



Rania Kisar

Graduate Student

rkisar@asu.edu

Biography

Student Information

Graduate Student
Global Security (Irregular Warfare)
The College of Lib Arts & Sci

Long Bio

I didn't study irregular warfare—I lived it for 14 years on the frontlines of Syria's collapse. When the uprising began in 2011, I left my academic career in Dallas and crossed into Idlib, Syria, determined to support civil society actors forging governance under fire. Over the next decade, I led humanitarian operations under bombardment, negotiated with armed factions, trained civilians in crisis management, and built institutional frameworks in areas held by extremist groups. That experience taught me how legitimacy is built, lost, and contested under the pressure of war. Now, I seek to formalize that operational knowledge through the MA in Global Security at Arizona State University, with a concentration in Irregular Warfare and a dual-track enhancement in Political Psychology. My goal is to convert field-tested insights into strategic expertise that advances U.S. security interests.

The most pivotal experience that shaped my path came during my years building and directing the SHINE Institute for Strategic Empowerment, which I founded in 2015 across Dallas, Istanbul, and Maaret al-Numan, Syria. There, I led education and civil society projects for thousands of civilians displaced or living under siege—operating through Russian airstrikes, chemical attacks, and extremist rule. I built rehabilitation programs for disabled children, designed vocational training courses in IT and civic administration, and ran trauma-informed summer clubs for youth—all under the surveillance of al-Qaeda affiliates who controlled much of Idlib. When HTS officials demanded curriculum changes or enforced gender segregation, I negotiated, adapted, and preserved our mission: to keep civilians learning, functioning, and resisting radicalization. My team operated under constant threat, but we never stopped. Our classrooms continued even as missiles fell nearby.

In those years, I watched Syria fracture not just physically, but psychologically. Information warfare, cognitive control, and narrative manipulation became central tools for actors like the Assad regime, Iranian proxies, HTS, and ISIS. I began documenting these tactics—disinformation cycles, fear-relief loops, weaponized grievance theory—and training my staff to recognize them. This is what drew me not only to irregular warfare, but to its psychological dimension. These experiences deepened my recognition that cognitive warfare isn't just a byproduct of insurgency—it is one of its primary weapons, and it demands a new kind of analytical response.

In parallel with this degree, I plan to audit or formally pursue key courses from ASU's MA in Political Psychology. Psychological warfare and influence operations are not peripheral—they are now core components of insurgent strategy. Strengthening my analytical precision in this domain will allow me to produce more targeted intelligence for U.S. decision-makers and expand our understanding of how hostile actors manipulate populations at scale.

Today, I serve as Chief Editor of The Early Phoenix, an open-source intelligence product read daily by senior officials at the White House, State Department, Department of Defense, CIA, and leading U.S. think tanks. My reports map evolving insurgency dynamics, proxy warfare patterns, and irregular threats in Syria, Iran, Yemen, and the broader region. My assessments are grounded in field experience and driven by U.S. policy priorities. In recent years, I have briefed members of Congress, advised diplomatic teams, and worked directly with local councils in exile and on the ground.

This program offers the theoretical framework I now seek to apply to that mission. I want to fuse strategic foresight with doctrinal understanding of irregular actors, hybrid warfare models, information operations, and counterinsurgency frameworks. My objective is to help shape next-generation U.S. policy that doesn't just react to collapse—but anticipates and neutralizes its architects. I bring with me field-tested resilience, operational credibility, and a record of frontline innovation. My work has already informed U.S. Syria policy. This degree will allow me to do so with greater precision and institutional fluency.

I am not pursuing this program to pivot—I am pursuing it to weaponize what I already do. The fusion of Irregular Warfare and Political Psychology is not academic for me. It is operational. It will directly serve my daily work advising the U.S. national security community on how to counter hostile insurgents, anticipate psychological manipulation, and protect vulnerable populations from extremism. I am ready to contribute to this cohort, learn from the field's top minds, and graduate with the tools to confront the defining irregular threats of our time.

Education

University of Phoenix