

# SSI researcher explores Middle East events as they happen

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March 2 - As events have erupted in Yemen, Jordan and Egypt, a Strategic Studies Institute researcher has been a magnet for journalists seeking to understand the politics and the implications of a changing tide in the Arab world.

The Middle East is a volatile place, according to Dr. W. Andrew 'Andy' Terrill, whose studies on Yemen and Jordan this past year have proved to be the right information at the right time for policy makers and students of the region. SSI published in January *The Conflicts in Yemen and U.S. National Security*, and Praeger Publishers in 2010 produced *Global Security Watch – Jordan*, written while on sabbatical between SSI projects.

“I look at what I think are strategically important issues for the United States. Sometimes they are not the issues in the news – sometimes they are dimensions of issues in the news,” he said about the process of selecting a focus for research and publication. “I talk to people at the Pentagon and CENTCOM to get a feel for concerns they have and identify topics with which I can make a difference.”

When three suspicious packages tracked from Yemen were thought to be trail runs for the smuggling of a bomb on board a cargo plane, the world's attention fixed on Yemen – a nation in a state of tremendous unrest with a government in trouble, according to Terrill.

With a serious al Qaeda problem, massive poverty, off-and-on rebellion in the north and a secessionist movement in the south, there is much that could push the country toward instability, he said. The country is running out of oil. The capital city is running out of water with maybe five years to become the world's first capital to run out of water.

“Al Qaeda has a strong foothold. If Yemen fragments into tribal entities or a failed state, al Qaeda will flourish more in that kind of chaotic environment,” said Terrill who noted Yemen's long, porous border with Saudi Arabia. “A failed state on the border of the world's most important oil producer is an important issue.”

“A failed state could mean terrorist attempts every month instead of every year,” Terrill said, noting that both the would-be ‘Detroit bomber’ and the thwarted cargo package plan – were fueled from Yemen

“There's a substantial aid program for Yemen. The problem is that the mind-bogglingly endemic corruption makes it hard for Yemenis to administer development programs,” Terrill said. “They accept outside aid and non-governmental organizations and some development aid from foreign nations but it's not always safe for these people.”

“And Yemen is fiercely independent,” he said. “Anything that looks like attempts to control from the outside backfires.”

Working with SSI since 2002, Terrill had previously been a Middle East nonproliferation analyst for Lawrence Livermore National Lab's International Assessments Division, and taught and published extensively. Since 1994, at the invitation of the State Department, Terrill has participated in the Middle Eastern Track 2 talks, which are part of the Middle East Peace Process. He holds a Ph.D., in International Relations from Claremont Graduate University, Ca.

Terrill has developed relationships through his travels and research

in the region, and stays in touch with developments through regional media, leading journals and books in the field, and through other researchers. His interest in the Middle East dates to his doctoral dissertation on Jordan.

“Jordan was an interesting study in the contrasting issues of the Arab world – a key strategic crossroads.” Issues of importance across the Arab world, like modernization, were being addressed in Jordan, he noted about his decision to refocus his research on Jordan again last year.

“I have tremendous respect for King Abdullah and his son. Both leaders have taken a country with few resources, no oil, no real wealth of any kind and yet, through diplomacy and wise policies, have seen to it that Jordan is a prospering society,” said Terrill.

“Our job is to do research that meets the needs of the Army and the nation,” he said about himself and his fellow SSI researchers. Every researcher asks, ‘am I connecting with my audience and adding value?’ he said. “You always need to tell what they don’t want to know – if that’s what the research suggests. The alternative is to be a cheerleader telling people what they want to know.”

**Dr. Terrill’s studies for SSI are available online:**  
[www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil)  
(<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/>).