



المنتدى الاستراتيجي العربي
ARAB STRATEGY FORUM

OUTLOOK FOR CONFLICTS & HOTSPOTS

IN MENA / IN 2017



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region contains a range of armed conflicts in today's world. These conflicts vary greatly in the types of actors involved and the mode of confrontation, ranging from terrorism by sub-state militants to civil wars to proxy warfare between states.

Major civil wars in Syria and Yemen, and civil war-like conditions in Libya, the Sinai Peninsula and south-eastern Turkey will continue to see intense fighting in 2017, as none of the warring sides are in a position to achieve a clear victory.

Potential specific developments include the following:

Sub-state Actors

Sub-state actors remain important players within the region and intensify the strategic competition between MENA states that do not want a major regional war, but are willing to use such actors as proxies.

Islamic State Group (ISG)

ISG's focus may shift to other targets, most notably Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, where their terrorist activity is likely to increase. Overall, ISG remains the Middle East's most prominent sub-state actor, but others may surpass it within the next few years, and al-Qaida may re-emerge as a more prominent force.

Methods of Warfare

Armed groups will continue to use conventional tools of warfare against states, while developing new tools such as legal battles, cyber-attacks and mass attacks via social media.

Iran

The risk of a major regional war involving Iran remains very low, but tensions will increase. Iranian domestic political conflicts could spill over into foreign policy, as the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) looks to assert its authority. This will result in more aggressive IRGC naval actions in the Strait of Hormuz, and in more intense support for Shia militants in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as part of an escalating proxy war between Iran and the Gulf States.

Libya

ISG will shift tactics as it loses territory, hitting high-profile coastal and government targets. In 2017, the conflict is likely to mutate again and revolve around two key players: the UN-brokered Government of National Accord (GNA) and Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar.

Syria

The Pro-Assad forces are expected to face a lack of combat capabilities, as the regime and its allies must provide resources on different battlefronts, failing to control the city of Raqqa.

Yemen

The war in Yemen could stretch into 2017 and grind on until the warring sides are exhausted. The ceasefire talks are unlikely to succeed in the first half of 2017.

Iraq

Mosul is likely to be recaptured by early 2017, and state forces will likely take control of ISG-held cities in Iraq, although they will remain a significant terrorist threat.

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STATE & SUB-STATE ACTORS

Direct fighting between states remains very rare, but proxy warfare is on the rise.

Sub-state actors are an important feature of Middle Eastern conflicts. The Islamic State Group (ISG) is today's most prominent actor. With ISG under pressure in Iraq and Syria, however, others such as Jebhat Fatah al Sham (JFS) and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) may surpass it as a potential threat within the coming years.

Many sub-state actors have risen to the level of proto-state entities, including in their ability to use advanced conventional weapons. One example is ISG's effort to build a 'caliphate' and all associated instruments of government.

While direct fighting between states remains rare, MENA countries that cannot risk an all-out regional war are employing sub-state actors as proxies, intensifying indirect competition. The various conflicts occurring simultaneously feed into one another, making each one more effectual than it would be otherwise.

Iraq

Some muscular Shia militias and Kurdish factions are equipped with missiles and have organised armed forces.

Lebanon

Hezbollah possesses an armed wing that is more powerful than the Lebanese military or indeed the armed forces of many small nations, including major surface-to-surface and anti-shipping missile forces.

Libya

Militias are taking control of energy infrastructure and operating as conventional regional armies.

Turkey

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has sought in the last year to hold urban terrain in the country's south-eastern region.

Syria

Kurdish factions in Syria have coordinated state-like conventional armed forces.

Yemen

Huthi rebels are boasting their own missile capabilities and conventional warfighting forces.

ESTABLISHED STATES

Established states are actively embroiled in 'hot wars' against sub-state challengers. These state actors appear less willing to accept international advice on how to end these struggles but they want foreign military technology and intelligence support nonetheless.

Iraq, Syria and the Yemeni government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi are fighting conventional wars in partnership with international backers to liberate terrain from rebel or terrorist actors.

Egypt and Turkey are fighting to erase aggressive insurgencies in their rural areas: Sinai in Egypt's case and Kurdish south-eastern Turkey in the latter case.

Israel is focused on deterring Hamas and Hezbollah from new offensive actions.

INDIRECT COMPETITION

Direct fighting between states remains exceedingly rare, but indirect military competition is escalating. Iran is building up its missile and conventional military forces, trailing the ongoing military development in the Gulf States. Turkey is risking clashes with both Iraq and Syria by deploying armed forces onto the sovereign territory of these states.

PROXY WARFARE

Strategic competition between MENA states that cannot risk a major regional war is intensifying the use of proxy warfare.

- Iran is backing Iraqi Shia militias, Huthi fighters in Yemen, Shia volunteers in Syria and militants elsewhere across the region.
- Individual Gulf States, Jordan and Turkey are backing Sunni factions within Syria.
- The UAE and Egypt are backing Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army. In the fight against terrorism and its organizations, in agreement with the announcement of the UAE government last April.

IMPACT

As regards the potential results of these conflicts over the course of the next year:

1. Exit of Daesh from Mosul and Raqqa with the creation of alternative strongholds, potentially within Syria.
2. US-Russian accord regarding the ousting of Assad while retaining his regime.
3. Agreement between Turkey and Iran to expand their military control inside Syria under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

The impact of all these conflicts occurring simultaneously may be making each one more intense and impactful than they would have otherwise been. The rise of ISG in Iraq was greatly hastened by the Syrian civil war, which gave the movement a secure base and access to military hardware.

- Resolution of Yemen's civil war is likewise made harder by Iranian-Saudi rivalry.

- Iraqi-Turkish competition could complicate the stabilisation of Mosul.

- Turkey's interventions in Syria and Iraq are tied to its domestic struggle against the PKK.

The international community has little or no ability to manage and resolve so many conflicts. Each competition feeds many others, and ISG will exploit the full range to find new environments in which to develop safe havens.

METHODS OF WARFARE

Armed groups will continue to use conventional tools of warfare against states, while developing new tools such as legal battles, cyber-attacks and mass attacks via social media.

Conventional attacks will continue to play an important role in MENA conflicts, but irregular methods will increasingly be used to effect. Protests and provocations of security forces, as well as proxy warfare including cyberattacks, social media trolling and 'lawfare' are among the non-conventional methods that will be deployed in 2017.

FIRST: CONVENTIONAL WARS

Armed groups will continue to expand their military attacks inside one state and across state borders in the Middle East, including:

LAND

In Iraq, Syria and perhaps Yemen large mechanised ground forces will operate as brigades, divisions and even as corps-sized units. Heavy rocket and tube artillery plus close air support, armoured attack helicopters and armed drones will continue to play a key role in the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Yemen and Libya.

AIR

In the aerial sphere, there will be an ongoing aerial blockade by the Gulf Coalition of Huthi-held areas, made possible by the air superiority of Saudi Arabian and UAE combat aircraft. In the Gulf, there will be a growing Iranian surface-to-air missile threat as new S-300 PMU systems are deployed and appear in the Gulf waterways.

SEA

In the maritime arena there is also likely to be a wide range of traditional naval power projection missions. Yemen will be kept under and arms blockade backed by the United Nations (UN) by both the Gulf Coalition and international navies. Bab el-Mandeb Strait can be expected to be the scene of escalating tension in 2017 as Iran seeks to establish a more regular naval flotilla presence and as Huthi rebels make periodic use of anti-shipping missiles to harass Gulf Coalition shipping and even international naval vessels and commercial traffic.

Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGC-N) attack boats will continue to harass United States (US) vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz and an expected toughening of US rules of engagement early in a new presidency will raise the risk of US-Iranian naval clashes.

SECOND: NEW MODELS OF WARFARE

IRREGULAR WARFARE

Several forms of irregular warfare will be used in the year ahead.

- Probable protests and provocations of security forces in Bahrain and perhaps Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province
- Parallel anti-tourism terrorist campaigns and conventional military attacks by the PKK and other Kurdish militants in Turkey or by the Islamic State Group (ISG) in Sinai, Egypt

Non-kinetic options will also be used more regularly.

GREY ZONE CONFLICT

'Gray zone conflict' will also be a growing area of warfare practised by Iran and its proxies in the MENA region. Iran will ramp up these kinds of attacks on Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the US in the coming year, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandab.

A result of some failures that these groups may face on the battlefield, they will resort to developing their models of warfare and instruments of conflict against states, which requires them to begin creating new models; among them cyber-attacks, mass attacks via social media and legal battles.

1. Cyber Attack:

These groups will seek to recruit cyber-armies from their supporters, worldwide or local, urging them to target foundations, organizations and governments that oppose their war in the region. For example, some of the attacks may target government officials and ministers in Iraq, Syria, Jordan and the GCC states.

2. Mass attacks via social media:

These organizations will rely on broadcasting undocumented information and data to mobilize new supporters from around the world on the one hand, as well as to cast doubt on official governmental data and information regarding their fight against these groups or their victory on the ground on the other hand. This is in addition to broadcasted information and clips meant to both appeal to the masses and be used as a legal basis for prosecuting some governments.

3. Legal battles:

These groups will rely on support of some regional governments in preparing legal files to prosecute some states before international courts to gain international recognition of the necessity of their representation in any political resolution.

THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP

The broader struggle against the region's most prominent sub-state actor will continue.

ISG is expected to develop its position across the region, mounting attacks in 'provinces' which have been specifically identified by the group. Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are all potential ISG targets in the coming year.

The Islamic State Group (ISG) can be expected to develop its position in several 'provinces' that it has declared.

Egypt & Sinai

ISG will aim to expand its operations beyond Sinai to include terrorist attacks in Cairo. Recent terrorist incidents, however, have been attributed to newly emerged groups, which possibly were a reaction to the brutal methods employed by the Egyptian security services against political Islamists. These groups are likely to persist in their attempts to undermine President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi's regime, but the regime's suppression will likely hinder them from expanding.

Jordan

Amman's counter-terrorism effort against ISG and Jebhat Fatah al-Shams is underperforming, suggesting that its vaunted security services may have declined in effectiveness. Jordan could face a situation akin to Saudi Arabia in 2003-2004, suffering one or more major terrorist attacks.

Saudi Arabia & the Gulf States

ISG networks in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain could intensify their operations. Their focus will be divided between Shia targets (to stoke sectarian tensions and Shia militancy), government personnel, western civilians and military personnel.

IRAN

The risk of a major regional war involving Iran remains low, but tensions are on the rise.

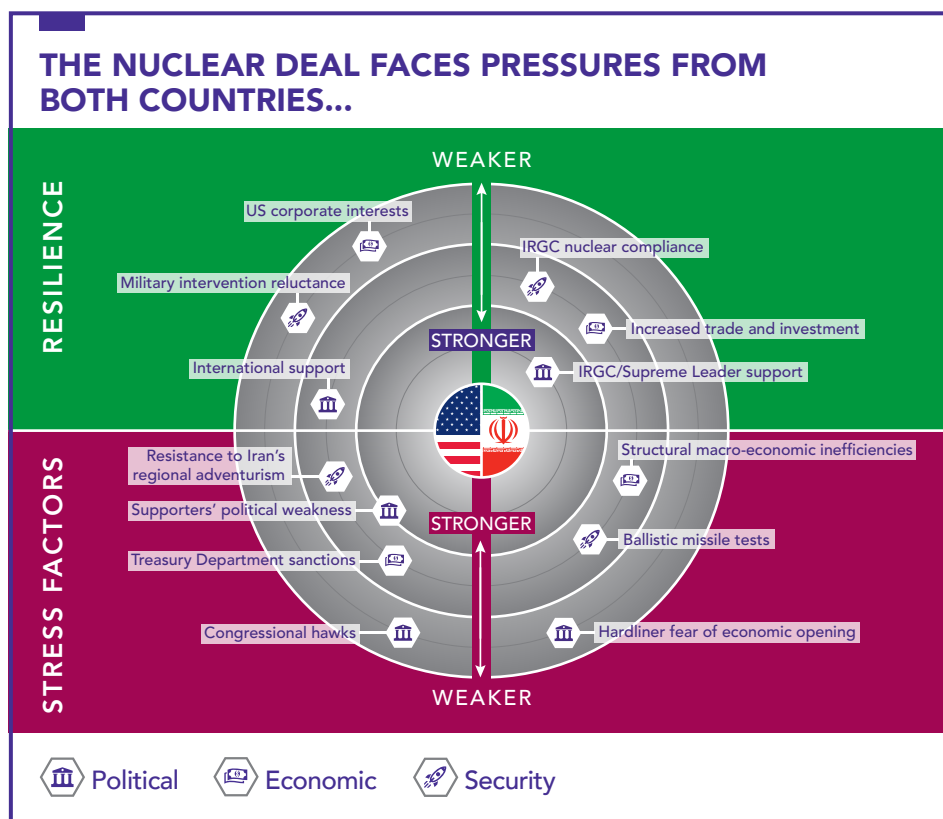
The risk of a major war is low, but domestic debates over foreign policy are escalating. President Hassan Rouhani, who advocates opening Iran to foreign investment, is fiercely opposed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The IRGC is likely to assert its authority through aggressive naval actions and increasing support for Shia militants in the Gulf States.

DOMESTIC DEBATES

Inside Iran, there is a fierce domestic debate over the future direction of foreign and security policy. Advocates of a diplomacy-led foreign policy include the chair of Iran's Expediency Council, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and current Iranian president Hassan Rouhani. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and related

relief of nuclear sanctions is the centrepiece of Rouhani's effort to open up Iran to foreign investment and the reopening of diplomatic relations with the West, including the United States (US).

The JCPOA reflects a belief that international reopening is better for Iran than overt ownership of nuclear weapons and aggressive regional policies. These assertions will be strongly challenged by hardliners associated with the Islamic



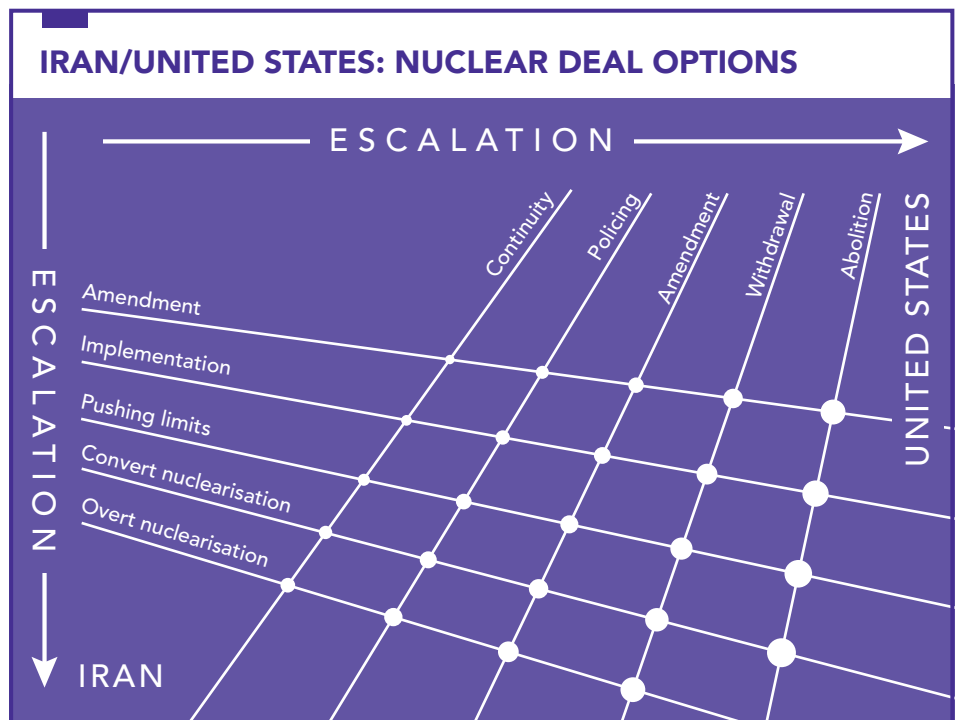
...CREATING A NUMBER OF POSSIBLE LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- DEAL HOLDS**
 - Gradual commercial opening
 - Managed provocations
 - Non-nuclear sanctions remain
- SOFT BREAK**
 - Iran's moderate conservatives and centrists undermined
 - West splits on sanctions
 - Murky investor outlook
- HARD BREAK**
 - Iran's hardliners empowered
 - Military confrontation risk
 - Collapse of foreign direct investment
 - Escalation of proxy conflicts

Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in 2017, particularly in the lead-up to the Iranian presidential elections in May 2017.

Rouhani's opponents will seek to show that the JCPOA has brought few near-term economic benefits (given ongoing caution amongst investors and banks) and that they, the IRGC, should control foreign and security policy.

This will result in more aggressive IRGC naval actions in the Strait of Hormuz, including missile tests. The IRGC may use its proxies to ramp up support for Shia militants in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen and Iraq. There may be an Iranian-prompted effort to pressure Iraq's government into removing US forces after the battle of Mosul.



Source: Oxford Analytica

US RESPONSE

The new US president is likely to react aggressively in response to these actions, with the US Navy loosening its rules of engagement throughout 2017 in both Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb. Intelligence support to the Gulf Coalition naval blockade on Yemen may increase. The level of support, however, will depend on President-elect Trump's approach to regional conflicts and the US's role.

In 2017, both Washington and Tehran have multiple options with the Iran nuclear deal, some escalatory. The most likely scenario is more aggressive policing of the deal by the US and possibly additional sanctions. Tehran would remain within the formal parameters of the agreement, but respond through regional proxy conflicts and Gulf naval activity, risking a vicious circle of escalation and counter-escalation.

IRAQ

The conflict in Iraq will witness a dramatic transformation in 2017.

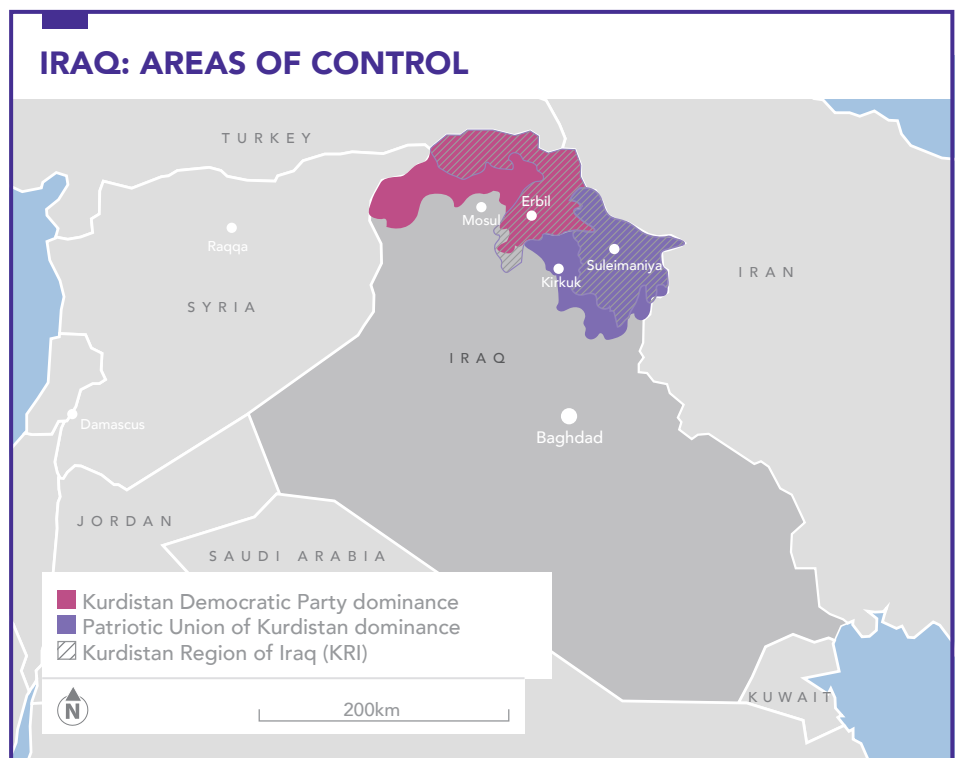
While ISG is likely to be evicted from most Iraqi cities by the summer of 2017, efforts to prevent them from reconvening in rural parts of the country will probably be unsuccessful. The organisation will re-emerge, once again posing a serious threat. Tensions are also likely to escalate between various factions struggling for power.

EVICTING ISG

The Islamic State Group (ISG) 'capital' of Mosul is likely to be liberated by early 2017, and the security forces will then turn to the remaining ISG strongholds in the country.

Hawija, another Sunni town and a notorious ISG stronghold to the south of Mosul may also see increased effort by Sunni tribes, Iraqi military forces and Popular

Mobilization Units (PMU) to proceed with clearing operations in the first quarter of 2017. Similar efforts will begin also in the Euphrates River Valley in Anbar and along the Syrian border to remove ISG from the small city of Al-Qaim and from the desert towns of Akashat and Ba'aj. These operations should be reasonably simple and quick to execute. Should the current coalition of anti-ISG forces hold together, by the summer of 2017 ISG may have been evicted from most Iraqi cities.



THREATS RETURN

In parallel to these final major campaigns there will be counter-terrorism operations to prevent ISG from regrouping in remote parts of Iraq like Diyala province to the northeast of Baghdad, or the Jallam Desert and Hamrin Mountains north of Baghdad. These operations will test the Iraqi military's capability to perform complex, long-range and logistics-intensive counter-insurgency campaigns. These efforts are unlikely to be successful in 2017.

In Iraq, ISG will re-emerge as a potent terrorist organisation with significant capacity. Iraqi attention in the latter half of 2017 will become increasingly focused on the protection of Baghdad and Shia shrines and pilgrimages, and the country's provincial elections, if they are held in 2017 as scheduled.

TENSIONS RISE

By the end of 2017, Iraq will be experiencing the leading edge of post-Mosul follow-on conflicts.

- On the Arab-Kurdish dividing line there will be slowly escalating military tension between the Shia PMU and Kurdish Peshmerga, particularly in Tuz Khurmatu, Taza (outside of Kirkuk city), northern Diyala and perhaps the Nineveh Plains, east of Mosul.
- Fighting will escalate between Shia PMU elements in Baghdad, Diyala and perhaps Basra as they compete for localised power and economic gain.
- If Mosul's liberation is mismanaged there may be armed resistance mounted by non-ISG Sunni militants – including al-Qaida affiliated, tribal or Ba'athist – against Iraqi and Kurdish forces.
- Finally, some Shia PMUs will likely begin to target United States military and diplomatic forces in Iraq if an Iranian-backed effort is made to prevent an enduring US military presence after Mosul.

PALESTINE

In light of the expansion of Iranian control over the course of events in Syrian territories, some Iranian-backed groups are expected to dominate the Golan region, threatening Israel and pushing it to strengthen its forces on the Syrian border. This in turn will have negative repercussions on the occupied territories in Palestine.

Threats to Israel from sub-state actors such as Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas have been effectively minimised. Similarly, the risk of escalations from the Syrian government and other regional states are also declining. Israel's key concern now is that sub-state actors or a terrorist group will dominate the Syrian side of Golan.

Hezbollah

In light of the expansion of Iranian control over the course of events in Syrian territories, some Iranian-backed groups are expected to dominate the Golan region, threatening Israel and pushing it to strengthen its forces on the Syrian border. This in turn will have negative repercussions on the occupied territories in Palestine.

Regional States

In light of the continued boycott against Qatar, Qatari support for Hamas may see a notable decline, which could open the door wider for Egyptian mediation, with Gulf support, in a constructive dialogue with other Palestinian parties.

KEY CONCERN

Israel's preoccupation with protecting its borders with the Golan and directing attacks against Hezbollah and other armed groups within Syria may result in a reduction of Israeli pressure on the Palestinian government and fewer clashes within the occupied territories.

LIBYA

Increasing polarisation in the country will fuel factional fighting.

Without a unified fight against ISG, Libya is likely to see a rise in factional fighting in 2017. With the nation more polarised than ever, the UN-brokered Government of National Accord and Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar may end up on a collision course if negotiations between the factions do not resume.

Misratan and other western Libyan forces have been successful in retaking Sirte from the Islamic State Group (ISG). Its remnants are likely to become southern-based raiding forces that periodically attack coastal targets, including hotels and government targets in Tripoli.

DIVIDING LINES

As in Yemen, the ongoing civil war-like conditions in Libya will probably prevent a conclusive pursuit of ISG and al-Qaida militants. Without the unifying factor of fighting against the ISG, divisions among different factions may come to the surface in the coming year. This could be drawn along the lines of support or opposition to the Government of National Accord (GNA), brokered by the United Nations (UN), which has failed to gain support from a wide section of the population or support an opposition to Khalifa Haftar.

LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY

In the east, the Libyan National Army led by Haftar, who does not support the UN-backed political process, will continue to consolidate military power during 2017 with

the aid of the UAE and Egypt. He already faces a range of challengers for control of the Gulf of Sirte refineries and oil export terminals including ISG adherents, Misratan militias, rivals from Benghazi and Petroleum Facilities Guard units loyal to Ajdabiya leader Ibrahim Jathran. GNA Defence Minister Mahdi Barghathi, an easterner like Haftar and a military officer – he was a deputy to Haftar before he joined the GNA – is also emerging as a credible challenger and could be a less controversial alternative to Haftar's leadership.

IMPACT OF US POLICY

Libyan factions are engaged in an ongoing complex, nationwide set of negotiations and testing of positions over their political futures as governance of the country remains wide open. United States (US) policy will be crucial in these nationwide, often violent negotiations. US President-elect Trump may want to change policies on Libya that were previously associated with Hillary Clinton.

There are two possible scenarios, neither of which bodes well for the UN-backed GNA:

1. US withdrawal from Libya

This would lead to a slow weakening of the GNA, which has counted on US support for its viability, and deeper entrenchment of divisions.

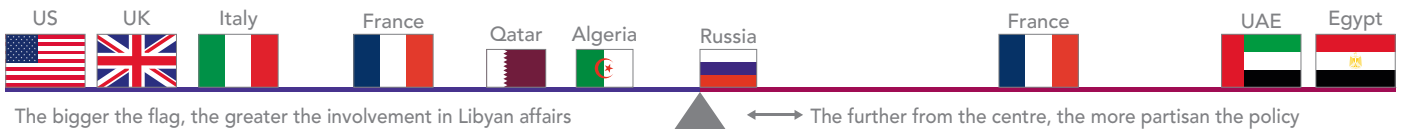
2. US support shifts to the east

Urged by Egypt and the UAE and attracted by rhetoric of fighting against jihadi terrorist groups, Trump might transfer US support

from the GNA to Haftar and the House of Representatives. This would embolden eastern forces to pursue military options in the west of Libya and accelerate the conflict.

Even if Trump continues existing US policy, Libya has become more polarised over the past year. Without a restart of negotiations, Haftar's forces and anti-Haftar militias may still end up on a collision course.

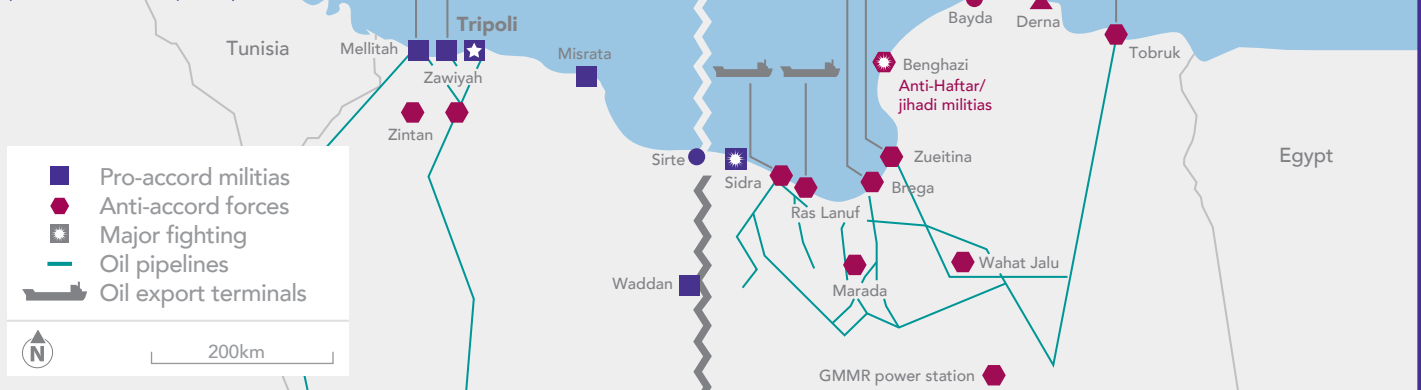
KEY FOREIGN INTERESTS



KEY NATIONAL ACTORS



The situation on the ground (As of December 8, 2016)



SYRIA

The nature of the country's civil war will evolve in the coming year.

■ The campaign to recapture Raqqa is unlikely to be successful as each of the potential 'liberators' will be otherwise engaged. The country's various military players will continue to fight to consolidate their gains. Finally, US policy towards Syria could have an immense impact, but the new administration's approach remains unclear.

LIBERATION FORCES

The campaign to recapture Raqqa is likely to be more problematic, as each of the candidate 'liberation' forces has other priorities.

■ Pro-Assad Government Forces

Pro-Assad forces currently face a shortfall of available combat power. Even when besieged Aleppo falls to government troops, there will be a strong insurgency that will pin down large garrisons. The regime and its allies will need to resource extended battlefronts and the control of core areas like Damascus. It is possible also that the regime wants to extend the Islamic State Group's (ISG) lifespan to preserve the cover that the Assad regime is part of an anti-ISG coalition.

Sunni Rebel Forces

Backed by Turkey and fighting under Euphrates Shield, the Sunni rebels will similarly be focused on protecting the new 5,000 sq km (2,000 sq mi) 'safe zone' west of the Euphrates River and holding frontlines against the Syrian Kurds on either flank. Sunni rebel forces in northern Syria do not include many Arabs from Raqqa, suggesting that they might meet heavy resistance from ISG-aligned local Arab tribes in the city.

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

Led by the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), SDF will also be preoccupied with contesting the Afrin-Kobane corridor against Turkey. The PYD will likely require additional guarantees, such as United States (US) backing for federalism in Syria, before it fully commits to the liberation of Raqqa.

MILITARY PLAYERS

The various military players in Syria will each seek to consolidate their gains with further fighting in 2017.

Russia, Iran & Lebanese Hezbollah

These three players will remain firmly committed to the survival of the Assad-led regime. Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah have almost achieved their objective of stabilising the Assad regime's control of what they call 'useful Syria', a corridor linking Syria's coastal region and Hezbollah's strongholds in Lebanon with Damascus, Homs, and land borders with Iraq (and indirectly Iran).

Jabhat Fatah al Sham (JFS)

An al-Qaida derivative, JFS will likely eclipse ISG as the most effective salafi-jihadist group.

Turkey

Turkey will meanwhile push ISG back from the Turkish border and interpose the Sunni 'safe zone' between the western and eastern Syrian Kurdish areas of control. Unless furnished with international support and promises, the Syrian Kurdish-led SDF will primarily be on the defensive in the coming year.

IMPACT OF US POLICY

United States policy towards the regime, the insurgents and their various foreign patrons, especially Russia, could be a key factor in the conflict's trajectory in 2017. President-elect Donald Trump, however, has no political history or previous access to classified intelligence, and has never articulated detailed views on Syria.

Trump's choice of advisers may promote a harder line on Iranian influence in Syria, in contradiction to his pro-Russian stance. While this appears unlikely for now, the most robust anti-Assad option might involve the establishment of 'safe' or 'no-fly' zones (explicitly supported by Vice President-elect Mike Pence, although repudiated by Trump), as well as greater support for the armed opposition. This would escalate the risk of confrontation with Moscow.

Trump has made strong statements focusing on the need to confront ISG, and pointing towards a rapprochement with Russia. If he remains consistent and opts for this alternative, that would involve scaling down or cancelling covert US support to the insurgency and could contribute to a regime victory, at least in the cities.

YEMEN

Opposing sides will seek to tip the political-military balance in their favour.

With ceasefire talks unlikely to be successful, Yemen's civil war will continue into 2017. Huthi/Saleh forces will increasingly launch attacks against international and Gulf Coalition shipping, to which the Hadi government is likely to respond with a campaign to clear the Red Sea coast. In the south-eastern region of the country, terrorist attacks are expected to continue.

Ceasefire talks in Yemen are unlikely to succeed in the first half of 2017. Instead, the two sides in the civil war will seek to shift the political-military balance in their favour.

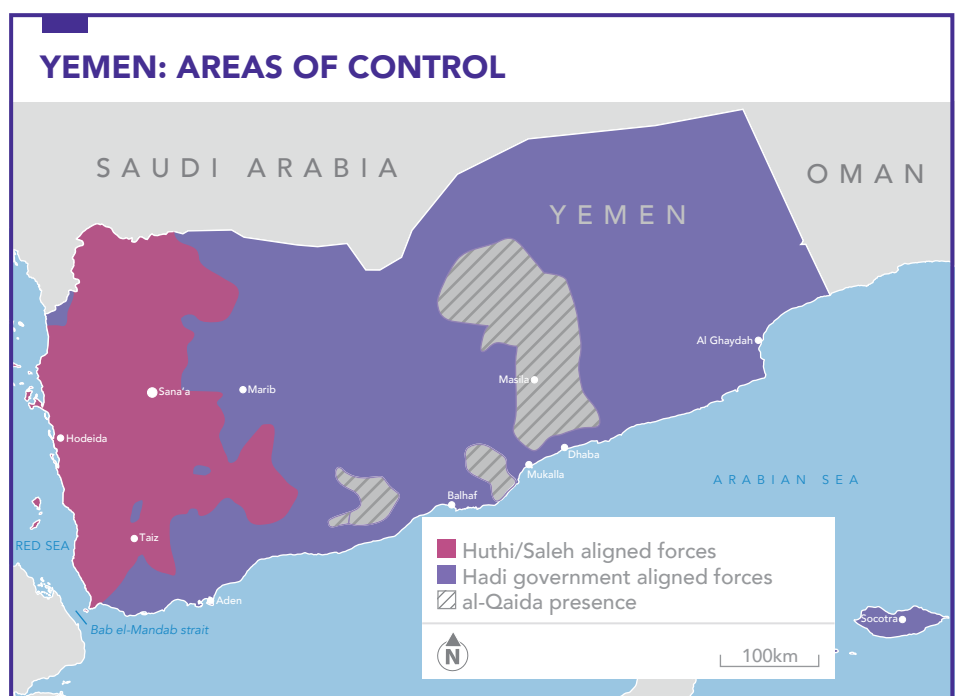
HUTHI/SALEH

On one side, the Huthi rebels and former President Ali Abdullah Saleh will seek to tighten their relationship with Iran. They will also challenge the aerial and naval blockade. Increasing numbers of anti-shiping

missile and other attacks will be launched against international and Gulf Coalition shipping in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and UAE naval facilities in Assab, Eritrea may come under escalating attack in commando raids and mortar strikes.

HADI GOVERNMENT

On the other side, the Gulf Coalition-backed Hadi government's response is likely to be a Saudi Arabian-led campaign to clear the



Source: Media reports

Red Sea coast of Huthi/Saleh forces, including the main Huthi-held port of Hodeidah.

Such a Red Sea coastal campaign would rely heavily on Saudi naval, marine and ground forces, which are already overstretched defending the kingdom's southern border with the Huthi heartlands. This suggests the current frontlines could become entrenched, with a tighter Gulf Coalition blockade of Sana'a and Ta'izz but ongoing Huthi missile attacks and commando raids on Saudi Arabian territory throughout 2017.

AQAP and the Islamic State Group (ISG) will keep up terrorist attacks on Aden and Mukalla, potentially against electricity and energy infrastructure as well as ports. Both groups may make new efforts to control towns and cities if Hadi and United Arab Emirates (UAE) forces become distracted by new challenges from southern separatist militias, eastern Yemen tribesmen and criminals, as well as the ongoing fighting against Huthi/Saleh forces.

AQAP & ISG IN YEMEN

In the Hadi-controlled southern and eastern regions of Yemen, the situation is likely to complicate in 2017. Yemen forces led by the UAE and supported by the United States (US) will keep up the pressure on al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which will reserve its strength in mountain strongholds in Shabwa and Abyan provinces.



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The world is constantly evolving and, in today's digital age, the underlying current of change is flowing at an increasingly rapid pace. Leaders, confronted with the challenge of making the most of opportunities and addressing issues, are constantly looking for latest data and expert opinion on which to take informed decisions.

The Arab Strategy Forum is one of the platforms that is organically rooted in the Arab world whilst attracting global expertise. It is a neutral forum in which insightful, influential and well-informed people analyse, discuss and debate the key issues facing the region and the wider world.

Better decisions are made when supported by fact-based rationale. The Forum is a repository of knowledge about the key geopolitical and economic issues facing the Arab World. From special reports and regular data-driven analysis to encourage discussion, the Arab Strategy Forum is an established and trusted source of knowledge for leaders, citizens and academics.

Since 2001, The Arab Strategy Forum has produced accurate annual forecasts of the major events of the year ahead. The Forum combines expert opinion, reliable data and informed analysis to facilitate the gathering of global expertise to predict forthcoming regional challenges and opportunities. Arab Strategy Forum brings together senior government officials from Arab nations and other regions of the world, as well as business leaders and influential academics.

Ultimately, the goal of the Arab Strategy Forum is to support current leaders through knowledge sharing, debate and forecasting to make decisions in full knowledge of the risks facing the Arab world. The Forum also provides the coaching necessary to produce the next generation of successful leaders.



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