm-Water Ports Important to Russian Security?****The Cases of Sevastopol and Tartus Compared**

Tanvi Chauhan

**77 The Struggle for Air Superiority****The Air War over the Middle East (1967–1982) as a Case Study**

Dr. Tal Tov

**98 The Foreign Policies of Large Democratizing African States****South Africa and Nigeria**

Dr. Stephen F. Burgess

**VIEW****130 How the Israel Defense Forces Might Confront Hezbollah**

Dr. Ehud Eilam

**INTERVIEW****138 Aid to Anti-Assad Forces Became the Most Expensive  
US Covert Action**

Dr. David S. Sorenson

Interview by Nuño Rodríguez

## BOOK REVIEWS

- 146 *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance,*  
Edited by Ann-Sofie Dahl  
Reviewed by Leandro Guimaraes Froes
- 147 *The End of Strategic Stability? Nuclear Weapons and the Challenge of Regional Rivalries,*  
Edited by Lawrence Rubin and Adam N. Stulberg  
Reviewed by Seth Conor McGeehan
- 149 *Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order,*  
Edited by Nicholas Wright  
Reviewed by Dr. Srinivasa Sitaraman

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## Generals Testify at Senate Hearing on FY 2021 Defense Budget



*On 25 February 2020, Gen Tod D. Wolters, USAF, commander of US European Command and NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), and Gen Stephen R. Lyons, US Army, commander of US Transportation Command, testified at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the defense authorization request for fiscal year 2021 and the Future Years Defense Program. The following is an edited and condensed transcript of their testimony, focusing primarily on General Wolters testimony. The video of the full testimony is available via DVIDS at <https://www.dvidshub.net/>.*

**General Wolters:** Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of the committee, it's an honor to appear before you, and on behalf of the men, women, and families that represent USEUCOM, we thank each and every one of you for your steadfast support. As all of you well know, it's an absolute privilege to serve alongside the patriots that represent the United States of America. In Europe, political uncertainty, energy competition, and diffusion of disruptive technology are stressing the established Western order. Threats and challenges, most notably Russia, Iran, and China, seek to take advantage of these conditions through aggressive action using all instruments of national power and are backed by increasingly capable military forces. Fully aligned with the *National Defense Strategy* [NDS] implementation efforts, we confront these challenges by adapting our approach to most effectively employ our means.<sup>1</sup> Together with the like-minded allies and partners, our team of patriots defend freedom in all domains, across the area of responsibility, and around the clock. Thanks to their ef-

forts and the authorities and resources you provide, EUCOM continues to maintain positive momentum with respect to readiness and is postured to compete, deter, and effectively respond with the full weight of the transatlantic alliance. In 2019, NATO took significant military strides with improvements in command and control, indications and warnings, mission command, and by approving a new NATO military strategy titled *Comprehensive Defense and Shared Response*. NATO continues to adapt its force structure with the establishment of two additional NATO headquarters: Joint Forces Command Norfolk, which is focused on maintaining transatlantic lines of communications, and the German-led Joint Support Enabling Command, focused on rear-area logistics coordination. These headquarters increase our ability to command and control, enable deployment, and sustain NATO forces in crisis through conflict. The European Union, NATO, and EUCOM have made progress improving infrastructure and transit procedures to facilitate rapid movement of forces across the Euro-Atlantic. We will leverage many of these advancements to facilitate deployment of a division-size force as mentioned by the Chairman during the US-led exercise Defender Europe 20, an exercise that showcases US and allied commitment to collective security of the Euro-Atlantic. The United States' position in Europe is an invaluable cornerstone of national security. Today, US service members in Europe continue to generate peace alongside our allies and partners. We are grateful for sustained Congressional interest and support through authorities and funding. Together with the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians of USEUCOM, your support demonstrates our nation's continued commitment to defend the homeland forward and preserve peace for the one billion citizens in the Euro-Atlantic. Thank you.

**Senator Jim Inhofe (R-OK), chair:** As I mentioned, General Wolters, we appreciate the briefing that we got in Germany. And you covered something I think might be worth repeating here. In October 2019, the news report suggested that Russia deployed as many as 10 submarines for some of the largest fleet maneuvers since World War II. Can you describe, as you did this last week, how the pace and scope of Russia's maritime activity has changed in recent years and what implications that has for EUCOM?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Chairman. We took note of the Russian undersea activity in the summer, fall of 2018 and compared it to what Russia executed in the summer of '19, fall of '19, and what we saw was a 50-percent increase in the number of resources in the undersea that Russia committed to both those out-of-area submarine patrol operations. But, what we also witnessed was an improved degree of good-order discipline on behalf of the Russian sailors. So, this observation is

one more reflection about how important it is to continue to improve our competitive edge to buy down the risk to ensure that we can operate with freedom.

**Senator Inhofe:** Okay, that's good. And on that same trip, we went through Rota, Spain, when they were talking about adding the two US destroyers to the four that are already there. Is that something you support, and where does that fall into your level of request you have for additional forces in EUCOM?

**General Wolters:** Chairman, it's precisely in line with our request for two additional destroyers. And, what I'm also proud to report with the support of this committee through EDI, we've been in a position to where we've been able to improve and mature the infrastructure at Rota. If you ask me to accept two more destroyers tomorrow, we actually possess the infrastructure at Rota to be able to house those two additional destroyers—a reflection of the value of the funds for deterrence.

**Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), ranking member:** General Wolters, the European Command strategy document states meeting the challenge of countering Kremlin-sponsored malign influence campaign necessitates a whole-of-government solution. Do you assess currently that we have a synchronized campaign prosecuted in a unified manner to address malign influence particularly directed to the 2020 election?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I think our campaign momentum is improving in that area. As you're familiar with, we established two years ago the Russia integration group that bears the responsibility to represent USEUCOM with the United States and with many NATO nations to align a whole-of-nation, whole-of-government activity and activities below the level of actual kinetic conflict to ensure that we can have better control of the information domain. We're improving. I think we're to a point to where we expect to do better, and I think that's a good place for military leaders to be. I will tell you that I'm pleased with the campaign momentum. I've had the opportunity to visit with many of the US entities and national entities that represent whole-of-government and whole-of-nation activity to provide more influence in the information domain, and I'm pleased with the progress.

**Senator Reed:** Thank you. Can you just give me your assessment of the current state of alliance cohesion within NATO? And, I would assume that at a military level there's one sort of analysis and a political level another. Can you touch on both?

**General Wolters:** Senator Reed, the mil-to-mil alignment that I see with the United States and NATO with the North Atlantic extension through the Euro-Atlantic is strong as I've ever witnessed, and I've had the opportunity to serve in

NATO since 1983. And, I am pleased to report that at the political level, as a result of recent documents that were approved at NATO at the political level, we're seeing greater cohesion as well. For the first time in over six decades, we at NATO approved the first NATO military strategy. It's a document that's classified NATO Secret. It codifies the threat and codifies the activities that we need to embrace to more comprehensively defend, all 29 nations agreed to that NATO military strategy, and I think that's a reflection at the political level and the military level of improving cohesion.

**Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS):** Let me ask you, General Wolters, the proposed OMB Fiscal Year 2021 budget requests \$705.4 billion for DOD.<sup>2</sup> This represents three-tenths of one percent over the current fiscal year. In other words, the proposed budget buys us less resources than the current year, considering inflation. Am I correct there?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator.

**Senator Wicker:** And let me just ask you this, do we need less security resources in the European command next year than we do this year?

**General Wolters:** Senator, we need more.

**Senator Wicker:** And in addition to that, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the National Defense Strategy commission have all endorsed 3.5-percent real growth. Is that also your opinion, General Wolters?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator.

**Senator Wicker:** I appreciate the distinguished Chairman mentioning early on in his questioning Rota, Spain, and I'm glad that he and his team visited there, bipartisan delegation visited there just the other day. The DDGs [guided-missile destroyers] are the workhorse of the Navy. General Wolters, in European command, how does a mere three-tenths of one percent increase over the current fiscal year affect what we're gonna be able to do there with the DDGs? With the two extra DDGs?

**General Wolters:** Senator, every cent counts. Those two additional DDGs would allow us the opportunity to continue to improve our ability to get indications and warnings in the potential battle space and also dramatically improve our ability to better command and control. And because of the flexibility of those resources, they can comprehensively defend in all geographical areas in support of Europe. So, those destroyers are critical to improve the campaign to deliver peace, particularly in the areas of indications and warning and command and control.

**Senator Wicker:** Thank you, thank you for that. And we're gonna certainly try to help you up and down the dais here on a bipartisan basis on the resources to defend America and Americans. It's interesting that the leader of EUCOM would mention in the first few seconds of his statement not only Russia but China. And so, could you enlighten us about where you're seeing increased problems with China and increased influence in the European theater from China?

**General Wolters:** Senator, two areas. The first is seaport equities and the second is 5G Huawei.<sup>3</sup> And what we've seen in several critical nations on the periphery of Europe is an economic majority on behalf of China investment for seaports in critical nations like Belgium, Italy, France, and Greece. And that's a large concern to all of the NATO nations. And when you start to do the collective math you discover that China has access to 10 percent of the shipping rights into and out of Europe. Those are daunting figures that should lead one to believe that we need to continue to be vigilant with respect to seaport equities on the economic side. But, the second issue happens to be Huawei and 5G. I'm firmly aware of several European nations who have a tendency to lean toward Huawei and 5G. My concern goes back to the Soldiers. Without the appropriate network protection, there's a potential compromise of technical data and personal data, and that is not to the good order and discipline of our US Soldiers and our NATO Soldiers.

**Senator Wicker:** And finally, General Wolters, a number of us have been involved on a member to member basis with our parliamentary brothers and sisters in the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] parliamentary assembly. We have a great new ambassador to the OSCE, Amb. Jim Gilmore.<sup>4</sup> To what extent is the OSCE organization important to you and to providing you information that you need?

**General Wolters:** Very important, Senator, and I think it builds incredible trust for the Euro-Atlantic link. Your hearings that you held in Gdańsk [Poland] last year were a huge boost in trust, not only between the US and Poland but throughout all of NATO.

**Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT):** Many of my colleagues and I have received briefings as recently as this morning from other departments and agencies in the administration about the coordinated response to the coronavirus. I'm also concerned about the Department of Defense response to protect service members and family members that are stationed at military installations abroad. The rapid spread of this virus as well as the number of diagnoses and deaths in countries where Americans are stationed, a lot of Americans are stationed in, for example, South Korea, is very, very concerning. I'm focused on ensuring that the depart-

ment is reevaluating and updating procedures and actions necessary to keep our service members and their families safe. General Lyons, your command manages the intertheater movement of our service members in and out of areas that have been impacted by coronavirus, making you really uniquely positioned to address this issue. What action has your command taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the wellbeing of our service members and their families? And do you need additional resources; is there more we can do to help you? And what more do you think should be done?

**General Lyons:** Senator, was it for me? I agree with your concern, and the Secretary of Defense has indicated that protection of the force is his number-one priority regarding the coronavirus. US Northern Command [USNORTHCOM] is the lead for the department, working very closely in support of Health and Human Services. We're connected with them on daily basis, frequent number of times a day. And so, we're watching this very, very closely for any implications on global mobility.

**Senator Blumenthal:** And what specific actions are you taking?

**General Lyons:** Inside the transportation enterprise, locations like Travis Air Force Base has become a receiver for potential folks coming out of the theater—particularly Indo-Pacific. We're not taking particular health-protection measures inside the command other than to protect the force. But in a more broad sense, we're in support of Health and Human Services and that's done through the lead of USNORTHCOM.

**Senator Blumenthal:** And General Wolters, do you feel you've been given the necessary resources and other tools to protect American service men and women and their families in Europe?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator. And, we've also been given the appropriate authorities. As we speak, in Europe today, we have over 300, cases and the nation that is most concern is Italy, with six reported deaths. We've restricted travel to certain zones, and we require all mil air arrival flights to be screened for the virus.

**Senator Blumenthal:** Are you taking any additional steps to constrain travel by service men and women or their families on their leave and so forth?

**General Wolters:** We have in what we feel are the affected areas, in particular two states inside of Italy.

**Senator Blumenthal:** And do you have plans to restrict travel to any other states?

**General Wolters:** We anticipate the need may arise in Germany, but that is still to be determined.

**Senator Blumenthal:** General Wolters, in your posture statement, you highlight American service members' on the ground in the [Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine] work.<sup>5</sup> And, you note they serve shoulder to shoulder with Ukrainian forces. Can you expand on the important efforts to deter Russian aggression there?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator. The joint military training group initiated military training team activity on a rotational basis starting in 2016. And, they also began about six months later to rotate military training teams in the special operations category. There are several phases of the long-range plan, and here we are three and a half years later in work to phase three, which puts those military training teams that represent the Joint Military Training Group. Canada and UK are the participants. Those teams are now in observer status because of the demonstrated expertise of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the conventional force in the SOF side of the house. We're very pleased with the progress of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and the stronger that they are, and the more that they embrace democratic values, the greater the alignment with the West, which is exactly where we need to hit.

**Senator Deb Fischer (R-NE):** General Wolters, how would you assess the progress that's been made in implementing the *NDS* and its emphasis on prioritizing strategic competition with Russia?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I'm very pleased. As I mentioned earlier on one of the questions from your colleagues, for the first time in many decades, we approved a NATO military strategy, and it looks very similar to the United States *National Defense Strategy*, and I believe this is one area that reflects the powerful alignment and a willingness on behalf of NATO to lean forward with respect to what we do across the full spectrum from competition to crisis to conflict, which is exactly what we call for in the *NDS*. So, I'm pleased with the ever-improving alignment in NATO and with our European nations.

**Senator Fischer:** What do you think is the biggest challenge that you have in fulfilling the goals of the *NDS* in Europe?

**General Wolters:** It is to do all we can to cure the malign influence on behalf of Russia. And, that requires a more concentrated effort in the competition phase of embracing a potential foe. And, what we've heard throughout many of the questions today are the activities that we have to embrace in twenty-first-century military, below the actual activities of kinetic conflict, and understanding what we

are doing and what the return on investment is, and we're making rapid improvement in those areas.

**Senator Fischer:** So, in order to improve, basically you'd need to work together more in your training?

**General Wolters:** Yes, ma'am.

**Senator Fischer:** Do you feel that you've come together or are coming together with other NATO partners in facing what the threats are?

**General Wolters:** We are, and a reflection of that is the approval of a NATO military strategy that actually codifies those threat and agreement on behalf of the 29 nations to identify those threats.

**Senator Fischer:** Now you and I yesterday, we discussed the growing recognition that there is [agreement] among the NATO partners on the important role of our nuclear deterrence in keeping the peace. Obviously, we all understand that our deterrent, the triad, is the bedrock of the security of this country. Can you tell us a little bit about what you are hearing from our NATO partners when it comes to the deterrent in private conversations, if you can share that, but also in public the support that you see?

**General Wolters:** Senator, there's a greater degree of awareness of the importance of deterrence, and as we look at the success that NATO has had for the last seven decades to deliver peace, one of the elements has to be the triad that exists from the United States and its representation to nuclear deterrence on the European continent. It has been very, very effective, and the nations understand more and more about that with each passing day as a result of embracing deterrence to a greater degree than we have in the past.

**Senator Fischer:** Would you say that our partners, in their embracing of this deterrence, are also becoming better messengers within their own countries about the importance of not just a strong NATO but of having that strong nuclear deterrence, that umbrella that is so vital in their freedom as well?

**General Wolters:** Absolutely, Senator. It has to do with the responsibility that we feel in NATO to generate peace—not just inside of the boundaries of Europe but on the periphery. And, as we embrace missions for NATO Mission Iraq and as we embrace Operation Resolute Support in Afghanistan we see how important it is to proliferate deterrence to the max extent practical to achieve greater peace.

**Senator Fischer:** And what are your views, sir, on adopting a so-called “no first use” policy? Do you believe that that would strengthen deterrence?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I'm a fan of flexible first use policy.

**Senator Fischer:** And, do you believe developing ground-launched conventionally armed intermediate-range weapons will enhance your ability to deter Russia?

**General Wolters:** It will. It dramatically complicates an enemy's task.

**Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA):** General Wolters, I want to ask you a question. In your testimony, I think it was maybe in a back-and-forth with Senator Reed, you talked a little bit about increased Russian sub activity in the Atlantic. The president's budget proposes to cut the *Virginia*-class sub program 50 percent by only funding one of the two in the block buy. And, on February 13, the DOD used its general transfer authority to move \$3.8 billion of Pentagon money to the general drug account for use on the southern border, and part of those funds that were moved was a reduction of \$180 million from the P-8 Poseidon aircraft program. As you know, that airplane's a modified Boeing 737 that's used as a sub hunter. It usually operates from Iceland or elsewhere in Europe to work with the fast-attack subs like the *Virginia*-class to track Russian sub activity coming from the Greenland, Iceland, UK gap. Without commenting on the budget, I would like you to talk about the importance of both the *Virginia*-class sub and the P-8 Poseidon in countering Russian sub activity.

**General Wolters:** Senator, they're vital capabilities, and what they contribute to overall maritime patrol activity has proven over time to be very, very successful. We're lucky to be part of NATO. We lean on our brothers and sisters from a national perspective to ask them to take a look at the resources they can contribute when we are in situations with respect to some decrements in the maritime patrol area. Norway has been a great contributor on the P-8 side of the house, and we see the effectiveness of that system. They are vital resources and very much needed to improve our overall deterrence posture.

**Senator Kaine:** Both of those platforms, the *Virginia*-class and then the P-8 Poseidon?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator.

**Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR):** General Wolters, let's talk a little bit more about coronavirus and its impact in the European theater. I'm reading here from a *Stars and Stripes* report on Sunday saying that at Vicenza [Italy] there had been a temporary closing—Monday through Wednesday, all dependent schools, activity centers, fitness centers, theaters, and chapels. Is that report accurate?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator.

**Senator Cotton:** Are there any updates from that report on Sunday in *Stars and Stripes*?

**General Wolters:** Those facilities remain closed, and travel to the two states are still prohibited in Italy.

**Senator Cotton:** Okay. Do you expect that those facilities in the Vicenza community will reopen on Thursday as initially planned, or do you think that closure might have to be extended?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I'd give it about a 50–50 right now about potentially extending the closure.

**Senator Cotton:** How many US troops do we have at Vicenza, roughly speaking?

**General Wolters:** Sir, we've got about six or 7,000.

**Senator Cotton:** How many of those have accompanied spouses or children?

**General Wolters:** 70 to 80 percent.

**Senator Cotton:** So, maybe about 4,000 to 4,500 husbands and wives and then some larger number of children probably?

**General Wolters:** Absolutely, and over 35,000 US military members in Italy.

**Senator Cotton:** And they're all mostly just sitting at home right now trying to avoid the coronavirus?

**General Wolters:** Not mostly, but there's a fair amount, yes, sir.

**Senator Cotton:** Coronavirus has been present in Germany as well. In fact, that was one of the first European nations in which it appeared. It hasn't appeared in the numbers yet that have exploded in Italy in the last few days. First off, has there been any such closures at our military bases in Germany?

**General Wolters:** Not yet, Senator, but we're anticipating an increase in the number of cases reported in Germany, and we're prepared to execute.

**Senator Cotton:** Troubling situation. Let's move to another troubling situation, which you've spoken about briefly as well: Huawei, the Chinese telecom company. You state in your written testimony that 5G networks by Huawei will place intellectual property, sensitive technology, and private personal information at heightened risk of acquisition and exploitation by the Chinese government. You further say that this ongoing initiative, coupled with China's growing interest and investment in European ports and infrastructure, complicates steady-state and contin-

gency operations. It sounds like you consider the use of Huawei and 5G networks in Europe to be a threat to our national security. Is that correct?

**General Wolters:** Certainly a threat to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines.

**Senator Cotton:** My next question is, it a threat to the troops that you lead?

**General Wolters:** Affirm, Senator.

**Senator Cotton:** Unfortunately, some European nations are moving forward with Huawei technology and their networks, most notably our NATO allies the United Kingdom and Germany. What are we to do about that, and how can we guarantee the security of our troopers as well as our NATO command-and-control systems?

**General Wolters:** Senator Cotton, it's vigilance, education, and going back to the basics with respect to network protection of the critical data on the technical side of the house and the personal side of the house for our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines—not just in the US but all of our NATO forces.

**Senator Cotton:** Do your military counterparts understand the threat that Huawei poses?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator.

**Senator Cotton:** So, the problem may be at the political leadership level. Statement not a question. Finally, I want to conclude on a somewhat related matter. We discussed this yesterday in our meeting. I want to bring your attention, bring everyone's attention to an alarming poll by the Pew Research Center among 16 NATO countries.<sup>6</sup> Happily, it shows that NATO's favorability ratings are pretty strong, two to one, in fact, 53 to 27 of the peoples of these 16 countries have a favorable impression of NATO. Not surprisingly, NATO scored pretty low in Russia. Somewhat disappointingly, though, when asked who should fight Russia if there were a conflict between a NATO ally and Russia, only 38 percent of peoples in these nations said my nation should fight Russia. Whereas 50 percent said the United States should fight Russia. And, in some of the biggest NATO allies, it was even more alarming. Italy 25 percent said we'll fight them, 75 percent you Americans go fight. In Germany, it was 34, 63 so that's a little better, I guess, but not too much. General Wolters, can Europeans expect Americans to care more about their security and their kids than they care about their security?

**General Wolters:** Senator, my consultations at the mil-to-mil level with chiefs of defense and ministers of defense, I see a very, very eager desire and willingness to fight the Russians. And those nations that I continually communicate with show that desire if required to protect themselves.

**Senator Cotton:** And I hear the same thing when I consult with European defense leaders, not surprisingly. These are men and women who have dedicated themselves, dedicated their lives, to the service of their country and the defense of their country. So, it's really a political problem at the level of political leadership in Europe, both in the leaders and the leadership that they show to their peoples, to demonstrate that they have to be willing to fight as hard for their future and their security as they expect Americans to fight for them. Thank you.

**Senator Gary Peters (D-MI):** General Wolters, I'd like to focus on the Baltics. In 2017, I visited Latvia and Lithuania to observe the US Army's Europe Operation Saber Strike exercise. The Michigan National Guard regularly participates in this exercise as Latvia's counterpart in the National Guard State Partnership Program, as you know. Similarly, Latvian forces participate in the Michigan National Guard's annual Northern Strike exercise, which is a joint multinational exercise hosted at Camp Grayling in Michigan. The Latvian military particularly benefits from this training in Michigan, because it offers them an opportunity for them to certify as JTACs [Joint Terminal Attack Controller], and as a result of this program, Latvia is one of only eight allied countries that are certified to call in United States close air support in combat. And part of the reason the Michigan National Guard and the Latvian military have a strong relationship is because the Latvian military is built around integrating reserve and their regular forces as a major component of their national defense strategy. So, my question to you, sir, is could you discuss how EUCOM tailors its training and partner strategies to support the Baltic States' reliance on these reserve forces and specifically the state partnership with our National Guard and how integral that is to all of this?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I can. First of all, for the Baltics writ large, the insertion of the four battalion-sized battle groups into Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland in the summer of 2016 has dramatically improved our all-domain security awareness. And in particular, as you well know, with the participation of your Michigan Air National Guardsmen, who have been very, very integral in the air-land integration piece, the lead nation in Latvia at that battalion-size battle group happens to be Canada. And we have many force elements that are intermixed amongst the other nations. The overall improvement day in and day out of those battle groups to be able to see the battlespace and defend their sovereign territory is palpable. And they're doing so in all domains and all functions. And our next step is to make sure that those battalion-sized battle groups that represent generating peace in the Baltics are aware of all the activities in the southeastern sector of Europe as well as the western portion of Europe. So, we're very, very pleased

with the continued transparency and alignment and very, very pleased with the air-land integration that we've seen improving in Latvia for the last two years.



(US National Guard photo by 1Lt Andrew Layton)

**Figure 1. Michigan National Guard affirms partnership during Latvia's 101st Independence Day celebration.** Military vehicles from NATO partner countries participate in Latvia's 101st Independence Day parade, 18 November 2019, in Riga, Latvia. Michigan and Latvia have been linked under the US National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program since 1993.

**Senator Peters:** Well, thank you. My next question is related to the development of the Next-Generation Combat Vehicle, which is now taking place in Michigan with a cross-functional team. The first platform was intended to replace the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, but the Army has just recently restarted that program and much of the debate has basically focused on the trade-off between armor and mobility and specifically how readily the vehicle can be positioned in a crisis zone. However, in the European theater, the size and weight of the vehicle could be equally problematic for its maneuverability through European terrain and civilian infrastructure, particularly the bridges there. General Wolters, you seem to address this issue in your written statement where you mention the EU in consultation with NATO is investing six and a half billion Euros in the improvement of civilian and military dual use. However, I'm concerned that this approach may not address

the core issue that I just mentioned. But, my question to you is, what is more realistic, should the next generation of combat vehicles be built to accommodate European infrastructure limits, particularly in Poland and the Baltics, or is the solution to reinforce transportation infrastructure throughout Eastern Europe?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I hate to give you this answer, but I think it's a little bit of both—and I know that General [James] McConville, leading our United States Army, has his experts taking a peak at that. And, I know that he stepped up even one more level. It gets into a discussion about armor versus mobility, and I think from a global perspective there are some trade-offs and from a regional perspective there are some trade-offs, and it all has to do with a demonstrated capability of the nations in Europe as well as other regions. So, I know that we're taking a very, very serious look at that.

**Senator Peters:** My follow-up question is how do our Western European allies, who also produce heavy military equipment, how do they accommodate limitations of civilian infrastructure, particularly in Poland and the Baltics?

**General Wolters:** A greater degree of education on the challenges that we face from a bridging perspective in Eastern Europe versus Western Europe. And, it was an issue that all of Europe was very, very aware of in the mid-80s, and they are getting themselves reacquainted with it today and they understand the imperative of making sure that we have bridging programs in the regions in the northeast and the southeast of Europe to ensure that we can shoot, move, and communicate fast.

**Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA):** General Wolters, I'm gonna pick up where my colleague Senator Peters left off. He was talking about the State Partnership Program that his Michigan National Guard has with those Baltic State members. Well, Iowa, our National Guard has a partnership with Kosovo, and I'm just always very excited about that and have relationships that I've carried on for about the decade of time that the Iowa Army National Guard has been involved with those partners. So, as the only force that both the Kosovars and Serbians trust, how can KFOR [Kosovo Force] best posture itself to ensure that there is enduring stability between the two sides, Kosovo and Serbia?

**General Wolters:** Thanks, Senator, and I can't thank you enough for the contributions of your state to Kosovo.

**Senator Ernst:** Thank you.

**General Wolters:** And as we sit today, KFOR is very, very active and engaged, more so than they were one year ago, as a result of the continued involvement of

US operations activities and investments in Kosovo and Serbia as well as the NATO investments of operations activities. We typically rotate in NATO military training teams, but when they land at those locations, to be able to have a soft landing with the force element from your National Guard State Partnership Program affords us the opportunity to reintegrate at a much faster pace. We're very, very concerned about the security disposition in the Balkans. We're very, very pleased with the efforts of KFOR, and KFOR is far more capable today as a result of learning from the experiences of the State Partnership Program like yours as they reveal themselves in Kosovo.

**Senator Ernst:** Great, thank you. And obviously a number of us here do support those state partnership programs. And what is NATO's role for peacekeeping as the KSF [Kosovo Security Force] transitions into a full army? Will it be able to guarantee Kosovo's territorial integrity? Do you see that in their future?



(US Air National Guard photo by TSgt Michael McGhee)

**Figure 2. Iowa National Guard hosts Humvee maintenance course for international partners.** The Iowa National Guard, in conjunction with the National Guard Sustainment Training Center located at Camp Dodge Joint Maneuver Training Center hosts soldiers from several Balkan countries during a weeklong Humvee maintenance management course. Members of the Kosovo Security Force review the Humvee maintenance handbook during a maintenance check.

**General Wolters:** That is certainly the goal, Senator. And, again, it's by, with, and through in a very, very tough neighborhood, and as you probably know better than I, there are some very, very, very, very serious tendencies that exist between Serbia and Kosovo that we're seeing improve over the course of the last several weeks. Amb. [Richard] Grenell has been very, very aggressive in getting those security apparati to communicate with each other, so we hope for continued good news in that area with respect to the Serbia–Kosovo relationship, with respect to taxation.<sup>7</sup>

**Senator Ernst:** Absolutely, and I think that here is undue pressure obviously coming from Russia in that region as well.

**Senator Doug Jones (D-AL):** General Wolters, we've taken the first steps to begin the Defender Europe 20 military exercise, the largest of its kind in 25 years. I think there are 18 countries participating across 10 countries. So, what are the biggest challenges you see in executing the Defender 20 program, and what are the key takeaways you hope to see coming out of the exercise?

**General Wolters:** Senator, on the logistics side of the house, the environment in Europe has to be mature enough to be able to absorb 20,000 Soldiers and get those Soldiers to the right pre-positioned locations to be able to grab the appropriate gear that they're supposed to get and get to their foxhole and be able to execute. And, what we want to do is count every second that it takes to get the Soldier from the first point of entry all the way to his or her foxhole to be successful to adequately defend. And, we anticipate that there will be some snags. I want to applaud this committee on the fact that two years ago we couldn't exercise Defender Europe 20. We weren't mature enough with respect to the pre-position stockpiles to have Soldiers show up at location X and be able to grab resources. Today, we can do that. We know the fitness of the resources and now we'll be able to examine their speed with which they can get to the foxhole and be able to execute.

**Senator Jones:** Great. Is Turkey participating?

**General Wolters:** Senator, they are, as observers. And they are in certain areas with respect to activity on the periphery of Georgia.

**Senator Jones:** Just a follow-up real quick. What, if any, response or reaction are you seeing from Russia or do you expect from the Russians? Or any of our other adversaries?

**General Wolters:** Senator, we've seen a fair amount of response from Russia. They're not overly pleased with Defender Europe 20. We're concerned mostly about the readiness of our forces. And, we're doing all of that in accordance with international law in sovereign space and sovereign seas and sovereign land.

**Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC):** General Wolters, tell me a little bit about how well your area of responsibility partners are closing the gap on their cyber capabilities, how well we're actually coordinating, and your assessment of our, if you take a look at Russia, they're all over the place. Any time I travel to that part of the world, you're talking about Russian information campaigns and their malign activities. So, give me some hope on how we're either creating a gap or filling holes we have right now.

**General Wolters:** Senator, we're improving our strategic transparency and alignment in the cyber domain. I would say that over the course of the last two years, the NATO nations have done a much better job of understanding the challenges that they face on the defensive side of the house from a hygiene perspective. And once they've got their backyard in order; now they're in a position to understand where they start with respect to network protection. And that truly has come about as a result of our USCYBERCOM's willingness to lead from the front.

**Senator Tillis:** And actually as you move into that answer, I'd also like for you to talk about Huawei, ZTE,<sup>8</sup> and whether or not we've gotten to a good place where clearly they're gonna allow that infrastructure to be present but in terms of critical infrastructure, are we getting to a good place?

**General Wolters:** Senator, that's a great point, and that's exactly where I was headed. The hygiene piece, the defensive cyber piece, has to be applied with respect to what is about to become an issue in Europe with respect to proliferation of 5G activity and Huawei. Network protection is going to be job one. So, we're right back to the basics. And as you well know from your time with General [Paul] Nakasone [commander, USCYBERCOM], he's keen on that, and we've seen a marked improvement in the manning for defensive cyber ops on the US side in Europe. And we've seen an increase in manning on the defensive cyber-op side of the house for the NATO nations in Europe.

**Senator Angus King (I-ME):** General Wolters, quick question. Do we have sufficient visibility of Russian submarines in the Atlantic? Do we know where they are?

**General Wolters:** We do, but not 100 percent of the time.

**Senator King:** I don't want whatever the missing percent is to be off the coast of Maine.

**General Wolters:** I agree, Senator.

**Senator King:** Or New York.

**General Wolters:** Absolutely.

**Senator King:** Not to be too parochial about it. What's the risk of a, I think it's unlikely, I hope I'm right, that Russian tanks are gonna roll across the border into the Baltics. But what is our thinking and strategic thinking about a hybrid kind of activity involving Russian language, a kind of Crimea model? Is that a concern, and do we have a strategic response?

**General Wolters:** It is very much a concern, Senator. And it has to do with the posture of our forces as we sit today in competition and attempt to effectively deter. And, we are improving in our ability to do so. And, we have to do so to a point to where we compel any potential enemy of ours to not take those first steps against us. And, NATO agreed in the NATO military strategy to also recognize a whole-of-government, whole-of-nation approach that will allow us to dramatically improve our posture so that we can better see the battlespace from an indications and warnings standpoint and better be able to more proactively deploy to defend.

**Senator King:** And be prepared for a different kind, not a traditional tanks rolling over the border invasion.

**General Wolters:** Absolutely.

**Senator King:** I think we should, and I'm sure we are, a lot of study on Crimea and how that played out and what the response could have been or might have been.

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator.

**Senator King:** Final question, the attacks on the Saudi tanker field and also the Iranian missile in Iraq after [Iranian general Qasem] Soleimani's death to me raise concerns about our ability to defend against, I don't know what you want to call them, cruise missiles, low-level missiles, intermediate-range, and I believe the Iranian missile was an ICBM. What is our capability to defend against those kinds of attacks? Because it didn't work in Iraq, and it didn't work in Saudi Arabia.

**General Wolters:** Senator, it's improving, but it has to get better. And we have a plan that refers to integrated air missile defense that comprehensively takes into account what happens at long ranges and long altitudes and short ranges and lower altitudes. And it all has to be nested together from an indications and [monitoring] standpoint and a command-and-control standpoint.

**Senator King:** You would agree that this is a significant gap in our defense that we really need to get to work on in a hurry?

**General Wolters:** It's a shortfall, Senator, and we need to continue to work on it.

**Senator Rick Scott (R-FL):** With the European or NATO members that are now spending the money they were supposed to spend in the past, does it give us

any opportunity to reduce our funding or does it give us any opportunity to reduce our troop deployment in Europe?

**General Wolters:** Senator, it could in the future.

**Senator Scott:** And does it concern you that countries like Germany still don't want to pay their fair share? And does it impact our ability to defend? Does it give us a need to start thinking about where we should have troops and where we shouldn't have troops? Should we be in Poland more than we should be in Germany?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I believe all of those are of concern. In my mil-to-mil consultations with my German counterparts, they are just as concerned about meeting the two percent as we are.

**Senator Scott:** But there's no action that we need to be taking?

**General Wolters:** I think the vigilance that we continue to show with respect to requirements colocated with defense spending needs to continue today. What we've observed between FY 16 and FY 20 is an actual increase across NATO of an additional \$130 billion of funds for defense. That's positive and we need to continue on that track.

**Senator Scott:** With Turkey buying the S-400<sup>9</sup> and it seems like cozying up to Moscow, does it impact your ability to rely on them as a partner?

**General Wolters:** Senator, it hasn't to this point. Turkey remains a very reliable NATO ally.

**Senator Scott:** And with Huawei, have you had to make changes on the types of information you're willing to share as a result of knowing that these countries are gonna continue to use Huawei in 5G but also even in their existing infrastructure?

**General Wolters:** Senator, we haven't at this point, because of the current posture with respect to 5G and Huawei and in particular UK, but my guess would be in the near future we have to be more vigilant with respect to network protection and Huawei and 5G.

**Senator Scott:** The investment that communist China is making in Europe and all around the world, is that impacting our ability to be a good, not just the United States but other members, to be able to defend against Russian invasion, but even what China's doing?

**General Wolters:** Senator, not an impact today but it could be in the future if we continue to see that economic equity increase with respect to seaports on behalf of China in Europe.

**Senator Scott:** And for them it's mostly the seaports that's impacting in Europe?

**General Wolters:** Today, that's the biggest issue, Senator.

**Senator Scott:** How about the supply chains? How dependent the world is on China as a member of the supply chain, does that cause you any concern?

**General Wolters:** It does cause a concern, Senator. I haven't seen those reflections yet in Europe but I anticipate that we could.

**Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK):** General Wolters, let me mention. I appreciated your reference on Arctic issues in your testimony, even though that's not necessarily Alaska. We're kind of in the seams, right. We got [USINDO]PACOM forces, we got the threat from Russia, we got STRATCOM, we got TRANSCOM, NORTHCOM, everybody. Let me just mention, this committee has been very focused on Arctic issues; the Chairman mentions great-power competition. There's been an important Arctic focus. The problem is the Pentagon has been pretty slow to address some of these challenges and recognize it. We have two icebreakers right now. One is broken. That's the American capability. Russia has 54. This article, for the record, they just recently announced they have a nuclear icebreaker and a Russian shipyard launches a cruise missile-capable icebreaker. Can you talk to the challenges of the Arctic with regard to Russia and how you're addressing it?

**General Wolters:** Senator, it is of great concern. And, as we crafted the NATO military strategy—its title is *Comprehensive Defense and Shared Response*—and one of the realizations was the fact that we need to be as focused in the Arctic as we are in the Baltics, as we are in the Black Sea, as we are in the Mediterranean, as we are in the central portion of the Atlantic. The Arctic needs to ensure that it gets the appropriate scrutiny and the appropriate resources. We're excited about the fact of NORTHCOM serving as the executive agent for capability development in the Arctic. We're also pleased that in the summer of '19, DOD delivered their Arctic strategy. And I know you drove that, Senator, and we appreciate that. It's vital. We see a lot of activity on behalf of Russia in the Arctic. And, we also see activity on behalf of China in the Arctic, and we think most of that has to do with money and commercial fishing activity. So, it is of great concern. And security exists on the periphery in Europe and the Arctic is a big reason why we have to make sure that we maintain our vigilance.

**Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH):** I want to begin, General Wolters, with a continuation of the discussion we had yesterday. And I appreciated your taking time to meet with me. Earlier this month, the president informed Congress that he was

going to divert another \$3.8 billion from the Pentagon toward the border wall. This is on top of the \$3.6 billion that he took from military construction [MILCON] projects last year. These reprograms would eliminate, among other things, the military weapons systems. I know Senator Kaine referred to one of those. That includes eight MQ-9 Reapers, which are an ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] asset. And, my recollection of previous conversations is that ISR assets are at a premium within the European theater and other areas. So, can you discuss how the elimination of these weapon systems and MILCON projects are gonna affect your campaign momentum?

**General Wolters:** I'd like to address the fact that we had 44 projects that were MILCON related that were deferred because we couldn't get those projects on contract by September of '19. And the total value of the 44 projects was approximately \$1.3 billion. And they came in two buckets. One was a set of projects, 25, that were European Deterrence Initiative MILCON projects. The other projects were baseline MILCON '19. The EDI MILCON was about \$771 million and the MILCON base was about \$550 million. And, when you take a look at all 44 of those deferred projects, which we hope will reappear one day, what you see is three major areas of reduction of campaign momentum. The first has to do with advanced airfield infrastructure on some of the NATO airfields in the farther eastern side of Europe. The second has to do with the infrastructure that supports pre-positioned stockpiles for fuel and for ammunition. And, the final area of impact for campaign momentum is the modernization of infrastructure that supports a couple of military headquarters and schools. All those are important to campaign momentum. It slows the campaign momentum. Despite all of that, Senator, we still maintain positive campaign momentum in the critical areas of indications and warnings, as you alluded to ISR, command and control, and mission command. It just slows down the progress.

**Senator Shaheen:** So, as you read the *National Defense Strategy*, what's a bigger threat to our national security, is it a threat from Russia and China and the great-power competition or is it a threat from immigrants coming across our southern border?

**General Wolters:** Senator, both are threats. As the commander of USEUCOM, I will tell you that I am most concerned about.

**Senator Shaheen:** That was a very diplomatic answer, and thank you. I'm sorry, I should not have put you in that position, but I think it's an important point to make. The threat you're dealing with is one that has significant implications for our future when we look at Russian aggression and its potential to impact the

United States. . . . General Wolters, I want to go back to NATO because with Senator Tillis, he and I chair the Senate NATO observer group, which is an effort to try and make sure that the Senate is aware of what's happening with NATO and what we need to do. I wonder if you can give us an update on the new Cyber-space Operations Centre that NATO is planning to be fully functional by 2023?

**General Wolters:** We're very pleased, Senator. As you know, it all originated in Estonia. And, it started with the involvement of the US and the declaration by the United States USCYBERCOM to have one US single military commander responsible in the military for the domain of cyber. And, the Europeans have embraced that. Were excited about the future. And NATO headquarters on the political side is also very excited.

**Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO):** General Wolters, let's talk a little bit, if we could, about the European Deterrence Initiative [EDI]. I assume you would characterize this as a success. Is that fair to say?

**General Wolters:** Yes, Senator, I would.

**Senator Hawley:** Can you give us some specific examples of things that EUCOM would not have been able to do without EDI?

**General Wolters:** Senator, the first largest example is we have started Defender Europe 20, an exercise that brings over a division-size force. We couldn't do that a year ago; we couldn't do it two years ago. We can do this exercise as a result of the benefit of EDI funds.

**Senator Hawley:** Why would EUCOM have struggled to do some of these things without EDI? What specific obstacles has EDI helped you overcome?

**General Wolters:** First of all, it's funded the rotational brigade combat teams that go to Poland. And, that teaches all of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines how to lift and shift larger quantities of forces across the Atlantic and do so without any harm. And that in itself is very important. We've also, through EDI, been able to fund our Army pre-position stockpiles, our emergency contingency air operation sets for the Air Force, and our deployable air-based systems for the Air Force. We've also been able to dramatically improve the airfield infrastructure and the reception infrastructure in the eastern part of Europe to where it is equipped today to safely receive those resources and effectively get those resources where they need to go for our Soldiers and Sailors and Airmen and Coastguardsmen and Marines to be effective.

**Senator Hawley:** That's an impressive record of success, and that's one of the reasons, I think, that we need something similar in other theaters, [INDO]PACOM in particular, as I've long advocated before. General, staying with you, Whiteman Air Force Base, my home state of Missouri, of course is proud home of the B-2 and the proud future home of the B-21. Can you just speak to the role that you see the B-2 and one day the B-21 playing in deterring Russia from using nuclear weapons as part of any attempted fait accompli in the Baltics?

**General Wolters:** Senator, those airframes are part of the critical triad, and I'm firmly convinced that the nuclear deterrence umbrella that sits over Europe is part of the great success that we've had for the last seven decades in NATO to be able to generate peace. And, I'm excited about the future of the B-21, because I think it will do more of the same with even a greater impact.

**Senator Hawley:** Very good. Let me shift to China for a moment, if I could. In your written testimony, General Wolters, you said that China's efforts to build 5G networks in Europe—coupled with its growing interest and investment European ports and infrastructure—complicates steady-state and contingency operations. Can you just say more about that? How specifically do these Chinese activities complicate steady-state and contingency operations?

**General Wolters:** The equities that they have on the shipping capacity inside and outside of Europe, it is very alarming. And, when you control the ability to take in and regulate resources, you have a large impact on what actually exists on the continent with respect to its ability to effectively generate peace and security. That's the concern.

**Senator Hawley:** How do our European allies respond when you raise these concerns with them, as I'm sure you do?

**General Wolters:** With vigilance. In some cases, they're surprised to the degree of equities that China has with respect to seaports. But in most cases, very concerned, and vigilance increases once we get past the education stage.

**Senator Hawley:** You also wrote that you're seeing encouraging signs, those are your words, from European nations as they become increasingly weary to the strings attached to Chinese capital and investment. Can you give us a sense of what those encouraging signs are?

**General Wolters:** Several nations not willing to accept 5G, Huawei. And, we've had reports of that in other nations being a lot more stingy and scratchy with respect to their willingness to engage in deliberations on port equities.

**Senator Hawley:** Let me ask you for a second about our ally's contribution to NATO, which is something that has come up, rightly so, a number of times already this morning. I think that the progress toward the two percent mark is very important but only just a first step. Because the division of labor within NATO has to fundamentally change, I think as this committee has been saying now for some time. What is your assessment about what would need to happen for our European allies to get to the point where they are able to assume primary responsibility for their security in your theater?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I think we need to continue on the current campaign that we're on. As you know, from 2016 to 2020, in the cash portion of contributions for burden sharing, we've had a net increase of \$130 billion. There's also the examination of contributions and capabilities. And in NATO, we've been very, very vigilant with respect to our focus on improving our readiness, the ability of force elements to be more resilient, more responsive, and more lethal. That is all part of the equation with respect to European contributions to adequately defend, and we're improving.

**Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL):** General Wolters, I'd like to bring into the discussion, we've been hearing a lot about Defender Europe and what we hope to learn from this exercise. I'm looking forward to hearing about not only the successes but perhaps more importantly the challenges that the exercise helps identify as well. How would you classify your level of concern going into Defender Europe—whether from an overall capacity standpoint, from a lack of previous exercise familiarity, or due to other factors inside and outside our control? And how are you gonna leverage that into lessons learned going forward?

**General Wolters:** Senator, great question. And I'd like to extend a personal thanks to you for your support in the logistics area. As we speak, there are Soldiers down-loading at Bremerhaven [Germany] for Defender Europe 20 at this very moment. I'm concerned about the bandwidth to be able to accept this large force. And, I'm also concerned about road and rail from the center portion of Germany to the east, all the way to the eastern border. Because we have the appropriate resources, we now possess a white team capability to examine our speed of move from east to west, correction, from west to east. And, we also have enough white cell individuals to assess how safely we get stuff through Bremerhaven and to the next point. Bandwidth with respect to size and speed are my greatest concerns.

**Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-TN):** I know you all are so happy to see me because I'm the last one. And you'll get to finish up and head off. I want to go back, General Wolters. You told Senator Reed that the Chinese control 10 percent of

the shipping rights in and out of Europe. I'd like for you to expand on that just a little bit, talk about, do you think it's pretty much going to stay at that level? If it's going to increase, the rate of increase? A little bit more insight into what you think this means.

**General Wolters:** The Chinese investment covers 10 percent of European shipping capacity. I would contend that's a whole-of-government, whole-of-nation concern to make sure that Europe has the appropriate equities with respect to shipping capacity.

**Senator Blackburn:** So, you see that as a floor or ceiling?

**General Wolters:** I see that as the conditions that exist on the ground today. And, I think the nations need to understand what that means with respect to their ability to effectively ship what their nation needs for their national interest. And, an education process needs to follow fast.

**Senator Blackburn:** I think we see the need for that education process not only when it comes to infrastructure, but the Belt and Road Initiative, the implications that that may have as we look at 5G and the rollout there. The implications that it has. So, what is NATO going to do to address this? Because it doesn't matter if it is shipping and that infrastructure or building roads and connectors, or 5G with that infrastructure. There is an issue. Being able to communicate with our allies over a Huawei network is a very difficult thing to do. Give me kind of a timeline and the steps that you all are taking to implement an education process.

**General Wolters:** In the NATO political paradigm, there is a growing realization that this is an issue. There will have to be a common understanding at the political level at NATO that this is an issue that NATO should embrace. And, I think, that's the start of success to ensure that the national interest of the 29 nations in NATO are protected with respect to China proliferation. And, we are at that phase. As a military member supporting NATO, it's my job to report the facts, and that's what we're doing.

**Senator Blackburn:** Okay, so who is receptive to this message? The first part of solving a problem is defining a problem. So, you say there is awareness in defining this problem, correct?

**General Wolters:** Correct. The first task is to ensure, of the 29 nations, which ones have concern and which ones still need more of a dialogue done.

**Senator Blackburn:** Out of those 29 nations, who is receptive to this and who are you getting pushback from? Are you at a 50–50 on this? What is the standing there?

**General Wolters:** Senator, I can only speak at the mil-to-mil level, not the political level for the 29 nations. And, I would say that the majority of the nations are incredibly concerned about China proliferation.

## Notes

*The citations in this publication are for informational purposes only. They were not part of the generals' testimony.*

1. The *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* is available here: <https://dod.defense.gov/>.
2. The DOD budget request is available at <https://comptroller.defense.gov/>.
3. The US Bureau of Industry and Security “added Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd. (Huawei) and many of its non-U.S. affiliates to the Entity List effective May 16, 2019 on the basis of information that provided a reasonable basis to conclude that Huawei is engaged in activities that are contrary to U.S. national security or foreign policy interests and its non-U.S. affiliates pose a significant risk of involvement in activities contrary to the national security of the United States. This information included the activities alleged in the Department of Justice’s public Superseding Indictment of Huawei, including alleged violations of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), conspiracy to violate IEEPA by providing prohibited financial services to Iran, and obstruction of justice in connection with the investigation of those alleged violations of U.S. sanctions. Effective August 19, 2019, BIS added another 46 non-U.S. affiliates of Huawei to the Entity List because they also pose a significant risk of involvement in activities contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States.” *See* “Huawei Entity List and Temporary General License Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs),” 18 February 2020, <https://www.bis.doc.gov/>.
4. From the US Mission to the OSCE website:

The Senate confirmed James S. “Jim” Gilmore III as U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation on May 23, 2019. He was sworn in as Ambassador on June 25, 2019. Gilmore was the 68th Governor of Virginia (1998-2002). He grew up in Richmond, Virginia and in 1971, he enlisted as a volunteer in the U.S. Army after college and worked as a counter-intelligence agent in then-West Germany after intensive language training in German, in which he became fluent. In 1974, Gilmore was awarded the Joint Service Commendation Medal for Service to NATO. After serving his country and receiving his law degree, Gilmore was elected as chief prosecutor for Henrico County and then Attorney General of Virginia in 1993. In 2003, Gilmore served as chairman of the Air Force Academy Board of Visitors. He was the chairman of the Republican National Committee from 2001 to 2002. Gilmore graduated from the University of Virginia (UVA) and earned a B.A. degree in International Relations, Russian Area Studies. He then earned his law degree at the UVA School of Law.

As Governor, he led extensive work in economic development including trade missions to the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Gilmore has also traveled to Israel, Pakistan, Croatia, Austria, Czech Republic, Australia, and Peru. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a frequent participant in the Center for the National Interest, and has lectured at the Potomac Institute on homeland security and terrorism issues.

From 1999 to 2003, Gilmore served as Chairman of the Congressional panel known as the “Gilmore Commission” to assess America’s capabilities to respond to a terrorist attack. He ran for the GOP nomination for president from July 2015 to February 2016. He most recently served as President and CEO of the American Opportunity Foundation, which works to shape the discussions around American society and offer conservative solutions that promise prosperity, national security, and American values. Since leaving office, he has served on eight corporate boards of directors.

5. “Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine,” 7th Army Training Command, 2020, <https://www.7atc.army.mil/>.

6. Moira Fagan, “NATO Viewed Favorably across Member States,” 10 February 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/>.

7. From the US Embassy & Consulates in Germany website:

Richard A. Grenell is the Acting Director of National Intelligence. He serves concurrently as the US Ambassador to Germany and Special Presidential Envoy for Serbia and Kosovo Peace Negotiations. Ambassador Grenell previously served as spokesman to four ambassadors at the US Mission to the United Nations, and founded the global public affairs consultancy, Capitol Media Partners.

8. ZTE Corporation is a Chinese multinational telecommunications equipment and systems company headquartered in Shenzhen, Guangdong, China. It is one of China’s leading telecom equipment manufacturers. Like the more familiar Huawei, ZTE is currently actively engaged in pursuing 5G opportunities in European markets. The US government has pointed to these companies’ ties to the Chinese government and military apparatus as a security threat to Western intelligence, command-and-control, and private communication systems.

9. Originally developed by the Soviet Union in response to Pres. Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative, the S-400 Triumph (SA-21 Growler) is a system of medium- and long-range air defense, capable of destroying modern air weaponry. The system is among the cornerstones of Russia’s international arms sells ventures. The system is capable of targeting three dozen targets at a range of 150 kilometers. Much to the chagrin of the United States, Turkey agreed to purchase the S-400 system in 2019, further escalating tensions between Ankara and Washington.

# The US Withdrawal and the Scramble for Syria\*

DR. WOJCIECH MICHNIK  
DR. SPYRIDON PLAKOUDAS

## Operation “Peace Spring” and . . . Chaos in Rojava

On 9 October 2019, Turkey ordered the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and its proxies in the Syrian National Army (SNA) to invade Syrian Kurdistan (or Rojava) after a fateful conversation between Turkish president Tayyip Erdoğan and US president Donald Trump a few days earlier. The White House declared that the United States did not endorse the operation but would not obstruct it either. And as the unintended consequences, the most stable and peaceful corner of Syria was transformed into a messy battleground by an incursion ironically labeled “Operation Peace Spring.”

Amid an outbreak of protests and recriminations against the Trump administration for its “betrayal” of the erstwhile allies in the struggle against the Islamic State (ISIS),<sup>1</sup> the following questions must be answered: (1) could such a situation have been avoided; (2) how will this policy impact on the power and prestige of the United States in the Middle East and beyond; (3) what does this incident indicate about the use of proxies by the United States in the Middle East and beyond; and (4) how does this affect the regional balance of power and major powers’ competition in Syria?

With the benefit of painstaking research on the relations between the United States and the Syrian Kurds, this article will endeavor to examine a situation that is still unfolding and offer answers to the above four questions, while attempting also to identify winners and losers.

## An Acrobat’s Act

In reality, this coming storm was expected, owing to the inherent contradiction of the overall US policy in Syria after the Siege of Kobani (2014–2015) and the start of a “special” relationship between the United States and the Yekineyen Parastina Gel (YPG, People’s Protection Units), a primarily Kurdish militia. The

\*This article is an updated version of the authors’ previous publication in the *Wild Blue Yonder* digital journal: <http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Wild-Blue-Yonder/Article-Display/Article/2013791/the-us-withdrawal-and-the-scramble-for-syria/>.

United States adopted a narrow counterterrorism mission (i.e., the destruction of ISIS) without particular concern for the future (and wider) implications of such a short-sighted policy. In light of the incompetence of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a decentralized band of Syrian rebels, against ISIS and the extremism of several of FSA units (formerly supported by the West), the Pentagon resolved to overlook the objections of Ankara and partner with the most trustworthy boots on the ground against ISIS—the YPG.<sup>2</sup>



(Flickr photo courtesy Kurdishstruggle, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kurdishstruggle/>)

**Figure 1. Erstwhile allies.** Beginning in 2014, US forces partnered with the YPG against ISIS in Syria. In 2015, the YPG joined other Syrian groups to form the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), comprising the SDF's leading component. Turkey considers the YPG to be the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a US-designated terrorist organization that has waged a decades-long insurgency in Turkey. Ankara has strongly objected to US cooperation with the SDF. While US officials have acknowledged YPG-PKK ties, Washington considers the two groups to be distinct.

As the Islamic Caliphate declined, the Rojava or Syrian Kurdistan appeared—to the alarm of Ankara.<sup>3</sup> The emergence and expansion of an independent Kurdish state—especially one controlled by an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Kurdish militant and political organization based in Turkey and Iraq<sup>4</sup>—was considered the top threat for Turkey, especially in the aftermath of the failed talks between President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and PKK (2013–2015).<sup>5</sup> Turkey twice unilaterally intervened in 2016 and 2018 to disrupt YPG operations and piece-by-piece dismantle the Rojava west of the Euphrates River—even allying itself with Russia to accomplish Ankara's ends.<sup>6</sup> Thus,

Washington was confronted with a stark dilemma: how could the United States satisfy the security concerns of Turkey and stop the rapprochement between Erdoğan and Russian president Vladimir Putin, on the one hand, and defend Rojava from Ankara, Damascus, and Tehran on the other hand?

A “prisoner of geography,”<sup>7</sup> Rojava could be sustained only through indefinite US support. Thus, Washington oscillated between its NATO ally (Turkey) and its partner in the victorious war against ISIS (the YPG), proposing half-formulas (such as the “security mechanism” in August 2019) to avert a conflict in northeast Syria.<sup>8</sup>

### **A Perfect Storm**

However, the US military strategy in Syria was subjected to two independent variables in this equation: presidents Trump and Erdoğan. The latter was steadfastly committed to dismantling Rojava and, if possible, expanding the borders of Turkey according to the “National Pact.”<sup>9</sup> And the former, loyal to the “America First” doctrine, favored disengagement from the “endless wars” in the Middle East.

In December 2018, President Trump threatened to withdraw US military forces from Rojava after a telephone conversation with Erdoğan. The decision was suspended (not reversed as some might have thought) after the resignations of the Secretary of Defense and the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition against ISIS. However, in October 2019 Trump surprised his cabinet once again—after yet another conversation with Erdoğan. With the Ukrainegate allegations prominent in the news and the American election campaign in full swing, Trump decided to adopt a “fight forward” policy that would promote his image vis-à-vis the US public opinion as the president who rejected the costly role of the “global policeman.”<sup>10</sup>

The decision for an end to the “mission creep” in Syria was expected and, to an extent, politically understandable. However, the timing and manner of implementing the decision created a “perfect storm of calamities.” The Turkish military and SNA proxies thrust into northeastern Syria after what appeared to be a “green light” by Washington, throwing the most stable corner of Syria into chaos.<sup>11</sup> Turkey capitalized on the self-contradictory US policy in Syria and the passivity of the European Union (EU) (which was paralyzed by the fear of new migratory flows from Turkey to Europe) and seized this unique opportunity to promote Ankara’s agenda: the neutralization of this alleged “terrorist threat” (the YPG) in Turkey’s soft underbelly through the establishment of a buffer zone deep inside the territory of Rojava (32 kms in depth and 446 kms in length) and the resettlement of millions of Syrian war refugees.<sup>12</sup>

The images of the war crimes committed by Turkish proxies and the displacement of civilians sparked an international outcry. Several member states of the

EU and NATO already imposed an arms embargo against Turkey, while the Trump administration eventually succumbed to pressure from the media and Congress and decreed minor sanctions against Ankara. After a six-hour meeting between Erdoğan and American vice president Mike Pence on 17 October, the warring parties announced a ceasefire. More of a face-saving move for mutual relations between Erdoğan and Trump than a genuine deal, this ceasefire would expire by no coincidence on the day of the meeting between Erdoğan and Putin. The message about who the rising power broker in Syria would be was crystal clear: Russia.

### **Scramble for Northeastern Syria**

Though still premature, an assessment of the winners and losers of this crisis can be identified. Russia emerged as by far the biggest beneficiary. The tarnished credibility of the United States in the Middle East and the rupture within NATO amount, in an irony of fate, to welcomed gifts to Russia from a US president already accused of being too friendly toward the Kremlin. Hitherto active only in Syria west of the Euphrates River, Russia has now expanded its influence east of the Euphrates River in a sphere of operations traditionally under US control and acts as an arbiter between Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and the Kurds as well as between Assad and Erdoğan. And at the same time, Russia continues to consolidate its newfound ties with Turkey in the military and diplomatic area to the detriment of NATO.

Iran is another power that gained from the US withdrawal. Not only was the dream of an independent Syrian Kurdistan dismantled but also the United States was expelled from northeastern Syria without a single shot. Iran can now act more freely to secure the Shiite Axis (Tehran–Baghdad–Damascus–Beirut) and use the momentum domestically against its own unruly Kurds.

For Assad, Operation Peace Spring delivers a great gift: the withdrawal of the United States and the neutralization of a Syrian Kurdistan. Without having to fight, Assad recaptured strategic loci such as Manbij and the Tabqa Air Base and secured the long frontier with Turkey—with the exception of those territories under occupation by the Turkish Army and its Syrian proxies. Obviously the question of the price tag attached to such a gift ought to be asked. So should be the question of the increased presence of the Turkish Army and its proxies on Syrian soil west and east of the Euphrates River. Probably Erdoğan and Putin discussed the interrelated questions of Idlib, which is strategically important to Turkey where it maintains several observation posts, and Rojava and agreed to a quid pro quo behind closed doors. Since Assad is currently preoccupied with Idlib, he is most likely saving his answer for later.

Turkey is another winner. Although Ankara did not achieve its maximalist goals, it did accomplish a tactical victory—most notably, the legitimization of its cross-border operation against “the justified terrorist threats” and the occupation of foreign territory without the consent of Syria. Turkey can now sit at the negotiation table for the next day in Syria with several cards in its hands. These tactical gains, however, may be overshadowed by the mid- and long-term fallout from the United States and the other NATO member states and Ankara’s new “hostage-like” bond with Russia. Worse, the reference to the Adana Pact of 1998 in the Sochi Summit could result in rising pressure from Russia and Iran toward Turkey to pull out completely from Syria and even recognize Ankara’s archenemy Assad. Therefore, this win should not be overestimated nor be treated as absolute. Consequently, Ankara would need to sustain a wave of international criticism, part of which comes from within NATO member states and goes beyond diplomatic disapprovals. Yet, given (mostly domestic) trade-offs, this appears to be a price that the Turkish government is willing to accept.

Last but not least, ISIS is evidently a net beneficiary of the chaos in northeastern Syria. As the recent history of this group indicates, whenever chaos ensues (e.g., in Iraq’s Kirkuk after the ill-conceived Kurdish referendum for independence) ISIS takes advantage of it. And the escape of several ISIS prisoners of war and their family members from Kurdish prison camps due to Operation Peace Spring will only boost the ongoing ISIS insurgency along the Euphrates River and may herald the dynamic comeback of ISIS. Even the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October of 2019 does not substantially diminish the group’s ability to thrive on the disorder in Syrian territory.

Who will be losers from the fallout in Syria? The Syrian Kurds are quite obviously the biggest losers. The Kurds strategically decided to ink an ad-hoc alliance with Assad—thanks to the mediation of Russia. The alternative was far grimmer, as the Operation Olive Branch in Afrin had made clear almost two years earlier. The dream of an independent Syrian Kurdistan is over, but the fate of the Rojava is not decided yet. Rather, it will be the subject of negotiations in the Damascus–Moscow–Ankara triangle. Yet, without US troops on the ground and in the face of a lack of political support, Kurds will most likely be helpless watchers of regional powers’ realpolitik.

Israel lost as well. Tel Aviv had invested in the disruption of the Shiite Axis and the debilitation of Turkey by a Syrian Kurdistan. However, the drawn-out electoral crisis in Israel does not permit Tel Aviv to react decisively in the face of Trump’s policy change.

Last but not least, the United States could hardly be labeled as a winner. This “Twitter-and-phone diplomacy” caused a rift between the Trump administration,

on the one hand, and the Pentagon and Congress, on the other hand. Washington's not-so-distant goals in the Syrian Civil War were the exclusion of Iran and Russia from northeastern Syria and the oil wells in Deir ez-Zor and the prevention of the ISIS's reemergence. Both of these core objectives have been jeopardized, despite the fact that a few months earlier the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *IISS Strategic Comments* had warned against such a pullout from Rojava.<sup>13</sup> This hasty withdrawal sent shockwaves throughout the Middle East, since Washington had signaled just a few weeks after the assault on Saudi Aramco that the United States will not defend its allies. Putin's visit to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in October signaled, conversely, the high tide of Moscow's influence in a region traditionally within the US orbit. Yet, given the complex and dynamic situation in Syria, Washington still maintains potential power to influence an outcome of the war, especially through the conduct of counterterrorist campaigns to take down reemerging ISIS and al-Qaeda threats. To do so, the United States would need to redeploy and possibly increase the number of American troops in Syria, a decision that is rather unlikely to be considered by the Trump administration in the election year.

It is also worth mentioning that European powers lost as well. Their inability or unwillingness to act is not just another blow to the EU's image as a potential security actor. More importantly, the EU, by distancing itself from taking responsibility for its nearest southeastern neighborhood, leaves security of proximate regions (both the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East) to outside powers, namely Russia, Turkey, and Iran. This powerlessness was strikingly evident when the European Council issued a declaration on 21 February 2020 amid a renewed military offensive by the Syrian regime and its allies in Idlib, calling the campaign "unacceptable" and demanding "all actors to cease hostilities immediately."<sup>14</sup> As the EU declared "its call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court," Brussels did not offer any unified plan on how to limit the violence in Idlib or to bring the Syrian conflict closer to an end.

### **Withdrawal like Brexit?**

The initial argument for the withdrawal of US military forces from Syria, according to the Trump administration, was about bringing home American soldiers after a "mission accomplished" against ISIS. In that light, it is even more puzzling to comprehend the White House's latest tour de force with the Pentagon's announcement on 20 October that US military forces will be deployed around the oil wells in Deir ez-Zor to protect them from falling into the hands of the Islamic State. Of course, this development only strengthens the hand of the Kurds in the ongoing negotiations with Assad (under the aegis of Putin) for the future of Rojava

and Syria. At the same time, US forces conducted three raids against ISIS with the help of the Kurds in areas under the influence (Idlib) or control (Azaz) of Turkey and eliminated key figures of ISIS—most notably al-Baghdadi.

The timing and nature of these operations cannot help but trigger various questions about the role of Turkey and the relationship between Ankara and the Washington. The adoption of a bill in the House of Representatives on the Armenian Genocide and the introduction of additional bills aimed at sanctioning Turkey will deepen much further the rift between the two uneasy allies. Meanwhile, Russia waits in the corner to pull Turkey further away from NATO. Turkey announced that it will deepen its cooperation with Russia and, after its exclusion from the F-35 program due to the acquisition of S-400 ballistic missiles,<sup>15</sup> opt to purchase Russian war jets instead. And all these at a time of a deep crisis within NATO as exemplified in the recent leaders' meeting in London for the 70th anniversary of the most powerful military alliance.

But the two partners, Putin and Erdoğan, must both walk on a tightrope. The start of the offensive in Greater Idlib in mid-December by Assad and his government forces' rapid gains in January<sup>16</sup> against the Turkish-backed rebel enclave and the support of two different factions in Libya amid the ongoing blitzkrieg by Haftar in Tripoli will put to the test the relationship between the two authoritarian leaders. Idlib, in particular, is the biggest test for the two leaders since 2015: Turkey will not allow the capture of the rebels' remaining stronghold in the north without a fight and even deployed armed convoys to the northern half of Idlib in an attempt to contain Assad's unrelenting advance.<sup>17</sup> The ongoing escalation between Erdoğan and Assad resulted in the deaths of dozens of soldiers on both sides and threatened a direct confrontation between Ankara and Damascus—a development that runs counter to the wishes of Putin for a rapprochement between the two.<sup>18</sup> Given the Russian air support for Syrian government forces encircling the Turkish military in Idlib,<sup>19</sup> Moscow has put itself in a delicate position that could quickly lead to a collision course with Ankara. It is in Russia's and Turkey's mutual interests to deescalate any tensions that would put both sides on the verge of a conflict, yet given the deteriorating economic situation of the Assad regime, time works in favor of Turkey's more decisive stance.<sup>20</sup>

The death of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in January in a US retaliatory strike already affected the situation in Rojava. The tensions between the United States and Iran as well as the ongoing protests in Iraq resulted in a further entrenchment of the US in northern Syria. This, of course, caused the collapse of the negotiations between the Kurds and Assad. And, in an unprecedented act, the military commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces, Mazlum Kobani, made peace overtures to Turkey.<sup>21</sup> A peace deal between the Syrian Kurds and Turkey

was always the ideal scenario for Washington, which would open once again the pathway to negotiations between Ankara and the PKK and allow the United States to extract its forces from the quagmire of Syria.<sup>22</sup> Whether Ankara will respond positively to these overtures or not will depend on developments elsewhere in Syria.

#### **Dr. Wojciech Michnik**

Dr. Michnik is a 2019 Eisenhower Research Fellow at NATO Defense College in Rome and assistant professor of international relations & security studies at Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. He is a former Fulbright Scholar, whose research interests include NATO–Russia relations; Middle Eastern security, and Poland’s foreign policy. The views expressed in this paper are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NATO Defense College or NATO.

#### **Dr. Spyridon Plakoudas**

Dr. Plakoudas is an assistant professor of homeland security at Rabdan Academy (Abu Dhabi). His research interests and expertise involve insurgency and terrorism with a special focus on the Middle East. His latest book examines the long war between the PKK and Turkey, and his new book with Dr Wojciech Michnik will examine the special relationship between the United States and Syrian Kurds.

#### **Notes**

1. Steven A. Cook, “There’s Always a Next Time to Betray the Kurds,” *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

2. Aaron Stein, “The Roadmap to Nowhere: Manbij, Turkey, and America’s Dilemma in Syria,” *War on the Rocks*, 29 June 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

3. The Kurdish-led local militias, backed by the US Air Force and Special Forces, were able to conquer 1/3 of Syria’s overall territory—including the capital of the Islamic Caliphate and almost 80% of the country’s oil wells and all the big dams of the Euphrates River.

4. The PKK has been intermittently fighting a separatist insurgency inside Turkey since 1984.

5. *Squaring the Circles in Syria’s North East* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 31 July 2019), <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/>.

6. Turkey and the allied FSA conducted Operation “Euphrates Shield” in 2016 and “Olive Branch” in 2018.

7. An expert summarized the problems of a Syrian Kurdistan and Washington’s skepticism toward an independent Kurdish entity: “An independent Kurdistan is certain to be landlocked, rendering it unable to participate in the international economy without being reliant on external—and hostile—powers such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. That’s why, despite a deep affinity for the Kurds and their cause, the United States has always been clear—to itself, if not always in public—about its reluctance to support Kurdish independence.” Bryan R. Gibson, “The Secret Origins of the U.S.-Kurdish Relationship Explain Today’s Disaster,” *Foreign Policy*, 14 October 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

8. Stein, “The Roadmap to Nowhere.”

9. The six decisions of the Misak-ı Milli (or National Pact in Turkish) extend far beyond the current borders of Turkey and were used as the basis of the territorial demands of Turkey in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

10. Peter Wehner, “Trump Betrayed the Kurds. He Couldn’t Help Himself,” *Atlantic*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/>; and Amberin Zaman, “Who Betrayed Syria’s Kurds?,” *Al-Monitor*, 21 October 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/>.

11. The Trump Administration repeatedly denied that it endorsed the aggression by Turkey; according to the president and his ministers, the USA did not approve of this invasion but would not avert it either (Blake, 2019).

12. Stein, “The Roadmap to Nowhere.”

13. In January 2019, this document argued that withdrawal from Syria would severely disrupt Washington’s Middle East policy, stating, “The US and its European partners have failed to achieve any of their goals in Syria. Several Arab states are attempting a rapprochement with the Assad regime. Russia has emerged as a regional mediator, and Iran is in a strong position to shape Syria’s future.” “The US Withdrawal from Syria,” *IISS Strategic Comments* 25, no. 1 (2019): <https://www.iiss.org/>.

14. Declaration of the European Council on the situation in Idlib, 21 February 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/>.

15. The USA had repeatedly warned Turkey that such an acquisition would lead to its expulsion from the F-35 program. Lara Seligman, “U.S. Lawmakers Move to Punish Turkey for Buying Russian Missile System,” *Foreign Policy*, 10 December 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

16. Assad just bypassed the Turkish military outposts in Idlib, making them in effect “hostages”. Fehim Tastekin, “Turkey’s Hands Tied as Syrian Army Makes Gains in Idlib,” *Al Monitor*, 31 January 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/>.

17. By February 10, Assad had captured 35% of Idlib and the M5 Highway. Diego Cupolo, “Erdogan vies for leverage in Syria’s Idlib as Turkish troops reinforce positions,” *Al Monitor*, 12 February 2010, <https://www.al-monitor.com/>.

18. Kirill Semenov, “Intel: Turkish demands on Idlib complicate Russia’s pursuit of compromise,” *Al Monitor*, 11 February 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/>.

19. Carlotta Gall, Syrian Attacks Draw Turkey Deeper into Syrian War, *New York Times*, 12 February 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

20. Jennifer Cafarella, Time to Recommit to Syria, *Foreign Affairs*, February 18, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>.

21. Amberin Zaman, “SDF Commander Says Kurds Ready for Dialogue if Ankara Is Sincere,” *Al Monitor*, 23 January 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/>.

22. If Turkey agrees to open direct negotiations with the YPG, it will not be the first time. Back when the “solution process” (2013–2015) had been launched by Erdogan for a peace deal between the PKK and Turkey, a delegation by the YPG had visited Turkey. Spyridon Plakoudas, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Turkey: The New PKK* (New York: Palgrave–Macmillan, 2018), 43–58.

# The Contract Broken, and Restored

## Air Rescue in Operation Inherent Resolve, 2014–2017 (Part 2 of 2)

DR. FORREST L. MARION\*

### Establishing a Dedicated Combat Search and Rescue/ Pararescue Capability, 2015–2016

Following the killing of 1st Lt Moaz Youssef al-Kasasbeh of the Jordanian Air Force (call sign Blade-11), US Central Command/US Air Forces Central Command (USCENTCOM/USAFCENT) rushed an HH-60G Pave Hawk element from Europe to the massive airfield at Erbil, Iraq. The three Pave Hawks became operational by early February 2015. Airmen had conducted strike missions over ISIS-contested territory for six months without the benefit of what AFDD 3-50 called “the premier PRO helicopter.” Pararescuemen (also known as Guardian Angels)—specialists in rescue-affiliated communications and recovery techniques and combat trauma care—joined the HH-60G crews. At roughly the same time, an HC-130J Combat King II element of two rescue-equipped tankers deployed from the United States and became operational at Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait, where simultaneously a maintenance-support package had been quickly ramped up from caretaker to operational status.<sup>1</sup>

The pararescuemen were divided between Erbil and Ali Al Salem. Lt Col James E. Brunner considered the split nature of rescue assets as the biggest challenge early in Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), in part because it required an inordinate amount of coordination including the takeoff times for missions that varied by aircraft type. For maximum efficiency, Combat Search and Rescue/Pararescue (CSAR/PR) planners preferred having all three legs of the “Rescue triad”—HH-60G, HC-130J, and Pararescue assets—in the same location.<sup>2</sup>

Although senior leadership was ultimately responsible for beginning an air campaign without CSAR/PR in theater, to its credit, following the loss of Blade-11, US leaders implemented what one PR plans officer surmised was “a

\*The author gratefully acknowledges the extensive research assistance and coordination for interviews, and their handling, provided by Ms. Kathi Jones, Mr. Mike Gartland, and Ms. Laura Palumbo at US Air Forces Central Command/Historian’s Office; the technical assistance of Mr. Thomas Rehome and Mr. Grady Simpson, both of the Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA), for transferring and preserving the oral history interview audio files for this project; as well as the several reviewers who provided valuable comments on this manuscript. Any errors, of course, belong to the author.

deliberate respite” during the several weeks required to get the HH-60Gs deployed.<sup>3</sup> One shudders to think what might have happened if a second Airman had been lost during that period, and the consequences surely would have reverberated in capitals beyond the operational theater, including Washington. Lt Col Aaron Griffith recalled that while the Pave Hawks were preparing to deploy to Erbil, USAFCENT’s “PR shop used that time to distribute new specialized radios and beacons for use by the most at-risk isolated personnel (especially downed Airmen) and for training coalition personnel at risk of isolation and their PR nodes on individual and staff initial actions and reporting” in the case of another incident. The combination of the lieutenant’s loss and the frenetic attempts to get the new equipment and training to those most in need of it (much of it driven by the Air Staff) created, in Griffith’s words, “a crisis of confidence that we had provided our Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors and Marines all that we could have.” That crisis was valid. Whether the question of why such equipment and training had not been provided before Blade’s loss—even prior to flying the first OIR strike sortie—may or may not have been voiced openly, but it must have been pondered. A troubling and complicating factor was that at least some of the new equipment could not be shared with the coalition.<sup>4</sup>

### **An “Anemic” Air Campaign**

Regardless of upbeat announcements coming out of Washington, for at least a year, the administration dragged its collective feet regarding the campaign against ISIS. At the end of 2015, one commentator wrote that the Obama strategy to date “is, in reality, a combination of half measures and outdated ideas.” US air strikes on Syria averaged only seven a day. Even more alarming, perhaps, Abe Greenwald noted that nearly three-quarters of planned US bombing sorties against ISIS “never drop their payloads owing either to insufficient ground intelligence or overly strict rules of engagement.” Earlier in the year, the director of the London-based Air League, airpower expert Andrew Brookes, cautioned, “I am not convinced that we are knocking ISIS back,” and he argued in favor of air strikes in coordination with a ground campaign.<sup>5</sup>

Retired USAF Lt Gen David Deptula added his voice in mid-2015, calling the air strikes to that point “anemic.” At the end of the year, he stated the small-scale bombings resulted from a risk-averse administration, inordinate concern over civilian casualties, and an emphasis on counterinsurgency. Deptula’s last-mentioned point stemmed from the fact that ISIS was not an insurgency, although the administration treated it as such. Rather, it controlled the infrastructure and resources of a state, making for much simpler targeting than an insurgency. As one knowledgeable writer who spent time in the theater expressed, “There is a front

line in this war. . . . maps in operations centers have lines defining ISIS-controlled territory.” In 2019, Maj Thaddeus L. Ronnau, a career Rescue HH-60G pilot who three years earlier had been based at Diyarbakir AB, Turkey, recalled the deployment in 2016 had been the first of his six in which there was a forward line of troops, northeast of Mosul. In mid-2016, Deptula, dean of the Washington-based Mitchell Institute of Airpower Studies, reiterated his concern, describing the strikes against ISIS in Syria as “anemic relative to previous air campaigns that were effective.” At that point, US airstrikes averaged a miniscule 15 sorties a day: nine against Iraq, six over Syria. By comparison, even the Serbia air campaign in 1999—following a slow start when US-Coalition leadership wrongly expected Serbian president Slobodan Milošević to quit after two or three days of air strikes—averaged nearly 300 strike sorties daily.<sup>6</sup>

### **From Erbil, Iraq, to Diyarbakir, Turkey**

The Erbil-based HH-60G teams, two of which served roughly four-month deployments, provided dedicated CSAR/PR coverage until October 2015 when the replacement Pave Hawk detachment relocated just after its arrival at Erbil, to Diyarbakir. The incoming pair of Rescue tankers deployed directly from the United States to the latter base. CSAR/PR alert duties transferred from Erbil to Diyarbakir near the first of the month as the newly-arrived HH-60G and HC-130J crews at Diyarbakir became established, along with the most recently-deployed PR element. By that time, the 1st Expeditionary Rescue Group had been activated (in July), providing an institutional home for CSAR/PR forces under CJTF-OIR.<sup>7</sup>

The stand-up of dedicated CSAR/PR assets considerably closer to the target area was a huge step in the right direction. However, it was not enough on the rotary-wing side to allow unit leaders to breathe easily. As Col Greg Roberts put it, while two HC-130s could effectively cover the Iraq–Syria theater, the same was not true for three Pave Hawks: “You can’t effectively cover the whole [area of responsibility] with one two-ship of H-60’s and a spare. . . . We thought the best we could get away with was five [HH-60G’s],” with two helicopters at two different locations (north, south) plus a spare. “That crisis of steel dogged the 1st Rescue group from day one [of his command, in July 2015] . . . through the first of July the following year,” when Roberts departed.<sup>8</sup> Colonel Roberts stated the PR task force requirement of two unit type codes (UTC) of HH-60Gs—totaling six helicopters—two of pararescue, and one of HC-130Js had been submitted by US-AFCENT and validated by the Joint Staff, but it was pared down to one UTC for each weapon system somewhere between the Air Staff and Headquarters Air Combat Command.<sup>9</sup>

## **Only Three Pave Hawks, Maintenance, and Ad Hockery**

A three-helicopter element at Diyarbakir was no small risk given the age and long, hard usage of the Pave Hawk fleet. In 2015, *The Daily Signal* reported, “the current fleet of Pave Hawks face a litany of maintenance issues after more than a decade of heavy use in austere environments.”<sup>10</sup> Three years later, at least two official Pentagon news items highlighted the dangerous trends concerning the Rescue helicopter fleet. Focusing on the Okinawa-based 33rd Rescue Squadron and the increasing problem of airframe structural cracks, *Defense News* referred to “an overworked fleet of aircraft that is literally coming apart at the seams” as the HH-60Gs approached or exceeded the (revised) planned 7,000-hour lifespan.<sup>11</sup> *Air Force Magazine* reported, “Only 68 percent of the 96-helicopter fleet were mission-capable in fiscal 2017, well below the Air Force’s desired mission-capable rate of 75 percent.” Flight time throughout the Pave Hawk inventory averaged 7,100 hours, 18 percent higher than the 6,000-hour initial expected service life.<sup>12</sup>

For the initial Rescue deployment to Diyarbakir, the two maintenance officers, Maj Paul A. Campbell and Capt Stephen D. Weigel, arrived at the airfield in November 2015. They were preceded by a maintenance team from Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, led by CMSgt Kevin Davis, which set up most of the US compound for the first rotation of CSAR/PR aircrews. The crews of two HC-130J tankers and three HH-60G helicopters assumed alert around the first of October, providing rescue coverage in support of OIR.<sup>13</sup>

Most aviators considered Pave Hawk maintenance to be outstanding in the theater. Two experienced maintainers, SMSgt Mark W. Aube and MSgt Marcus J. Sydow, noted that preventive maintenance normally was accomplished at home station so the deploying aircraft “[go] there 100 percent,” plus the Rescue aircraft typically did not fly as much while deployed as at home station. When work came up at the deployed base, everyone wanted to be a part of it. Referring to the HC-130J-model tankers—two were deployed—they were new and hardly ever broke, Aube recalled.<sup>14</sup>

During one period of about three weeks in late 2016, however, one of the three HH-60Gs at Diyarbakir was out of service for a cracked “308 beam.” In that case there was no maintenance or safety margin, should the Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) require a Pave Hawk two-ship out of Diyarbakir. And for one day during that period, the Rescue group informed the JPRC they were down to one good helicopter, as one of the other two H-60s required repairs for something required for combat. Although the Diyarbakir-based CSAR team was second to Al Asad’s by that time (Al Asad’s Rescue team began operations in October 2016), the lack of a backup helicopter was a concern, nonetheless. In 2018, the USAF-

CENT deputy chief of PR and a retired colonel, Mr. Steven P. Kelley, summed up the state of the aging Pave Hawk fleet, stating, “It’s been run into the ground.”<sup>15</sup>

Of the approximately 96 Pave Hawks USAF-wide, 82 were designated for operational purposes and 14 for training and development. In 2015, if not later, Nellis AFB, Nevada, supported no less than 18 Pave Hawks, “the largest HH-60 fleet in the Air Force,” one maintenance unit program manager observed. Whether sent out from Nellis or a train/test facility, admittedly, a decision to send even one previously unplanned Pave Hawk halfway around the world was bound to create various programmatic, logistic, and administrative headaches. But no matter the lens through which one looked, in the final analysis, which was the higher priority: keeping stateside requirements on track—as important as those were—or providing an increased margin of safety for aircrews hitting ISIS targets which, in the unlikely event that one was downed and captured by the enemy, expected to be burned alive in a cage, or something worse, to viewers worldwide?<sup>16</sup>

The CSAR/PR forces committed to preventing such a tragic end included USAF A-10C Thunderbolt II close air support aircraft, whose pilots, while not tasked solely with rescue (they had their own ISIS targets to hit), nevertheless expected to play a leading role in any rescue mission. Traditionally, in many cases A-10 pilots located, authenticated, and protected the survivor before the helicopters arrived, and during the most vulnerable moments when the helicopter was in a hover or on the ground, protected it as well. Lt Col Mark A. Redfern, who commanded the 75th Fighter Squadron during its deployment to Incirlik AB, Turkey, from October 2015 to March 2016, considered the CSAR/PR setup “not great” when his A-10 unit arrived. He would have preferred another HH-60 or two among the available assets.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to October, A-10s had supported OIR from Ahmad al-Jaber Air Base, Kuwait, but the 75th was the first Warthog squadron to operate from Incirlik. The unit had been uncertain of its destination up to two weeks before departing home station, and its personnel deployed lacking written orders, going to war on verbal orders only—ad hockery to be sure. Upon arriving at Incirlik, which required upgrading to support bomb-dropping aircraft for the first time in years, Redfern observed a “very ad hoc” approach and a lack of a common frame of reference regarding CSAR/PR operations in theater. Although the 75th’s predecessors had made progress with “CSAR standards” for OIR, Redfern’s squadron upgraded and propagated the standards among the several players, including the Marine Corps, Navy, and coalition forces. The standards took into account that Marine MV-22 Osprey assault support aircraft were potential participants in a rescue or personnel recovery mission; as were, by 2016, US Navy or coalition helicopters. If he had to leave his jet and was rolled-up by the enemy, Redfern estimated his own

life expectancy at about 15 minutes once ISIS realized he was a commander. In any case, all players in a CSAR/PR scenario needed to know what to expect from Sandy-1, the call sign of the handful of A-10 pilots most highly qualified in combat rescue escort and charged with directing the rescue mission.<sup>18</sup>

From about 1 February 2016 until mid-April, four US Navy MH-60S Knighthawk helicopters and some 70 personnel, detached from the USS *Harry S. Truman*, were stationed at Erbil airport to support the CSAR/PR mission for OIR. While they were not placed under the tactical control of the 1st Expeditionary Rescue Group (1ERQG) commander, Colonel Roberts, he was glad to have them even on a coordination-only basis. Although the MH-60 crews styled themselves jacks-of-all-trades-and-masters-of-none—rescue was one of their several mission sets including utility and special operations duties—their capability matched that of any other, non-USAF CSAR/PR rotary-wing assets made available at the time. The MH-60 crews operated out of the same facilities used the year prior by the PR task force's HH-60Gs. One huge drawback was that the Navy helicopters were not air refuelable and so were limited in their effective radius for any potential rescue.<sup>19</sup>



*(US Air Force photo by SSgt Keith James)*

**Figure 1. 1st Expeditionary Rescue Group conducts combat search and rescue exercise.** An HH-60 Pave Hawk assigned to the 46th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron arrives at the site of a simulated aircraft crash site to provide personnel recovery operations and support for Battlefield Airmen assigned to the 52nd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron on the ground assisting role players in an undisclosed location, Iraq, 15 July 2018. The primary mission of the HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter is to conduct day or night personnel recovery operations into hostile environments to recover isolated personnel. Battlefield Airmen assigned throughout the combined joint operational area conduct operations in support of Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve, which aims to enable and equip local forces to take ISIS head on while leveraging Coalition nation airpower to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

In the only retrieval of a downed aircrew by Inherent Resolve's CSAR/PR forces, on 5 March 2016, a twin turboprop aircraft crash-landed in a field west of Erbil, Iraq. At least one of the Navy's Erbil-based MH-60S helicopters responded within four minutes of the alert and recovered all four personnel from the US Army-registered aircraft, assisted by 52nd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron parascuemen (within 1ERQG). The four were uninjured, and the aircraft's downing was not due to hostile action but was apparently technical in nature. If the situation had required further assistance, however, an HC-130J had launched from Diyarbakir AB and was available. But perhaps in part because of reluctance on the part of USAFCENT and the JPRC to clarify tactical control and launch authority issues—despite USAFCENT's practical ownership of the JPRC mission—Colonel Roberts recalled the short and successful mission fueled an extended, rancorous discussion among the JPRC, USAFCENT staff, and the Navy MH-60 crews on whether the Erbil detachment had possessed the proper authority to conduct the mission.<sup>20</sup>

### Issues with an Ally

By the end of August 2015, the host nation, Turkey, had begun operating its Diyarbakir-based air-to-ground F-16s on OIR missions as part of the US-led coalition, a step facilitated by the ISIS-inspired suicide bombing a month earlier at Suruc, Turkey. Further, and important to US combat rescue efforts, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's decision to allow CSAR/PR assets to operate from Diyarbakir may have taken on a heightened sense of urgency. His government had agreed to the basing plan in April, but things moved slowly after that. Basing the rescue assets at Diyarbakir not only placed them closer to the fight than in Kuwait or Erbil but also accorded with Air Force personnel recovery operations doctrine that called for positioning forces "as far forward as the situation allows." It was not long, however, before the shifting battle lines made the Turkish base's "tyranny of distance" from the ground fight an increasingly problematic planning factor for personnel recovery forces.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the Turkish government's decision to join the coalition in 2015, its purpose differed from that of the United States from the very beginning of Inherent Resolve. As one Arab government official expressed, "There are two competing objectives within the coalition. Some countries are more interested in removing Assad [notably, Turkey], while other countries are more interested in addressing the extremist threat." Two *Middle East Policy* scholars surmised that Washington and Ankara will "likely find it increasingly difficult to respond to the changing dynamics on the ground or to forge a common front."<sup>22</sup>

Despite sharing one side of Diyarbakir's airfield with the Turks' commercial terminal (Turkish F-16s were based on the opposite side of the airfield), there was adequate ramp space for additional CSAR aircraft. In the view of the Rescue group's maintenance squadron commander, Major Campbell, "We had the ramp space, if the Turks . . . agreed to it." Rather, it was a matter of "optics," Campbell was convinced. His boss, Colonel Roberts, tried in vain to acquire additional Pave Hawks, making the question of where they might be based a non-issue. The reality was the Rescue group possessed only three HH-60Gs and two HC-130Js, at Diyarbakir, which meant that no more than a single helicopter, or tanker, could be non-mission capable at any time to maintain a two-ship helicopter element, plus a tanker, on alert. The far greater concern was for the rotary-wing capability, not so much the tankers.<sup>23</sup>

The optics issue that Campbell perceived probably resulted from Turkish suspicions that the 1ERQG's aircraft were assisting the hated Kurds surreptitiously. While it was no secret that the United States was, in fact, supporting the Kurds, 1ERQG aircraft did not do so. In Major Campbell's opinion, such suspicion was the logical explanation for the excessive customs checks of US aircraft required by Turkish officials at the airfield. An unnamed USAF officer based at Incirlik AB, who otherwise thought very highly of the Turks and their military, recounted that the first part of many meetings he attended in 2017 consisted of his hosts telling the US personnel that the Turkish government thought the United States was supporting terrorism by working with the Kurds. The same officer also noted that lower- to mid-ranking Turkish Air Force officers became highly risk averse, afraid to make any decisions on their own, perhaps the result of a failed military coup in July 2016. In any case, issues had to be elevated to the O-6 level to get anything accomplished. But whatever the reasons for the onerous customs practices, other Rescue Airmen commented on the generally frustrating relations with the Turks. One Pave Hawk pilot, a captain based at Diyarbakir, bluntly stated, the Americans "kinda tried to stay out of their way." An A-10 pilot and squadron commander who deployed to Incirlik in 2017 felt the Turks "tolerated our presence, barely." The Turks' bureaucratic hurdles made clear to the Americans that they were not especially welcome. One example was the Turks' arbitrary limiting of the number of maintenance helicopter flights permitted on a given day, a frustrating hindrance to keeping the three Pave Hawks flyable.<sup>24</sup>

Aside from the Turks' coolness toward their longtime NATO ally, the US logistics system that provided aircraft parts to the Rescue group at Diyarbakir suffered from two main issues: the first was perhaps partly self-induced, but the second was a Turkish matter. As 1ERQG maintenance personnel explained, when US aircraft parts were flown from Ramstein AB, Germany, to Turkey, the items

went through customs at Istanbul. But, then, as Marcus Sydow recalled ruefully from his 2016 deployment, the parts “would just crawl across the country over to Diyarbakir,” for reasons not entirely clear. Eventually, the group obtained a customs liaison to track down delayed or missing parts, which in many cases had been taking close to three weeks to get to Diyarbakir even with a supposedly priority assignment. It was very frustrating for the Rescue maintainers charged with keeping the few CSAR/PR aircraft flyable.<sup>25</sup>

The second cause of delayed aircraft and other needed parts was the Turks’ reluctance to issue fuel to large aircraft at Diyarbakir. For that reason (and because the Rescue force was too small to warrant regular airlift to its location), some, if not many, US airlifters flew into Incirlik instead, meaning that the parts had to be trucked from there to Diyarbakir. As the Turkish truck drivers who transported the parts worked a fairly relaxed schedule, including no weekend duty, the Americans were exasperated at the time it took for the trip of about 350 miles.<sup>26</sup>

In July 2016, a coup on the part of Turkish military personnel failed in its attempt to overthrow the regime of President Erdoğan. In the coup’s aftermath, the Turkish leader, increasingly authoritarian and aggressively Islamic in tone, detained thousands of suspected plotters or government dissidents. Perhaps just as critical from the US perspective, the government crackdown also called into question the coalition’s ability to use Turkish air bases in the fight against ISIS. By August, the new 1ERQG commander, Col Stephen R. Moyes, took steps toward relocating the Rescue group from Diyarbakir to Erbil, because the Turks had become so difficult to work with. One arbitrary, unworkable requirement (at least for CSAR/PR) the Turks sought to enforce was a one-hour notification before any US sortie was flown. In another situation that actually highlighted the Turks’ more favorable view of USAF Rescue than strike assets, Moyes recalled cases of US aircraft that resorted to unauthorized borrowing of Diyarbakir-based Rescue aircraft call signs in order to gain entry into Turkish airspace by Turkish air traffic control (traditional strike aircraft call signs were unlikely to be allowed entry). Moyes’ proposed move was turned off only when a senior Turkish officer contacted senior US officials in Washington.<sup>27</sup>

As part of Erdoğan’s crackdown, three months after the coup he ordered an American pastor who had served his Turkish congregation quietly in Turkey for more than two decades, Andrew C. Brunson, arrested on frivolous terrorism charges, increasing the tensions between Istanbul and Washington. Brunson remained in prison for the next 21 months, before being moved to house arrest in mid-2018, by which time his highly publicized predicament (Turkey also held other Americans) threatened to derail Turkey’s plans to receive a large number of F-35 stealth fighters from the United States, in addition to other economic sanc-

tions imposed by a displeased Pres. Donald Trump. Brunson was released in October 2018, but his two-year ordeal was an excellent example of how an unwarranted domestic action by a US ally, seemingly without ramification for US policy at the time, could evolve into a major issue between the two countries.<sup>28</sup>

### **Ayn al Asad the Primary CSAR/PR Base, 2016–2017**

USAFCENT and JPRC planners had looked toward the former Iraqi air base at Ayn al Asad as a possible deployed location for personnel recovery assets. In late 2016, some 600 additional US troops flowed into the base to support the fight to recapture Mosul (achieved in July 2017). In October 2016, Rescue personnel arrived at Ayn al Asad and established Operating Location-Alpha (OL-A), 1ERQG. The two deployed HC-130J tankers were based at Diyarbakir while the Guardian Angel force was divided between the northern and southern bases. From then until early 2018, when the 1ERQG departed Diyarbakir, CJTF-OIR boasted six HH-60Gs: three at Ayn al Asad and three at Diyarbakir. It had taken two years to obtain a total of six Pave Hawks dedicated to OIR. However, given that the HH-60Gs needed to be within 200 miles from a pickup site for a reasonable chance of success, the moving of the front lines farther away from the northern base, Diyarbakir, ensured that Ayn al Asad became the primary helicopter base from the day it opened (Diyarbakir to Mosul was about 200 nautical miles).<sup>29</sup>

When the 1ERQG's southern element opened at Ayn al Asad, the front lines were some 40 miles away. Rescue personnel lived in a tent city on the base, and working conditions were difficult, especially for the maintainers. But within several months, successful coalition air-ground operations—including in January 2017 the highest number of weapons released monthly in OIR air strikes to date (3,600)—pushed the front farther to the south and west. Meanwhile, the build-up at Ayn al Asad provided Rescue personnel with the relative luxury of permanent structures for working, housing, and dining. (Prior to the US withdrawal in 2011, US Marines called the base “Camp Cupcake” for its amenities, including high-quality dining and fitness centers.) A hardened aircraft parking area in the immediate vicinity meant that all of OL-A's essentials were no more than a quarter mile away. By the first half of 2017, the front approached the town of Al-Qa'im near the Euphrates River as it crossed the Iraq–Syria border. By mid-year, ISIS had lost most of the Iraqi territory it once occupied and one-half of its ground in Syria.<sup>30</sup>

The practice of *ground laagering*, whereby helicopters took off from their base heading toward the front and, somewhere en route, landed in a remote and presumably safe area to save fuel—keeping their rotors turning—was one measure that mitigated the long distances to potential pickup areas. When US-coalition targeting was completed for a particular air tasking order's strike window, if Pave

Hawk services were not required they returned to base perhaps performing training en route if the crew was coming off alert. During his command, Colonel Moyes “bumped-up” the practice of ground laagering because ISIS’s loss of territory placed the front ever farther from Ayn al Asad. Although ISIS’s withdrawal meant Diyarbakir’s Rescue team was a lesser participant by then, Moyes considered having the Pave Hawks at two separate locations offered the 1ERQG better options in case of a mass casualty event or a bad weather incident.<sup>31</sup>

Even six Pave Hawks dedicated to OIR did not allow Rescue forces to relax, however. One pararescue instructor, MSgt David B. Schumacher, tasked with preparing new pararescue personnel for the theater, commented that instructors had to teach their students to plan for quicker pickups than in past conflicts: “Our response time, depending on where somebody punched out . . . was substantially smaller” than historically had been the case. A combat rescue officer, Capt Nicholas L. Sola, who deployed for OIR in 2017, added, “They [ISIS] don’t have rules, and they know that we do,” making a rapid response on the part of CSAR/PR forces an absolute requirement.<sup>32</sup>

As Colonel Brunner and others indicated, Diyarbakir became “less relevant” over time, because it was so far away from the fighting. If Ayn Al Asad had not been packed with aircraft and other services’ forces such as the Marine Corps, which claimed much of the airfield’s pavement for a forward operating base, CSAR/PR planners might have tried moving the Diyarbakir-based helicopters there. In 2018, one Pave Hawk pilot who deployed in late 2016, Capt Timothy G. Wisner, expressed, “We were in Diyarbakir for way too long.” Thankfully, no other US-coalition aircraft were downed, nor were there any known incidents of isolated personnel that required air assets for their recovery.<sup>33</sup>

### **The A-10 Sandy Perspective on CSAR**

Although the A-10s at Incirlik were tasked daily against ISIS targets, the pilots included CSAR procedures in every pre-mission briefing. Each shift of A-10s included CSAR-qualified pilots, and the possibility of a combat rescue was never very far from their thoughts. Given ISIS’s butchering of its captives, CSAR/PR personnel experienced a heightened motivation to ensure no US-coalition Airman fell into the terrorists’ hands. One A-10C pilot, Capt Sean T. Westrick, a CSAR-qualified Sandy-3 at the time he deployed in 2016 as a member of the 75th Fighter Squadron, expressed the mind-set of many of his squadron mates: “If you get captured, you’re not going to come back. . . . My game plan [was], I’m not going to get captured.” If his wingman went down, Westrick’s first action was going to be to contact one of the several entities that could “talk to the helos and

get those guys moving,” while at the same time keeping his wingman in sight, prepared to neutralize the area if enemy forces approached him.<sup>34</sup>

One year later, Major Michael Dumas, an A-10 Sandy-1 instructor pilot who deployed to Incirlik, described the attitude of his squadron mates this way: “If somebody gets out of their airplane, we *have* to pick them up. We *have* to be the first ones there. . . . which makes sense, obviously, especially based on the enemy.” Dumas’ squadron commander, Lt Col Craig L. Morash, agreed, recalling their goal was an immediate pickup for any downed Airman, because there was no expectation that a pilot would survive capture by the enemy. In Morash’s words, their CSAR/PR planning involved “timetables of minutes” should a pilot hit the ground. Major Dumas observed that basic position was not merely the attitude shared by many individual members in the Rescue community; it was the published CSAR standard for the operation.<sup>35</sup>

A planned timetable of minutes was often at odds with the realities of CSAR/PR helicopter basing, however. Colonel Morash noted his squadron’s pilots realistically could not expect a Pave Hawk to be overhead in much less than an hour, given the most likely areas for a pilot to be forced to leave his jet by mid-late 2017. By that time, the heaviest fighting was southeast of Raqqa along the Euphrates River (Raqqa was retaken in October 2017), and the friend-or-foe status of some ground forces in the area had become murky at best. In a 2018 interview, Morash recalled, “There was no clear coalition at that point, at least on the ground.”<sup>36</sup>

In discussing the morale factor of a commitment to rescue US-coalition Airmen, Major Dumas was confident that, at least within the USAF’s culture, the expectation of friendly Rescue forces making a major effort to retrieve a downed compatriot had long been established and could hardly be increased. But, if for any reason “we were to prove that we can’t go get our own people, that would be an incredible detriment to morale overall.” He added, “The pride that we as A-10 pilots have in the mission of CSAR is incredible,” a view echoed by others. Two years after his deployment, Captain Westrick expressed the same opinion that the Air Force Rescue community had stated many times in conflicts before 2001 as well as after: US Airmen “can put their neck out there a little bit more than maybe any other country . . . because they know . . . we’re going to do everything in our power to come out there and pick them up and bring them home.”<sup>37</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Pride in the USAF’s CSAR mission had been established in Korea and rediscovered in Southeast Asia a decade later.<sup>38</sup> Since then, every major conflict, as well as some of lesser scale or duration, had provided occasion for Rescue or special operations rotary-wing crews to perform their art.

However, for a six-month period beginning in August 2014, US-coalition Airmen who engaged in combat over ISIS-held or denied territory in Iraq–Syria were left at high risk. Even if PR doctrine was not violated after September 2014, nevertheless, contrary to US military tradition, history, and, arguably, what the JPRA called “the moral imperative of PR,” it was February 2015 before CJTF-OIR provided *dedicated* CSAR/PR assets with a reasonable chance of getting to a downed pilot in time to save him.<sup>39</sup> The lack of a dedicated personnel recovery force realistically within reach of a downed aviator during that period must be judged a failure on the part of USAF, Pentagon, and USCENTCOM senior leadership, regardless of the fact that the Obama administration took an offhanded approach to OIR for at least a year. In the year OIR began, Lt Gen Daniel Bolger, US Army, retired, wrote that every US military casualty from Iraq and Afghanistan had been recovered, in keeping with what he called a “blood oath to bring everyone home.”<sup>40</sup>

The CSAR/PR lapse in Inherent Resolve’s early going allowed for operational situations that threatened to violate that oath. Four years later, one USAF colonel—well-placed in 2014—had this to say:

It was one thing when you say, “Hey, I need a 12-ship of F-16s . . . we gotta hit some more targets,” and for the Air Force to say, “I know that, but we really don’t have a squadron to give you, they’re doing something else, a higher priority.” . . . Got it. But when you say, “I need PR, ‘cuz I’m flying in an area where if [an] aircrew hops out of a plane he’s gonna get skinned alive,” I don’t know how anybody in the Air Force can say, “Hey, sorry, you can’t have that.”<sup>41</sup>

In one rescue attempt in December 1969, a total of 336 sorties were flown in support of one F-4 navigator downed near Tchepone, Laos. One pararescueman died, several others were wounded. Of 10 helicopters damaged in the operation, five never flew again. As noted airpower historian Earl H. Tilford, Jr., wrote, “Yet no one asked if the life of one man was worth all the effort.” The question was unnecessary. That was at the far end of the spectrum, as most rescue missions required less effort. However, more than 40 years later, the question of *how much effort* remained unanswered for a new generation of those in the CSAR/PR business. Between 8 August and mid-September 2014, CJTF-OIR lacked a dedicated combat rescue or personnel recovery capability, and for the next five months the expected time (at least three hours) for OIR’s dedicated PR forces to reach a downed Airman gave pause to planners and fliers alike. Only after a coalition pilot was downed and killed in a horrific manner did the PR posture improve to offer other Airmen a reasonably good chance of recovery. In short, the situation required a different, and distasteful question to be asked—unblinkingly—by

military professionals: how much effort did a pinprick military operation warrant for potential combat rescues that senior leadership hardly anticipated?<sup>42</sup>

### **Dr. Forrest L. Marion**

Dr. Marion (VMI; MA, University of Alabama; PhD, University of Tennessee) has been a staff historian and oral historian since 1998 at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. He retired as a colonel from the US Air Force Reserve in 2010 with 16 years of active duty. His most recent publication is *Flight Risk: The Coalition's Air Advisory Mission in Afghanistan, 2005–2015* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018).

### **Notes**

1. OHI, Lt Col James E. Brunner, USAF, interview by the author, Davis Monthan AFB, AZ, 11 September 2018 (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2793); *Personnel Recovery Operations*, 13; and Lt Col Aaron B. Griffith, USAF, telephone discussion with the author, 22 October 2018.

2. OHI, Col Gregory A. Roberts, USAF, interview by the author, Randolph AFB, TX, 24 August 2018 (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2783); and OHI, Lt Col James E. Brunner, USAF, 11 September 2018.

3. One option available to the USCENTCOM commander was to register a “non-concur” with the CJCS or the Secretary of Defense with respect to the decision to source a particular Request for Forces (RFF). A document search at the Office of the Secretary of Defense Executive Archive for unclassified documentation produced during 2014 pertaining to the sourcing of CSAR/PR assets for OIR produced negative results.

4. Emails, “RE: question – OIR, Jan 2015,” Lt Col Aaron B. Griffith (USAF), to author, 4 January and 7 January 2019; and Nolan Peterson, “What ‘Boots on the Ground’ in Iraq Looks Like,” *Daily Signal*, 22 September 2015.

5. Abe Greenwald, “On His Watch,” *Commentary*, 14 December 2015; and Fred Shepherd, “Up in the Air,” *Armada International*, April 2015, 13.

6. David Welna, “After A Year Of Bombing ISIS, U.S. Campaign Shows Just Limited Gains,” *NPR.org*, 7 August 2015; Peterson, “What ‘Boots on the Ground’ in Iraq Looks Like”; Mark Thompson, “U.S. Bombing of ISIS Oil Facilities Showing Progress,” *Time*, 13 December 2015; Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., “Airstrikes Up in Iraq & Syria, Afghanistan Eats ISR: CENTCOM,” *breakingdefense.com*, 20 July 2016; and Maj Thaddeus L. Ronnau, USAF, telephone discussion with the author, 8 January 2019.

7. OHI, Lt Col James E. Brunner, USAF, 11 September 2018; “CSAR Unit Activates for Iraq and Syria,” 8 September 2015; Jeff Schogol, “Air Force Search-and-Rescue Crew Deploys to Turkey,” *Air Force Times*, 1 October 2015. The pararescuemen were also referred to as “Guardian Angel” forces, an allusion to the traditional Air Rescue emblem that featured an angel holding the globe.

8. In fact, it was three months later (October 2016) when a second element of three HH-60G’s deployed to Ayn Al Asad AB, Iraq, providing the CSAR force with a southern base in addition to Diyarbakir. OHI, Col Gregory A. Roberts, USAF, 24 August 2018. Colonel Smith commented on USAFCENT’s desire for both northern and southern bases for PR assets; see OHI, Col Dustin P. Smith, USAF, ret., interview by the author, Shaw AFB, SC, 6 September 2018 (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2792).

9. OHI, Col Gregory A. Roberts, USAF, 24 August 2018. Roberts’ recollection regarding the paring down to one UTC was confirmed by USAFCENT documentation; see CD entitled

“CSAR files,” by USAFCENT/HO, 9 October 2018. Following the decision to provide one, rather than two, unit type codes [CSAR/PR ‘packages’] under Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)-OIR, any documentation addressing a “non-concur” on the part of the USCENTCOM commander to the CJCS or the Secretary of Defense—if it existed—was unknown to this writer.

10. Peterson, “What ‘Boots on the Ground’ in Iraq Looks Like.”

11. Valerie Insinna, “Structural Issues Plague US Pave Hawk Helicopters,” *defensenews.com*, 20 February 2018.

12. Kyle Rempfer, “After Flying beyond Their Service Life, Air Force Pave Hawks Are Finally Getting Replaced,” *Air Force Magazine*, 17 August 2018.

13. OHI, Maj Paul A. Campbell, USAF, interview by the author, Little Rock AFB, AR, 16 August 2018 (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2781); and OHI, Capt Stephen D. Weigel, USAF, interview by the author, Maxwell AFB, AL, 14 August 2018 (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2780).

14. Maj Thaddeus L. Ronnau, USAF, telephone discussion with the author, 8 January 2019; and OHI, SMSgt Mark W. Aube, USAF, and MSgt Marcus J. Sydow, USAF, interview by the author, 11 September 2018, Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2795).

15. OHI, Capt Timothy G. Wiser, USAF, interview by the author, Nellis AFB, NV, 13 September 2018 (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2796); MFR, author to self, “Follow-on to OHI with Capt Timothy G. Wiser, USAF, on 13 Sep 18,” 17 September 2018; OHI, SSgt Rachel K. Watts, USAF, interview by the author, 5 September 2018, Shaw AFB, SC (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2791); and OHI, Mr. Steven P. Kelley, USAFCENT/PR, interview by the author, 5 September 2018, Shaw AFB, SC (audio-only, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL, call no. K239.0512-2788).

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# Why Are Warm-Water Ports Important to Russian Security?

## The Cases of Sevastopol and Tartus Compared

TANVI CHAUHAN

### Abstract

This article aims to examine why Russia's warm-water ports are so important to Russian security. First, the article defines what *security* encompasses in relation to ports. Second, the article presents two case studies: the Crimean port of Sevastopol and the Syrian port of Tartus. This article proves that warm-water ports are important to Russian security because they enable Russia to control the sea, project power, maintain good order, and observe a maritime consensus. Each of these categorical reasons are then analyzed in the Crimean and Syrian context. The results are compared in regional perspective, followed by concluding remarks on what the findings suggest about Russian foreign policy in retrospect, as well as Russian security in the future.

### Introduction

General discourse attribute ports with a binary character: commercial or naval. However, the importance of ports is not limited to those areas alone. *Security* in the twenty-first century has come to constitute multidimensional relationships, so this article will approach the importance of warm-water ports for security by using the broad concept of *maritime security*, rather than *naval security* alone. Previously, the maritime context covered naval confrontations and absolute sea control, but today, scholars have elaborated the maritime environment to include security missions spanning from war and diplomacy to maritime resource preservation, safe cargo transit, border protection from external threats, engagement in security operations, and preventing misuse of global maritime commons.<sup>1</sup> Thus, maritime security has crucial links to political, economic, military, and social elements. It is therefore imperative that all such dimensions are considered for an overall and overarching security picture.

### *Methodology and Research Background*

To determine *why* warm-water ports are important to Russian security, the reasons for why any port is generally important come under consideration first.

Any naval port enables states to execute maritime security functions, and as discussed previously, maritime security is wide-ranging. Pioneers in naval studies, like strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, emphasized significance of naval supremacy, while Julian Corbett stressed the necessity of joint warfare (navy and army).<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Till built on these ideas and described maritime security in today's globalizing world.<sup>3</sup> Till presents two competing models of maritime security—modern and postmodern navies—where the former's missions reflect ideological supremacy and competitive military power, while the latter's are sea control, good order, power projection, and maritime consensus. Till concludes that postmodern navies embrace the globalized maritime order, while modern navies, whose governments reject or despise globalism, have a narrow concept of maritime power projection, focusing less on maritime consensus and more on deterrence.<sup>4</sup> Another scholar, Sam J. Tangredi, also maintains that globalization is the defining characteristic of global order. However, states hardly fit into any two models perfectly, so a port's importance in acting out maritime security functions cannot be divided strictly in terms of modern or post-modern missions.<sup>5</sup> Skeptics, like Colin S. Gray, discuss how power dynamics—including rivalries, conflicts, international organization memberships, and so forth—form the milieu in which maritime security policies take place in the post-Cold War era much more than globalization.<sup>6</sup> So, the two thoughts (globalization vs. presiding international power dynamics order) are needed to evaluate why a warm-water port is important to a state's security.

This article aims to blend explanations that fit both the globalized maritime world and the traditional realist one, so that the reader can get a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. I use Till's maritime functions as the categorical reasons for *why* warm-water ports are important to Russian security, analyzing each one per the chosen case.<sup>7</sup> The reasons are listed below followed by descriptions and indicators of each reason:

1. sea control;
2. power projection;
3. good order at sea; and
4. maritime consensus.

First, *sea control* means that the controlling power can use the sea to serve its interests,<sup>8</sup> but in today's world, sea control also means securing it for everyone except the enemies of the system.<sup>9</sup> Second, maritime *power projection* is the "ability of a state to influence or coerce others at, or from, the sea."<sup>10</sup> This definition is very wide, allowing maritime power to translate into social, political, and/or military projections. As Till suggests, power projection not only means "what they can do at sea, but what they can do from it."<sup>11</sup> This means that ports may permit states to

project power for historic or cultural reasons, meet geopolitical ends, and even militaristic expeditionary operations away from their shorelines. Third, *good order at sea* means using the port to protect anything that threatens the set beneficial order. *Order* is understood differently by different states: good order involves dealing with traditional threats (alliances, balancing, unipolarity, etc.), as well as new-age globalization threats (weapons of mass destruction (WMD), illegal immigration, nonstate actors' aggression, radicalism, environmental degradation, and so on). Lastly, *maritime consensus* entails cooperation and integration of as many countries' maritime agencies as can be persuaded to cooperate to deal with common threats.<sup>12</sup> A naval port is required in order to command and share the global commons peacefully and effectively.

### ***Case Selection***

This article focuses on Russia's warm-water ports from two different regions where it has a naval fleet stationed: the Black Sea (Sevastopol in Crimea) and the Mediterranean Sea (Tartus in Syria). There are three reasons for selecting these ports. First, because one is a home base and the other is an away one: to fully assess the importance of a Russian port to its security, a home and abroad comparison is imperative. Second, because both give access to multiple regions of influence: the Black Sea gives access into the Mediterranean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea pours into the Arabian, so an expansive maritime security policy can be realized, both from a globalization perspective as also the traditional realist one. Lastly, because of Russia's geographical limitations, the research de facto chooses two of its only naturally occurring warm-water ports. Novorossiysk in the Black Sea was excluded from the analysis because it is primarily an economic port housing only *part* of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF), while Vladivostok in the Far East is kept open using ice-breakers and is not a naturally occurring warm-water port.

I utilize Arend Lijphart's interpretative-comparative case study method, whereby the research uses a theoretical foundation to examine or interpret a case; however, the focus is still mainly on the case.<sup>13</sup> This method is not only useful in interpreting the cases involved, but the interpretations themselves lend better understanding of posited theory, i.e., whether theory is appropriate to explain a case or if another one is better, or there is need to create one. In our situation, by comparing the two regions for their port importance, newer insights or explanations that confirm or debunk Russian actions in those places can be found. The two ports share the similarity of being warm-water ports. So, by utilizing the "most similar systems design" for my cases, this article attempts to examine the reasons (independent variables) for why Russian warm-water ports in two different regions are important for Russian maritime security (dependent variable).

## Case Analysis: Sevastopol (Black Sea)

This section will analyze why the warm-water port of Sevastopol is important to Russian security using the categorical reasons as stated and explained in the methodology: sea control, power projection, good order at sea, and maritime consensus.

### *Sea Control*

Sevastopol is important because it gives Russia the ability to control its open and littoral waters. As previously mentioned, the vast definition of *sea control* entails using the sea to serve a state's political, economic, and military interests. First, Russia values Sevastopol because it can use the port to accomplish political ends. Before Moscow's annexation of Crimea, Sevastopol's port facilities were shared by Ukraine and Russia—this joint basing “provided practical limitations on Ukraine's maritime power [while] the presence of Russian BSF in Sevastopol hampered Ukraine's ability to control effectively its main port and its infrastructure.”<sup>14</sup> So it was in Russian political interests to have a pro-Moscow government or ruler in Kiev who would continue the longstanding lease on Sevastopol because the port limited Ukraine's freedoms as much as it did Russia's, especially given Ukraine's inclination to integrate with the international organizations of the West. Now, after the annexation, although maritime governance was, and remains, fraught with divergent views regarding Crimea, the absolute control over a strategic port like Sevastopol provides Russia with the lead in any new geopolitical maneuvers it chooses to make—whether they be power projections, expeditionary operations, participation in sea commerce, or new multilateral arrangements, to name a few. In Tillian logic, *military sea control* refers to preventing adversaries from effectively controlling the same region. By controlling Sevastopol, Moscow obviously denies Ukraine the same space and simultaneously ensures that Russian forces are no longer constrained by Ukraine. Before the annexation, the BSF was only permitted to replace old naval craft with similar ones, so Russia could not advance the port with modern naval technology; however, post annexation, such constraints were removed.<sup>15</sup> From Sevastopol, therefore, the BSF can reconnoiter the sea and also dominate the aerial space, creating a formidable antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) situation for its enemies (including NATO). We see examples of this during the Crimean annexation when BSF control of the sea executed a blockade on the Ukrainian army and fleet. Roy Allison informs that Russian efforts to control the sea go further to include reactivating its submarine base at Sevastopol, upgrading naval weapons testing, and advancing early warning radar stations that cover the Black Sea and Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Thus, such physical modernization elevates the Sevastopol port as a platform from which Russia can control the sea for offensive reasons.

But let us not forget defensive sea control. BSF admiral Viktor Kravchenko notes that “Russia’s military superiority in the Black Sea has to rely on its stationing arrangements in Crimea [because] the Black Sea has two components: Group West based in Sevastopol, and Group East—on the Caucasian Coast.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, security of one main port affects another. Through Sevastopol, Russia can monitor conflictual zones like Moldova-Transnistria (Giurgiulești port) or effortlessly access newly sieged bases like Abkhazia (Sukhumi).

Although Sevastopol is primarily a naval base housing the BSF, it also indirectly affects and reinforces Russian economic security. If the Sevastopol lease had not been ratified, then Russia would be left with only one warm-water port in the Black Sea—Novorossiysk—chiefly an economic port, which houses only part of the BSF because its main purpose is to support the local economy with its ship repairing, fishing, cement manufacturing, food processing, machinery, and textile industries and its export facilities of timber, coal, grains, and cement. In fact, Russia’s key Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline also passes through this commercial port. Since a good portion of Russia’s wealth depends on Novorossiysk, an unfriendly or uncontrollable Sevastopol directly compromises Novorossiysk, so the latter’s protection depends upon the former’s ability to control the maritime space. This in no way suggests that Russia controls the entire Black Sea economy, because according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), all littoral Black Sea states have responsibilities and rights to their exclusive economic zones (EEZ). Thus, Sevastopol does not afford any state (let alone Russia) full economic control in the sea outside of their legal EEZ.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Sevastopol does enable Russia to control littoral waters in general and problematic littoral states, in particular. This section analysis confirms that Sevastopol is indeed important to Russian security because it allows Russia to control the sea *in* and *for* various political, economic, and military reasons.

### ***Power Projection***

As noted earlier, maritime power can be translated to achieve social, political, and military effects, so it is worth understanding Sevastopol’s importance to Russian security in terms of the port being Russia’s gateway for regional and international power projection. First, let us examine the use of maritime power projection to achieve social effects. In a 2014 address to both houses of the Russian legislature, Pres. Vladimir Putin claimed that Crimea has always been an “inseparable part of Russia” and that “there was no single armed confrontation in Crimea and no casualties.”<sup>19</sup> The decision to annex Crimea and unilaterally control Sevastopol must then be understood from a nuanced social power projection lens. The port is the emblematic representation of Russia’s soft-power victory against the West.

Russia frames its soft power in geopolitical terms as a “counterforce to the West” in an effort to defend Russian interests.<sup>20</sup> Although *soft power* has far-reaching applications and definitions, Joseph Nye’s original idea translates for Russians, like Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, as the “ability to influence the world with the attraction of one’s civilization and culture.”<sup>21</sup> So, when the pro-Russian leader Sergei Tsekov appealed to Russia for help in Crimea, this presented a cultural obligation for the Russian Federation to extend the notion of *Russkyi Mir*—the conceptualization of a greater Russian world beyond the current borders of the federation—and an opportunity to reinstitute power based on the premise that areas like Crimea were home to Russian culture and ethnicities. For why would Russia risk huge economic losses and international derision when the BSF was legally guaranteed Sevastopol port facilities until 2042? Annexing the peninsula with a strategic and historic port meant that Russia got a symbolic trophy of having protected and defended the Russian world from the *Other*. For as Anna Matveeva puts it, had Russia not attended to Crimea or Donbas, the very society moved by Russia’s soft power (Russian identity and ideology) would have felt betrayed.<sup>22</sup> So, the port’s importance is not simply geographical as most scholars believe; it stands as the symbolic triumph of soft power and the physical manifestation of placated social surges.

Next, Sevastopol is obviously important to Russian security because it is the outlet that Russia uses to reach certain geopolitical and military effects—both domestic and international. Till states that offensive naval missions are dealing with a disorder on land (normally political); so, what happens at sea is treating the symptom, not the cause.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, Sevastopol’s importance to Russia goes beyond the hackneyed imperialistic and re-Sovietizing theories abounding in general discourse. Let us consider the port’s naval importance to home base first. Once Sevastopol was under Russia’s possession, there was no fear of an anti-Moscow government in Kiev reverting the lease, so instead of using the port to militarily project dominion over Ukraine, Moscow used the annexation of the peninsula, and with it the port, as a medium of political warfare. By restricting how much maritime power Ukraine could project, Russia added another pressure point that it hoped would force Ukraine to adopt a federalizing scheme favorable to the Russian polity.<sup>24</sup>

Ukraine was not the only sore spot. Looking at the Black Sea map, the onlooker notices at once how Russia is encircled by adversarial or fickle states: Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria are NATO members, while Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are aspirants to membership in that organization. In this milieu, Russia’s possession of an important port means that it can wield political sway over its adversaries using the maritime domain as one of its key pressure points, among other

things. For example, Russia threatened to stop energy exports to Moldova as Chișinău vacillated between a European and Russian alliance, as well as Latvia and Lithuania in 2006, but rewarded Ukraine with a price cut when a pro-Russian candidate won the presidency.<sup>25</sup>

Now, let us discuss the port's naval importance for expeditionary operations. Sevastopol renders Russia uninterrupted ability to conduct naval missions within the Black Sea of course, but the readiness and tactical convenience of this facility means that Russia can also extend its power beyond the Black Sea, for example, through the Mediterranean Sea and into Syria. Sevastopol was valuable in allowing Russia to conduct its first "military intervention outside of Europe since the Soviet collapse."<sup>26</sup> From Sevastopol Russia can therefore send reinforcements and supplies for its power projects outside of the Black Sea. So, this section analysis also confirms that Sevastopol is undeniably important to Russian security because it allows Russia to not only project power socially, militarily, and politically but also maintain that same power in subtle ways.

### ***Good Order at Sea***

Sevastopol is important to Russian security because from this port, year-round, Moscow can protect its region from any threat that upsets the established stability or order—from social threats on culture and radicalism to economic and military threats that tip regional stability off. Michael O. Slobodchikoff maintains that Russia created a regional order that was compatible with the global one, but increasingly, Western actions have isolated Russia, destroying the regional order nested within the global one.<sup>27</sup> So, a dissatisfied Russia now looks to challenge the Western hegemonic order.<sup>28</sup> Hence, *good order at sea* does not necessarily involve protecting the region only from globalization threats as Till would have it<sup>29</sup> but also protecting one's state and companions from the presiding *global order* threats that is West-favoring and anti-Russian. However, this does not mean Russia has completely turned away from battling globalization threats; Moscow can, from its strategic port, allow itself to treat threats in a way Russia wants and in the priority that they appear—using or not using the nested global order framework. Take terrorism for instance: Sevastopol's year-long access means that when terrorists use the sea to influence social and political agendas, a strategic port can help with policing and protection against that threat. Although this is crucial for any littoral state's security in the Black Sea, it is especially important for Russia, which has been threatened with the instability and spillover effects of terrorism in Central Asia and by Islamist separatism within the federation, i.e., Chechnya.

But larger than these threats are those that Russia faces from the West, which wishes to challenge and interfere in Russia's regional order. The *West* is an aggre-

gate term, so here we must separate it from the immediate west (Europe/EU), to the combined west (NATO), and the hegemonic west (United States). Russia attempted to nest regional treaties into global lodestone agreements, indicating Russia's inclination to pluralism in foreign policy,<sup>30</sup> but the EU's "domestic pluralism is balanced by foreign policy monism."<sup>31</sup> This means that the Russia–Europe order is truly separate and divisive. Europe magnetizes those states, like Ukraine and Georgia, that fall under Russia's perceived order to join the EU's monistic vision, forbidding Russia from both participating in a comprehensive continental order and sustaining her own regional order. This also explains Russia's aversion to NATO. President Putin had expressed strong opposition to NATO, stating that "we are against having a military alliance making itself home right in our backyard or in our historic territory [and] I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors."<sup>32</sup>

Russian security is not limited to maritime security obviously, but a force landing at or around Sevastopol translates into a threat that tips security off in a plethora of other areas. For Moscow, Eurasia is obviously a sphere of influence, but more so, a region that it bears the responsibility to stabilize. Most of the former Soviet states heavily rely on Russia in terms of debt, energy dependency, security guarantees, political support, labor migrations, and remissions.<sup>33</sup> The Sevastopol port assists Russia by upholding this good regional order, but the Russia-averse Western global order threatens this stability. For instance, the United States even resisted Russia's efforts to utilize the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)—a regional intergovernmental organization of nine post-Soviet republics in Eurasia—as a way of integrating the region.<sup>34</sup> Under such circumstances, Russia's good regional maritime order is perpetually threatened, and although the port at Sevastopol does not by and in itself protect Russia's orchestrated regional order in any unconditional way, it does, however, serve as one bulwark against any gross aggressive action taken by the West.

Of course, combating shared threats like WMD and terrorism will translate as maintaining good order no matter which littoral state or Western power one asks, but Russia's actions are not limited to combating these threats alone. Since Russia uses Sevastopol as a buffer against any imminent threat from the Western system along with dealing with other threats, the port's importance for Russian security order is quite particularistic. Whether this classifies as good order or not depends on perspective, but objectively speaking, Russia has used Sevastopol more for its own interests than it has in solely combating globalization threats. This very well may be because Russia is incessantly consumed with trying to protect its own regional order from collapsing before it can wholly focus on altruistic global endeavors. In this respect, Sevastopol is important to Russian security because it

allows Moscow to preserve its own good order more than that of the globe, even as it plays a small part in combatting globalization threats.

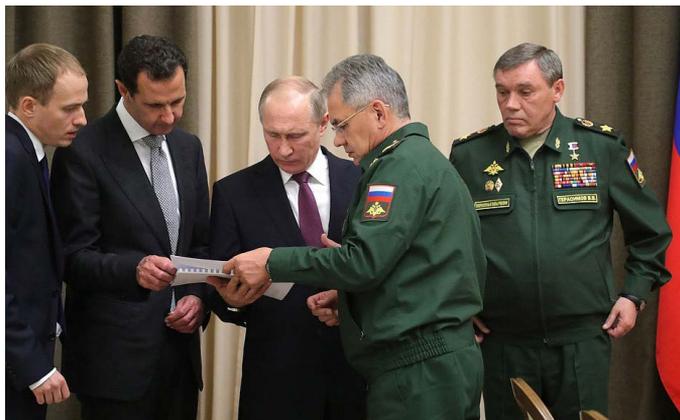
### ***Maritime Consensus***

Sevastopol is important to Russian security because it allows the Russian state to effectively maintain cooperation with its region on trade, military support, non-traditional threats, and so forth. Ports, therefore, enable maritime commitments to actually be practiced and realized. Bilateral and multilateral consensus come into consideration here. Take Moldova, for instance. Sevastopol allows Russia to uphold its maritime consensus with Moldova in transporting Russian forces, conducting joint military operations, exchanging military hardware, and codirecting border security operations in Transnistria.<sup>35</sup> The port also comes handy for Russia's multilateral commitments. The CIS and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), as well as the Collective Security Treaty Organization, depend on Russian hegemony and control in guarding the maritime space.

Moscow also values Sevastopol because Russia can use it to advance joint maritime security operations with other countries into a fully standing multinational maritime task force. This includes Black Sea Naval Force (BLACKSEA-FOR), a multinational security force established by Turkey that deals with maritime threats to and from the Black Sea with port visits to Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Russia, and Turkey.<sup>36</sup> Another example is Operation Black Sea Harmony, a Turkish-led maritime operation that aims to prevent risks and deter threats at sea. One more consensual organization is the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC); founded in 1992, BSEC fosters good relations and cooperation among all the littoral states. In the case of BSEC, because it is a structured intergovernmental organization, rather than an interventionist one, it only facilitates cooperation instead of constraining member behavior,<sup>37</sup> so it is difficult to say that the warm-water port is advancing Russia's security simply because Russia is proactive about joint maritime agreements. Nevertheless, Russia's voluntary participation in multinational maritime security operations (even with adversary states) implies both the importance of the port for that end and Russia's willingness to espouse maritime consensus.

### **Case Analysis: Tartus (Mediterranean Sea)**

This section will analyze why the warm-water Syrian port of Tartus is important to Russian security, using the categorical reasons as explained in the methodology: sea control, power projection, good order at sea, and maritime consensus.



(Photo courtesy of the Office of the President of Russia)

**Figure 1. Russia in Syria.** Syrian president Bashar al-Assad (second from left), Russian president Vladimir Putin (center), Russian minister of defense Sergei Shoigu (second from right), and chief of the general staff of the Russian Federation armed forces Valery Gerasimov (right) meet 21 November 2017 in Sochi, Russia, to discuss Russian support for operations in Syria.

### *Sea Control*

For a geographically locked or restrained country like Russia whose access to the Mediterranean is controlled by Turkey and other littoral Black Sea states, a sole Russian port in the Mediterranean enables Russia to control a portion of the sea away from home to further its military, geopolitical, and economic interests. Tartus is first and foremost important to Russian military interests in the world beyond the Black Sea. If military maritime control means preventing an adversary from effectively using the same region, then to some extent Russia was successful in doing so during the 2015–2018 period; however, it has been unable to form a complete A2/AD environment around Syria. Nonetheless, starting with and from Tartus, Russia has been able to control half of Syria in its fight against the Islamic States (ISIS) and to protect the Assad administration from collapse. Although it has not stopped the United States and its allies from inserting themselves in the Syrian Civil War, Russia's presence in Syria (afforded by Tartus) has diluted NATO's unchallenged and/or America's unilateral control in the Middle East. This military presence at the port, therefore, serves Russia's geopolitical interest too, since it forces NATO and the West to include Russia in the decision-making process. By controlling Syria's littoral waters, Russia is inserting itself in a region that is either strongly allied to the United States (Israel and Saudi Arabia) or highly opposed to it (Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon). Russia has demonstrated that by being able to work with both sides, it can certainly influence decisions,

directly challenging the US monopoly in the region. So, by controlling the littoral Mediterranean shores from Tartus, Russia uses its naval presence to leverage its own political interests on the West's favorite regional playground. Doing so, Russia hopes to leverage matters back home into the Black Sea and Eurasia.

Tartus also allows Moscow to control the sea for Russia's economic interests. In 1971, when Hafez al-Assad permitted Moscow to use Tartus in return for Soviet arms, the port was chiefly used for materiel and technical maintenance of smaller ships in Russia's BSF.<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting that Russia wrote off Syria's massive arms sales debt in 2005 in return for free access to Tartus, because Russia was aware of the approaching end of its lease on Sevastopol. At that time, Moscow had not yet acquired its port in Abkhazia either, as the Russian invasion of Georgia did not occur until 2008. So, purely as a way to control the sea for economic pursuits, Tartus was and remains very valuable to Russian economic security abroad. Syria would immediately turn down any contract that bypassed Russian economic interest, like Qatar's LNG natural gas pipeline that would run from Iran through Turkey and Syria, because of the debts written off and the Tartus port deal.<sup>39</sup> This also means that Tartus will allow Russia to build more of its own pipelines in the future, helping the Russian economy. Rosatom, for example, opened a regional headquarters in 2017, constructing reactors in Iran, Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey.

This section analysis shows Tartus's importance to Russian security in that it allows Russia to control the littoral Mediterranean waters around Syria to realize foreign policy interests with the military and the economy, as well as geopolitical interests that benefit domestic policies. However, this *control* must be contextualized. Russia does not want to control the Mediterranean Sea like it would like to the Black Sea. Russia is by no means desiring full command of it, because to do that, Moscow has to face another naval power—Turkey. Under the 1936 Montreux Convention, Turkey has rights to close off Turkish straits that connect the Black and Mediterranean Seas, which would thereby lock Russia to its shorelines, effectively bottling the BSF up in Sevastopol.<sup>40</sup> Russia also has to face NATO and US regional allies who are jockeying for control of the Mediterranean as well. So, Russia's littoral control is simply to establish a small foothold in the region, so in no way is it attempting to use Tartus to institute a complete command of the Levant shorelines.

### ***Power Projection***

Earlier we ascertained that maritime power can be translated to achieve social, political, and military effects, so the port at Tartus, very much like Sevastopol, forms Russia's gateway in regional and international power projection. First, let us

examine the use of maritime power projection to achieve social effects. The famous 2007 Munich charge-sheet, wherein Putin claims the West humiliated Russia after the Soviet collapse, is vital in understanding the underlying reasons why an away base in a crucial region like the Middle East is important for Russia. Stripped off its superpower status, Russia has been confined as a regional power who, as Pres. Barack Obama once claimed, acts “not out of strength, but out of weakness.”<sup>41</sup> Hence, gaining Tartus empowered Putin to use it as symbolic rebuke of the label Russia was given internationally and domestically. A spot in the Mediterranean Sea (Tartus) boosts ethnic Russian sentiments against the perceived mistreatments of the West. The Middle East presence allows Russia to challenge the unipolar worldview synonymous with anti-Americanism. Even Anna Borshchevskaya states that, thanks to the foreign facility, Russia reached a global prestige that served to distract from domestic problems and invoke patriotic feelings necessary to maintain Russian cultural security back at home.<sup>42</sup> Further, Tartus was not annexed or conquered—it was a deal made by the Alawite Syrians who have had historical connections to the Russians. Thus, the port enables Russia to maintain a powerful relationship on a social level because Syrians feel a “connection with Russians” and “do not look down on them as they did on other nations in the region.”<sup>43</sup> An interesting extension of such social power projection includes the establishment of an Arabic RT news station to resonate symbolic presence in the Middle East through the physical presence at the port. Next, Tartus is important to Russian security since it is Russia’s gateway for projecting actual military power with geopolitical interests at heart. As with the social power projection, one can call Syria Russia’s testing ground for military efficiency. The Russian military understood after its 2008 Georgian war how antiquated its weapons were, so Syria became what some say the Gulf War was to America—a military litmus test.<sup>44</sup> Russian ships in Tartus played a major role in supporting Moscow’s aerial bombing campaign.<sup>45</sup> Projecting such maritime power from this port prompted Middle Eastern powers like Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia to sign “agreements to purchase arms from Russia” in the second half of 2015.<sup>46</sup> Russian influence to permeate into the Middle East through a permanent port presence at Tartus has also added geopolitical Russian interest to assert itself where the United States has pulled back, thereby walking a step closer to restoring the former’s superpower status. US Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder reports that Moscow has deployed 30 combat ships and submarines to the port, effectively “ending NATO’s uncontested control of the Eastern Mediterranean.”<sup>47</sup> So, Tartus is not simply a display-case ornament; it is a real medium of aggressive power projection for Russia—a key factor that in turn safeguards Russia’s own security. In as far as expeditionary operations go, we do not

(yet) see Russia using Tartus to project power beyond the Mediterranean into the Red or Arabian seas. However, there is the possibility of an intervention into Libya from Tartus. Even if Tartus is not used for expeditionary operations around the Middle East and North Africa, there seems to be no doubt about the port's value in projecting power back into the Black Sea. That is, by means of Tartus, Sevastopol's existence and position is strengthened in the Black Sea, and vice-versa. For instance, Tartus can become the device Russia uses to encircle its encirclers, e.g. a double presence in the Black and Mediterranean Sea weakens Turkey's fronts. Thus, analysis of this section also confirms Sevastopol's importance to Russian security because it allows Russia to project power socially, militarily, and politically and provides impacts that are felt back home.

### ***Good Order at Sea***

As in the previous analysis with Sevastopol, Tartus's importance is twofold in maintaining good order at sea: first, in combating globalization threats like terrorism; and second, in countering threats emanating from the established Western order system to Russian security. *Good order* depends entirely on one's perspective, especially when the Middle East is concerned. Firstly, Tartus is key to dealing with the globalized threat of terrorism, since the port aids in policing and precluding spill-over effects into the Eurasian neighborhood. Scholars who state that Tartus is only important to Russia because it is a warm-water port valuable for Russia's economic and naval security miss the fact that Russia has lost thousands of citizens to terrorist attacks and has more than 5,000 nationals fighting in Syria.<sup>48</sup> If Russia justified its Syrian involvement using the pretext of combating terrorism simply to keep its warm-water port, then that was a precarious gamble.

Jiri Valenta and Leni Friedman Valenta posit that over the long run ISIS could percolate into Afghanistan and directly affect Russia's Central Asian allies, even encouraging North Caucasians to fight in Russia.<sup>49</sup> The Beslan town attack in the North Caucasus was Russia's wake-up call for terrorism long before Moscow ventured into Syria. Therefore, Tartus gives Russia the ability to deal with the terrorist threat right in its hotbed, so that good order can be maintained both in the region and back at home.

Through Tartus, Russia can also tackle Western unipolar-order threats. That is, by maintaining a maritime presence and policing the shorelines, Russia has challenged Western foreign policy actions and criteria, enacting a rather contrary, alternate version in dealing with regional issues. Take for instance Moscow's support for the Western-condemned Assad government. Supporting that government was Putin's rationale for good order in Syria, whether maritime or whatever else, because Russia wanted to prevent Syria from the same fate as Iraq after the demise

of Saddam Hussein and Libya after Muammar Gaddafi. In Russia's view, the Arab Spring was not a region-wide success, so it was necessary to cultivate stability by assessing the impact of the grassroots rebellion in each country. The decision to support Assad rested on that very premise. Scholars like Borshchevskaya, who claim Russia's priority was protecting Assad instead of fighting terrorism, miss the crucial point that without a political framework, nonstate threats like terrorism cannot be effectively eliminated. One can presume that keeping Assad in power meant the port stayed in Russia's possession because the port is necessary for Russia's power projection schemes, but if that was all Russia aimed for, Moscow would not worry about negotiating peace between rival groups and regional powers.

Tartus is obviously important because it is the physical proclamation of Russian presence in the Middle East, but more than that, it is Russia's *demonstration* of good order. In Russia's 2017 naval doctrine, Moscow objected to "the US and its allies of dominance of the world's oceans" and proclaimed it would combat such unipolarity by "crushing the superiority of their naval forces."<sup>50</sup> Russia is driven by an alternate worldview that despises Western democratization-crusading and distrusts grassroots rebellions,<sup>51</sup> so through Tartus, Russia demonstrates to NATO a different way of conducting interventions against global threats like terrorism, as also meeting the objective of maintaining good order in a region—maritime order being only one such aspect. Now, one can argue that Russia is using Tartus to in fact collapse the good order because of Syria's ties to Hezbollah and Iran, who are deemed as direct threats to the West and its allies in the Middle East. However under Russian intervention through Tartus, states like Israel have felt more secure because of Russia's ability to cajole Assad, as well as to preoccupy Hezbollah's attention.<sup>52</sup> Israel's downing of a Russian fighter jet still does not change how crucial Russian presence at Tartus is to containing Israel's enemies. Russia's ability to operate within reach of the Golan Heights—a contested territory in the ongoing Arab–Israeli conflict—suggests that the port presence allows for Russia to achieve friendship that conditioned good order in the region as the Syrian Civil War raged and, in lieu of an Israel–Syria peace treaty, presented hope for future peace around Golan.

Tartus has endowed Russia with a prestigious role not only in Israeli issues but also in fostered renewed maritime accord with Turkey. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was quoted as saying that "without Russia, it is impossible to find a solution to the problems in Syria."<sup>53</sup> The two countries partnered in formulating a political settlement in Syria that some may call a rapprochement of sorts.<sup>54</sup> Although it very well may be Turkey's way to bandwagon for profit, Russia's influence in the Mediterranean order is not so lightweight. Whatever one's perspective of good order, the warm-water port at Tartus is crucial to Russian security because

it is Russia's mechanism for enacting its own version of good order in a region that is also the epicenter to the gravest global threat this decade—terrorism.

### ***Maritime Consensus***

If maritime consensus is to be analyzed in the Middle East, it is crucial to factor in NATO. Despite their antagonisms and supporting opposite factions, both sides have not used this region as a way to turn their new “cold war” into a proxy hot one. Therefore, Tartus is helpful to Russian security because it gives Russia the leverage and the sensitivity to make judicious decisions by factoring in NATO, which is using the same sea to tackle the common terrorist threat. Other than NATO, Tartus's basing allows Russia to be proactive about its commitments in and to the Mediterranean region. There are countless examples of this—whether it is legally responding to the summoning of its ally Syria for help through the UN mandate, or the once active Iran Nuclear Deal, or even the Syrian peace process. Under this legal consensus, Tartus facilitates Russian foreign policy dealings.

Take Iran–Russia consensus for instance: Moscow could engage in a cooperative relationship with Tehran like pipeline projects and arms deal and utilize the latter's Hamadan Airbase, all the while containing Iran from mischievous behavior in the locality in the early years through the nuclear deal. Getting an estranged state to commit to cooperative arrangements shows how the local presence afforded by Tartus allowed Russia to understand the region from the ground up and produce consensual relationships.

Another example is the Syrian peace process, which brought key regional players like Russia, Turkey, and Iran to negotiations in Astana and Geneva IV. Just a simple basing in Tartus meant Moscow played a role in regional consensus, which in turn affected domestic Russian relations and policies. For instance, working closely with Turkey, a littoral Black Sea state, means the furtherance of the two nations' relationship beyond the Mediterranean, while working with Iran means direct economic relationships and extended influence on Hezbollah in Lebanon. This in turn also impacts the Russo–Israeli relationship, given the huge Russian Jewish diaspora resident in Israel. With the Syrian peace talks in 2017, de-escalation zones were established to initiate a political process on the ground. Consensus was achieved, albeit with problems, but it was achieved without the Western giants. As Dmitri Trenin confirms, Moscow was able to build common ground between the region's contending factions.<sup>55</sup>

Russia has used its presence in Syria through Tartus to work with other connected navies and armies in dealing with day-to-day issues, rather than simply shielding Assad. So, it is clear, at least from this analysis, that Russia values its Middle Eastern asset to foster consensual agreements with key regional players

who have a lasting impact on Russian security in other areas. Therefore, the port is more than a physical placement of navies. It is the gateway, literally, for Russia's insertion into the Middle East power-consensus and security system.

### Results in Comparative Perspective

As the analysis indicated, there was stronger support for some reasons versus others in explaining the importance of the respective ports to Russian security. The table below categorizes the overall intensity and validation of each reason when analyzed in their separate contexts:

Strong = overwhelming supporting evidence or action  
 Weak = nonexistent, limited, and/or ambiguous evidence or action

Reason for Importance	Sevastopol	Tartus
Sea Control	Strong	Weak
Power Projection	Strong	Strong
Good Order at Sea	Weak	Strong
Maritime Consensus	Strong	Strong

The results above illustrate Sevastopol's importance to Russian security for various reasons—letting Russia control the Black Sea, project power, and generate maritime consensus. Sevastopol is not as important to Russian security in dealing with globalized threats like terrorism as much as it is in dealing with threats emanating from the Western-style order (e.g., NATO expansion). On the other hand, the analysis also shows Tartus's striking importance to Russian security even though it is an away base. Tartus enables Russia to continue power projection beyond its regional waters and actually contain globalized threats by attaining a regional maritime consensus, including with adversaries like NATO. At present, being stationed on the Syrian shorelines, controlling the Mediterranean Sea is not as important to Russian security as much as all the other maritime functions are. Since both ports only differ in one reason of importance to Russian security, we can conclude they are equally important to Russian security. The main difference lies in prioritizing any of the different maritime functions in the context of those regions.

### Discussion

Russia's ports in the Far East, Caspian, and Baltic freeze for some time during the year, thereby obstructing, compromising, and/or limiting Russia's maritime security. This article has incessantly stressed that maritime security guarantees and reinforces security in other areas, so Russia's warm-water ports at home and away are constantly working toward this end—protecting and furthering Russian interests at home and abroad. It is not redundant to state the obvious fact that Russia's

warm-water ports are important to Russian security because they are, indeed, warm. They are naturally available, replete with strategic advantages, and operational year-round. However, these ports in and by themselves do not unconditionally guarantee Russian security in any way. To quote Nicholas Spykman, “geography does not argue, it simply is.”<sup>56</sup> So in addition to, and outside of, a geographic reason, this study aimed to find out *why* and to what extent warm-water ports are important to Russian security when distinct regions are compared. From this analysis, it is clear that Russian warm-water ports are important to Russian security because they genuinely enable Russia to control the waters, project power, maintain good order at sea, and observe maritime consensus. By comparing a home base (Sevastopol) to an away base (Tartus), the aim was to juxtapose two warm-water Russian ports in separate regions to assess why each one is important to Russian security when contrasted using the *same* reasons. This gives us perspective about Russia’s regional as well as foreign maritime policy conduct. Future studies can apply the same analysis to other Russian ports as well. For instance, a home base like Sevastopol can be compared to an away one like Cam Ranh Bay (Vietnam) to check if the reasons discussed herein still resonate equally in another region like the Indo-Pacific.

In as far as this research, it is not surprising from the results to see how important a home warm-water port is as compared to an away one because of its obvious proximity and influence to the immediate region. Sevastopol gives Russia a monopolizing sea control second only to Turkey, a clear domain to project regional power of varying social and military dimensions, a medium of deterring threats from the Western order, and a vestibule that further leads to consensual bilateral and multilateral relationships, for example the CIS, EEU, and so forth. So, the port’s importance goes beyond being the site where the BSF is located. Once we understand that, Russian actions in Crimea, Abkhazia, and Syria can be comprehended in their entirety, thus debunking the much in vogue imperialistic-only and militaristic-only theories about Russian behavior. Even with Tartus, its importance lies not only as a show of Russian power abroad but also as a genuine effort to reshape the region with Russia’s version of order and to attain harmony with regional players.

## **Conclusion**

So, what does the future hold? Russia has no outlets to influence a world beyond its region. In the North, it is impeded by harsh winters; in the East by a dominant China; in the Black Sea by uncooperative actors; and in the Mediterranean by unreliable participants. Given the antagonistic Russia–West tensions, the maritime domain will effectively remain an important contest medium be-

tween the two sides. However, from its warm-water ports, the BSF is guaranteed to take on additional missions beyond the Black Sea at any time in the year, especially sealift operations and amphibious landings in the Mediterranean. Even the Libyan intervention from Tartus appears to be a likely possibility. The strategic warm-water ports will remain instrumental in Russia's ability to ward off NATO threats, challenge Western maritime dominion, and compel the United States to rethink geopolitical maritime strategy in those regions. Further, Russian economic interests and security appear to profit from these ports; so, more pipeline projects are likely to be implemented. In a subtle yet critical way, the strong Russian presence year-long in home and foreign waters also means that Russian cultural values (soft power) will continue to impact communities disillusioned by globalization and the Western system, affording such communities the opportunity to perchance appreciate the alternate stability proposed by Russia. Though this analysis is nowhere suggesting that the ports are part of the new cold war between Russia and the West, they are definitely strategic tools—weapons or shields, depending on one's perspective—in this poisoned bilateral relationship.

This simple study to identify reasons why warm-water ports are important to Russian security has actually revealed the need for scholars to transcend superficial naval philosophies and plunge into underlying political, economic, and social importance of such facilities for a comprehensive maritime security understanding. Only then can we make any meaningful conclusions and predictions about overall state security in the case of Russia.

#### **Ms. Tanvi Chauhan**

Miss Chauhan holds a master of science in international relations (with honors) from Troy University, AL. Her research interests include regional and international foreign policy, geostrategy, cultural ideology, and ethnic studies. Her graduate focus centered on global affairs as a whole, with special attention given to US, Eurasian, Middle Eastern, and African studies. Her works have been published by *International Affairs Forum*, *International Policy Digest*, *Modern Diplomacy*, and *Foreign Policy News*. Currently, she is working on a research paper about the Caspian Basin for the Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade (ARTNeT). This paper will be published under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific branch by summer 2020. Chauhan is a young professional with a strong third-culture upbringing, including living and travel experiences in Africa and Asia. She enjoys traveling and interacting with diverse cultures and wishes in earnest to positively impact the world. In this light, she has worked on refugee acculturation missions in Clarkston, Georgia, and hosted international cultural events at Brewton-Parker College in Mount Vernon, Georgia.

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# The Struggle for Air Superiority

## The Air War over the Middle East (1967–1982) as a Case Study

DR. TAL TOVY

Russia's announcement in October 2018 regarding the transfer of advanced S-300 surface-to-air missiles (SAM) to Syria following Israel's numerous aerial attacks, once again brought to the fore the struggle between aerial forces and the weapons systems tasked with preventing the free operation of aerial forces in the Middle East. This struggle began almost immediately with the utilization of aerial forces in World War I (WWI), and the struggle to gain aerial freedom of action or air superiority can be identified in all the wars since then. The definition of *air superiority* includes the main role of the aerial force, which is to gain freedom of action in the air and to prevent the enemy from achieving the same, at both the strategic and tactical levels. This freedom of action is vital for the ability to support operations on land and at sea in the areas of close air support (CAS) and air interdiction (AI) as well as for bombing in the enemy's strategic depth.<sup>1</sup>

The goal of this article is to examine the aerial campaigns between Israel and the Arab states (with an emphasis on Egypt and Syria). A discussion of the operational history of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) between the years 1967 and 1982 will be used to analyze an additional chapter in the historical struggle to gain air superiority, while also highlighting the importance of gaining air superiority and maintaining it over armies that rely on a ground-based air defense (GBAD) to prevent it. A further goal is to examine the formation and implementation of the various strategies applied by the belligerents in their confrontations and the system of learning lessons and applying them from one campaign to another. For example, beginning in 1969, the air war in the Middle East turned into a lethal encounter between American and Soviet technologies and served as an important operational laboratory for both superpowers.<sup>2</sup> This trend continues today, and therefore an analysis of the history of the air wars in the Middle East can provide insights and lessons for those that are currently operating against advanced and dense GBAD systems.

The first part of this article will briefly examine the concept of *air superiority* and the historical struggle to achieve it. The second, main part of the article, will analyze the confrontation between Israel and the Arab states through four case studies: the Six-Day War (1967), the War of Attrition (1969–1970), the Yom Kippur War (1973), and the First Lebanon War (1982). In these wars, which were indeed brief and conducted in a limited geographical area in global and historical

terms, the aerial forces on all sides had an important—and at times—crucial role. Also, through these case studies it is possible to learn not only about how the belligerents coped but also about their learning curves and how they applied the lessons they learned from one confrontation to another. Thus, the article will contribute, if only modestly, to the research of the dynamic between offensive weapons systems and defense systems.

### Air Superiority

*Air superiority* can be defined as a military situation in which the aerial force of a country has freedom of operation that is restricted in time and space but that is sufficient for the aerial force to complete its missions without significant interference on the part of the enemy.<sup>3</sup> The other side of air superiority is the ability to prevent the enemy from using the air space, thereby preventing him from efficiently operating his aerial force, while at the same time, the side that has gained air superiority can complete its aerial missions. This is why John Warden—whose book *The Air Campaign* (1988) can be considered one of the most important in the field of operating aerial forces—argues that gaining air superiority is a fundamental condition for completing the mission and even for achieving victory in war. Warden also wrote that since World War II (WWII), not one main attack succeeded against an enemy that enjoyed air superiority, and not one defense managed to hold up against an enemy that ruled the air.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, one must strive to gain air superiority in a relatively short time and with a low rate of attrition of the aerial force. In this way, freedom of action is made possible in the tactical, operational, and strategic space, according to the relevant requirements of each campaign or war. Since this is the case, it is critical to gain the ability to operate the aerial force freely and effectively in strategic missions as well as tactical ones—and primarily in support of the land battle.<sup>5</sup>

From a historical point of view, the struggle over air superiority began almost as soon as armies had aircraft of various types, with airplanes being the primary weapons systems for aerial combat. Indeed, anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) was developed during WWI, but it was used mainly to defend land targets and was limited in its ability to be a dominant element in the struggle for air superiority. This trend continued into WWII. Thus, for example, one of Germany's most important opening moves in its invasion of the Soviet Union was a comprehensive, surprise attack on Soviet airfields. The damage inflicted upon the Soviet air force while it was still on the ground provided Germany with air superiority over the operational zone in which its armored corps were moving. Britain and the United States gained air superiority over the battlefields of Western Europe in a complex operation that combined aerial combat with the targeting of factories that pro-

duced airplanes and airplane parts and the infrastructure for refining oil into airplane fuel. Thus, air superiority was achieved in a lengthy process for both offensive purposes (the strategic bombing campaign) and defensive purposes, meaning defense of the advancing land forces.<sup>6</sup>

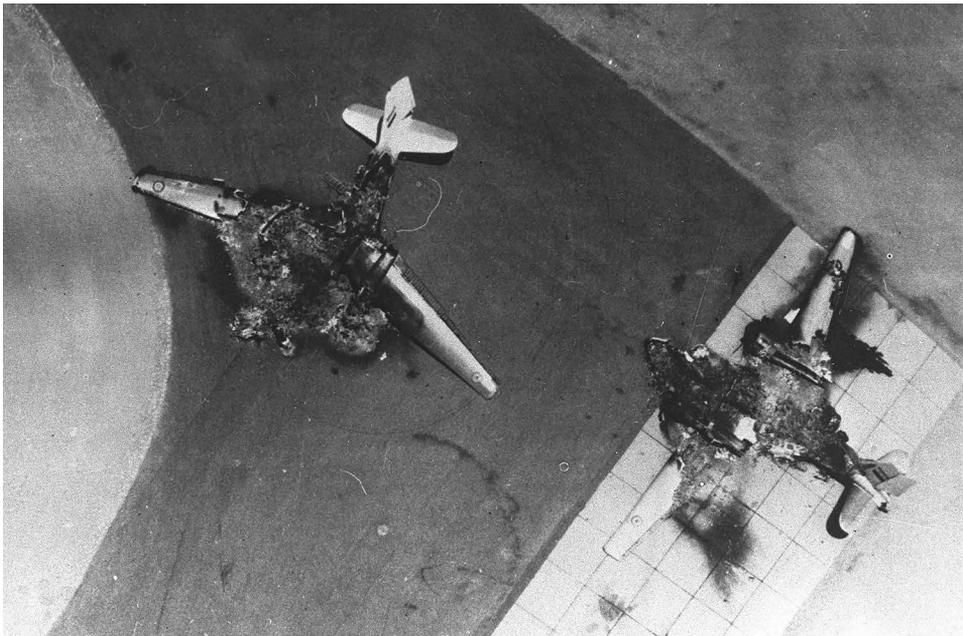
In the 1950s, new weapons entered operational service that created a new threat to the freedom of action of aerial forces and their ability to gain air superiority. In this period, armies began to equip themselves with SAMs and radar-guided AAA. In fact, a multilayered air defense system was developed that, with the backing of interceptor aircraft, created a significant change in the ways in which an attacking aerial power could realize the principle of achieving air superiority. Nonetheless, since the enemy aircraft continued to be a threat, the struggle over air superiority simply became more complicated and continued to include air-to-air combat.

Besides the need for interceptors, it also became clear that new weapons must be integrated and that a system must be constructed to provide relevant intelligence regarding the location of enemy anti-aircraft (AA) systems. These trends brought about a series of transformations in the construction of aerial forces, especially among air forces—such as Israel and the United States—that had sanctified the offensive dimension of gaining air superiority through aircraft. These air forces were compelled to adjust to the changing aerial battlefield and equip themselves with new technologies and weapons, change their attack tactics, and adapt their organizational structure to the new challenge posed by the enemy's aerial defense systems. Therefore, the challenge of achieving air superiority became more difficult and created a need to construct a new operational mix consisting of several components, as opposed to relying solely on fighter aircraft. This process of adaptation involved numerous technological and operational difficulties, which led to failures and heavy losses to the attacking forces—until the air forces reacquired the ability to triumph in the struggle for air superiority. These trends were clearly manifested in the Israeli–Arab wars between 1967 and 1982.

### **The IAF in 1966–1967**

Until its victory in the Six-Day War, Israel lacked strategic depth and natural borders as well as the ability to engage in a lengthy war of attrition. This operational reality brought Israel to concentrate on building an offensive force that could decide the issue quickly, while focusing on quality manpower and weapons.<sup>7</sup> In this reality, the IAF was an important and central component of the military power of the State of Israel. The main reason for this was the fact that the IAF was an offensive force that could act quickly, as its main force (pilots and ground crews) was on regular active duty, contrary to the ground forces, which relied mainly on reserves. Therefore, the mission of the IAF was to prevent the Arab air

forces from conducting aerial attacks on the Israeli rear and disrupting the mobilization of the reserves.<sup>8</sup> The increase in the quantity and quality of the aerial offensive capabilities of the Arab states, and particularly of Egypt in the years prior to 1967, further heightened this threat.<sup>9</sup> In the second half of the 1950s, Egypt began to build airbases in the Sinai Peninsula, which significantly shortened the primary flight distances to Israel's main urban centers. Furthermore, the fact that Israel lacked strategic depth prior to 1967 prevented it from intercepting enemy aircraft beyond its own borders. This problem worsened as Egypt was equipped with a wide range of Soviet-made airplanes, some of which were the most advanced models in the Soviet arsenal, such as the MiG-21 and the Tu-16 Badger strategic bombers, which Egypt received in 1960 and were capable of carrying 10-ton bombs to Israel's urban and industrial heartland.<sup>10</sup>



(Photo courtesy of Government Press Office [Israel])

**Figure 1. Destroyed on the ground.** The Israeli Air Force destroyed enemy aircraft on the ground during the opening stages of the Six-Day War.

These developments brought Israel to develop a doctrine that singled out the achievement of air superiority as the most important role of the IAF, which was tasked with finding ways to fulfill this objective.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the IAF adopted an offensive approach that determined that the enemy air forces must be destroyed in the beginning of the war and their air bases struck at the same time. In the Egyptian context, this largely meant the immediate destruction of the Tu-16

bombers before they took off for Israel. Only after this goal was fulfilled could the IAF engage in CAS and AI missions.<sup>12</sup> Facing the threat from the Tu-16 bombers and in light of the deterioration that began in the middle of May 1967, the IAF planners decided to focus on a preventive strike on the Egyptian Air Force. Subsequently, in the morning of 5 June 1967, the IAF initiated Operation Focus (Moked).<sup>13</sup> According to the myth surrounding this operation, the Egyptian Air Force was destroyed in three hours.<sup>14</sup> The truth is a bit more complex, but at the end of the first day of combat, Israel did enjoy almost complete air superiority over the Egyptian theater of war and afterward also vis à vis Syria and Jordan.<sup>15</sup>

Israel's maneuvering forces were afforded effective CAS, which greatly facilitated the swift breakthrough of the Egyptian lines of defense in the Sinai by Israeli armored divisions, which operated almost entirely absent an aerial threat.<sup>16</sup> Once again it was proven that ground maneuvers required aerial support and that such support can be effective only if air superiority had been gained. In addition, Israel's air superiority made a crucial contribution to the CAS and AI operations that aided the swift ground maneuvers in the other fronts, especially in the difficult terrain of Judea and Samaria and the Golan Heights.<sup>17</sup> Lon Nordeen argues that if the Arab air forces had not been destroyed and Israeli air superiority achieved in the beginning of the war, more air-to-air fights would have been conducted. In other words, fewer aircraft would have been available for CAS missions, and he opines that as a consequence the duration of the war would have been extended, as the ground forces would not have benefited from effective CAS, which would also have increased their losses.<sup>18</sup>

### **The War of Attrition (July 1969–August 1970)**

The Israeli victory in the Six-Day War was decisive—too decisive. Three Arab armies were defeated in a span of six days, and the State of Israel tripled its territory. The Arab rout severely damaged the national and pan-Arab prestige of Egypt's leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who strengthened his relationship with the Soviet Union in return for rehabilitating his army. Egypt also began a process of learning the lessons of the war, with the understanding that its army was inferior with respect to maneuver battles against the Israeli armor and in light of the obvious superiority of Israel in the air.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Egypt sought ways to neutralize the Israeli advantages. The Arab armies, and especially Egypt's, began to construct additional air bases to disperse their airplanes. Concrete shelters were constructed for the airplanes to prevent them from being hit while on the ground, hardened fuel depots and command posts were also built, and air bases and other strategic facilities were afforded denser GBAD systems.<sup>20</sup> These trends took away from Israel the possibility of a future aerial bombing as had occurred on 5 June

1967. However, the most critical change was the shift from an air defense system based on fighter aircraft to a GBAD system. This approach was realized and manifested in the War of Attrition.

Confronted with the Soviet Union's rearming of the Arab states, the United States expanded its military aid to Israel and began supplying two types of fighter aircraft: first, the A-4 Skyhawk, and then the F-4E Phantom II, both of which were more advanced, relative to the existing IAF arsenal. These airplanes significantly upgraded the operational capabilities of the IAF, which despite the victory in 1967 found itself in a weak position, both in light of the rearming of the Arab air forces and also due to the IAF inventory of aircraft, which was old and clearly unfit for another war. In fact, only the Mirage airplanes could take part in the forthcoming air superiority campaign, but the IAF only had 60 Mirages that were airworthy and operational. The arrival of the new American planes caused a second technological revolution in the IAF.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the airplanes, Israel also received from the United States a variety of advanced weapons and munition systems, turning the upcoming confrontation between Israel and Egypt, i.e., the War of Attrition, into a proxy war between Soviet and American technology and weapons systems.

The Egyptian president realized that he could not embark on an all-out war against Israel, but to gain political achievements, military action was necessary. Therefore, Egypt adopted a strategy of attrition, with the aim of increasing the involvement of the superpowers, similar to what occurred in 1956, in the hope that they would pressure Israel into retreating from the territory it had captured in 1967 without reaping any political benefits. Another goal of the strategy of attrition was to inflict damage on the Israeli economy, as it would be burdened with financing an extended war but even more so with the understanding that Israel would be unable to sustain a large number of casualties over an extended period.<sup>22</sup> On 3 March 1969, President Nasser declared an end to the ceasefire along the Suez Canal front, and Egyptian artillery began massive bombardments of the makeshift Israel Defense Forces (IDF) positions in the eastern sector of the canal.<sup>23</sup> The IDF ground forces did not have an adequate answer for the Egyptian bombardments, and the losses grew daily. In the same period, the IAF was busy with reorganizing the new weapons that had arrived from the United States, and the commander of the IAF, Maj Gen Mordechi Hod, preferred preparing the Israeli Air Force for an all-out war over intervening in a limited confrontation that would wear down the force, both materially and in manpower.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, at the end of July 1969, the IAF too began taking an active part in the War of Attrition.

The participation of the air force began first with achieving freedom of action over the Suez Canal. The initial operations focused on destroying the SAM bat-

teries that protected the Egyptian artillery and seizing the initiative against the Egyptian Air Force, to attrite the latter's force in air-to-air combat. This meant aggressively seeking out MiG airplanes to down them, and for this purpose Israeli airplanes flew demonstratively in airways leading to important Egyptian air bases and waited for Egypt to scramble interceptors toward them. The flight areas were devoid of GBAD systems, and therefore, only interceptors could set forth to protect the Egyptian sites. For these missions, pilots with vast air-to-air combat experience were selected, and they received permission beforehand to intercept Egyptian airplanes, meaning that they did not require permission from air control. Thus, the moment enemy planes were sighted, the pilots could engage with them. The IAF also operated a decoy system in which transport aircraft and helicopters were flown, and when the MiG planes were launched toward them, the Israeli interceptors, which were flying below the Egyptian radar, climbed up. The IAF also operated electronic countermeasure (ECM) systems that jammed the Egyptian radar systems and the communication channels between the airplanes and the ground-control intercept. The Israeli pilots called these battles "the Texas and Arizona battles," over the course of which dozens of MiG airplanes were downed as opposed to only two Israeli Mirages, whose pilots managed to bail safely in Israeli territory.

Israel's aerial activities in July 1969 destroyed the SAM batteries on the western bank of the Suez Canal and caused Egypt to withdraw its MiG airplanes westward. The IAF achieved air superiority over the canal, which enabled starting the methodical bombardment of Egyptian ground targets (Operation Boxer), particularly the artillery batteries. These bombing operations were highly successful, and the number of Israeli casualties dropped significantly. Toward the end of 1969, the Israeli government approved a series of bombings deep in Egypt's territory. Called Operation Blossom, these attacks were the first baptism by fire of the Phantom aircraft that had arrived in Israel in September 1969.<sup>25</sup> The IAF's in-depth bombing campaign caused a serious crisis in Egypt, which had lost its air superiority over crucial areas, especially in light of the fact that Israeli aircraft were flying freely over the capital, Cairo. In fact, the IAF was capable of bombing any target it wanted to in Egypt at any time, without having to face any response from Egypt, which was unable to prevent them.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the attempts by the Egyptian Air Force to conduct in-depth bombings of Israel failed. Nonetheless, despite the military success of the in-depth bombings, Israel's political goals were not achieved, which were, unofficially, to force Nasser to resign. The IAF operations made Nasser feel a real sense of threat and that Egypt had no operational option against the IAF. In the beginning of January 1970, Nasser flew to Moscow to request immedi-

ate assistance and even asked that Soviet air defense forces deploy in Egypt and assume responsibility for defending the Egyptian skies.<sup>27</sup>

Within several months, the Soviet Union deployed a comprehensive air defense system that included the new SA-3 batteries and an upgrade to the SA-2 system.<sup>28</sup> In addition, 72 MiG-21 and three MiG-25 aircraft were sent to Egypt for patrol missions over the Sinai Peninsula, and several early warning radar systems also arrived in Egypt. In fact, the Soviet Union transferred to Egypt an entire air defense division, manned by 15,000 Soviet officers and soldiers. The division was deployed according to Soviet doctrine, which was to create a protective envelope around Cairo and then counter the Israeli air superiority by extending the air defense toward the canal. In the end, the Soviet presence in Egypt brought the in-depth sorties of Operation Blossom to a halt, due to the increased threat posed by the SAM systems and the fear that Soviet forces would be harmed in the bombings. Therefore, in April 1970, the IAF returned to concentrating on preserving its air superiority over the Suez Canal and 30 km west of it. However, despite the repeated attacks on the SAM batteries, the Soviet forces managed to advance eastward toward the canal. Thus, we may argue that it is possible that the aerial warfare until April 1970 brought Nasser to the verge of a ceasefire, but the Soviet intervention, which limited Israel's aerial activities, prevented a clear Israeli victory.

Israel did not yet have an effective ECM response to the Soviet air defense system and, therefore, turned to the United States, which had some experience with such systems in Vietnam. However, the United States also did not yet have in its possession decisive operational answers to suppressing the air defense systems of North Vietnam. Nonetheless, the United States shared with Israel the experience it had gained in Southeast Asia, which included sending technical advisors and advanced electronic systems as well as delivery of Shrike antiradiation missiles, which at the time were still of limited effectiveness.<sup>29</sup> The truth was that the IAF emerged from the War of Attrition without a clear operational response, neither technological nor doctrinal, to the Egyptian air defense system, particularly in light of the SA-6 mobile SAMs with which the Soviets were now equipping Egypt.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most important factors that spurred Egypt to strengthen its GBAD capabilities and to rely on a dense air defense system that included missiles and artillery was the aerial battles conducted during the War of Attrition.<sup>31</sup> From Israel's point of view, these battles were part of the struggle for air superiority, while from the Egyptian side, the goal was to restore confidence to the Egyptian pilots and also to try and prevent the IAF from flying freely over Egypt. However, during these battles, Egypt lost 111 airplanes in air-to-air combat, as opposed to four airplanes lost by Israel (a kill ratio of 1:27.75). This demonstrated once again that

the operational quality of Egyptian pilots was, generally speaking, lower than that of their Israeli counterparts, even though some of these pilots had gained the trust of the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup> The aerial campaign reached its peak on 30 July 1970 in an aerial encounter between MiG-21 airplanes manned by Soviet pilots and IAF Mirage airplanes.

Due to the expansion of the Soviet involvement in Egypt, Soviet pilots began to plan aerial combat with the IAF to create direct contact with Israeli airplanes and down them.<sup>33</sup> In response, the IAF decided to plan an aerial battle in which the Soviet pilots would be induced to chase after IAF airplanes that would penetrate Egyptian territory. This operation, dubbed Operation Pomegranate 20 (Rimon 20), was planned as an ambush in which Israeli airplanes were armed and prepared for aerial battle but simulated an air-to-ground attack and a reconnaissance flight so as to seem defenseless and incapable of conducting air-to-air combat. The Soviet pilots swallowed the bait, and in the ensuing battle, five MiG-21 airplanes were downed and one Mirage was hit, though its pilot succeeded in making it back to Israel.<sup>34</sup> This was the first aerial battle that the Soviet Union conducted since WWII, and it ended with a rout. For political reasons, Israel and the Soviet Union tacitly agreed to discontinue the clash, but in the long term, this Israeli victory was to its detriment.

On 3 August 1970, the IAF conducted Operation Hair 265 against the SA-3 batteries, during which a missile ambush downed a Phantom airplane and hit another that managed to get back to Israeli territory. The results of the operation made it clear to the IAF that it did not have a tactical solution for the Egyptian GBAD system and that it severely curtailed Israel's air superiority. Accordingly, Israel's primary demand in the negotiations for an agreement to end the war was that Egypt would commit to refrain from advancing missiles to the Suez Canal. The ceasefire agreement was indeed signed on 7 August, but Egypt violated the agreement the very same day, advanced missiles to the canal, and later began to construct a dense air defense system on the western bank of the canal. The United States, which recognized the Egyptian violations, pressured Israel to hold its fire, and in return sent it a large amount of military aid, including advanced weapons and ECM systems that were supposed to help the IAF if Egypt renewed the hostilities.

It can be determined that in the aerial campaign of the War of Attrition, Israel was the victor. Generally, the IAF achieved and preserved air superiority, and the Egyptian Air Force had almost no operations deep in Israel's territory.<sup>35</sup> However, it is impossible to know what would have happened if the war had extended beyond August 1970, in light of the increasing density of the Egyptian air defenses and the fact that they were being operated by the Soviets. An initial clue as to the lethality of this new arrangement was provided in the beginning of August 1970,

and as mentioned, when the war concluded Israel still did not have an effective operational response to the Egyptian air defense systems.

From the Egyptian point of view, the operational lesson to be learned was clear, as was the *modus operandi* in a possible future confrontation. Although the IAF enjoyed a distinct superiority in air-to-air combat, the War of Attrition proved the difficulty of operating in an environment saturated with various AA systems. But there was more: Egypt was compelled to recognize Israel's superiority in air-to-air combat and, in the subsequent three years, constructed one of the densest integrated air defense systems (IADS) in the world.<sup>36</sup> To the SA-2 and SA-3 missiles were added new weapons systems such as the SA-6, which was mobile and did not require constructing revetments prior to the deployment of the batteries, as well as the shoulder-fired SA-7 and the advanced ZSU-23x4 AA cannon. In this manner, Egypt gained air superiority within a range of about 15 miles east of the Suez Canal, in territory that was actually under Israeli control. The Syrian Army learned the same lesson, as the Syrian Air Force also suffered from inferior performance in air-to-air combat with Israel. Consequently, Syria also constructed a massive and dense GBAD system.<sup>37</sup>

The surface-based AA system constructed by the Arab armies was composed of a variety of weapons; the fields of fire of the fixed SAM batteries overlapped each other, and this fixed system was reinforced with mobile batteries that could change positions quickly, surprise the Israeli aerial attackers, and close gaps if the fixed systems were damaged. The armored forces and infantry were equipped with the shoulder-fired SA-7, and the maneuvering forces were also accompanied by mobile AA batteries, primarily the ZSU-23X4.<sup>38</sup> With this integrated system, it was possible to hit airplanes flying at various heights, and it was these dense and sophisticated defense systems that the IAF faced when it went to war in October 1973.

### **The Yom Kippur War**

The Yom Kippur War (6–24 October 1973) was primarily a land war within which the air campaign was clearly integrated. However, the dense air defense systems of the Egyptian and Syrian armies dramatically curtailed the ability of the IAF to participate in land combat and provide effective CAS to the Israeli armored forces, which were critically outnumbered, especially in the Golan Heights front.<sup>39</sup> The literature on this war has adopted a similar point of view, according to which Israel was surprised by the combined attack on both fronts and that this surprise was the cause of the large number of casualties suffered by the IDF, especially in the first days of the war. However, when examining the IAF, the picture is more complex. The IAF command began intensive preparations for war 10 days prior to its breakout, the main reason being a large aerial battle that

took place with the Syrian Air Force on 13 September 1973. In this battle, 12 MiG-21 airplanes were downed versus one Mirage plane lost by Israel, which feared that Syria would embark on a large-scale reprisal operation (though the estimate by Military Intelligence of a low probability for war was not yet altered).

As part of the preparations, IAF reserves were called up, the combat readiness of the combat squadrons was raised, and operational plans were updated, especially the plans for achieving air superiority immediately with the outbreak of war. These plans included a combined and simultaneous strike on the air bases of the Arab states along with the destruction of the air defense systems, after which the IAF would be free to assist the ground forces. In other words, the operational plan of the IAF on the eve of the war was similar to Operation Focus six years prior. Twenty-four hours before the beginning of the war, the commander of the IAF, Maj Gen Beni Peled, ordered his deputies to prepare the aircraft for an attack on the Syrian SAM system. However, the political echelon rejected Peled's request to conduct a preventive strike on the Arab air bases, fearing that Israel would be presented as the instigator of the war and would thus lose the support of the United States.<sup>40</sup>

At 1350 hours, a massive artillery bombardment began in the Golan Heights and the Sinai, and 10 minutes later, three Syrian divisions crossed the Golan border and the Egyptian Army began crossing the Suez Canal. At the same time, the aerial forces of both countries embarked on attack sorties against targets in the Golan Heights and the Sinai, while helicopters attempted to land commandos in the Israeli rear. At this stage, the IAF planes were in the midst of changing munitions, but many Egyptian and Syrian airplanes were downed in air-to-air combat, and in general, the damage done was not severe. The IAF had to cancel its original plans and dedicated itself to defending the Israeli air space near the front lines, attacking the invading forces and providing CAS to the ground forces of the IDF, which found themselves outnumbered. In effect, due to the reality in the war fronts and especially in the Golan Heights, the IAF was forced to change its operational priorities from achieving air superiority to immediate support of the ground forces.<sup>41</sup> It is this change that caused the large number of losses of Israeli airplanes in the first days of the war. The numbers speak for themselves. During the war, the IAF lost 102 airplanes, of them only five in air-to-air combat, while downing 277 airplanes from the air forces of all the Arab states that participated in the war or sent expeditionary forces (a kill ratio of 1:55.4).<sup>42</sup>

Most of the Israeli airplanes were downed by the ZSU-23x4 cannons, due to the fact that to evade the missiles, the Israeli pilots had to fly at lower altitudes, which were controlled by the AAA fire. The bare statistics indicate that the Arab armies fired hundreds of missiles to down one Israeli plane. After the war, the IAF

estimated that 36 Israeli airplanes were downed by missiles (SA-2, SA-3, SA-6, and SA-7), though it is impossible to say which missile was responsible for the kill, as the air defense launched missile barrages of all types. Nonetheless, the IAF estimated that 1,800 SA-2, SA-3, and SA-6 missiles were launched along with 12,000 SA-7 missiles. In other words, for every airplane downed by the Egyptian and Syrian air defenses, they launched 383 SAMs.<sup>43</sup> Although these are just numbers, the IAF materiel and personnel was depleted, and it lost one-quarter of its operational force during the war.

Another major problem the IAF suffered from in the first days of the war, until 10 October, was the swift change in the missions the IAF pilots were conducting, without sufficient preparation or up-to-date and relevant intelligence. Once again, these changes were a result of the swift breakthrough of the Arab forces, whereby on 7 October, it seemed that the Golan Heights were going to fall due to the swift advance of Syrian forces in the southern Golan and the fact that in this area nearly the entire Israeli armored force had been destroyed.<sup>44</sup> Israeli Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan ordered the IAF to dedicate most of its force to CAS and AI missions in the southern Golan. At that time, the IAF was in the midst of Operation Quarrel (Tagar), which was meant to destroy Egypt's air defense system as the first stage toward attacking the bridgeheads that the Egyptian Army had built on the Suez Canal.<sup>45</sup> The attacks, which were conducted in the morning of 7 October, did not achieve their goals, and the airplanes were being armed for additional sorties, when the decision was made in the middle of the day to divert the IAF to the southern Golan. To gain freedom of action over this arena, the Israeli aircraft embarked on Operation Model (Doogman) to destroy the Syrian air defense system along the border. However, the pilots were sent on their missions without up-to-date intelligence. The SA-3 batteries had changed their positions, and Syria also had mobile SA-6 launchers, the location of which was also unknown in real time. Thus, Operation Model also failed, though the Israeli aircraft were downed not by SAMs but by AAA fire. However, the failure was a consequence of other factors as well. The first was the absence of an airborne electronic warfare (EW) system tasked with jamming and deceiving the detection capabilities of the Syrian air defense system.<sup>46</sup> Also, there was a mishap in the operation of the drones as decoys by the 200 Squadron. Thus, although the Syrians did launch SAMs against these decoys, the attacking aircraft failed to arrive right behind them. When the aerial attack on the Syrian defenses finally began, 200 Squadron had no drones left to fly as decoys.<sup>47</sup>

Although the threat of the missiles remained in force until the end of the war, it gradually lessened as the war went on, as the IAF managed to gain air superiority and even preserve it. There were several reasons for this. First, Syria's supply of

SA-6 missiles was running out. This enabled the IAF aircraft to operate at higher altitudes beyond the range of the AAA, as the Israeli pilots were able to deal very successfully with the older missiles.<sup>48</sup> A second reason was the Soviet failure to replenish the supply of missiles in Syria due to the bombing of Syrian air bases and the strikes on Syrian convoys that were making their way to the front. A third reason was the steep learning curve of the IAF pilots, who devised new attack tactics as the fighting was going on and integrated technological improvisations developed during the war and immediately installed on the airplanes.<sup>49</sup> A fourth reason was that after the IDF forces crossed the Suez Canal (16 October), the tanks on the western bank began to fire directly on the missile and artillery batteries. This opened up for the Israeli aircraft a corridor that was free of threats, enabling them to fly in relative freedom and to provide CAS to the ground forces on the western bank of the Suez Canal.

As mentioned, the IAF lost a fourth of its operational force, and many pilots were killed or captured. However, despite these losses and the inability to gain freedom of action over the Golan Heights and the Suez Canal in the first days of the war, the IAF embarked on a series of CAS and AI missions. Alongside the struggle for tactical air superiority, the IAF also conducted in-depth bombings, especially in Syria. Furthermore, both Syria and Egypt appreciated the power of the IAF to the extent that they did not send their aircraft to attack in the depth of Israel; instead, they launched several surface-to-surface FROG (free rocket over ground) missiles toward Israeli targets, and in the beginning of the war Egypt also launched two Kelt air-to-surface missiles (ASM), which were intercepted by Mirage planes. Thus, we can state that Israel preserved complete air superiority at the strategic level and that the Arab aerial forces failed to strike Israel's strategic centers of power or to disrupt its movements (logistic or combat) toward the fronts.

From the military point of view, Israel won the Yom Kippur War. However, this victory did not immediately translate into a political achievement, and it came with a heavy death toll, which turned the war into a national trauma. Thus, following the historical paradigm in which the losing army or the army that failed in the war initiates processes of rehabilitation and organizational and operational reform, the IDF, including the IAF, began learning the lessons of the war. As far as the IAF was concerned, Operation Model was a microcosm of the systemic failure of the IAF. On the other hand, in Syria, the functioning of the air defense system in this campaign was considered an operational success, which could be made even more effective by making it denser and adding operational components.

The operational failure had a negative effect on the morale of the IAF, and it demonstrated the great difficulty involved in coping with a dense air defense system. Nonetheless, the failure spurred the IAF to find operational solutions to this

problem. The solution consisted of a mix of standoff weapons, EW means, and precise battlefield intelligence. Consequently, many resources were invested in intelligence, specifically in constructing a ground-based observation system that would transmit to the attacking aircraft the location of the mobile missile batteries in real time.<sup>50</sup> This system was supported by a drone system that was upgraded to conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions and light up targets. As we shall see below, this operational mix was employed with unprecedented success against the Syrian IADS in the First Lebanon War.

### **The IAF in 1974–1982**

Two trends characterized the actions taken by the IDF after the Yom Kippur War. The first was a process of studying the war and learning its lessons, which influenced, among other things, the IDF's procurement plan.<sup>51</sup> Preparations for the possible renewal of hostilities were also continued, especially vis à vis the Syrian Army. Furthermore, despite the diplomatic rapprochement between the United States and Egypt and the beginning of peace talks between Israel and Egypt, the IDF continued to prepare for the renewal of hostilities on the southern front as well. At the same time, and as a second trend, the daily confrontation with the Palestinian organizations, which had strengthened their grasp in southern Lebanon after they were forced to leave Jordan, continued. In the context of this dual strategy, the IAF had a central role, as its operational systems were integrated in the general preparations for an additional regular war as well as in the exhausting combat against the terror organizations in Lebanon.<sup>52</sup>

The IAF learned a number of lessons in the Yom Kippur War, the main one being that the absolute superiority it enjoyed in aerial combat did not suffice for achieving air superiority in an arena that had a dense air defense.<sup>53</sup> The IAF acted in several directions to enable it to cope more effectively with this system and its operational challenges. In fact, the IAF concentrated its efforts on formulating a doctrine that would bring about the suppression of the enemy air defense (SEAD). The first aspect of this was the acquisition of attack helicopters that could provide CAS and also hold attacking armored columns.<sup>54</sup> The purpose of this acquisition was to divert the highest possible amount of airplanes to SEAD missions and to attain a significant concentration of force when attacking the air defense systems of the Arab armies. The second aspect was the development of an offensive doctrine for the destruction of IADS, and the third was developing improved ISR capabilities that would provide accurate, real-time intelligence regarding the location of the mobile batteries. This was a direct lesson learned from Operation Model, as mentioned above, which failed primarily due to the fact that the Israeli planes could not locate the mobile SA-6 batteries.

In the years following the Yom Kippur War, the IAF began to receive F-15 tactical fighter aircraft and later also the F-16 multirole fighter aircraft. These aircraft began to operate against the Syrian Air Force, which attempted to intercept the airplanes that were bombing terrorist targets in south Lebanon. These dogfights ended with the IAF achieving complete air superiority in the skies of south Lebanon. The Syrian response to this was the construction of a dense SAM system in Lebanon's Beqaa region.<sup>55</sup> In summer 1981, the IAF planned to strike this system, but the operation was cancelled due to American pressure. By summer 1982, the Syrian SAM system was further reinforced, with the number of batteries reaching 19, including mobile SA-6 batteries supported by the ZSU-23x4 AAA cannons for thwarting low-altitude attacks. In this year Israeli Tadiran Mastiff and IAI Scout drones played a crucial role, routinely monitoring the Syrian IADS. Israel also used drones as decoys that attracted AAA fire, and it is possible that some of them were intercepted. The payoff was that the missile batteries revealed their location and also the frequencies and electronic signature of the Syrian radar systems, which helped develop ECM for jamming the Syrian radar. All the information that was gathered became part of the IAF's attack plan, with forces awaiting the order to execute it. This occurred in the beginning of June 1982 (Operation Mole Cricket 19). Throughout three consecutive days (9–11 June), the IAF destroyed the Syrian missile system in Lebanon's Beqaa and downed over 80 Syrian airplanes that were launched to defend the batteries.<sup>56</sup>

After the Yom Kippur War, Syria continued to base its IADS on Soviet principles, so that the doctrine and technology of the Soviet Union took a hard hit. The operation demonstrated that a simultaneous attack, from the air and the ground, is the solution for suppressing and destroying a dense air defense system. Israel applied a combination of air and ground weapons systems, along with EW, intelligence measures, and means of deception to cause the SAM batteries to reveal themselves to munitions that home in on radar radiation. In this operational mix, the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) system played an important role in the gathering of precise visual intelligence (VISINT) regarding the location of the missile batteries and the radar vans and in exposing the characteristics of the radiation emitted by the radar systems.<sup>57</sup> This information arrived in real time, which enabled locating and jamming the radar systems during the attack using EW means or destroying them with standard AGM-70 antiradiation missiles (ARM) fired by the Phantom airplanes.<sup>58</sup> The IAF also used drones as decoys. The radar profile of the drones simulated that of fighter planes, and as planned, the Syrian missile batteries located the drones and fired missiles toward them. This act exposed the precise location of the batteries in real time as well as the radar radiation, and consequently various types of ARM were launched at them. At the

same time, airborne and ground-based electronic means located the batteries and exposed them to ground fire that was combined with aerial attacks by the F-4 planes. After the radar systems were taken out, the missile batteries themselves were bombed from the air and the ground, using general-purpose bombs and cluster bombs to target the teams manning the batteries as well.<sup>59</sup> The drones provided the ground-based and aerial fire systems with real-time updates on the damage inflicted, and batteries that were not damaged at all or insufficiently so were attacked for a second time. Thus, the batteries were attacked sequentially rather than concurrently, to ascertain their destruction and dedicate resources to a repeat attack if necessary, or move on to the next target if not.

During the attack upon the missile batteries, an operational paradox occurred. Half an hour after the Israeli attack began, Syria understood that its missile system was being fatally hit. To protect it, Syria scrambled airplanes to intercept the attacking Israeli aircraft. One must recall that Syria increasingly relied on a GBAD, which was a consequence of its understanding that its air force was inferior to the air-to-air combat capabilities of the IAF pilots. UAVs flying over the Syrian air bases in Syria itself provided VISINT on the takeoff of the Syrian airplanes. This information was immediately relayed to the IAF's ground-based and aerial (Northrop Grumman E-2 Hawkeye) control units, assisting the controllers in vectoring the IAF aircraft to intercept the Syrian MiGs. The F-4 planes stopped their attacks and made way for the F-15 and F-16 aircraft that were accompanying them. Twenty-three Syrian planes were downed without the IAF incurring even one loss.<sup>60</sup>

At the end of the first day, the Syrians advanced additional missile batteries, including for the first time the cutting-edge SA-8.<sup>61</sup> On 10 and 11 June, the IAF once again conducted attack sorties in which the batteries that were not destroyed in the first day were demolished and to hit the new batteries that had arrived in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. The Syrian Air Force continued to scramble its airplanes to intercept the attacking aircraft, but once again, the MiGs were downed by the accompanying Israeli aircraft. In all, 30 SAM batteries were destroyed, and in the aerial battles, 85 Syrian airplanes were downed, versus not one Israeli interceptor. The kill ration was, therefore, 0:85.<sup>62</sup> It is impossible to say which specific component had a decisive effect. The attack plan created an operational synergy composed of aerial and ground-based weapons. As a result of the operation, the IAF achieved air supremacy over Lebanon, and this dominance affected the ensuing ground operations and the high combat effectiveness of the CAS missions.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

This article analyzed the struggle and the learning competition between Israel and the Arab countries in the field of aerial warfare. While Israel continued to rely

on interceptor aircraft, Egypt and Syria increasingly relied on GBAD to prevent Israeli superiority. The clearest manifestation of these trends was the Yom Kippur War, in which the IAF experienced great difficulties in executing CAS and AI missions, and the maneuvering Arab armies enjoyed operational freedom of action in the first days. Thus, we may argue that preventing Israeli superiority in fact created a type of air superiority for the Arab countries. On this background, we may present three main conclusions. The first is that this strengthens the argument regarding the critical importance of gaining air superiority, so that the aerial force is able to fulfill its CAS and AI missions, i.e., supporting the maneuvering ground forces. The second is the fact that air defense systems are highly complex and multidimensional and that a complex system must be employed to counter it. The third conclusion is the critical need for a process of studying and learning lessons after a confrontation and with the prospect of employing aerial forces in an environment that has a dense and complex GBAD system.

From the air war perspective, the Six-Day War followed a pattern similar to WWII. The destruction of most of the aircraft of the Arab air forces while on the ground granted almost complete air superiority to Israel and contributed decisively to the success of the land maneuvers during the war. After 1967, the Egyptian and Syrian armies constructed air defense systems that were indeed very dense but relied only on a surface component and lacked aerial support. Since the IAF failed to find an effective operational system for suppressing Egypt's air defense system, we can argue that at the end of the War of Attrition and in the initial days of the Yom Kippur War, the IAF had by and large lost its ability to achieve air superiority over the war fronts. Nonetheless, the Yom Kippur War proved that interceptor aircraft remained a crucial component of this system, as once the operational conditions tilted in favor of the IAF, it managed to gain control of the air, though not completely, and assist the ground forces to a greater extent. This point was driven home dramatically in 1982, when the IDF enjoyed air superiority over the battle fields in Lebanon, after mortally wounding the Syrian air defense in Lebanon. That said, it is worth remembering that Palestine Liberation Organization forces lacked an aerial force, and its AAA defense was no challenge for the IDF. In fact, from 1982 to the present, the IAF has enjoyed air superiority, evidenced by the hundreds of bombing sorties conducted on targets in Syria in the past few years, in the course of which only one Israeli airplane was downed by a SAM.

In a relatively short span of 15 years, four confrontations took place between Israel and the regular armies of Arab states. The struggle for air superiority in the Arab-Israeli wars demonstrates very well the process of learning lessons by the military and their application from war to war. Thus, the aerial war in the Arab-Israeli conflict can serve as a historical model for examining the force-building

processes in the area of airpower, and especially how these processes came to be manifested operationally.

### Dr. Tal Tovy

Dr. Tovy is an associate professor at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. He holds a PhD in history from the University of Haifa. A veteran of the Israel Defense Forces, Dr. Tovy has published extensively on a variety of military history topics, including the influence of counterinsurgency theory upon American combat operations. His other fields of interest include Western military thought, US foreign policy, and US military history. In 2007 Dr. Tovy won the Yitzhak Sadeh Prize for excellence in writing military history. He is the author of the books *Like Eating Soup with a Knife: The American Experience in Vietnam, 1959–1973* (2006, in Hebrew), and *Guerrilla and the War against It: The Military Heritage of Mao* (2010, in Hebrew), and *The Changing Nature of Geostrategy, 1900–2000* (2015, in English). Among the journals he has contributed articles to are *Armed Forces and Society*, the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, the *European Journal of American Studies*, and *War in History*.

### Notes

1. William W. Momyer, *Airpower in Three Wars (WWII, Korea, Vietnam)* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2003), 125.

2. See Robert F. Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force (vol. 2), 1961–1984* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1989), 484–85. Throughout the years, Israel transferred to the United States a great deal of information regarding the Soviet technologies that fell into its hands, such as the MiG-21 that an Iraqi deserter pilot flew to Israel in 1966 (Operation Diamond), SA-2 missiles that the IDF captured in 1967, and particularly the Soviet P-12 (NATO reporting name Spoon Rest), which served as the search radar for the SA-2 missiles. Toward the end of the 1960s, the United States began supplying Israel with aircraft and advanced technologies, and after the Yom Kippur War the IAF was equipped with the new F-15 Eagle fighter aircraft.

3. Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air* translated by Dino Ferrari, (Washington DC: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 24; and Woodford A. Heflin, ed., *The USAF Dictionary* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1956), 37.

4. John A. Warden, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1988), 13.

5. P. D. L. Gover, “Air Supremacy – The Enduring Principle,” in *War in the Third Dimension: Essays in Contemporary Air Power*, ed. R. A. Mason (London: Brassey, 1986), 61.

6. See the discussion in Walter J. Boyne, *The Influence of Air Power upon History* (Gretna: Pelican, 2003), 251–80.

7. Brereton Greenhous, “The Israeli Experience,” in *Case Studies in the Achievement of Air Superiority*, ed. Benjamin F. Cooling (Washington DC: Center of Air Force History, 1994), 565–66; and David Rodman, *Sword and Shield of Zion: The Israeli Air Force in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–2012* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 1–4, 15–16.

8. Itai Brum, “Israeli Air Power,” in *Global Air Power*, ed. John A. Olson (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2011), 144.

9. Regarding the Egyptian Air Force prior to 1967, see Edgar O’Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 56–60; and Lon O. Nordeen and David Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile: A History of the Egyptian Air Power 1932–1994* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 193–96.

10. Greenhous, "The Israeli Experience," 576.
11. Nonetheless, the IAF was also tasked with the traditional missions of aerial forces, such as AI and CAS, strategic depth bombing, and various logistical missions.
12. Regarding the IAF before the Six-Day War, see: O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 49–55.
13. See the discussion in Sterling Michael Pavelec, *War and Warfare since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 63.
14. In this regard see the comprehensive article by Kenneth M. Pollack, "Air Power in the Six-Day War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 3 (2005): 417–503. See also Shmuel L. Gordon, "Air Superiority in the Israel–Arab Wars, 1967–1982," in *A History of Air Warfare*, ed. John A. Olson (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2010), 133–34. Gordon points out the fact that throughout the entire war the struggle for air superiority continued, though with a clear advantage to the IAF.
15. The aerial campaign of the Six-Day War has been heavily researched, with Operation Focus being emphasized, naturally. See, for example, Lon Nordeen, *Fighters over Israel* (New York: Orion Books, 1990), 66–87. For an Egyptian point of view of the Israeli aerial attack, see Nordeen and Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile*, 202–18; and Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2002), 62–63, 74–75.
16. Regarding CAS in the Six-Day War, see Greenhous, "The Israeli Experience," 503–09.
17. Greenhous, 509.
18. Nordeen, *Air Warfare in the Missile Age*, 123. See also Rodman, *Sword and Shield of Zion*, 29–31.
19. Peter Allen, *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1982), 31.
20. Nordeen and Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile*, 227–28. See also Traver N. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars, 1947–1974* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 547–49.
21. The first revolution was the arrival of the French jet airplanes in the 1950s.
22. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 90–91.
23. For a comprehensive review of the IAF in the War of Attrition, see Rodman, *Sword and Shield of Zion*, 42–45.
24. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory*, 549.
25. Operation Blossom was a series of in-depth bombings conducted between January–April 1970. In this period, 118 sorties were made, primarily by the Phantom aircraft, against radar stations, SAM batteries, and army bases in Egypt's depth and even around Cairo.
26. Nordeen and Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile*, 246–47.
27. David A. Korn, *Stalemate: The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1964–1970* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992), 198; and Nordeen and Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile*, 248–49.
28. The SA-3 was a medium-altitude missile intended to complete the coverage of the (high-altitude) SA-2 system and the (low-altitude) AAA. Israel's attempts to secure intelligence on the system by capturing a radar station and transferring it to Israel failed (Operation Robinson and Sheshet, 21 May 1970).
29. See the discussion in Edgar O'Balance, *The Electronic War in the Middle East 1968–1970* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 102–12.
30. Meir Finkel, *On Flexibility: Recovery from Technological and Doctrinal Surprise on the Battlefield* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 166.

31. Nordeen and Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile*, 250–51. The authors cite an American intelligence report according to which between July 1967 and August 1970, Egypt lost 109 airplanes as opposed to only two that Israel lost. Ibid, 255.
32. Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 96.
33. Mark A. O'Neill, "Air Combat in the Periphery: The Soviet Air Force in Action during the Cold War, 1945–89," in *Russian Aviation and Air Power in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Robin Higham, John T. Greenwood, and Von Hardesty (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 227–28.
34. Nordeen, *Fighters over Israel*, 111–12; and O'Neill, "Air Combat in the Periphery," 228.
35. On 11 October 1969, sixteen Egyptian airplanes attacked targets in the Sinai. Eight of them were downed by Mirage airplanes and another three by Hawk missiles. After this, Egypt stopped attacking targets in the Sinai. See Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 95.
36. Kenneth P. Werrell, *Archie to SAM: A Short Operational History of Ground-Based Air Defense* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2005), 148–49.
37. On the lessons of the War of Attrition as leading to the construction of a dense air-defense system, see Nordeen and Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile*, 257–61.
38. For a discussion of the air defense systems of the Egyptian and Syrian armies, see Werrell, *Archie to SAM*, 149–53.
39. In the beginning of the war there were 200 Israeli tanks facing 1,500 Syrian tanks of various types, including the new Soviet T-62 model.
40. George W. Gawrych, *The Albatross of Decisive Victory* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 169–70.
41. Regarding the IAF in the first hours of the war, see Dupuy, *Elusive Victory*, 550–51.
42. Nordeen and Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile*, 303–05.
43. Greenhouse, "The Israeli Experience," 597–98; and Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 123–25, 498–501.
44. Regarding the combat in the Golan Heights, see Dupuy, *Elusive Victory*, 445–61. The actions of the IAF in the Golan Heights in the first two critical days of the war are described in Nordeen, *Fighters over Israel*, 124–25.
45. Nordeen and Nicolle, *Phoenix over the Nile*, 280–82.
46. The airborne EW system was at the Sinai front at the time, preparing for Operation Quarrel, and was unable to get to the Golan Heights front in time.
47. Shmuel Gordon, a Phantom pilot in the Yom Kippur War who went on to have a career in academia, determined that the failure of operations Model and Quarrel was not a consequence of the effectiveness of the Arab air defense system or a lack of ECM measures in the IAF but of the decision to attack quickly without real-time intelligence. See Gordon, "Air Superiority in the Israel-Arab Wars, 1967–1982," 146; and Gordon, "The Air Force and the Yom Kippur War: New Lessons," *Israel Affairs* 6, no. 1 (1999): 221–36.
48. The Syrians had fired all their missiles by the third day of the war. As a result, during the IDF counterattack in the Golan Heights (11 October), the IAF benefited from a relatively high level of freedom of action, which enabled it to provide more effective CAS.
49. See Finkel, *On Flexibility*, 171–76.
50. Foreign sources claim that this is the primary mission of the Kingfisher unit ("Shaldag," Unit 5101)—to use lasers to light up targets for fighter-bombers that then destroy the targets with different types of precision guided munitions (PGM). See Rodman, *Sword and Shield of Zion*, 60–61; and David Guttenfelder, "Israeli Commando Missions Come Out of the Shadows," *USA Today*, 13 August 2006, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-08-13-commando-missions\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-08-13-commando-missions_x.htm).

51. Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, (vol. 1): *The Arab-Israeli Conflicts, 1973–1989* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 110–14. In 1976, Israel purchased the F-15 airplanes, and in 1980 the first F-16 airplanes arrived in Israel.

52. Rodman, *Sword and Shield of Zion*, 54–55.

53. Nordeen, *Fighters over Israel*, 179–80.

54. At this time the United States was also thinking about how to stop the masses of Soviet armor in case of an attack in Central Europe. This thinking resulted in the development of the AirLand Battle doctrine, which included the integration of new weapons, one of the most prominent being the new AH-64 Apache attack helicopter. The US Air Force was also equipped with a tougher aircraft for CAS missions, the A-10 Thunderbolt. Although attack helicopters are also exposed to ground fire, perhaps to a greater extent than airplanes, they are able to locate to safe places and launch their munitions from beyond the range of antiaircraft fire. The IAF purchased the AH-1 Cobra and the MD-500 Defender from the United States, which arrived in Israel in 1975 and 1979, respectively.

55. Trevor N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, *Flawed Victory: The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the 1982 War in Lebanon* (Fairfax, VA: Hero Books, 1986), 90.

56. Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 110–19; and Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 532–34.

57. VISINT provides an up-to-date overhead picture of the areas of action. This mechanism enables locating the target and swiftly closing fire circuits, as the ISR means mark the target, and the relevant fire elements in the sector execute a precise attack on it. Afterward, VISINT enables estimating the success of the attack and attacking once again, if necessary.

58. Israel also developed a version of the missile that was fired from trucks.

59. Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Moscow's Lessons from the 1982 Lebanon Air War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1984), 5–8.

60. Nordeen, *Fighters over Israel*, 170–76.

61. This is a tactical, short-range mobile SAM system aimed at low-flying aircraft.

62. Two Israeli airplanes were downed by ground fire.

63. Dupuy and Martell, *Flawed Victory*, 119–22; Greenhous, “The Israeli Experience,” 599–600; and Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 203.

# The Foreign Policies of Large Democratizing African States

## South Africa and Nigeria

DR. STEPHEN F. BURGESS

### Abstract

Large country size (measured by gross domestic product), democratizing regime type, and two exceptional leaders created sufficient conditions for innovative foreign policy leadership by two African states, including the creation of regional institutions committed to democracy and human rights norms and the willingness to intervene to stabilize war-torn states and uphold human rights and democratic values. The global democratic wave of the 1980s and 1990s provided pressures from outside and inside Africa for the promotion of democracy and human rights. In the 2000s, South Africa's Thabo Mbeki and Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo led in founding the African Union, the New Partnership for African Development, and other institutions that included democratic and human rights norms. These leaders helped make similar innovations in the Southern African Development Community and Economic Community of West African States respectively. Their nations' relatively large country size provided the basis for "symbolic hegemony"—leadership in creating norms and peacemaking. However, these states often have lacked the power and leadership to pressure other countries to democratize and observe human rights norms. In addition, less exceptional leaders in the 2010s accompanied a recession in foreign policy leadership, including a diminished commitment to democracy and human rights that coincided with the beginning of an autocratic wave. The two cases demonstrate that large size, assertive leadership, and democratizing regime type can produce innovative foreign policies that include limited democracy and human rights promotion.

### Introduction

The democratic wave of the 1980s and 1990s and collapse of Soviet-led socialism, mass protests in Africa, and democracy and human rights promotion helped lead toward widespread democratization. Some African states moved toward democracy and beyond promoting regional solidarity with dictatorships and narrow national interests, and toward adopting innovative, value-laden foreign policies. Skillful democratic leaders of larger democratizing states used foreign policy re-

sources and state capacity to promote new institutions on a continental level and in their subregions. However, tensions remained between the values of leaders and the countries' interests and limited power, producing inconsistent foreign policies. In addition, autocratic states resisted pressures from large democratizing states, producing outcomes that left dictators in power. Eventually, less skillful leaders replaced skillful ones, and the democratic wave ended, lessening conditions for innovative foreign policies and the promotion of democracy and human rights. Instead, foreign policies narrowed to focus on assistance for economic growth.

Foreign policy innovation happens in the wake of wars, international crises, and systemic changes, with exceptional leaders devising new approaches. Prominent examples include the US "containment" of the Soviet Union, 1947–1992, with the end of World War II and multipolarity and the beginning of the US–USSR confrontation, as well as the "new world order" and "enlargement" of the world of free market democracies in the 1990s with the end of Soviet-led socialism. In Africa, the 1980s economic crisis led to democratization in the 1990s with the aim of accountability and "good governance" as a way to attract foreign aid and investment and produce economic growth and jobs.<sup>1</sup> This led to institutional innovation in the creation of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The 1994 Rwandan genocide exposed the weakness of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in conflict resolution and human rights maintenance, helping lead to the creation of a more interventionist African Union (AU), which established mechanisms to prevent and punish massive abuses. In the 2000s, most African states became parties to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to try human rights abusers and agreed to the "responsibility to protect" civilians (R2P) resolution adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2005.

The popular rejection of military and one-party rule and wave of democratization in Africa led to the innovation of norms supporting constitutional changes of governments and sanctions against unconstitutional change. In addition, the UN established democratic norms, including the stipulation that changes in government take place through constitutional procedures and free and fair elections. This was especially the case in UN peace operations, with efforts to hold free and fair elections and human rights monitoring in postconflict countries, many of which were in Africa. However, foreign policy innovation and norm acceptance became problematic in the face of resistance in the implementation phase.

Large states generally have foreign policy resources, including foreign affairs bureaucracies and economic resources, which they can use for agenda-setting and norm creation as well as diplomatic "carrots" and sizable militaries that can serve as "sticks." Large states with large GDPs that are democracies (or aspire to be) can

afford to adopt foreign policies that go beyond national interests and toward promoting democracy and human rights and that can credibly threaten multilateral intervention against authoritarian human rights abusers.<sup>2</sup> However, in Africa, large states may be ambitious in foreign policy innovation and can build consensus but often lack the power to compel other states to change behavior. Autocratic leaders of small, weak states can still resist intervention by playing the sovereignty card, even in contiguous states.

South Africa is the strongest state in Africa, with an industrial economy and diplomatic, economic, and military instruments of power as well as companies that operate throughout Africa. However, Pretoria still has limits on its influence and reach, operating in a large continent full of authoritarian leaders of weak states, who are resistant to change and cling to power. Chris Alden and Maxi Schoeman characterize South Africa as a “symbolic hegemon” with limited powers of implementation; they reference the failure to pressure neighboring Zimbabwe and eSwatini (Swaziland until 2018) to democratize as examples of such limitations.<sup>3</sup> The symbolic hegemon moniker could also apply to Nigeria in West Africa. The country is more limited in power than South Africa and is a petro-state with a large population. It is important to note, South Africa and Nigeria, with GDPs just above 300 billion USD, are far from being major powers, such as China (12 trillion USD GDP) and India (2.5 trillion USD GDP).<sup>4</sup>

A democratizing regime is one that demonstrates a commitment to a transition from autocracy to democracy, even though it may continue to maintain limits on political competition and civil liberties. Democratic waves diffuse values to states that then undergo democratization, and these states in turn pass the values on to other states. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way observe that contiguous states in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s were most effective in spreading democracy from one to another.<sup>5</sup> Seva Gunitsky identifies four different types of democratic diffusion, including the “third wave”—“horizontal contagion” that spread from Portugal to Latin America, 1974–1989—and the post-Soviet wave of the 1990s—“vertical contagion” from the Soviet bloc to developing countries with failing experiments in state-led socialism.<sup>6</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union and “hegemonic shock” meant that there was no longer an alternative development model to that of Western free market democracy. In addition, the United States and other Western countries adopted programs to spread democracy.<sup>7</sup> The US-led “new world order” of assertive multilateralism through the UN produced a willingness to intervene with peace operations to stabilize war-torn states in Africa, stop human rights abuses, and assist in democratization. There were a number of successes, such as Sierra Leone and Mozambique, as well as high-profile failures, such as Rwanda and Sudan.

Communism's failure in Central and Eastern European states led to democratization and then to foreign policies that included democracy and human rights promotion (e.g., that of Václav Havel's Czech Republic). The collapse of the Soviet Union sent shock waves throughout Africa, accelerating democratization, including in South Africa in 1994 and Nigeria starting in 1999. The democratic wave led some states to adopt democracy and human rights norms in their foreign policies.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the democratic wave helped propel African leaders and states to conduct innovative foreign policies that led to NEPAD, the AU, and the adoption of democracy and human rights norms. However, the combination of the democratic wave and democratizing states still had limited impact on autocratic regimes, which resisted becoming more democratic and observant of human rights.<sup>9</sup>

Concerning foreign policy innovation and leadership qualities, experience, education, and personality play a role.<sup>10</sup> For example, Woodrow Wilson had the background, vision, and determination to promote the concepts of collective security and self-determination in the 1910s. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his advisors also had the experience and the ability to lead in building consensus during the development of the UN and Bretton Woods in the early 1940s. George Kennan had the vision and experience in Soviet affairs to generate the strategy of containment but not the leadership skills to implement his more diplomatic, Europe-centered version. While Paul Nitze shared Kennan's vision of containment, he was a consummate insider with the ability to implement a global, militarized version.<sup>11</sup> George H.W. Bush developed the vision of the "new world order" after the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the foreign policy experience and ability to lead in implementation. However, Bill Clinton defeated Bush in the 1992 elections, leaving it to the Clinton administration to pursue its strategy of "assertive multilateralism" and "enlargement" of the world of free market democracies.

Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo were both exceptional leaders. Mbeki had a postgraduate education and foreign policy and political experience with the African National Congress (ANC)-in-exile and as President Nelson Mandela's deputy president; he was also a supporter of democracy and human rights. Obasanjo was military ruler, 1976–79, handed back power to civilians in 1979, campaigned against military rule in the 1990s, and had the ability to lead and willingness to promote human rights and democracy. In the 2000s, Mbeki and Obasanjo took advantage of large state size and the democratic wave to do more in foreign policy innovation than any other African leader since Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah. Before and after Mbeki and Obasanjo, there was markedly less foreign policy innovation and support for human rights and democracy, with the exception of Mandela–Mbeki, 1994–99.<sup>12</sup>

My approach is to analyze the impact of regime type and varying levels of size, democratization, and leadership on foreign policy innovation. I choose to focus on the cases of South Africa and Nigeria, because they are the two largest states in Africa and have the foreign policy resources that have made an impact.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the democratic wave helped to propel them toward democracy and toward enabling exceptional leaders to innovate foreign policies that included episodes of values promotion and the creation of regional institutions that included democracy and human rights norms.

I analyze the effects of large size, pressures for democracy and human rights, and leadership on foreign policies in three distinct decades—the transitional 1990s, the activist 2000s, and the declining 2010s. Comparing leadership in the three periods, I demonstrate that a combination of the three factors brought foreign policy innovation and activism in the 2000s in contrast with the other decades.<sup>14</sup> Concerning levels of analysis, I illustrate how South Africa and Nigeria were able to build consensus at the continental level for the founding of the AU and NEPAD and the inclusion of democratic of human norms and were able to lead in promoting values in their respective subregional organizations. At the global level, I explore how the two interacted with the United States, other powers, and the UN and responded to international pressures for democracy and human rights. In assessing to what extent they have included democratic and human rights norms in their foreign policies, the two cases demonstrate conflicting interests and varying ability and willingness to project power.<sup>15</sup> Comparing South Africa and Nigeria demonstrates differences in foreign policy resources and influence between an industrialized democracy with some resources versus a semi-democracy with a large population and limited resources. However, even at the subregional level, both encountered difficulties in promoting democracy and human rights norms.

In the final analysis, I provide sufficient evidence that democratization, regime, and leadership type produce foreign policies that exhibit commitment to democracy and human rights. As is the case with other foreign policies, even that of the United States, interests often contradict norms. I also assess alternative arguments for the creation of the AU, NEPAD, and other instances of institution creation. I assess countervailing cases—Ethiopia, Rwanda and Senegal—to explore the validity of the three factors in countries where one or more of these factors is missing.

### **The 1990s: Democratization and Foreign Policy Innovation**

Before the 2000s, South Africa was going through a challenging democratic transition with Nelson Mandela as president, 1994–99, and could only undertake modest foreign policy innovation. Nigeria was suffering through a kleptocratic

military dictatorship, 1985–1999, and its only innovation was the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) missions to enforce peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone, partly to demonstrate that it was a good international citizen despite an oppressive military dictatorship that flew in the face of the democratic wave.

Before 1994, apartheid South Africa was a large pariah state that influenced a few states in the subregion and the wider African continent to seek recognition and divide the OAU. In addition, the apartheid regime reached out to Western powers and a range of developing countries to ward off sanctions. The country was industrialized and had four times the GDP of all other Southern African states combined and almost equal to all of Africa's GDP. South Africa developed a large and capable foreign policy bureaucracy to defend apartheid. In 1994, the ANC-led government started to assume control of this bureaucracy.<sup>16</sup>

Starting in the 1960s, the ANC gained experience that helped it take over the state and develop an innovative foreign policy. The ANC-in-exile exhibited diplomatic skill in building a support network in Africa and abroad, gaining and taking advantage of observer positions at the UN General Assembly, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and OAU.<sup>17</sup> In the 1980s, the ANC was able to lead the forces of resistance to apartheid South Africa by enlisting support from African states, the Soviet bloc, and the NAM as well as pressing for US and West European sanctions. The ANC-in-exile prepared for leadership by opposing the apartheid South African security state and actively participating as an observer in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Group of Front Line States, with the aim of strengthening political and economic resistance to apartheid and helping Southern African states to balance against the apartheid regime.<sup>18</sup>

By the time the apartheid regime unbanned the ANC in 1990 and began the process of negotiating a transfer of power, the ANC had reestablished itself inside South Africa as the most popular movement for change. The ANC power base of super-majority black support would be important in providing backing for the post-apartheid regime's foreign policy leadership and use of diplomacy in Southern Africa and Africa as a whole from 1994 onward.

The democratic wave helped to expose the ANC's ideological divisions. The South Africa-based United Democratic Front, the external Anti-Apartheid Movement, and Nelson Mandela based their political positions on the 1955 Freedom Charter, envisaging South Africa as a multiracial, multiparty democracy with equal rights for all. The ANC's ally—the South African Communist Party—and many within the ANC leaned toward Soviet-led socialism. There was also skepticism about US-led democracy and human rights promotion during the Cold War, especially in the wake of the Reagan administration's "constructive engagement" policy

in cozying up to apartheid South Africa. This division would play a role in the new South Africa's foreign policy and Pretoria's approach to democracy promotion. With the collapse of the Soviet socialist bloc in 1990, the democratic wave, and Nelson Mandela's emergence from prison and assumption of leadership, the ANC moved away from a socialist platform and toward tentative support for free market democracy, which some saw as surrendering to Western neoliberalism.<sup>19</sup>

In 1994, the emergence of a democratic South Africa with a relatively large state and the ability to influence African countries, combined with the democratic wave, created conditions for foreign policy innovation. Nelson Mandela and the ANC came to power as senior partners in a power-sharing arrangement with the National Party in a transitional government. The "new South Africa" was cautious in its foreign policy in the 1990s. The transitional government focused its attention internally on implementing its Reconstruction and Development Programme and developing education, jobs, and housing for the millions of black victims of apartheid oppression. The transition required considerable domestic focus and placed limits on South African leadership in Africa, including in the OAU and SADC. Furthermore, given the negative legacy that the apartheid regime had built particularly in the Southern Africa region, the Mandela administration tried not to emulate the "bully" profile of apartheid South Africa and proceeded with sensitivity.

Despite a deliberate approach, Mandela led in some foreign policy innovation, including democracy and human rights promotion.<sup>20</sup> He exhibited moral leadership that derived from his record of opposition to the evils of apartheid and magnanimous reconciliation with the National Party that proved attractive to global public opinion and many world leaders.<sup>21</sup> He said, "this must be a world of democracy and respect for human rights, a world freed from the horrors of poverty, hunger, deprivation and ignorance, relieved of the threat and the scourge of civil wars and external aggression and unburdened of the great tragedy of millions forced to become refugees."<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, with Mandela at the helm, South Africa possessed "soft power" and diplomatic capacity and at times effectively used the diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) instruments of power to play an important role as regional leader in Southern Africa and Africa as a whole, especially with the prestige and talents of Mandela. When the ANC assumed power, it had cultivated good relations with SADC and the rest of Africa and had no real enemies.

Antimilitarist voices dominated government thinking in the mid-1990s in a backlash to the brutality of the apartheid military. The 1996 Defence White Paper called for the judicious use of military power, only when vital South African interests were at stake, and a broader definition of "security" to include human security.<sup>23</sup> The voices and White Paper helped to create the basis for a foreign policy

that included developing the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) as a leader in peace operations and inculcating the security forces with concerns for democracy and human rights.<sup>24</sup> The 1994 Rwandan genocide also had an impact, driving thinking on how peace operations might react quickly, protect civilians, and prevent future massive human rights abuses.

Concerning innovation at the African and global levels, one of South Africa's first initiatives was leading African states in agreeing to the Treaty of Pelindaba in 1995 for an African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, which would commit state parties to battle the proliferation of nuclear weapons materials. Thirty years of global leadership by the ANC's Abdul Minty and the nuclear expertise of the South African foreign policy bureaucracy—a reflection of state size and past experience at dealing with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT)—were key ingredients in diplomatic efforts for the treaty. South Africa continued to lead at the global level in NPT review conferences held every five years from 1995 onward. In addition, South Africa fully rejoined the UN, including the Human Rights Commission. The country negotiated with the European Union (EU) for a trade deal. South Africa engaged with the United States in the binational commission, led by Deputy President Mbeki and Vice Pres. Al Gore, 1994–99.<sup>25</sup> While Mbeki and Gore helped the two countries heal the divide created by the Reagan administration's constructive engagement, Mbeki remained skeptical about US motives for promoting democracy and human rights.

The new South Africa innovated in peacemaking efforts in Africa, helping to resolve conflicts and holding out hope for the establishment of democracy and human rights. The genocide in Rwanda started in April 1994, occurring at the same time as Mandela and the ANC were campaigning for the 1994 elections. Pretoria's inability to act at that time led to the new South Africa's commitment to stop genocide as well as its support for the Rwandan Patriotic Front regime of Paul Kagame and efforts to build a "new Rwanda." In the latter half of 1994, South African diplomacy helped to reverse a military coup in Lesotho and restore democracy. At the same time, President Mandela intervened with Mozambican leaders to persuade both political factions in that country to follow through with multiparty elections and successfully save the United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) from failure. Mandela and South Africa mediated between the two sides in the Angolan civil war, 1994–99, with little success as fighting resumed and intensified. In 1998, Mandela helped to persuade Libyan leader Colonel Mu ammar al-Gaddafi to hand over suspects in the Lockerbie aircraft bombing to end the damaging international sanctions on Libya's oil and gas industry. In 1999, Mandela, Deputy President Jacob Zuma, and South African

diplomats took over the peacemaking process in Burundi and shepherded it to success in 2002.<sup>26</sup>

In May 1997, South Africa took the initiative in negotiations to persuade the longstanding dictator of Zaire, Mobutu Sese Seko, to resign, after gaining the trust of the leaders of an advancing rebel force, Laurent Kabila and Paul Kagame, whose Rwandan Patriotic Army played the leading role.<sup>27</sup> In addition, SANDF generals convinced Mobutu's generals to end resistance to Kabila and Kagame's forces and dissuaded foreign allies of Mobutu from intervening.<sup>28</sup> After Mobutu's departure, Kabila established the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Mandela and other SADC leaders invited him to join the subregional organization, especially given the close ties between Southern Africa and the DRC's mineral-rich Katanga Province.

In August 1998, Mandela and South Africa opposed Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia's intervention in the DRC at the invitation of President Kabila "in the name of SADC," because the three did not consult the other leaders of SADC for approval.<sup>29</sup> When the three refused to withdraw, South Africa proposed a new round of diplomacy to put an end to the renewed civil war. However, in 1998, some observers saw South Africa as tilting toward Rwanda partly because of a sense of guilt at Pretoria's inaction during the 1994 genocide. Coincidentally, the following month, South Africa and Botswana intervened militarily in Lesotho in the name of SADC, deploying the SANDF to stop a military mutiny and preserve democracy. The excessive use of force in the intervention tarnished the image of the new South Africa as a benign hegemon and demonstrated that the country had much to learn in the use of hard power in the cause of civilian rule and democracy.<sup>30</sup>

In SADC, Mandela and South Africa proceeded cautiously. The entry of South Africa into the SADC in 1994 threatened the regional power that Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe had accumulated and the civil war that Angolan president José Eduardo dos Santos was waging to consolidate his rule. In 1996, the SADC founded the Organ on Politics, Defense, and Security to deal with civil wars and other issues of instability. In opposition to Zimbabwe and Angola, which wanted to create a military-oriented body that would be able to provide mutual defense, South Africa worked with Botswana, Tanzania, and Mozambique to ensure that the new organization should be primarily a peacemaking body, committed to democracy and human rights.<sup>31</sup>

Concerning democracy and human rights, the pressures of the democratic wave and ANC human rights advocates clashed with the ANC's traditionally strong relations with NAM countries, producing a contradictory foreign policy that included democratic and human rights promotion but also solidarity with dictators who supported the ANC during the anti-apartheid struggle. Mandela's govern-

ment featured a commitment to combined social justice, an acceptance of free market democracy, and advocacy for social justice, democracy, and human rights in African organizations and in relations with several African states.<sup>32</sup> However, the South African government permitted arms sales to human rights abusers, such as Syria; established close relations with Cuba and Libya and cordial relations with Iraq and Iran; and was reluctant to condemn human rights abuses by Myanmar and Indonesia. In these cases, support for the ANC during the struggle trumped the new South Africa's democratic and human rights values. In addition, a number of countries continued to contribute to the ANC's coffers after the party came to power, which swayed government policies to some extent.

The most challenging democracy and human rights case for South Africa came in 1995 with dictator Sani Abacha's human rights abuses in Nigeria. Abacha had imprisoned Obasanjo and the winner of the 1993 elections, M.K.O. Abiola, and other democratic leaders, accusing them of coup plotting, and was set to execute Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other environmental and human rights activists in the Niger Delta. Initially, South Africa conducted a campaign of "quiet diplomacy" in the Commonwealth, OAU, and UN and bilaterally with visits by Mandela and Mbeki to Abuja. Pretoria opposed oil sanctions, partly because Nigeria continued to assist the ANC with financial contributions even after it assumed power in 1994. However, Namibia and Zimbabwe had already condemned Abacha's actions and called for the consideration of sanctions. Therefore, expectations grew that Mandela and the new South Africa would act. After his pleas for the lives of the activists went unheeded and the Abacha regime executed them on 10 November 1995, Mandela reversed his position and supported the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth and the imposition of oil sanctions. However, Mandela's efforts to convince the OAU to suspend Nigeria and impose oil sanctions failed, with no country supporting his position. Mandela and South Africa had failed to conduct the necessary diplomatic work to win support from other African countries.<sup>33</sup> Some African leaders and observers saw Mandela's moves as a sudden overreach, while others saw it as evidence of the slow progress that democracy and human rights norms were making in the OAU during the 1990s. This episode spurred on South African leaders to strengthen democracy and human rights norms and enforcement powers in the AU in the 2000s.

Thus, South Africa in the 1990s exhibited a deliberate approach, with some foreign policy innovation. The democratic wave, South Africa's size (reflected in its established instruments of power), and the leadership of Mandela and Mbeki, as well as the ANC's relations with Africa, were responsible. However, Pretoria's failures in Nigeria and the DRC demonstrated that the new South Africa had much to learn about African foreign policies.

## **1990s Nigeria: Foreign Policy to Resist the Democratic Wave**

After independence in 1960, Nigeria struggled to translate its large size in population and oil wealth into foreign policy innovation and success. However, the country was hobbled by domestic ethnic rivalries, the oil curse, and seven military coups.<sup>34</sup> Concerning successes, foreign policy served to keep the country from falling apart in the 1967–70 civil war, to strive to legitimate military rule, and to demonstrate leadership in West Africa. Nigeria worked with the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union, and most African states to counter the Biafra secession and the rebels' international supporters. The country led West Africa in the founding of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, convincing francophone states to collaborate in its creation and development and basing the organization in the Nigerian capital. In late 1975 and 1976, General Murtala Muhammad and his successor, General Olusegun Obasanjo, stood up to the United States over Angola and recognized the dos Santos's Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola–Partido do Trabalho (MPLA) government, influencing the deadlocked OAU. In 1980, Nigeria led the first OAU attempt at peacekeeping in Chad. With the rise of Libyan-sponsored rebel movements in West Africa in Chad, Nigeria led ECOWAS states in negotiating a mutual defense pact that was agreed to in 1981. In sum, Nigeria had episodes of foreign policy success and developed an experienced foreign policy bureaucracy.<sup>35</sup> However, the kleptocratic Babangida and Abacha military dictatorships, 1985–99, weakened the state and the diplomatic instrument of power. With the return of civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria slowly emerged as a large state with democratic features and regained a degree of foreign policy effectiveness.

The democratic wave helped bring changes in Nigerian foreign policy, as the Babangida and Abacha dictatorships faced external and internal pressures to democratize and return to civilian rule. The two reacted by showing the international community that Nigeria could lead in making peace and upholding democracy in the region when no other country would. The self-styled “military president” Ibrahim Babangida deployed troops in the ECOMOG mission to Liberia in 1990, and his successor, Abacha, kept them there until 1997. Abacha deployed troops as part of ECOMOG to Sierra Leone in 1997 to reverse a military coup, and escalation by the Revolutionary United Front led to a siege on the capital, Freetown. In sum, Nigerian military dictators sent troops to uphold democracy in Liberia and Sierra Leone partly as a way of seeking international legitimacy for authoritarian rule in the face of democratic pressures.<sup>36</sup> The democratic wave and internal and external pressures on Nigeria in the 1990s finally achieved a breakthrough when

Abacha unexpectedly died in June 1998, and his successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, began the transition to civilian rule.

Thus, Nigeria's dictators in the 1990s used the country's oil wealth and military to strive for legitimacy by innovating in peace enforcement with the ECOMOG operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, the military rulers never achieved the legitimacy that they sought. Instead, domestic opposition and international pressure helped lead to civilian rule, under which Nigeria could not afford such large-scale military deployments as occurred in the 1990s. In contrast, South Africa had a five-year head start on Nigeria and achieved modest foreign policy innovation. A competent foreign policy bureaucracy and Mandela and Mbeki's leadership helped achieve some gains in peacemaking.

### **2000s: Innovative Leadership, Institution-building, and Norm Creation<sup>37</sup>**

The arrival on the scene of presidents Obasanjo and Mbeki set the stage for major foreign policy innovation led by Nigeria and South Africa. Under their, South Africa and Nigeria worked effectively to innovate in multilateral settings, promoting ideas for African progress and change and persuading many countries to commit to work toward good governance, democracy and human rights, and more open, investor-friendly economies. South Africa and Nigeria's leadership in the generation of ideas and diplomacy led to the formation of new continental institutions, the AU, the Pan-African Parliament, NEPAD, and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), including the African Standby Force (ASF).<sup>38</sup> South Africa and Nigeria sought to promote democracy and human rights norms through NEPAD and the AU.

In May 1999, Thabo Mbeki became South African president after serving five years as deputy president. He had spent 1960–1990 in exile, building ANC relations with states and international organizations and conducting diplomacy throughout Africa and the world.<sup>39</sup> As a result, he was more versed than Mandela was in the dynamics and leaders of Africa. Mbeki's connections, cosmopolitanism,<sup>40</sup> and ambition, as well as his foreign policy team enabled South Africa to become more assertive in African affairs.<sup>41</sup>

In 1998, Mbeki led in the launching of the "African Renaissance," which aimed to regenerate Africa's place in the world and build on Senegal's Cheikh Anta Diop and Léopold Senghor's vision of *negritude*, developed in the 1950s and 1960s, a movement aimed at raising and cultivating "Black consciousness" across Africa and its diasporas. Mbeki also helped to found the African Renaissance Institute that focused on education and the development of intellectuals and that

emphasized artistic and scholarly freedom.<sup>42</sup> Mbeki also ensured that the African Renaissance included a vision of how to restructure African institutions to make them more effective, and he coined the Pan-Africanist rallying cry, “African solutions to African problems.”

In 1998, South Africa and more than 100 other countries adopted the Rome Statute of the ICC to try human rights abusers, which entered into force in 2002 and achieved its first conviction in 2012. That same year, South Africa supported the OAU in founding the African Court of Human and People’s Rights, which opened in 2002 and delivered its first judgment in 2009.

In 2000, Mbeki led in proposing the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Plan (MAP), which sought to fulfill Africa’s potential for social and economic development based on reform efforts, including democratization and respect for human rights. Using the MAP as a starting point, Mbeki joined with Obasanjo and other African leaders in founding NEPAD.<sup>43</sup> This included the APRM, which required African states to demonstrate progress to their peers in governance, including the development of democracy and human rights, as a means to attract foreign aid and investment and spur economic development. Through NEPAD and the APRM, South Africa led in developing a continental mechanism to impose standards of good governance and democracy.<sup>44</sup> NEPAD, the APRM’s prospect of increased aid, and investment were attractive to many African leaders and states who signed on to them, expecting increased flows from the West and multilateral financial institutions.

Peer review came into effect in 2004, and the first reviews took place mainly in SADC states. The new international institutional setting divided those states and leaders who were willing to undergo peer review and those who refused to move outside the shadow of “sovereignty.” In addition, NEPAD and APRM also set the stage for Mbeki and Obasanjo presenting the case for the doubling of aid to Africa at the 2005 Gleneagles G-7 Summit and at other venues.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, South Africa continued to host the NEPAD secretariat, but the AU Political Commission took over NEPAD and APRM, reducing their autonomy and power to monitor and enforce good governance norms.

Mbeki and South Africa played the leading role in transforming the largely ineffectual OAU into the more authoritative AU. This proved to be the most significant instance of a large democratic state with skillful leadership innovating foreign policy, which included building consensus on democratic and human rights norms. In 1999, al-Gaddafi and Libya presented plans and provided funding in starting the process, and Mbeki and South Africa joined. The AU would feature stronger institutions, including those that would provide peace and security as well as democracy and human rights.<sup>46</sup> Soon afterward, South Africa took over the initiative

and drove it away from al-Gaddafi's vision of a "United States of Africa" with the colonel as head of state. Instead, South Africa led in the drafting of the AU Charter in 2000 and championed AU "non-indifference" to human rights abuses plus sovereignty as the "responsibility to protect" (rather than "non-interference in internal affairs of member states") as well as the right to intervene to stop genocide and other crimes.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Pretoria led in gaining approval for two of the AU Charter's provisions—line seven (democracy) and line 8 (human rights), as well as an African Charter of Human Rights. South Africa also led in establishing an AU APSA Early Warning Center, which would alert member states to impending conflict and massive human rights abuses. South Africa joined with other states in including AU provisions to suspend member states where unconstitutional changes in government, especially military coups, took place.<sup>48</sup>

In 2003, South Africa helped lead in generating the ASF construct, with six deployment scenarios, including stopping genocide and ethnic cleansing and upholding human rights and democratic transitions. Subsequently, African military leaders approved the ASF and began the process of trying to operationalize it. ASF Scenario six held out the possibility that the force could intervene in another Rwandan-style genocide to stop massive human rights abuses and protect civilians.

In 2005, South Africa and Nigeria supported the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) at the UN World Summit and its four key concerns—to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.<sup>49</sup> In 2007, the two countries led in securing agreement on an African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) that stood for free and fair elections and constitutional procedures for changes of government and suspension of countries from the AU that interfered with those procedures, such as military coups and changing the constitution to eliminate term limits.

Mbeki dramatically expanded South Africa's diplomatic role, playing a major role in ending wars in Burundi, the DRC, and Sudan; promoting movements toward democracy and human rights; and engaging in difficult negotiations in the Côte d'Ivoire peace process. From 2003 to 2005, South Africa supported the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and human rights in southern Sudan, as the civil war came to an end and as the Darfur genocide accelerated. Mbeki and South Africa led in the Sun City negotiations that ended the interstate war in the DRC in 2003, a conflict involving almost a dozen different nations. The agreement put in place a power-sharing agreement and road map for democratization and protection of human rights. In 2006, the South African delegation's quick endorsement of the election of Joseph Kabila as DRC president subsequently elevated South Africa's standing and demonstrated a combination of skillful diplomacy and support for economic interests. However, in the complex and turbulent

eastern DRC, numerous guerrilla movements continued to clash with each other over mineral resources and land issues and preyed upon the civilian population.

Mbeki committed the SANDF to a number of AU and UN peace operations. Following on the heels of Pretoria's diplomacy, South Africa provided a protection force for leaders of the various factions to Burundi, then provided the backbone of the African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB) peacekeeping force, and finally was a major troop contributor to the United Nations Mission in Burundi (MINUB). South Africa backed the peace agreement by the deployment of a protection force in 2001; then contributed peacekeepers to an AU mission (2002–04) and then a UN mission (2004–06).<sup>50</sup> South Africa sent peacekeepers to the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) in 2003.<sup>51</sup> South Africa also provided troops for peace operations in Darfur and Comoros and deployed election support contingents to the DRC, Mozambique, and Tanzania. All peacemaking efforts called for adherence to constitutional principles.

In the SADC, South Africa led the way in convincing other member states to join a mutual defense pact in September 2003. The pact contained provisions on the decision-making process to avoid squabbles over intervention in the name of the SADC. In addition, South Africa led in securing agreement for a SADC free-trade area in August 2008, with plans for a customs union leading to a common market and monetary union by 2016. However, nontariff barriers continue to hamper trade expansion. South Africa continued to develop its mixed economy and interacted economically with Africa and the world. In the area of trade, post-apartheid South Africa practiced nonreciprocity within the Southern African Customs Union (SACU). In the 1990s, Pretoria's main domestic imperative was job creation and preservation, which explains why it was unwilling to extend SACU arrangements immediately to the rest of the SADC. However, in the 2000s, South Africa gradually expanded nonreciprocity to the rest of the SADC. In addition, Pretoria led the SADC in seeking a trade agreement with the EU, which interfered with development of the SADC free-trade area.

Mbeki and South Africa undertook a number of diplomatic initiatives to bring peace to troubled SADC countries, namely Zimbabwe, Angola, and eSwatini (Swaziland), with the aim of power sharing, reconciliation, and democracy. Resistance came from autocratic leaders who were fearful of South Africa's promotion of democracy and the right to intervene to stop massive human rights abuses. In the case of Zimbabwe, 2002–08, Pretoria could have imposed sanctions but chose solidarity and "quiet diplomacy" over democracy. Mbeki played the leading role in negotiating with Mugabe and eventually arrived at a power-sharing agreement. In 2000, Mugabe had issued orders to seize white commercial farms for redistribution, which, over time, devastated the economy and resulted in catastrophic

levels of hyperinflation. In March 2002, assaults on opposition party officials and white commercial farmers and the unfree and unfair presidential elections led to EU and US sanctions and Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth, which Pretoria believed worsened the chances for conflict resolution. In 2002 and 2008, South Africa participated in SADC election monitoring teams to Zimbabwe, which tended to downplay election irregularities. Despite the flagrant abuses of democratic and human rights norms, Mbeki opposed sanctions and argued that South Africa's quiet diplomacy would end the crisis, which was a reflection of ANC solidarity with a leader and country that had provided support during the liberation struggle. The end result was that Mugabe remained in power, and Mbeki proved powerless to change his behavior. In the meantime, Mbeki helped prevent Mugabe and Zimbabwe from holding any leadership positions within the SADC.<sup>52</sup> The Zimbabwe crisis and Mugabe's undemocratic and economically disastrous behavior harmed the image of the NEPAD, Mbeki and South Africa, and the SADC. In addition, Zimbabwe, in 2008, led in indefinitely suspending the SADC Tribunal that had ruled in favor of 79 Zimbabwean commercial farmers whose land the government had seized.

In 2008, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) won parliamentary elections and the first round of presidential elections. After massive repression and fraud, Mugabe claimed victory in the second round. Finally, after fraudulent elections, Mbeki and other SADC leaders persuaded Mugabe and the opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangarai, to agree on a power-sharing arrangement. While this seemed to be a victory for democracy and human rights, Mugabe abused his position as the senior partner in the government and undermined the MDC's popularity.

Concerning other resistance, the monarchy in eSwatini opposed democratization pressures from the South African government and civil society, even though the small country was virtually surrounded by South Africa. Unlike Zimbabwe and eSwatini, Angola did not share a border with South Africa and continued to oppose Pretoria's efforts to spread democracy, good governance, and human rights. Resistance also came from further afield in Africa, including Libya and Sudan. The Sudanese military dictator, Omar al-Bashir, objected to South African support of the SPLM and criticism of massive Sudanese human rights abuses in South Sudan and Darfur.

In 2007, the year before the financial crisis and great recession, South African Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel hosted the G20. Mbeki and Obasanjo participated in several G7 summits, besides Gleneagles 2005, dealing with African debt and development issues. South Africa's relations with the United States declined with the latter's 2003 invasion of Iraq and the creation of US Africa Command (2007–08), and attempts to situate that command on the continent. Mbeki

viewed the Bush administration's democracy promotion as a cover for regime change. While Mbeki gained international status for himself as a norm setter and peacemaker, he lost some of the moral authority that Mandela had garnered. The biggest detraction was Mbeki's persistent denial that HIV causes AIDS. In September 2008, the ANC removed Mbeki from power.

The leadership of Mbeki, combined with the democratic wave and South Africa's disproportional power, led to significant foreign policy innovation, including the creation and transformation of African institutions that emphasized democracy, good governance, and human rights as well as the right to intervene to stop massive human rights abuses and crimes against humanity. South Africa also achieved significant gains in peacemaking and peacekeeping under Mbeki. However, Mbeki and South Africa were unwilling to use Pretoria's economic and military power to compel Zimbabwe, eSwatini, and other countries to abide by democratic and human rights norms. This was mainly due to deference for countries that had provided support for the ANC during its struggle during the apartheid era.

### **Obasanjo and Nigerian Foreign Policy Innovation, 1999–2007**

In 1999, with elections that were partially free and fair, President Obasanjo and other Nigerian leaders claimed that the country had returned to democracy and expected preferential treatment from the international community. This belief and aspiration helped to drive the country's foreign policy and promotion of democracy and human rights.<sup>53</sup> Just as important, the election of Obasanjo led to foreign policy innovation. Obasanjo had been an active player in Nigerian foreign policy when he was military ruler from 1976 to 1979, and his leadership in handing power back to civilian rulers through democratic elections in 1979 gained him international approval. In the 1990s, he established international contacts with a wide range of government and nongovernmental organization leaders, including Mbeki and Mandela, during his resistance to the Abacha regime.<sup>54</sup> From 1999 to 2007, Obasanjo drove many of Nigeria's foreign policy innovations and accomplishments.<sup>55</sup> However, Nigerian lawmakers criticized Obasanjo for not consulting them and not using the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with his foreign minister playing mainly a supporting role.<sup>56</sup>

Obasanjo's principal goal was to rebuild Nigeria's economy and political system after the ruinous military regimes. He undertook extensive shuttle diplomacy to reassure international partners that Nigeria was reforming. The most concrete goal was to overcome the debt that Babangida, Abacha, and previous rulers had left Nigeria. This meant economic diplomacy and working with the United States, France, and the United Kingdom and through the Paris Club to reschedule the country's debt. Ultimately, his efforts paid off in October 2005, with a final agree-

ment for debt relief worth 18 billion USD and reduction of Nigeria's debt stock by 30 billion USD that was completed in April 2006.<sup>57</sup>

On the global level, Obasanjo led in refurbishing Nigeria's image and elevating it on the world stage.<sup>58</sup> Of particular importance was President Bill Clinton's 2000 visit and support for Obasanjo and civilian rule and democratization. In the aftermath, Nigeria requested US support in peacekeeping training and equipment, which the United States provided for four Nigerian Army battalions in Operation Focus Relief. Nigeria deployed two battalions to the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). In addition, Washington instituted programs to help Nigeria in developing democracy and human rights observance. The United States also punished the Nigerian military for human rights abuses; for example, suspending aid in 2003, because the army killed hundreds of civilians in intervening between two warring ethnic groups.

In 1999, Obasanjo joined Mbeki in promoting the African Renaissance, MAP, NEPAD, and the process that led to the founding of the AU in 2002. Nigeria provided funding for the NEPAD, and Obasanjo was personally involved, sitting on the board. Subsequently, Nigeria and six ECOWAS states submitted governance to the APRM. In addition, Nigeria acceded to the Treaty of Rome and the ICC and supported R2P at the UN World Summit. Despite this commitment to human rights, the Obasanjo regime struggled to keep its security forces from continuing to commit abuses.

President Obasanjo and Nigeria helped lead in negotiating the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in December 1999 in Lomé, Togo. The mechanism established a security architecture, including a Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. The protocol strengthened norms against military coups and other unconstitutional changes in government, such as ending term limits. The new civilian government in Abuja was fearful of another military seizure of power and was especially interested in the ECOWAS anti-coup norm.<sup>59</sup> The mechanism also included an ECOWAS Peace and Security Council that established procedure for more legitimate, orderly, and humane peace operations than those of the 1990s, as well as an early warning mechanism and a Council of the Wise to mediate in disputes and conflicts. Starting in 2003, Nigeria led ECOWAS in steps toward developing the West African Standby Brigade as part of the ASF.

Nigeria demonstrated leadership against coups and other unconstitutional seizures of power. In 2003, Nigeria helped to reverse a military coup in nearby São Tomé and Príncipe. In 2005, Abuja became involved in the transition process in Togo after the death of the dictator Gnassingbé Eyadéma and an attempted military coup. Because of pressure from Nigeria, ECOWAS, and other West Af-

rican states, the military backed down and allowed free and fair democratic elections and a constitutional denouement. However, the result was that Eyadéma's son, Faure, won the election and carried on the dynasty. The Protocol on Democracy set the stage for other interventions in the region.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike his military dictator predecessors, Obasanjo and civilian-ruled Nigeria had limited foreign policy and military resources. Therefore, Nigeria could not afford to pay for large-scale military expeditionary operations like ECOMOG. In 2000, Obasanjo withdrew Nigerian troops from Sierra Leone to cut costs and hand over responsibility to UNAMSIL. However, he had to return troops after the UN mission faced collapse, with the UN footing the bill and the US Operation Focus Relief providing training and equipment. Through the skillful use of diplomacy and UN and US support, Abuja led in restoring a lasting peace and democracy in Sierra Leone and Liberia at a lower cost. In addition, the UN paid much of the cost of Nigerian peacekeepers deployed to the DRC, Darfur, and Liberia.

In 2003, Liberian rebel groups closed in on the capital Monrovia and the former warlord cum president Charles Taylor. Obasanjo and Nigeria played the leading role in negotiations to end the civil war. In the meantime, the United States pressured Obasanjo to provide Taylor into exile to smooth the transition. In September, Nigeria led a three-week ECOWAS (ECOMIL) intervention that removed Taylor and replaced him with a transitional government. The UN Security Council (UNSC) authorized the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) that took over from ECOMIL in October.<sup>61</sup> Nigeria played a leading role in UNMIL; the transition to a democratically elected Liberian government led by Pres. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf; and security-sector reform, including providing generals to lead the new Liberian army. In 2006, the United States—after pressuring Obasanjo to take Taylor in 2003—demanded that Nigeria hand Taylor over to the Sierra Leone War Crimes Tribunal. After some resistance and US sanctions, Nigeria complied.

In 2003–04, Nigeria intervened in the Darfur genocide to try to stop massive human rights abuses and bring peace. At the same time, President Obasanjo was AU chair and became a major actor in negotiating between the Khartoum government and the SPLM and the Justice and Equality Movement that had started fighting in February 2003. He and Pres. Idriss Déby of Chad attempted to stop the escalation of tensions following a rebel attack on a military airfield in April 2003. Their efforts led to the Intra-Sudanese Dialogue in September 2003, which eventually led to a peace talks in Abuja in August 2004. However, a new wave of fighting led to mass killing, rape, and displacement by the Sudanese Janjaweed militia backed by the Sudanese military, starting in November 2003. More interventions by Obasanjo, the Nigerian government, and others led to a Humanitarian Cease-

fire Agreement in April 2004. Nigeria led the Abuja Peace Talks and AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and was the first troop-contributing country in Darfur.

Obasanjo spent much of the year involved in Darfur as well as in working to complete the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between southern Sudanese led by the SPLM and the Khartoum government. Despite Obasanjo and Nigeria's efforts, the genocide continued. The AMIS lacked the capacity to stop the burning of villages and killing, rape, and displacement or rebel activity by several different groups. Therefore, Nigeria took the issue to the UNSC to convert the AMIS into a better-resourced and larger UN peacekeeping mission. After overcoming Sudanese and Chinese resistance, the UNSC approved United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) hybrid mission in 2007. Nigeria became a major troop-contributing country and provided force commanders to UNAMID.

Obasanjo accepted the verdict of the Nigerian parliament in denying him a third term by refusing to amend the constitution. This led to Obasanjo's elevation in the international community. Within eight short years, Obasanjo had led Nigeria back to respect in the international community. After Obasanjo left office, he continued to engage in foreign policy activities, particularly through the AU and ECOWAS's Councils of the Wise, and intervened in a number of crises and helped to bring about resolution.



**Figure 1. Continued leadership.** Former presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo discuss issues at the 6th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa, held in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, 22–23 April 2017.

Both Mbeki and Obasanjo had international experience and leadership qualities that enabled them to take advantage of large state size and the democratic wave to lead in foreign policy innovation. Mbeki picked up where Mandela left off and succeeded in achieving his Pan-Africanist vision. Obasanjo had to start largely from scratch, though the ECOMOG provided useful lessons regarding how Nigeria should handle peacemaking and peacekeeping. Burundi provided the SANDF with the opportunity to correct the mistakes that it had committed in Lesotho in 1998 and set the stage for SANDF deployments to several UN peacekeeping missions.

### **2010s: Weaker Leaders, Internal Turmoil, and Foreign Policy Decline**

In 2007 and 2008, weaker leaders with limited foreign policy experience took power in Nigeria and South Africa respectively, which coincided with a decline in foreign policy innovation and support for democracy and human rights norms that persisted through the 2010s. In addition, both countries experienced internal turmoil that distracted attention from foreign policy matters. While the United States and other Western countries continued to promote democracy, autocracies were learning how to resist, and strongmen ended a number of democratic experiments. While the AU and subregional organizations had established democratic and human rights norms, implementation and enforcement proved difficult. After signing on to the ICC and R2P, a number of African states began to push back against the ICC as an “anti-African institution” after the indictment of Sudan’s President al-Bashir and Kenyan leaders Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto.

#### ***Nigeria: Post-Obasanjo Decline***

In 2007, Obasanjo picked Umaru Musa Yar’Adua as his replacement, once it became clear that a third term was impossible. President Yar’Adua was inexperienced and in poor health, and many considered him to be an Obasanjo puppet. Therefore, he was both physically and experientially unable to undertake the high level of diplomatic activity that his predecessor achieved. Furthermore, Nigeria had to deal with an ongoing insurgency in the oil-rich Niger Delta and its deleterious effects on the economy. Therefore, innovative foreign policy ideas, such as “citizen diplomacy,” gave way to economic diplomacy.

In 2009, Yar’Adua died, and Vice Pres. Goodluck Jonathan took power. He was similarly inexperienced in foreign policy. In addition, he faced a number of issues that prevented him from being active in foreign policy. Although Jonathan’s amnesty to militia fighters helped to end the Niger Delta insurgency, he had to deal

with the resurgence of the Boko Haram terrorist organization, which distracted Nigeria from foreign policy. In addition, the Nigerian government continued to focus on economic diplomacy.<sup>62</sup> Nigeria and the ECOWAS continued to deal with unconstitutional changes in government. In 2009, the ECOWAS and AU suspended Guinea-Conakry for a military coup; however, the organizations did not suspend Niger for an unconstitutional change.

Global powers continued to assess Nigeria as second to South Africa in terms of economic power. Nigeria was not invited to the first G-20 heads of state summit in 2009 to deal with the global financial crisis. In addition, Russia, China, India, and Brazil chose South Africa over Nigeria as the African BRICS representative. In 2011, the Arab League, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom persuaded Nigeria and South Africa to vote for UNSC Resolution 1973, which called for “all means necessary to protect civilians” in Libya in the spirit of R2P and protect civilians in Benghazi and elsewhere in Libya from al-Gaddafi’s forces.<sup>63</sup> The UN vote, the AU’s failure to convince al-Gaddafi to compromise, and al-Gaddafi’s subsequent murder cast a shadow over the organization and the leadership of Nigeria and South Africa.

In March 2012, Tuareg separatists took over northern Mali and declared the Republic of Azawad. In response, Captain Amadou Sanogo led a military coup in Bamako that caused the ECOWAS to suspend Mali. In June, extremist organizations took over the north and threatened to take over the rest of the country and the Sahel. Nigeria participated in delicate diplomacy to persuade Sanogo and the military to transition to a civilian government and agree to allow an ECOWAS force—the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA)—to guarantee the transition and restore Malian sovereignty in the north. In January 2013, Nigeria deployed air and ground forces to Mali, and a Nigerian general commanded AFISMA. However, when the extremists began to advance toward the Malian capital, AFISMA was incapable of stopping them, and France had to intervene with Operation Serval, which defeated the militants. In August, as the situation in northeast Nigeria deteriorated, President Jonathan announced the withdrawal of Nigerian forces. Mali demonstrated the limitations of Nigerian power and that of the ECOWAS.<sup>64</sup>

After the Boko Haram insurgency escalated in 2009, the United States periodically protested to Nigeria about military atrocities carried out in the northeast and elsewhere. In 2014, as Washington ratcheted up the pressure, Nigeria suspended security cooperation. In addition, US and global opinion mobilized after Boko Haram seized 276 Chibok schoolgirls and increased pressure on the Jonathan government to act. After four unfree and unfair elections starting in 1999, Nigeria in 2015 executed its first relatively clean election; the country moved a

step closer to full democracy; and Muhammadu Buhari defeated President Jonathan and assumed office. President Buhari confronted Boko Haram and the Islamic State–West Africa (ISWA) and falling oil prices and subsequently took action against the extremists and corruption. His assurances led the United States and Nigeria to resume full relations, including security cooperation. In acting against Boko Haram and the ISWA, Buhari agreed to expand the role of the Multinational Joint Task Force–Lake Chad Region that had existed since 1994. This allowed Chad, Cameroon, and Niger forces to enter Nigerian territory.<sup>65</sup> In addition, the fall in oil prices and subsequent recession forced Nigeria to focus once again on economic diplomacy to attract foreign direct investment for the petroleum industry and deal with a mounting debt crisis. However, Abuja failed to attract foreign capital toward boosting the industrialization and manufacturing to diversify the Nigerian economy.<sup>66</sup>

In December 2016, Buhari and President Macky Sall of Senegal led the ECOWAS in acting to restore President-elect Adama Barrow to his rightfully elected position in Gambia and force out the dictator Yahya Jammeh. Senegal and Nigeria led the way in deploying troops. The intervention demonstrated that Nigeria and the ECOWAS could succeed in acting to uphold democracy and human rights with a relatively modest operation. This contrasted with the AFISMA's failure in January 2013 to stop the advance of extremist forces in Mali.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, the Obasanjo presidency was the one instance in which Nigeria engaged in foreign policy innovation. At the same time, Obasanjo had to conduct economic diplomacy to reconstruct Nigeria. Economic diplomacy became the main focus of subsequent Nigerian leaders, as well as combating Boko Haram. Despite having the largest economy in Africa, an analysis of Nigeria's foreign policy reveals the country's inherent weakness.

### ***South Africa: Post-Mbeki Decline***

By the time the ANC removed Mbeki from office in September 2008, South Africa's leadership role had already been established and institutionalized in the AU and SADC. In 2009, Zuma became president and proved to be not as effective as Mbeki. Zuma did not have Mbeki's international exposure and education due to his incarceration in South Africa, 1962–72, and focus on ANC guerrilla operations. However, Zuma managed to play a significant role in making peace in Burundi in the early 2000s. He also took a tougher line on Mugabe than Mbeki had. Once Zuma became president, he focused on warding off corruption charges, maintaining power internally, and economic diplomacy, especially with the G-20 and the BRICS and seeking foreign assistance and investment. The 2012 Mari-

kana mine massacre and outbursts of xenophobia marred Zuma's presidency, marking strains that remain today.

Under Zuma, South Africa focused on building strategic partnerships with the G-20, dealing with the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis and global recovery issues in subsequent years. In 2011, Russia, China, India, and Brazil invited South Africa to join the BRICS bloc of emerging economies as the African representative, even though the other four countries dwarfed it in terms of economic power. In addition, South Africa strengthened relations with China, agreeing to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2010.<sup>68</sup> South Africa's failure to pressure Zimbabwe, eSwatini, and other countries to democratize and respect human rights and its inclusion in the G-20 and the BRICS signify that the international community values the country's "soft power," even though it is relatively weak. Thus, Alden and Schoeman's characterization of South Africa as a symbolic hegemon.<sup>69</sup>

In 2012, one notable foreign policy success was the election of President Zuma's wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, as chair of the AU Commission, 2012–17.<sup>70</sup> She spearheaded the launch of Agenda 2063—a long-term vision of where Africa should proceed. Dlamini-Zuma managed to turn South Africa's attention to continental issues for the first time since Mbeki in 2008. However, she was criticized for not spending more time at AU Headquarters and for not acting to defuse crises in the DRC, Gambia, and elsewhere.

After Mbeki, there was less South African involvement in strengthening key human rights and democracy institutions and instruments. For one, democracy and human rights norms have not been part of the purpose of the BRICS consortium. In addition, South Africa lapsed in its efforts to see that African states ratified the ACDEG.<sup>71</sup> In 2011, after Libyan rebels killed al-Gaddafi, South Africa revised its support for R2P, objecting to the use of military force to protect civilians, because it could be arbitrary. At the time, South Africa was leading an AU delegation trying to peacefully resolve the Libyan Civil War. Once NATO began bombing Tripoli and inadvertently aiding the rebels, South Africa protested that the United States and others were violating the spirit of the resolution and marginalizing the AU peacemaking effort.<sup>72</sup>

In 2014, Zuma congratulated Bashar al-Assad of Syria on winning the 2014 presidential election. This was at a time in which al-Assad was leading his security establishment in the killing of hundreds of thousands of citizens and the imprisonment and torture of tens of thousands and the displacement of millions. In June 2015, the South African government failed to turn over Sudanese president al-Bashir to the ICC. He had been convicted *in absentia* of ordering the Darfur genocide and was in the country for an AU summit. The High Court ordered the Zuma government to detain al-Bashir, but the government allowed him to board

a plane and leave the country. In the wake of the diplomatic crisis, the Zuma government started measures to withdraw South Africa from the ICC and to encourage other African states and the AU to do the same. However, the South African Supreme Court blocked this executive action based upon South Africa's ratification into law of the Treaty of Rome that established the ICC.

Concerning foreign policy measures that supported democracy and human rights, in 2009, South Africa helped lead the SADC and AU in suspending Madagascar and imposing sanctions after a military coup. In 2014, the SADC and AU lifted the suspension and sanctions after Madagascar implemented a process to restore civilian rule. In 2013, South Africa led Mozambique and Tanzania in the UN Force Intervention Brigade in the eastern DRC to augment the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and defeat the M-23 rebels who were committing massive human rights abuses and had captured the regional center of Goma. Pretoria also continued to deploy troops to several UN peacekeeping operations. In 2018, South African troops deployed to Lesotho along with other SADC troops to stop another mutiny and coup.

A negative aspect of SANDF deployments occurred in January 2013, when 15 SANDF soldiers died at the hands of the Séléka militia in the Central African Republic (CAR), which caused an uproar in South Africa due to the impression that SANDF forces were there to protect ANC mining interests and were not properly armed.<sup>73</sup> The forces had first been deployed in 2007 to protect CAR president François Bozizé and his regime against rival militias.

In 2018, Cyril Ramaphosa, who had significant foreign policy experience, took over from Zuma, but has subsequently focused internally on repairing the domestic damage caused by Zuma; the Gupta family's "state capture," in which this business family leveraged private interests to significantly influence Pretoria's decision-making processes to their own advantage; corruption; and a stagnant economy. Despite domestic pressures, President Ramaphosa and then-Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Lindiwe Sisulu promised a "new approach" to South African foreign policy in December 2018, when South Africa voted with the majority in the UN General Assembly, condemning Myanmar for genocide against the Rohingya minority. Pretoria announced this new approach as South Africa began a two-year term as a nonpermanent member of the UNSC, vowing to stress the issues of Palestine and Western Sahara.<sup>74</sup> South Africa assumed the presidency of the council in October 2019 and brought forward issues relating to women, peace and security, South Sudan and the DRC, and cooperation between the council and the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC).<sup>75</sup> South Africa led the other 14 UNSC members to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the An-

nual Joint Consultative Meeting with the AU PSC—in anticipation of South Africa assuming the chair of the AU in 2020.

South Africa and Nigeria experienced declines in foreign policy leadership and innovation in the 2010s, including democracy and human rights promotion. Although the democratic wave ended, the reasons for the decline have more to do with weaker leaders combined with increases in domestic challenges. While Nigeria under Buhari promised a fresh start and Gambia provided a glimmer of hope, domestic issues and economic diplomacy continue to distract from foreign policy leadership in the ECOWAS and AU. South Africa continues to experience domestic challenges, but leadership change, Ramaphosa and Sisulu's new approach, and positions at the UN, AU, BRICS, and G-20 hold out more hope for a new wave of foreign policy innovation.

## **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated that large country size, democratizing regime type, and exceptional leaders created sufficient conditions for innovative foreign policy leadership by two African states, including the creation of regional institutions committed to democracy and human rights norms and the willingness to intervene to stabilize war-torn states and uphold human rights and democratic values. The global democratic wave of the 1980s and 1990s provided pressures from outside and inside Africa for the promotion of democracy and human rights. Mandela, Mbeki, and Obasanjo championed those norms in multilateral and bilateral settings, though their nations' interests often trumped values, leading to inconsistent foreign policies. Mbeki and Obasanjo benefited from the wave in founding and then leading the AU, NEPAD, and other institutions that included democratic and human rights norms. However, implementing the norms has proved to be difficult, given a large continent full of authoritarian leaders resistant to change and clinging to power.

Concerning South Africa and Nigeria's relatively large size and foreign policy innovation, they have sizable GDPs or GDPs per capita and are respected in Africa and their subregions. While they have provided leadership in peacemaking and peacekeeping, they still have limits on influence and reach, given the large geopolitical space full of autocrats. Thus, the two countries' relatively large size has provided the basis for symbolic hegemony—leadership in creating norms—while lacking the power and leadership to pressure other countries to democratize and observe human rights norms.

Concerning leadership, foreign policy innovation and symbolic hegemony, Mbeki and Obasanjo took advantage of large state size and the democratic wave to do more than any other African leaders, especially in the promotion of democ-

racy and human rights. From 1994 to 1999, Mandela and Mbeki, as deputy president, managed some innovation. After Mbeki and Obasanjo, there were less capable leaders and less innovation, including a coinciding diminishment in commitment to democracy and human rights. However, the AU, NEPAD, and other institutions were already established, and the democratic wave had ended with the beginning of an autocratic wave. In addition, less exceptional leaders accompanied a recession in foreign policy leadership.

It is difficult to disentangle leadership qualities, state size, and democratization. In analyzing the correlation among foreign policy innovation and size, leadership, and democratization, one must take into account the fact that the rate of institution creation was at its peak, 2000–2003, for various reasons and that new institutions logically could not be created after that. In addition, African conflicts peaked in the 1990s, and the rate of conflict resolution peaked in the 2000s; thus, the instances of peacemaking after that could not be emulated in the 2010s.

Other countries besides Nigeria and South Africa led in the creation of the AU, NEPAD, and other institutions that included democracy and human rights norms. Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Senegal are cases of foreign policy innovation, including human rights promotion, where one of the three explanatory variables is missing. Ethiopia is a large state with an exceptional leader—Prime Minister Meles Zenawi—that was swept along by the democratic wave but halted democratization in 2005. Especially before 2005, the country demonstrated foreign policy innovation and activism, including some support of democracy and human rights norms through the AU and NEPAD—siding with Mbeki over al-Gaddafi—as ways to alleviate Ethiopia’s debt burden. After the 2005 crackdown, Ethiopia’s commitment to AU and NEPAD norms waned. Rwanda is a small, nondemocratic state with an exceptional leader—Paul Kagame—that the democratic wave touched but did not change. The United States and European powers did not pressure Rwanda to democratize due to “genocide guilt” and impressive socioeconomic development. Despite Rwandan government repression, the country supported human rights against genocide through the UN and AU, especially by sending battalions for peace operations that protected civilians. However, Kagame and Rwanda resisted democracy promotion. Senegal is a small democracy with significant leaders—presidents Léopold Senghor (1960–78), Adbou Diouf (1978–2000), and Abdoulaye Wade (2000–12)—who effectively promoted the African Renaissance and democracy and human rights in the NEPAD, AU, and ECOWAS despite limited foreign policy resources.

While Nigeria demonstrated foreign policy innovation and promotion of democracy and human rights in the AU, NEPAD, and ECOWAS under President Obasanjo, South Africa enjoyed a longer period that started with President Man-

dela in 1994 and continued with Mbeki. Subsequently, domestic challenges and weak leaders weighed more heavily on Nigeria after 2007, as foreign policy focused on economic diplomacy to alleviate debt and depressed oil prices and diversification. South Africa's soft power and stronger economic standing attracted the G-20 and BRICS, which enabled Pretoria to overcome the Zuma presidency and other domestic challenges and continue some foreign policy innovation. The removal of Zuma and installation of Ramaphosa have enabled South Africa to launch a new wave of foreign policy innovation and democracy and human rights promotion. While President Buhari brought hope that Nigeria could regenerate Abuja's foreign policy, domestic challenges and his authoritarian personality have confined the country to economic diplomacy.

### **Dr. Stephen F. Burgess**

Dr. Burgess has been a professor of international security studies at US Air War College since June 1999. He has published books and numerous articles, book chapters, and monographs on Asian and African security issues, peace and stability operations, and weapons of mass destruction. His books include *The United Nations under Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1992-97* and *South Africa's Weapons of Mass Destruction*. His recent journal articles include "Russia, South Asia, and the United States: A New Great Game?," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 2, no. 3 (Fall 2019); "A Pathway toward Enhancing the US Air Force-Indian Air Force Partnership and Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific Region," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2019); "Multilateral Defense Cooperation in the Indo-Asia Pacific Region: Tentative Steps toward a Regional NATO?" *Contemporary Security Policy* (December 2017); "Rising Bipolarity in the South China Sea: The Impact of the US Rebalance to Asia on China's Expansion," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 1 (April 2016); and "The US Pivot to Asia and Renewal of the US-India Strategic Partnership," *Comparative Strategy* 34, no. 44 (July 2015). He holds a doctorate from Michigan State University (1992) and has been on the faculty at the University of Zambia, University of Zimbabwe, Vanderbilt University, and Hofstra University.

### **Notes**

1. *Governance and Development*, World Bank, 1992. The Bank promoted the concept of good governance in the 1980s and 1990s as part of persuading states to fight corruption and make themselves attractive to foreign investment.

2. Dennis Kumetat, "Gaddafi's Southern Legacy: Ideology and Power Politics in Africa," in *The Rise of the Global South: Philosophical, Geopolitical and Economic Trends of the 21st Century*, ed. Justin Dargin (Singapore: World Scientific, 2013), 125-52. In addition, relatively small but oil-rich autocracies—Algeria and Libya—helped lead in innovation in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as did Senegal, a small democracy.

3. Chris Alden and Maxi Schoeman, "South Africa's symbolic hegemony in Africa," *International Politics* 52, no. 2 (February 2015): 239-54.

4. In terms of the World Bank's purchasing power parity measure, China's GDP is 27 trillion USD; India's is 11.5 trillion USD; Nigeria's is 1.2 trillion USD; and South Africa's is 813 billion USD. Nevertheless, South Africa is the African representative of the G-20 (Nigeria is excluded).

5. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "International Linkage and Democratization," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (July 2005): 20-34.

6. Seva Gunitsky, "Democratic Waves in Historical Perspective," *Perspectives on Politics* 16, no. 3 (September 2018): 634-51.

7. Thomas Carothers, *Critical Missions: Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).

8. In contrast to some democratizing states, India had been a large democratic state since 1947 and did not promote democracy and human rights in Asia or South Asia.

9. Nelli Babayan and Thomas Risse, eds. *Democracy Promotion and the Challenges of Illiberal Regional Powers* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

10. David Patrick Houghton, *The Decision Point: Six Cases in U.S. Foreign Policy Decision-making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

11. Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Henry and Holt, 2009).

12. While South Africa and Nigeria were less innovative after 2008, both agreed to the use of force to protect human rights in Libya, while Nigeria led in democratizing Gambia in 2016 and South Africa in stabilizing Lesotho in 2018. In addition, it was difficult to create new African institutions, as the AU, NEPAD, and APSA were already established.

13. Both South Africa and Nigeria are relatively large in that they have over 300 billion USD in gross domestic product (much higher in purchasing power parity terms).

14. In analyzing the correlation between foreign policy innovation and size, leadership, and democratization, one must take into account the fact that the rate of institution creation was at its peak, 2000–2003, for various reasons, and that new institutions logically could not be created after that. In addition, African conflicts peaked in the 1990s, and the rate of conflict resolution peaked in the 2000s, so the instances of peacemaking after that could not be emulated.

15. Freedom House has classified South Africa as “free” since 1994, even though the ANC has dominated politics and government since then. Since 1999, Freedom House has classified Nigeria as “partly free” with gradually improving political rights as opposed to gradually declining civil liberties.

16. Alden and Schoeman, “South Africa’s,” 239–54. The foreign policy bureaucracy underwent reform after the Muldergate scandal of the late 1970s and became more professional.

17. Scott Thomas, *The Diplomacy of Liberation: Foreign Relations of the ANC since 1960* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 164.

18. Thomas, *Diplomacy of Liberation*, 164. The SADC was the Southern African Development Coordination Committee (SADCC) from 1980 to 1994.

19. Alden and Schoeman, “South Africa’s,” 239–54.

20. James J. Hentz, *South Africa and the Logic of Regional Cooperation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). Adekeye Adebajo, et al., eds., *South Africa in Africa: the post-apartheid era* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2007).

21. Peter Kagwanja, “Power and Peace: South Africa and the Refurbishing of Africa’s Multilateral Capacity for Peacemaking,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 24, no. 2 (May 2006): 159–86. In the 1990s and 2000s, the following SADC states—Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Malawi, as well as the island states of Mauritius, Madagascar, and Seychelles—aligned with South Africa for a number of reasons. Only Zimbabwe and Angola and, to an extent, Namibia resisted.

22. Nelson Mandela, *Notes to the Future: Words of Wisdom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 170.

23. South African Department of Defence, *Defence in a Democracy: White Paper on National Defence* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1996).

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# How the Israel Defense Forces Might Confront Hezbollah

DR. EHUD EILAM

The inevitability of another war between Israel and the Hezbollah terrorist organization seems nearly certain; however, at present, neither belligerent in this longstanding feud desires immediate conflict.<sup>1</sup> The two sides confronted each other in Lebanon in the 1980s and in the 1990s, until the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) withdraw from that country in 2000, concluding a campaign that had come to be known as the “Israeli Vietnam.” In 2006, war erupted between the two combatants again, lasting a mere 34 days.<sup>2</sup> That war ended in a draw. Since then, the two sides have been preparing for another round.

In recent years, the IDF has been adapting to fight hybrid forces such as Hezbollah and Hamas, instead of focusing on the militaries of Arab states like Syria and Egypt. This transformation has been a challenging process, although overall the risk of state-on-state war is much lower for Israel in comparison with the era of high intensity wars (1948–1982). Even a coalition of hybrid forces together with the Syrian military in its current strength does not pose an existential threat to Israel, in contrast to the danger of an alliance between Arab states from the 1950s to the 1970s. However the IDF still must be ready for major combat.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2012, Israel has carried out hundreds of sorties in Syria, aiming to reduce as much as possible the delivery of weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>4</sup> Israel avoided directly attacking Hezbollah in Lebanon, although some in Israel support a preemptive strike against the terrorist organization.<sup>5</sup> There is a low probability that Israel will conduct a massive surprise offensive against Hezbollah due to its cost and the uncertainty of the outcome. Despite the military advantages of capturing Hezbollah off guard, Israel prefers to continue to contain the organization. Israel hopes that like another of its enemies, Syria, Hezbollah might also decline through other means, without confronting this group on the battlefield. After all, Syria once possessed a quite large and powerful military, which had been the IDF’s main enemy since the mid-1980s, until the civil war in Syria brought a sharp decline of the Syrian military. Hezbollah might lose much of its power if its Iranian patron weakens in the wake of new sanctions imposed upon the rogue state. Sometimes waiting, while maintaining deterrence, is the best way to handle a foe. However, there might yet be a war between Israel and Hezbollah, with or without Iranian instigation.

## **Firepower of Both Sides**

The IDF outnumbers Hezbollah in troops and weapon systems. However, Hezbollah has up to 150,000 rockets and missiles that can reach every spot in Israel.<sup>6</sup> Hezbollah might fire more than a 1,000 missiles and rockets a day during a war. The group's leaders, however, will be aware that doing so will bring a fierce Israeli response. While Iran too might seek to avoid a full-scale war, a clash between Israel and Hezbollah might still lead to such a conflict.

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) has defense systems, such as the Iron Dome, that can intercept only a portion of Hezbollah's projectiles due to their vast numbers.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, defense systems cannot destroy the missiles and rockets on the ground before they are launched. This is why the IAF has been training to launch thousands of sorties in a very short time, aiming at destroying Hezbollah targets, including rocket launchers.<sup>8</sup> Israel's F-35 could take part in the war, but this highly advanced aircraft is needed mostly against advanced air defenses that Hezbollah does not have. Both sides will use unmanned aerial vehicles for gathering intelligence and attacks.

## **The Israeli Offensive**

On April 2018, the IDF published an updated version of the *Israel Defense Forces Strategy Document*, which strives for a decisive and quick victory.<sup>9</sup> This is a tall order considering the strength and elusive structure of Hezbollah and its roots inside the Lebanese Shiite community.

The IDF has several potential fronts—mostly Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Syria and Iran in the Golan Heights.<sup>10</sup> If Lebanon is its only front, then the IDF will dispatch its best units there. Even if Israel faces more than one front, the fight in Lebanon will be its top priority. However, it does not make sense to overcrowd south Lebanon, with its narrow and often winding routes. IDF vehicles might be stuck in traffic jams, including during combat, so only the head of the columns would be able to fight back.

One of Hezbollah's main strongholds is in Dahiyeh, a suburb of the Lebanese capital, Beirut, which is about 55 miles north of the Israeli border.<sup>11</sup> The last time the IDF reached Beirut by land was in the 1982 war, and getting there took about a week. During high-intensity wars such as those of 1956 and 1967, the IDF advanced dozens of miles quickly. However, the IDF penetrated less than two miles in its wars in the Gaza Strip in 2008–2009 and 2014; so, Israeli forces were not tested in launching a massive offensive deep inside hostile territory. The IDF has to be skilled in this matter, even if it does not prove necessary to approach Beirut again.

The IDF might penetrate several dozen miles into Lebanon without remaining there for more than a few weeks or so. Israel does not want to renew its costly deployment in Lebanon. Instead, the IDF will stay there only long enough to annihilate Hezbollah's military infrastructure, mostly rockets and missiles, and then withdraw.

The IDF would need to concentrate on Hezbollah's centers of gravity, and there might be more than one. The Israeli offensive might be launched on a wide front to quickly reach many objectives and to save time, while putting maximum pressure on Hezbollah. In addition, due to the rugged terrain in south Lebanon, the IDF would strive to exploit any accessible road. This maneuver would also allow the IDF to gain momentum, which would help in shortening the war.

### **Manpower and the Corps**

The IDF, in a major war, relies on its citizen—active-duty personnel and reservists—who might be mobilized under fire from Lebanon. Leaving their families while rockets are striking their neighborhoods might cause some troops to hesitate. Hezbollah might also hit bases, where Israeli soldiers get their weapons, vehicles, materiel, and so forth. Israeli troops will continue to be exposed to Hezbollah's fire on roads to the front and in assembly areas. Where there are no bunkers, Israeli forces require basic shelters, such as foxholes. Israeli troops have to be aware that sometimes they have to dig their own cover.



*(Reuters photo by Baz Ratner)*

**Figure 1. Urban warfare training.** A view of a mock village set up by the Israeli army to conduct urban warfare exercises, at the urban warfare training center at Tze'elim military base in southern Israel.

For decades, the IDF has been training in urban warfare, since Hezbollah deploys its rockets in towns and villages across Lebanon. In 2005, the IDF built an urban warfare training center at the Tze'elim Army Base in the Negev Desert. This has become one of the most technologically advanced training centers in the world. At Tze'elim and other Israeli bases, there are mock villages designed to look like those the IDF may encounter in Lebanon, replete with homes, mosques, and clothes drying in the air.<sup>12</sup>

The IDF's sophisticated command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) network assists ground, air, and sea operations and upgrades the cooperation among Israeli services.<sup>13</sup> Despite the clear advantages of this advanced technology, the IDF should not rely on it too much, because it is vulnerable to cyberattacks. There is also the problem of overwhelming officers with too much information. The IDF ran training in which Israeli troops had to quickly adjust to carrying out their missions without their cutting-edge gear.

In recent decades the IDF infantry became more important than armor, due to the nature of the fight against hybrid forces, particularly in urban areas. However, tanks are still required to support the infantry. Tanks are also needed in generating the momentum. Therefore, the spearhead of a hypothetical Israeli offensive would include elite armored units such as the 401st "Iron Tracks" Brigade, with its Merkava Mark IV tanks.<sup>14</sup> The Israeli military industry produces ammunition for urban warfare, such as the M339 multipurpose tank cartridge.<sup>15</sup>

Israeli infantry such as the crack 1st "Golani" and the 35th "Paratroopers" brigades will move with Achzarit and the Namer heavy-armored personal carriers along with the vulnerable and antiquated M113.<sup>16</sup> The latter should be used to transfer troops to the battlefield but not to storm the enemy, unless there are no other choices. Even then, some Israeli troops might prefer to walk near the M113—the perception being it is safer than being inside one.

The IDF's combat engineers are essential in clearing routes from land mines and improvised explosive devices and paving new roads to bypass those that would be heavily mined or damaged. Combat engineers would assist also in fighting underground and in crossing rivers in Lebanon. Hezbollah might sabotage bridges; so, the IDF will have to build new ones, doing so under fire. If the IDF is not well-prepared to conduct such measure, casualties and delays are likely.

Israeli ground units will strike deep inside Lebanon—not only by land but from the air as well, with the IDF's new 89th "Oz" Commando Brigade, which was established in 2015.<sup>17</sup> The brigade will land its troops from CH-53 Yasur and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. Parachuting is also an option. Other Special Forces and high quality units will contribute in attacking key targets and collect-

ing intelligence. This effort must be coordinated as part of the overall Israeli offensive to have a positive effect.

In the 1982 war, the IDF carried out a relatively substantial amphibious landing on 6 June—sort of an Israeli D-Day, if you will—although leadership failed to fully exploit the landing. The lessons from that operation cannot be implemented if the IDF does not possess a real option to again conduct such a major amphibious assault. However, the IDF has hesitated to develop this aspect because of other priorities, budget constraints, and a dearth of experience in the complicated field, which demands a tight cooperation among air, sea, and land units. This represents a missed opportunity. Lebanon's long coastline offers a means for the IDF to outflank Hezbollah from the sea and then strike the latter from its flanks and the rear.

### **Hezbollah's Intentions and Capabilities**

Hezbollah is in a precarious position. While the group attempts to balance its commitments, domestic and international, within the Levant, it is leery of prompting another major conflict at present. However, each measure that the group implements to counter possible Israeli attacks makes the likelihood of just such a conflagration more probable.<sup>18</sup>

On 3 January 2020 the United States killed Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force. Israel welcomed the attack. Soleimani was one of Israel's most dangerous foes, who among others helped Hezbollah to receive weapons. Despite this setback, Hezbollah was careful not to provoke Israel, at least not in the weeks after the assassination. However, Hezbollah might be involved later on in an Iranian retribution against the United States and/or Israel, in the Middle East or elsewhere.

Hezbollah has significant influence in the Lebanese parliament and government as well. Through those bodies, Hezbollah tries to hide its terrorist identity, pretending to be a legitimate party. The group also has ties to the Lebanese military.

In 2018–2019, the IDF found and destroyed tunnels leading from Lebanon to Israel.<sup>19</sup> In the next war Hezbollah will try, above and below the ground, to infiltrate its operatives into Israel. Its cadres can seize a very tiny piece of land or part of a village near the border. The IDF will quickly kill or capture Hezbollah's fighters who breach into Israel. However, Hezbollah will, of course, portray that incursion—no matter how brief or unproductive—as a victory, necessitating that Israel emphasize the attempt as only a failed raid.

Hezbollah hides its rockets in urban areas. Israeli firepower, aimed at the rockets there, might inflict enormous collateral damage to those places and those living there. Thus, Israel, before striking towns and villages that serve as a fire base,

will allow Lebanese noncombatants to leave their houses, knowing that such a warning gives Hezbollah ample time to better establish its position.

Hezbollah has a few tanks, including Soviet-era T-72 main battle tanks, which will be exposed to Israeli air strikes.<sup>20</sup> During any Israeli offensive inside Lebanon, Hezbollah would have no ability to conduct major counterattacks due to Israel's overwhelming firepower and control of the air. Hezbollah could ambush small Israeli forces on a company-level or smaller, particularly vulnerable ones like those from the logistic corps. For the IDF, preventing Hezbollah from moving men and supply from one spot to another inside Lebanon could be difficult if it is done in small scale at night, exploiting the rough terrain Hezbollah knows well.

On 14 August 2019, Gen Hossein Salami, the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, said that "Hezbollah has now developed such an extent of power through the experience of confrontation against proxy wars that it is now able to wipe the Zionist regime off the map in any possible war by itself."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Hezbollah gained many lessons in the Syrian Civil War that could help the group in confronting Israel. However, a fight against the IDF would be quite a big challenge for Hezbollah, since the IDF is much better armed and trained than Syrian rebels. In Syria, Hezbollah also enjoyed air superiority, due to the support of the Russian and Syrian air forces, which will not participate in the war against Israel. Instead, the IAF's F-15 and F-16 multirole fighter aircraft will rule the skies and will bomb Hezbollah throughout Lebanon. While Hezbollah has some air defenses that might shoot down a few Israeli aircraft, such losses would not stop the IAF. Therefore, Hezbollah has to adjust from having air superiority and air support, as was the case in Syria, to a new reality in any conflict in Lebanon.

In the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah lost more than 2,000 dead, a significant cost for this group.<sup>22</sup> The fear of paying an even a higher price if the group confronts Israel, besides the huge damage that will be inflicted to Lebanese towns and villages, deters Hezbollah from getting involved in a full-scale war against Israel. If Iran demands that Hezbollah attack Israel, the group's leaders can try to limit the clash in the hope of reducing the casualties and the damages it can ill-afford to absorb.

## **Conclusion**

The IDF has an overwhelming edge over Hezbollah, but it would not be easy for Israel to defeat this tough and elusive hybrid force. The two sides will continue to try to avoid a war because of such a conflict's substantial cost for both of them. Israel will probably not launch a preemptive attack but will go on containing Hezbollah as much as possible. However, if Israel decides to engage Hezbollah, such an undertaking should be done in the best terms, i.e. when the IDF can

capture Hezbollah by surprise. Either way, the IDF plans to conduct a massive air, land, and sea offensive, aiming at gaining a quick and decisive victory.

### Dr. Ehud Eilam

Dr. Ehud Eilam has been dealing and studying Israel's national security for more than 25 years. He served in the Israeli Air Force and later worked for the Israeli Ministry of Defense as a researcher. He has a PhD and has published six books, including *Containment in the Middle East* (Potomac Books, 2019); *Israel, the Arabs, and Iran: International Relations and Status Quo, 2011–2016* (Routledge, 2019); and *Israel's Military Doctrine* (Lexington Books, 2018).

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# Aid to Anti-Assad Forces Became the Most Expensive US Covert Action

DR. DAVID S. SORENSON

INTERVIEW BY NUÑO RODRÍGUEZ

## Introduction

In December 2019, political scientist Mr. Nuño Rodríguez, founder and director of the *Quixote Globe*, interviewed Dr. David S. Sorenson, professor of international security studies at the US Air War College (AWC). Dr. Sorenson received his PhD from the University of Denver and has served on the faculties of the University of Colorado at Denver, Denison University, and the Mershon Center at The Ohio State University before joining AWC. Dr. Sorenson has served as chair of the International Security Studies Section of the International Studies Association and chair of the International Security and Arms Control Section of the American Political Science Association. He has written numerous books on defense policy, military aviation, and Middle Eastern affairs.

## Interview

**Rodríguez:** Dear Dr. Sorenson, thank you very much for attending our interview. It is an honor to have your knowledge and experience in *Quixote Globe*. We would like to discuss with you the situation of the conflict in Syria from various angles. Since World War II, the United States has had a special interest in Syria. What was that interest based on?

**Sorenson:** Since 1946, American policy in the Middle East generally and on Syria in particular focused on limiting Soviet expansion. The US saw Iran and Turkey as most threatened by Soviet forces, as the Soviets were mobilizing troops on Iran's border, and the USSR was demanding concessions from Turkey on access to the Mediterranean, including the building of Soviet bases on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Believing that colonialism was a key factor in allowing the Soviets to expand into former colonial countries, Pres. [Harry] Truman endorsed Syrian independence and opposed France's efforts to reinstall the League of Nations mandate on Syria. Once containment became global after the implementation of NSC-68, Syria, as a developing country, became important to the United States, as it has borders right below the borders of Turkey and Iran, which in turn border the former Soviet Union. The "domino theory" implied that once the

dominos next to the USSR fell, they would continue to fall, and thus if Turkey and Iran fell to the Soviets, Syria would be next.

There was also concern that early nationalist movements in countries like Syria were vulnerable to penetration by communist forces in those countries. Thus, there were American efforts to install or change regimes based on a sense of their vulnerability to or preference for communism.

**Rodríguez:** Different US administrations have planned and tried to execute actions to redirect Syrian politics, such as CIA Operations Straggle and Wappen. What dangers did Syrian policies pose to the United States?

**Sorenson:** Before Straggle and Wappen, the CIA supported the overthrow of Shukri al-Quwatli [the first president of independent Syria] in May 1949, based on Quwatli's refusal to sign a pact with Israel, but also because he refused to allow an oil pipeline from Saudi Arabia to Lebanon to run through Syria (which reflected the existing tensions between the Gulf monarchies and the other Arab republics). Husni al-Zaim replaced Quwatli in a bloodless coup, though the US effort backfired when Quwatli returned to power shortly and shifted his preference to the Soviet Union and Nasserist Egypt. A second coup attempt failed. Fearful of the advance of communism in Syria (as the US frequently confused communism with nationalism), the CIA organized Operations Straggle and Wappen in 1956–1957, though both failed (partly because the first was to occur during the 1956 Suez War, where the US supported Egypt). To the question, these coup support efforts were consistent with the prevalent American belief that the spread of communism globally by the Soviet Union (and in Asia by the People's Republic of China) was a menace to the United States. US Syrian policies of the time also showed the extent that the United States was willing to use disguised coup support to topple governments that the US believed to be pro-Marxist. In the end, almost all of these CIA coup policies failed, and the United States moved away from them, in favor of more traditional instruments of power.

**Rodríguez:** To what extent have Syria's hostile relations with Israel influenced American policies?

**Sorenson:** Pres. [Dwight] Eisenhower was hesitant to support Israel, particularly after the 1956 Suez War; so, it fell to Pres. [John] Kennedy to voice support for Israel based on its perceived value in containing Syria. Kennedy supplied Israel with American air defense systems in response to Syria getting Soviet aircraft, but Kennedy also tried unsuccessfully to limit Israel's nuclear weapons program, which he feared would escalate regional tensions and give the Soviets an advantage in Syria. Pres. Lyndon Johnson was more favorably disposed toward Israel

and increased American military and economic assistance to it after the 1967 war, though Johnson was also concerned that Israeli occupation of Golan would spur Syria to take action to take it back (he was correct). [Pres. Richard] Nixon, under Secretary of State [Henry] Kissinger's influence, took a more balanced approach to Israel and Syria, believing that he could reduce the Syrian threat to Israel by improving US–Syrian relations and détente with the USSR. Subsequent US administrations built on that process and emphasized a balance between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and as Syria cut its ties to the former USSR, its perceived danger to Israel lessened. As Syria faded as a regional threat, with its forces evicted from Lebanon after the Rafiq Hariri assassination, the United States shifted its Israeli security focus from Syria to Lebanon and its Iranian-linked militia, Hezbollah, and Iran itself.

**Rodríguez:** The Syrian conflict came about somewhat unexpectedly; what were the domestic politics that triggered an armed struggle with multiple actors on the ground? Why did the Islamic State choose Syria as a field of operations, being Syria was one of the most stable countries in the region?

**Sorenson:** The Syrian Civil War of 2011–present opened the door for the Islamic State, or ISIS. It started when Bashar al-Assad turned loose the jihadi arrested after the abortive Hama uprising in 1982, sending them to Iraq in 2003 to counter the Americans. As the Syrian Civil War created vast ungoverned spaces after its March 2011 initiation, some of the Syrian jihadists who had joined ISIS in Iraq returned to Syria. They returned partly because they were originally Syrians and had family and clan connections in Syria. The other reason was because the Syrian town of al-Dabiq is the site of a prophecy, allegedly by the Prophet Mohammed, that the final battle between Islam and the “Romans” (literally the Christian West) would begin at al-Dabiq. ISIS propaganda often featured al-Dabiq. ISIS also used Syria to fill its coffers with loot, taking Syrian oil, Syrian antiquities, and the contents of Syrian banks to fund its operations. It was relatively easy for ISIS to loot Syria, given the lack of security in the areas impacted by the civil war.

**Rodríguez:** From the beginning, the United States has seen the al-Assad regime as the main culprit of the situation and has made repeated denunciations of its government. What factors are similar from al-Assad and terrorist groups according to the United States? Why does the United States believe that both need to be fought?

**Sorenson:** The first concern with the Hafiz al-Assad regime was its Ba'ath Socialist ideology, which some in the United States confused with proto-Marxism. The other concern was Assad's relationship with the former USSR, which supplied

Assad with weapons and training. Cold War thinking persisted in the United States about the USSR using proxy forces like Syria to advance its own interests. The other concern was Assad's position against Israel, and the gains Syria briefly made in the 1973 war only reinforced the US belief that Assad wanted to eliminate Israel (it is much more likely that Assad wanted to gain back Syrian territory lost in 1967). Yet the United States distinguished Assad from Middle East terrorist groups by showing a willingness to negotiate with him a year after the 1973 war, as the United States managed to get Israel to withdraw from a strip of land on Golan, allowing the creation of a disengagement zone patrolled by the UN. Official US policy is to never negotiate with terrorist groups (though there have been exceptions), thus, the US willingness to negotiate with Assad showed that America was making a distinction between Syria and terrorist groups.

**Rodríguez:** What logistic support has the United States yielded to the armed opposition to al-Assad?

**Sorenson:** The United States delayed providing support to the anti-Assad forces for a while, trying to determine exactly who they were. Concerned that the jihadi Sunni Muslims led the opposition, the Obama administration tried to locate secular forces and settled on the Free Syrian Army and its affiliates. The problem was that the Free Syrian Army, founded in 2011 mostly by Syrian army deserters, fragmented into numerous groups with conflicting goals. While some subgroups had no particular ideology, others had Sunni Salafist leanings; thus, the Obama administration was reluctant to support them. Yet the CIA began to support certain opposition groups in early 2013, though it is not clear how carefully the agency vetted each group. The supplies included small arms, training, and money paid to commanders. By 2015, aid to anti-Assad forces became the most expensive US covert action program in history, topping 1 billion USD. However, some of the funds and arms wound up in the hands of violent extremists, while some of the troops with the units funded by the United States defected to other groups, taking their arms with them. After the rise of ISIS in June 2014, more US aid went to groups professing to be anti-ISIS, but some of these groups had violent jihadi orientations. It was also the case that the anti-Assad groups were disorganized, had no unified strategy, and sometimes wound up fighting each other. Finally, in June 2017, Pres. [Donald] Trump cut off aid to anti-Assad groups, a move that drew criticism from some of his allies, including Senators [John] and [Lindsey] Graham.

**Rodríguez:** As the conflict inside Syria was radicalized, more regional actors were taking part in the war. What has made Syria a turning point for the regional policy of Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Iraq?

**Sorenson:** There are several reasons for these turning points. The first is that Assad received support from Iran and Hezbollah, giving Shi'a groups a significant foothold in the Levant. This factor drew Israel and other Arab countries into an uneasy pact, as these countries had mutual interests in curbing Iranian influence in the eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries increased their support for Sunni opposition groups, which only fueled Iran and Hezbollah to increase support to Assad. Turkey also increased its support to anti-Assad groups, though its support was conditioned. Turkey feared that Syrian Kurdish opposition groups would gain autonomy in Syria, and thus Turkey sent some funding to Syrian opposition groups that were both anti-Assad and anti-Kurdish. Some of these groups were extreme jihadi groups, who affiliated with al-Qaeda-linked organizations. Russia also entered the Syrian Civil War on Assad's side, causing concerns across the region. While the benefits to Russia are limited, given the weakness of the Assad regime and the destruction in Syria, the neighboring countries are concerned that Russia will establish a base of influence in the broader Middle East. Both Turkey and Israel have tried to establish working relationships with Russia, now that its Middle East role has increased. Israel prevailed on Putin to get Iran to move its forces at least 70 km from the Israeli-Syrian border after Iranian units fired artillery and rockets into Israel. Turkey and Russia have tried to deconflict their regional aspirations, though they remain mutually suspicious due to long historical differences. Israel and the GCC countries (except Qatar) have repaired relations, out of mutual concern for the growing Russian and Iranian presence in Syria.

**Rodríguez:** What are the reasons for this to be a turning point in international politics?

**Sorenson:** Prior to the Syrian Civil War, international cooperation and the liberal international order were the prevailing mode of international relations, despite the persistence of conflict globally. The internationalization of the Syrian conflict raised real doubts about the validity of the previous international order, and in some ways pushed the region back to an order based more on realism. Mediation by both countries and international/regional organizations failed to find a solution for the Syrian Civil War, and the rise of ISIS during that war only increased the tilt toward realism. Great-power rivalry was increasing despite the events in Syria and beyond, but the Syrian Civil War gave Russia new opportunities, as Russia has positive, if tenuous relations, with Iran, most Arab states, Turkey, and Israel. Russia has no domestic barriers to expansion beyond its laggard economy, while the American public is tiring of two long wars that have cost close to 2 trillion USD just in direct costs. The pressure is to downgrade the importance of

the Middle East for the United States, and thus allowing Russia, as a great power, to expand its influence.

**Rodríguez:** To fight against the Islamic State, the United States sent troops into Syria. How has this impacted relations with the Syrian authorities?

**Sorenson:** The United States largely ignored the Syrian authorities and put troops mostly into northern Syria to support the Syrian Democratic Forces (mostly Kurdish) against ISIS. This is partly because the United States recognized that the Syrian government does not have control of the area where US troops have been deployed. There may have been informal contacts with officials in the Syrian government, but only informal.



*(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jodi Eastham)*

**Figure 1. Continued partnership.** In developments since Dr. Sorenson's interview, US forces have remained in Syria. Soldiers of Bravo Company, 3rd Infantry Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division conduct a patrol in northeast Syria, 30 January 2020. These patrols help maintain security and stability in the region as well as build community support. The Coalition and our Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) partners remain committed to increasing security in northeast Syria, to enable humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and stability operations. Terrorist organizations use ungoverned spaces as safe havens. The more stability that exists in a region, the less opportunities for terrorism to thrive.

**Rodríguez:** What are Washington's relations with the opposition forces, such as the Kurds or the different anti-government militias?

**Sorenson:** The United States has had a mixed record with the anti-government militias. It has supported a few, like the Free Syrian Army, and, more recently, the Syrian Democratic Forces. The reality for the United States is that there are hundreds of these militias, and they frequently evolve and morph into something that they were not originally. No militia or coalition of militias is strong enough to seriously threaten the Assad regime, with its Russian and Iranian support. So the

United States changed from supporting anti-regime militias to supporting anti-ISIS militias in Syria. That was the reason for supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces as they were using Syrian territory to fight both ISIS and Assad. The challenge was that the Syrian Democratic Forces, which are largely Kurdish, also have ties to the Kurdish PKK, and this is why Turkish Pres. [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan demanded that the United States withdraw the American troops between Turkey and the Syrian Democratic Forces. The withdrawal signaled what has been largely obvious, that the Obama administration never relied all that much on militias to overthrow Assad, and Trump has completed the residual American commitment to ending the Assad government.

**Rodríguez:** What have been the main differences between the policies of Obama administration, which entered the conflict, and the Trump administration, which seems primed to exit?

**Sorenson:** The difference, on the one hand, was not that much, as both administrations did not want to make a major American commitment to ousting the Assad government. Obama did lend support to a few militias, but the results were largely disappointing. Obama did try a different technique when Assad used chemical weapons, diplomacy; whereas, Trump used limited military attacks to the two large chemical weapons attacks that happened during his administration.

**Rodríguez:** Does Trump's exit from Syria represent a game-changer in the US geopolitics or is it a strategy change within the same game?

**Sorenson:** I would argue it was a game-changer. The United States has rested its security on forward presence and forward engagement since World War II. So, while it was a minor decision to withdraw American forces from Syria, it was seen widely as a signal that the United States under Trump was withdrawing from its larger global role. The US Syrian withdrawal came as Trump questioned American alliances in both the Pacific and NATO. It came as Trump appeared to downplay the European threat posed by Russia under [Pres. Vladimir] Putin. It came as Trump talked openly about withdrawing residual American forces from Afghanistan and Iraq. Israel and other American friends in the region interpreted the American withdrawal as both a retreat from a region and abandonment of a quasi-ally, the Syrian Kurds.

**Rodríguez:** After Trump's exit, Turkey has entered again in the war scene with virulence. Why is Ankara allowed to engage in large-scale warfare without the permission of the United Nations?

**Sorenson:** Most countries do not regard approval from the UN as essential to enter another country. The United States got an UN endorsement to evict Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait, and to Korea in 1950, but did not get UN permission to send forces to Vietnam, nor for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Turkey most likely knew that Russia would veto any effort to approve its movement of troops into Syria, as Russia has supported and defended the Assad regime.

**Rodríguez:** There were several actors on the ground depending on American protection, such as Syrian Kurds. What policy will be taken to prevent them from being punished by Turkey or Syria?

**Sorenson:** The Syrian Democratic Forces got no protection after the American force withdrawal. Turkish forces attacked them and drove them south. They have been trying to pact with their former enemy, the Assad regime, to protect them from further Turkish attacks. There is an uneasy status quo now, but it is likely that if the Kurdish forces try to regain territory, they will once again draw fire from Turkey. Turkey seems to have a long-term plan to control the 70 km or so of Syrian territory that borders Turkey, and plans to settle Syrian refugees now in Turkey. These refugees are mostly Arab and not Kurd, so there is the risk of further violence in the region.

**Rodríguez:** What predictions can be suggested for the evolution of a conflict that has local, regional, and global connotations?

**Sorenson:** This conflict could last for many more years, in reduced form. It is not likely that the great powers will want to play too strong a role, as the risk of escalation is high. Moreover, the cost of the Syrian Civil War has been catastrophic destruction of Syria, with a 300 billion USD price to take the country back to where it was in 2010. So, having forces in Syria may have relatively marginal value for Russia. Iran is facing pressure domestically to stop funding movements outside of Iran and spend more domestically. Even Hezbollah is withdrawing forces from Syria. Russia has put pressure on remaining Iranian forces in Syria to move at least 70 km from the Israeli border. Thus it appears that all sides understand that the benefits of continued fighting are minimal and have therefore acted to reduce the costs and risks of future conflict. The exception is ISIS, who is now using Syrian territory to rebuild its organization. If it succeeds in doing this, it may draw in a coalition of former rivals who have a common interest in defeating and destroying ISIS.

**Rodríguez:** Dear Dr Sorenson, thank you very much for your attention and your time. It has been a pleasure to draw upon your experience. We hope to have your valuable insight again in the near future.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance*, edited by Ann-Sofie Dahl. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization returns to be the topic of discussion, as the current rhetoric of government leaders challenging the efficacy of NATO and the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula threatens the West's false sense of peace. The United States calls on the NATO members to increase their spending on defense and reach the 2-percent margin, and some NATO members question the American commitment to Article 5. Meanwhile, Russia slowly defies the sovereignty of the Baltic States and the integrity of NATO.

The book *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance*, edited by Ann-Sofie Dahl, focuses on the security issues faced by the Baltic countries, the hybrid warfare tactics used by the Russians, the approach that NATO has taken to address future Russian aggression, and the position of other countries in the Baltic region. This work is a collaboration between experts in the field of international relations, featuring seven professors from the discipline—Christopher Coker, Ann-Sofie Dahl, Andres Kasekamp, Robert J. Lieber, Gudrun Persson, Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, and Håkon Lunde Saxi—the coordinator of the project Security and Defense in Northern Europe in Warsaw, Justyna Gotkowska; the ministerial advisor of the Finnish Ministry of Defense, Karoliina Honkanen; a senior associate in the International Security Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, Claudia Major; the defense adviser of the Embassy of Sweden in Washington, Johan Raeder; the NATO deputy assistant secretary-general for emerging security challenges, Jamie Shea; and the coordinator of a northern security issues research project at the German Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin, Alicia von Voss. All contributors have extensive work and research experience in international relations, security, and NATO. In addition, former NATO Secretary-General and former Prime Minister of Denmark, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, wrote the foreword of the book.

The book begins with the Rasmussen's foreword, which points out the relationship between Russia and the West has worsened with the unlawful Russian annexation of Crimea and the aggressive Russian military exercises in the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, NATO is unprepared to respond to Russian hybrid warfare tactics, although NATO's deterrence has been improving as cooperation among its members increased. Rasmussen concludes by saying that Europe and the United States must do their parts by meeting their military spending responsibilities and reassuring NATO members of their commitment to Article 5. After the foreword section, the book is separated in three parts.

The first four chapters explain the importance of American military presence in Europe, Russian national security doctrine, NATO cooperation programs in the Baltic Sea, and the problems and weaknesses displayed by NATO and its members. Robert J. Lieber argues that American military presence in Europe, especially in the Baltic Sea, is essential for deterrence against Russia and to promote American interest in the region. Gudrun Persson explains that Russia's goal is to create a new global order, stimulate Russian identity in the region, and defend its own interest by any means necessary—military, nonmilitary, and even nuclear. Jamie Shea demonstrates that NATO has developed programs, such as the Readiness Action Plan and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, to stimulate cooperation and increase commitment among NATO members. Christopher Coker warns us about the challenges that the Alliance faces as some members are more focused on the problems of massive immigration, the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, and the rise of China than the situation in the Baltic Sea region.

The next five chapters explore the threat to Baltic States, which potentially face fates similar to that of Ukraine, the antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy in the Baltic Sea, the approach of Poland to the threats of Russia, the perspective of Germany as a major power in the Baltic Sea, and the perspective of Norway on the security of the region. According to Andres Kasekamp, even though the Baltic States have a significant ethnic Russian population living within their borders

and these countries are no strangers to Russian hybrid warfare tactics, there will not be little green men in the Baltics. Kasekamp argues that the Russian populations in the Baltic States are comfortable with having better welfare programs and economic perspectives inside the European Union. Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen explains that Russia sees the A2/AD strategy as fundamental to controlling the Baltic Sea region and illustrates how NATO must increase the cost of a Russian implementation of this strategy. Justyna Gotkowska describes the Polish perspective in the region and emphasizes how Article 5 motivates Poland to actively participate in NATO. On the other hand, Håkon Lunde Saxi, Claudia Major, and Alicia von Voss discuss how Norway is only concerned about the security of its maritime High North and Arctic regions and how Germany assumed a passive posture in the Baltic Sea situation despite its power in that region.

The final three chapters describe the strategic importance of Sweden's Gotland Island in the Baltic Sea, the perspective of Sweden and Finland in relation to the challenges in the region, and the significance of these two nations to NATO as two non-aligned partners. Johan Raeder points out that the Gotland Island is an important territory for Russia to establish an A2/AD strategy. At the same time, Raeder writes that Swedish forces present on Gotland will defend it against Russian attacks. Ann-Sofie Dahl asserts that even though Russia views Sweden and Finland as potential targets, neither of these latter two nations plans to become members of NATO in the near future, instead investing in partnerships with the Alliance. According to Dahl, the position of neutrality holds political significance to the Swedish and Finnish societies. Furthermore, Karoliina Honkanen shows that not only does Finland use NATO programs to develop its national forces but also NATO can count on Finnish support in case of crisis in the Baltic Sea region.

Although the *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance* has less than two-hundred pages, it is a thorough work that explains the situation of the Baltic Sea region. The perspectives of all countries involved in the Baltic Sea, which would be affected by an armed conflict in the region, are assessed in this work. Although the book does not refer to the demographic challenges facing Europe in terms of aging and low birth rates, the experts expose the current direct challenges and threats facing NATO. This book is recommended to anyone interested in the subjects of international relations, international conflict, and/or security and politics—especially to military personal, governmental officials involved in defense, and academicians and students of international relations.

Leandro Guimaraes Froes  
Graduate Student, International Relations  
Troy University

*The End of Strategic Stability? Nuclear Weapons and the Challenge of Regional Rivalries*, edited by Lawrence Rubin and Adam N. Stulberg. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018.

Lawrence Rubin and Adam Stulberg have assembled an expert group of authors to help explore the complex landscape that is strategic stability in the modern era. They believe strategic stability “refers to a condition in which adversaries understand that altering military force posture in response to vulnerability—whether to avoid being emasculated or to preempt one’s opponent—would be either futile or foolish” (4). In the subsequent chapters, the respective authors detail how the nation they are writing about define this concept, those nations’ current trajectories, and how each trajectory stands to alter the overall status quo. In addition to state actors, some chapters allude to the ways nonstate entities or cross-domain deterrence may also factor into the stability equation.

The term *strategic stability* is primarily Western in origin. It developed out of the Cold War era from a dyadic system that was comprised of the United States and the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, strategic stability was never achieved, as both nations were constantly in a state of flux trying to gain a decisive edge over the other. This rivalry continued up to the Soviet Union’s down-

fall in 1991 (44). This state of flux was characterized by the constantly changing dynamics of conventional forces, nuclear armaments, and counter nuclear capabilities. The challenge today is not between two superpowers, but instead involves a myriad of complex relationships, each holding catastrophic potential should deterrence fail.

The volume is separated first into sections, each of which gives an overarching idea that encompasses the chapters within. The chapters follow and reflect on the arguments made by Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the current nuclear states. Breaking the book down in this manner allows each author to focus exclusively on the argument that they are presenting. For much of the time, this method works well. This technique is limiting when the scope of the chapter fails to encompass all possible competitors to a nation. Taken through this lens, chapter 8, which looks at the India–Pakistan relationship could have been further expanded to include China in the analysis of strategic balance in the region.

Another major point of potential conflict against strategic stability is the use or actions of non-state entities. The chapters that address this most readily are chapters 3 and 8. Here, the authors argue that in the dyad between India and Pakistan, Pakistan understands that both its nuclear and conventional forces have not, and likely never will, achieve parity with India's forces (72). As a means of supplementing their forces in the past, Pakistan resorted to funding terrorist organizations to conduct attacks against India, such as the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament and the 2008 attack on Mumbai (218). Happymon Jacob argues that this has upset the stability that was previously in place, as India had no intention of altering the status quo while it had a definitive edge over Pakistan. Use of state-funded terrorism provides the sponsor with a small level of plausible deniability. However, in this instance it is only destabilizing and could potentially lead to greater conflict as India has stated that in the event of future such attacks it would hold Pakistan directly responsible and take counteraction accordingly.

As is the nature of politics between nations, much has changed since 2018 when this volume was published. Several key points such as the effects of the Intermediate Nuclear Firearms (INF) Treaty between the United States and Russia, the signing of the Iran Nuclear Deal (also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA]), or the changes between the 2010 and 2018 US *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) and their effects on policy at the time, are no longer salient or have been significantly altered. While no fault of the editors or authors, the changes that these policies usher in would have made for interesting topics of review under their respective chapters. Given the arguments presented by the authors, these changes would most likely be upsetting for the strategic stability of the nations involved. Regarding the INF, both the United States and Russia accused the other of violating the treaty. The United States was accused of doing so through emplacement of the Mark 41 missile launcher in Poland and Romania, while Russia was accused of developing platforms forbidden by the INF treaty. Now both nations are free to develop capabilities that were previously restricted.

Finally, the JCPOA was not a formal treaty but an agreement between Iran, the United Nations Security Council, and the European Union. In exchange for Iran eliminating its medium-enriched uranium, restricting its low-enriched uranium, reduction of centrifuges, and maintaining compliance with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections, Tehran would receive relief from the heavy sanctions imposed by other nations involved. Consistent with Annie Tracy Samuel's analysis in chapter 5, Iran has viewed the US withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 as a threat to its security and promised to resume enriching uranium beyond levels agreed upon in the JCPOA. If the United States is successful in getting Iran to agree to more permanent measures than the JCPOA called for, then a greater stability would be achieved in the region. If Washington is unsuccessful, then the move to leave the JCPOA could be a steppingstone toward Iran attaining nuclear capabilities.

Rubin and Stulberg sum up the discussions of the edited volume convincingly, stating that there is no consensus about how states understand strategic stability, deterrence, and cross-domain deterrence (299). Without a common understanding of the terms being used and an awareness of cultural and linguistic barriers, strategic stability cannot be achieved. By providing a detailed road map of how the world's current, and potential, nuclear weapon states conceive of strategic stability, the authors have initiated a conversation that needs to be continued now and in the future.

Seth Conor McGeehan  
Graduate Student, Defense and Strategic Studies  
Missouri State University

*Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order*, edited by Nicholas Wright. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2019.

Air University Press and Air University Library have relaunched the Fairchild Series, which is an academic series that publishes cutting-edge research. The series is named after General Muir Stephen Fairchild, who served as the first leader of the Air University, located at the Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. This timely volume discusses the impact of advances in artificial intelligence (AI) that will lead to panoptic surveillance and directly contribute to highly authoritarian forms of political control.

This edited volume aims to prepare Anglo-American security practitioners for the impact of AI-related technologies on a country's domestic political system. This book contains 27 chapters, which is divided into six sections with 24 expert contributors drawing their insights from mixed professional backgrounds. Particularly, this book traces the differential impact of AI technology on competing domestic regime types. Chapters in the book describe how China will seek to further increase its authoritarian control by utilizing AI, while making its citizens prosperous and shielding them from external knowledge influences. The Chinese model of digital authoritarianism or digital social and political control is likely to emerge as a major and direct rival to free, open, and democratic society—a model championed by the Anglo-American alliance. The Russian model, offers a hybrid approach that relies on a variety of manipulative digital tools to destabilize challenger regimes while maintaining tight state control over critical resources and quashing political rivals.

Part 1 of the book with four framing chapters authored by the editor—Nicholas D. Wright—focuses on the impact of AI technologies on domestic politics and its far-reaching impact on the evolving global order. The remaining five sections of the book are filled with contributions from 23 authors, who are some of the world's leading experts in the field of AI and Internet technologies. Part two of the book, with five chapters, focuses on how the Chinese and Russian models of digital authoritarianism are shaping domestic political regimes with tools of surveillance, monitoring, big data-fueled AI led governance, facial recognition, and behavioral pattern recognition. Collectively these technologies are leading to intensifying political control of citizens. The third section of the book is on the export and emulation of Chinese and Russian models of digital authoritarianism to other parts of the world. Part four contains four chapters on how AI technologies influence China's domestic and foreign policy decision making. Focus of the fifth section, with five chapters, is on the various military dimensions of AI and its application to the development of modern weapon systems such as hypersonic glide weapons and enhancement of Chinese command authority through artificial intelligence.

Probably the most provocative section in this book is the final part of the book that focuses on *Artistic Perspectives and the Humanities*. This section draws on science fiction writings, movies, and art to present various telling scenarios of the future. The set of five chapters offers a vivid and frightening rendering of AI driven technological futures such as precognition to prevent crime, drones to monitor public spaces and summarily execute offenders, a color-coded social credit ranking system

to categorize people in a society by obedience to authority, and AI applications that goes beyond facial recognition to diagnosing depression and mood conditions in individuals. Drawing linkages between AI technologies and terrifying dystopian futures, this set of chapters has issued a clarion call to policy makers to develop robust rules and regulations for democratic governance of the digital world without which corporate and authoritarian control will become the norm.

For the purposes of this book, AI is defined as a “constellation of new technologies” that combines big data, machine learning, and digital things (e.g., the “Internet of Things”). Application of AI implies the analysis of data in which inferences from models are used to “predict and anticipate possible future events” (p.3). Critically, what is important to understand is that “AI programs do not simply analyze data in the way they were originally programmed,” instead the AI programs respond “intelligently to new data and adapt their outputs accordingly” (p. 3). Ultimately AI is understood as giving computers new behaviors and knowledge “which would be thought intelligent in human beings” (p. 3).

The authors argue that the greatest strength of AI capabilities are primarily perceptual, the ability to process images, speeches, and other patterns of behavior and choosing bounded actions to guide decision making. Google’s *Deepmind AI* is one such example, which draws data from Google’s datacenters and accurately predicts when the data-load is going to increase or decrease and correctly adjusts the cooling systems for the datacenters (p.7).

This book raises legitimate concerns with regards to singularity that represents the fear that an “exponentially accelerating technological progress will create an AI that exceeds human intelligence and escapes our control” (p. 18). AI systems will self-learn from data without any human input or management. The precise concern is that AI will become super-intelligent, which may “then deliberately or inadvertently destroy humanity” or usher changes that are outside the control of humans (p. 18). The terror of singularity is well captured in the five excellent chapters in the concluding section of the book, which draw on sources from reality, fiction, and art to depict an Orwellian dystopia in which conscious human beings either fight back as depicted in the movie series—*Matrix* or the *Terminator*—or they become mindless tools of these self-thinking and regenerating machines (p. 194).

Middle sections of book focusing on the Chinese model of digital authoritarianism, the hybrid Russian model of authoritarianism, and the American model of digital openness, but dependent on corporate control are temporary predictions of AI usage. The Chinese, Russian, and American models assume that governments could, should, and will be able to control AI and maybe deploy AI toward social control and military applications. “Given the rate of progress, the singularity may occur at some point this century” (p. 18). The lead author, Wright, adds that “although clearly momentous, given that nobody knows when, if or how a possible singularity will occur” and “limits clearly exist on what can sensibly be said or planned for now” (p. 18).

The authors are hoping that humans would be able to master and control AI in the same way that we have been (so far) successful in controlling the use and spread of nuclear weapons, albeit imperfectly. The key assertion here is that much like nuclear weapons, singularity issues related to AI “will require managing within the international order as best we can, although our best will inevitably be grossly imperfect” (p. 18). Our solutions are likely to be incomplete, inadequate, imperfect, and potentially counterproductive because “singularity potentially represents a qualitatively new challenge for humanity that we need to think through and discuss internationally” (p. 18). This is a serious and a major claim of the book that readers should take note!

At a more temporal level, the contributors to this important volume proffer three key recommendations: (1) the United States must pursue robust policies to keep ahead of the digital curve and it must respond by preventing the emergence of a military-industrial complex that is managed by an AI corporate oligopoly and a surveillance state; (2) the United States must build a new global order of norms and institutions required to persuade the world that the American model of

*Book Reviews*

free and open digital democracy offers an attractive and viable alternative to the Chinese and Russian models of digital authoritarianism; and (3) the United States should fight back against digital authoritarianism and hybridism so that it manages the risks associated with a multifaceted interstate AI competition.

**Dr. Srinivasan  
Professor, College of Security Studies  
Daniel K. Inouye Center for Asia-Pacific Studies**

# JEMEAA

600 Chennault Circle  
Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6010  
USA  
Fax: 1 (334) 953-4298  
<http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JEMEAA/>  
ISSN 2639-6351 (print)  
ISSN 2639-636X (online)

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