



Maxim Yulis

Over the summer, I worked at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) as a research intern focusing on Russia in the Middle East and North Africa. The Institute for the Study of War is a non-partisan, public policy-oriented research organization that informs policymakers and the general public on military affairs through analyzing and gathering open-source intelligence from conflict zones. As part of its effort to expand its grasp on Russian militarism, the Institute started to recently focus on Russia's military intervention in Syria, which was my primary research objective for the summer. Despite this seemingly niche topic, I also worked on other unrelated research projects that concerned Russian ties to nationalist groups throughout Central and Eastern Europe and Russian and Iranian reconstruction efforts in Syria

My daily workflow included conducting intel analysis, reading and translating Russian and Arabic state media sources, and contributing to the organization's secondary research projects. To start off the morning, the Russia and Ukraine team, along with Russia in the MENA team, hold a briefing to discuss any inflection points that happened overnight. Most of the nights were quiet; however, towards the end of the summer, Russia drastically stepped up its military and diplomatic efforts in Syria. Following that, there would be a daily briefing during which all of the ISW research teams share cross-team events or ideas.

These briefings were the perfect opportunity to learn about the intricacies of military affairs happening in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine. Usually, depending on the urgency of the events briefed out, the analysts and management decide the research priorities for the day shortly afterward.



*The Russia corner in the intern bay is distinctly covered in memes from wall to wall.*

The scope of my research was wide and was not limited to Russia's activity in the Middle East and North Africa; I tracked Russia's military campaign in southern Syria, Russia's changing relationships with Afghanistan and Pakistan, Russian nationalist groups in Serbia, and I had the chance to witness the making of the Russian Center for the Reception of Refugees. Towards the end of the internship, there was a greater amount of

focus put on the regime's potentially large-scale offensive into Idlib, a province whose fate remains uncertain even today.

Apart from the structured schedule for a typical ISW intern, there were occasional educational seminars, notable speakers, and unplanned meetings on significant events throughout the world. Interns had the chance to dive deep into the fundamentals of War Studies thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Kagan, both of whom led the lecture series. We also sat with prominent cybersecurity experts, military commanders, and former ambassadors to discuss the state of military affairs in various parts of the world. Lastly, I was able to attend numerous talks and lecture series around the city, including the Jamestown Foundation Conference on Russia in the Middle East, where I learned about the dynamics of the Russo-Iranian strategic alliance and Russia's mediating role in the Golan Heights.

After this summer, I'm much more confident in my plan to enter the Foreign Service. By having firsthand experience of tracking international crises from primary and secondary sources, analyzing trends in Russian foreign policy, and further improving my Russian and Arabic language skills, I am even more steadfast in my ambition to study conflict zones and foreign affairs. The Institute for the Study of War gave me the chance to expand my intellectual horizons, witness the unfolding of events in numerous conflict-ridden theaters, and to understand the inner-workings of the DC think tank realm. Overall, it was a truly enlightening and rigorous experience and one that will continue to propel my desire to work in national security and public diplomacy.



*Me in the Institute for the Study Of War Entrance Lobby*