

Final Internship Report

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At a glance

Joseph is a Government major and Public Policy minor from Toronto, Ontario. He interned at the Institute for Near East & Gulf Military Analysis, a Dubai-based research center on defense and security affairs in the Middle East. Joseph worked at INEGMA's Washington, D.C. office, where his internship consisted mainly of research duties in support of INEGMA's mission to produce non-partisan, fact-based scholarship that bolsters stability, peace, and security in the Middle East.

Overview of the Internship

My internship consisted principally of research duties in support of INEGMA's efforts to produce non-partisan, fact-based scholarship that bolsters stability, peace, and security in the Middle East. I worked on a number of regional defense and security issues while at INEGMA, including extensive research on Syria's air defense system, the impact of US nuclear reductions on crisis stability in the Middle East, US naval strategy in the Persian Gulf and the effect of local defense industries on democratization in Gulf states. During my internship, I was able to publish opinion pieces on several of these topics, which appeared in *CNN*, *Foreign Policy* and *Defense One*.

Projects + Types of Work

As a research intern, virtually all of my daily tasks and projects consisted of reading and writing about military and security affairs in the Middle East. I worked with INEGMA-North America's Executive Director and Head of Research, Bilal Saab, to support major research projects he was leading and also had the opportunity to pursue my own research activities.

One of my core responsibilities involved producing a weekly brief of defense news in the Middle East for INEGMA's clients. Before I arrived, INEGMA did not produce such a brief, but given the extra organizational bandwidth created by my tenure, Mr. Saab proposed that I begin compiling one. I was given significant leeway in determining the form the brief would take, including its format and presentation, major sources consulted to find weekly defense news stories, and the framework which governed the types of stories that would be appropriate for the brief. Several hours of each work day were devoted to carefully combing through major defense news outlets to select stories appropriate for that week's brief. I found this activity to be particularly rewarding, as I was constantly in tune with security developments in the region. After weeks of doing this, I found I was no longer simply absorbing the news items, I was making connections between them and analyzing their impact on broader regional security issues. This was also a great way to come up with new research topics to read and write about when I proposed projects to my supervisor.

The rest of my job involved a variety of different research projects related to Middle East defense and security. Several of them were in support of broader projects being pursued by the organization and varied in size and scope. For example, I conducted a literature review on scholarship analyzing Iran's war strategy in the event its leadership opted to shut down the Strait of Hormuz. This literature review supported a broader project proposal for a war-gaming exercise to simulate American and Gulf ally responses to such an event. For another project, I reviewed a scholarly article by Mr. Saab on the impact of U.S. nuclear reductions on crisis stability in the Middle East, which was published in the *The Nonproliferation Review*.

My self-directed research projects were even more varied in size and scope. My biggest project involved an extensive literature review on the political, social and economic

impact of local defense industries in the Middle East. Other small projects included research on Syria's air defense system, the role of aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf, and more broadly, U.S. naval strategy in the Gulf. A major skill I gained during my internship was an understanding of how to take lengthy research projects and translate key takeaways into cogent, pithy arguments for publication in the popular press. I did this with several of my research projects, publishing pieces in *CNN*, *Foreign Policy* and *Defense One*.

Expectations vs. Experience

Overall, my internship at INEGMA surpassed my expectations and provided a rewarding and highly educational experience. The main expectation-experience gap involved the extent of independent work I was asked to conduct, and consequently, my working relationship with my supervisor. Though INEGMA is a medium-size organization, almost all of its employees are based in its Dubai office. By contrast, the D.C. office was set up less than a year ago. That office employs two people: Mr. Saab and another executive who manages the business side of the organization. Working in an environment this small proved difficult at first, and this was compounded by several other factors. First, INEGMA's office in Washington wasn't a centralized space. Instead, it rented several rooms on the floor of an office building. My office was at one end of the floor while Mr. Saab's was on the other, which meant that face-to-face communication was more limited than would be if I had an office close by. Second, most of my internship tenure coincided with Ramadan, which meant that major projects were slow at headquarters and I had virtually no contact and did not collaborate with associates in the Dubai office. Finally, my boss worked often from home, which meant that I was alone in the office frequently.

The confluence of these factors meant I had to learn to work hyper-independently and often did not have enough work to fill the eight-hour workday. So on occasions when I had questions for which I could not get quick answers in my supervisor's absence, I had to learn to generate calculated assumptions that enabled me to continue my work without having all the answers at my disposal. To deal with the slow pace of work, I had to learn to generate my own work activities -- still relevant to INEGMA's work -- to keep myself busy and learning. After seeing these dynamics at play, I proposed a variety of 'projects' to my supervisor that would enable me to contribute to the organization through independent work. These are outlined earlier. In addition, I suggested think tank events related to Middle East defense and security to attend in the city and wrote brief summaries of the events for research staff.

Personal Growth, Skills Learned + Cultural Differences Encountered

The most significant cultural capital I accrued while interning at INEGMA was an understanding of the importance of identifying your supervisor's communication style before applying old workplace habits to a new environment. For example, under previous supervisors, I have worked best in a "constant communication" relationship. I check-in frequently because I like my supervisor to know what I am up to, and in the past, my

supervisors liked to know as well. My current supervisor prefers a much more hands-off approach. Though he is always open to answering my questions, he does not need frequent updates on my current projects and progress. We establish tasks, set deadlines together, and only if I need assistance do I get in touch to ask questions or seek clarification. Getting used to this relationship has illustrated the importance of establishing the guidelines of how and when to communicate with a supervisor at the outset of an internship.

A second significant lesson concerns the role that security scholars play in the foreign policy discourse. When I co-published my second op-ed in July, I wrote about the need for Navy officials to reduce the strategic emphasis on aircraft carriers as the military tool of choice in the Persian Gulf. I argued that aircraft carriers are large, expensive and highly vulnerable in the narrow waters of the Gulf. Instead, I argued, the U.S. should shift its emphasis to smaller, more agile platforms and applauded the Navy's decision to deploy a fleet of Patrol Coastal ships to Bahrain in support of the Fifth Fleet. When I submitted the article to Defense One, the first issue the editor wanted to address was whether or not I had a financial interest in the PC ship. The question brought home the often underestimated impact that scholarship in the popular press can have on the foreign policy discourse. Obviously, I am nearly certain that the article did not result in further procurement of the PCs, but at the same time, I became aware that I was entering the fray of scholars attempting to create those kinds of sea changes. In other words, this was scholarship with impact and consequences, not simply a scholar's opportunity to make a big splash with a bold argument.

Lasting Impact

My internship experience at INEGMA was invaluable for the wide array of professional skills I developed in policy research and analysis as well as general workplace leadership. But even more valuable for me were the revelations I had about my near and short-term goals. My tenure at INEGMA taught me what extraordinary political science scholarship looks like, but it also taught me that brilliance in policy analysis is not a tool of impact in and of itself. Impact is sharpened through the use of correct media, precise timing of a piece's release, gearing research to current policy topics, and narrowing policy recommendations to actionable and realistic steps. I also learned that undergraduate senior theses formed the backbone of the fields of expertise of many of the scholars I worked with and read from. The clear takeaway for me was to choose a senior thesis topic in security and defense that was not only interesting, but relevant and likely to continue being ripe for further scholarship.

Finally, my internship experience has re-affirmed my passion for and drive to pursue a career in security affairs. Upon graduation, I hope to enter the foreign service in my native Canada, and contribute to shaping my country's security policies in an ever-evolving Middle East. I'm grateful to the Dickey Center and the Class of 1966 for providing me with an unparalleled opportunity to contribute to shaping the dialogue on security affairs in such a vitally important region.