**The lull that wasn't: U.S. contract spending in the Middle East beyond Iraq**

With the air campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the United States has again intensified military involvement in the Middle East. Within Iraq itself, this represented a dramatic change, the new U.S. role is far more limited in scope and posture, but still represents a return. Is the same true of countries in the Iraq theater?

The location of U.S. contract spending is one way to get at this question. Contract spending does not tell us about the direct military engagements, there's less than a billion spent in the past decade in Syria, Libya, or Yemen. However, as my colleague [Rhys McCormick discussed in an analysis of the pivot to Asia](http://csis.org/files/publication/140116_CI37_McCormick_OCONUSContracting.pdf) contract spending does reflect the U.S. footprint in the region.

This approach does reflect the story of the surges in Iraq and then Afghanistan and the subsequent withdraws. Spending in Iraq tops $15 billion a year from FY2005-FY2008 only to fall to below $2.5 billion by FY2012. Afghanistan reaches near $15 billion in spending in FY2010 and stays high until FY2013 before dropping being cut in half in FY2014.

In Iraq's theater (Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates), there's a fall from peak spending of $10 billion a year in FY2009 and FY2010. Yet the obligations remains above $5 billion a year from FY2011-FY2014, comparable with FY2003-FY2008 and more than twice the level spent in FY2000-FY2002. As discussed in a recent [New York Times article](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/world/middleeast/sale-of-us-arms-fuels-the-wars-of-arab-states.html) and the [CSIS Federated Defense project](http://csis.org/event/federated-defense-middle-east), contracts supporting foreign military sales (FMS) may explain part of this sustainment, but this represents a shift in bill paying but not a reduction in activity.

At the national level. Kuwait had been the center of most of U.S. spending but now United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser degree Jordan, which receives notable civilian agency spending, has picked up instead. Meanwhile in Qatar and Bahrain spending is especially variable, spiking in FY2010-FY2011 in the former and FY2013 in the latter.