

Shirin Khan

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Working together with my classmate and colleague within the Atlantic Council's Middle East Peace and Security Initiative, Max Petersen, our IPSS deliverable consists of a series of infographics aimed at effectively conveying information regarding what we consider underreported developments in the Middle East—especially those of significant interest for shaping US foreign policy—to a broader audience with limited knowledge on such topics. Because we used several different platforms to create our graphics, some of which are interactive, following below are links (and passwords, where applicable) to each of the infographics we created after dedicated research and analysis of each topic, accompanied by short explainers.

**1) Yemen Conflict:** <https://maphub.net/kleinholz/Yemen>

A. Since the Houthi coup in September 2014, Yemen has been awash in both civil and proxy conflicts. Houthi rebels, allied with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's security forces, have waged a bloody war against president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi and his Saudi-organized coalition partners since March of 2015. This conflict alone has claimed more than 10,000 lives in the past two years, and is only compounded by regional actors and their ambitions. Saudi Arabia has taken a keen interest in the conflict, as it sees the deterioration of the pro-Saudi Hadi government as a direct threat to its own security. Reports of Iranian weapons shipments and support of the Houthis have raised the alarm across the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Kingdom has rallied its allies to the cause of blocking further Iranian intervention on its southern border. The Saudi campaigns have not come without their own difficulties, with thousands of civilians reportedly killed in Coalition airstrikes. The turmoil of this civil-proxy conflict has likewise emboldened AQAP and ISIS to try and regain footing, especially in the eastern provinces of Shabwa and Hadhramout. Prison breaks and armed occupations of towns in the sparsely populated east have drawn little attention since the departure of American forces with the fall of Sana'a to the Houthis.

**2) Military Capabilities in the Middle East:** <https://my.visme.co/projects/ep8vq8ev-military-capabilities-in-the-middle-east>

A. Although originally bolstered by Western allies in ensuring their state defenses, Middle Eastern countries have been continually improving their domestic capabilities as regional tensions strain their ability to rely on both regional and global partners for personal security. This trend has been a boon to domestic defense industries throughout the region, and domestic production of both arms and military vehicles has skyrocketed in recent years. Events like the International Defence Exhibition & Conference held in the Emirates, the Special Operations Forces Exhibition and Conference held in Jordan, Turkey's International Defence Industry Fair, and the Doha

International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference have all spurred interest and regional cooperation to increase domestic production of military technologies.

**3) US Military Installations in the Middle East:** <https://maphub.net/kleinholz/US-Mil-Bases>

A. The US has strategic interests that predicate its military involvement and basing operations in the Middle East. For one, the US has an interest in securing freedom of navigation and trade routes throughout the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Although the US is not dependent on Gulf energy supplies, many of our allies, including Japan, are. Likewise, the US seeks to continue working with allied Gulf states to stymie violent fundamentalism in the region, both to protect Gulf peace and to lessen the chances of violent extremism or ideologies being exported to the US. Along with these security interests, the US has secondary objectives that support its goals. Protecting the ability of the US to project conventional forces into the Gulf remains essential in this regard, including building relationships to maintain Bahrain's commitment to house the Fifth Fleet and Qatar's servicing of Al Udeid Air Base. The maintenance and building-up of defense contracts and spending on American systems also creates significant impetus for US engagement with these and other Gulf states. The US also seeks to use its relations with Gulf states to the benefit of countering Iranian aggression and expansionary goals, maintaining an authoritative counter-Iran coalition, and protecting allied Israel from regional violence.

**4) Nuclear Capabilities in the Middle East:** <https://www.thinglink.com/scene/903657799341309953>

A. Amidst a rising demand for energy and a desire to reduce fossil fuel dependence, countries across the Middle East have begun exploring alternative sources of energy—namely, civil nuclear programs. Iran built the region's first nuclear power plant in 2011, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will be the first Arab country with a nuclear power program as the first of four planned power plants is set to become operational in May 2017. Other countries in the region including Kuwait and Qatar shied away from nuclear power after the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in Japan, while some such as Oman have since shown renewed interest and have announced plans to develop civilian nuclear programs in the coming years. Some parties outside of the Middle East look on with apprehension, however, as the region still remains largely unstable and tensions between neighboring countries are only increasing. In light of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which permits Iran to pursue uranium enrichment for peaceful means, Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are more wary than ever of the Iranian nuclear threat and are likely to push for their own right to enrichment. Additionally, Israel—the only country in the region believed to actually harbor nuclear weapons—fears that the JCPOA has virtually set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Essentially, while

many Middle Eastern countries have presented such compelling arguments for developing civilian nuclear power programs as the need to diversify sources of energy, job creation, and pollution reduction, the threat of nuclear proliferation will continue to loom overhead as long as several regional relationships remain volatile.

**5) The Global Footprint of Hezbollah:** <https://magic.piktochart.com/output/21685049-hezbollahs-global-footprint> (password: *hezbollah*)

A. Hezbollah, the “Party of God,” emerged during Lebanon’s fifteen-year civil war when Israel’s invasion in 1982 and subsequent occupation galvanized a faction of disenfranchised Shi’ites to take up arms in support of an Iranian-inspired Islamic revolution. Hezbollah issued its founding manifesto in 1985 in which it vowed loyalty to Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and called for the following: (1) the establishment of an Islamic regime in Lebanon (2) the expulsion of the United States, France, and Israel from Lebanese territory and (3) the destruction of the Israeli state. Hezbollah’s relationship with Iran and its vehement anti-Israel stance eventually emerged as significant factors in its formal transition into a political party when the group took an opportunity to influence the behavior of the government from within and validate its authority by being a part of the recognized establishment. Hezbollah is one of few organizations today in the throes of a balancing act between its dual roles as both a state- and non-state actor. The group must reconcile its non-state activities such as providing armed forces, social services, and private telecommunications to a large Shia community in Lebanon with its role as a legitimate and influential part of the Lebanese government. Today, with significant support from Iran and Syria, Hezbollah simultaneously maintains an extensive security apparatus, social services network, and political organization in Lebanon while also fighting on the frontlines of the Syrian civil war against ISIS but also in defense of President Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Although Hezbollah is based in the Middle East, over time the group has spread its tentacles all over the globe, quite successfully diversifying its sources of funding and relying less and less on an already financially-burdened Iran. The United States has implemented sanctions on a number of organizations and individuals either known or believed to be associated with Hezbollah—considered a terrorist organization by Washington—but as the group gains hardened battle experience in Syria and Iran continues to impose its influence throughout the region, it is increasingly important to note where the group has previously or is currently operating in order to effectively curb their fundraising capabilities, and thereby their terrorist operations.

**6) Internal Insecurity in Bahrain:** <https://magic.piktochart.com/output/22919225-internal-insecurity-in-bahrain> (password: *bahrain*)

A. Like many nations in the Middle East today, Bahrain has a fraught relationship with Iran. The security situation in the tiny Gulf state is of significant strategic interest both as the host of the US Navy’s Fifth Fleet as well as a close ally of

Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional rival. Bahrain's uprising was one of the first of 2011's Arab Spring as the country's majority Shiites, perpetually poor and disenfranchised, ramped up protests against the Sunni Al Khalifa monarchy. The rebellion was quickly quelled by the Al Khalifa regime—with help from Saudi Arabian troops—though Bahrain has since continued to experience low-level but consistent protests on which the regime has severely, and often violently, cracked down. The Al Khalifa regime and many of its allies are convinced that the continuous unrest in Bahrain has Iran's fingerprints all over it—in an effort, they believe, to overthrow the Sunni monarchy and replace it with a Shiite government, thus creating an ally in the region and likely expelling the US Navy fleet stationed there. This infographic highlights a few of the more noteworthy instances of weapons smuggling, arrests, and violence in Bahrain in recent years—some of which are believed to be directly linked to government actors in Iran, while the origins of others remain unclear. Meanwhile, Iran steadfastly denies arming the Bahraini opposition, calling the accusations baseless. The question remains: is Iran indeed covertly meddling in Bahraini affairs, or is this purely a domestic conflict between majority and minority?