CIRS invited Seymour Hersh, a Pulitzer Prize winning investigative journalist and author on national security issues for the New Yorker magazine, to deliver a Distinguished Lecture titled “The Obama/Bush Foreign Policies: Why Can’t America Change?” before a large audience of 800 members of the community in Doha.

Hersh has covered everything from Vietnam to Iraq to Iran to the whole of the Middle East, and he regularly analyzes current U.S. foreign policy and issues pertaining to military intelligence, national security, and the press. His bestselling books include, The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House, The Dark Side of Camelot, and, most recently, Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib.

Currently, Hersh is at work on a new book in which he argues that the heightened sentiments of fear and reprisal after September 11, 2001, paved the way for a handful of neo-conservatives to take control of the White House with anti-Islam ideologies and policies. According to Hersh, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was presented to the public, both locally and internationally, as a crusade. The Bush/Cheney administration assumed that most people would back their actions because of the supposed nobility of the cause. “There is a tremendous amount of anti-Muslim feeling in the military community,” Hersh argued. “It is a crusade, literally.” What was most alarming, Hersh explained, was how easy it was to implement. None of the necessary checks and balances was put into place as the public acquiesced and the press became complicit and signed on to the narrative of the “global war on terror” without questioning the underlying motives.

The Obama administration has not made any significant improvements to how the U.S. is handling the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hersh claimed. Since 2003, the war in Iraq has been a losing battle and has resulted in a “war of attrition.” Similarly, the war in Afghanistan is as unsuccessful now for the Americans as it was unwinnable for the Russians in the 1980s.

Continued on page 7
A warm Doha greeting from all of us at CIRS. The last few months have witnessed another period of productive research, publications, and public affairs programming. We are tremendously excited about the imminent publication of two CIRS-produced edited volumes. *Innovation in Islam: Traditions and Contributions* is scheduled to be published by University of California Press in April 2011, and *International Politics of the Persian Gulf* will be released by Syracuse University Press later this year. Both volumes are the result of multi-year research initiatives in which renowned scholars shared their original research in several working groups that took place in Doha. For more information on these books, please turn to page 7 of this newsletter.

In the coming months, CIRS will put into action its newest research initiative on “Food Security and Food Sovereignty in the Middle East.” Earlier this spring, following its request for proposals, CIRS awarded funds in support of empirically-based, original research projects. As with other research initiatives, our goal is to fill in existing gaps in the literature on the subject and to contribute original knowledge to topics related to food security and food sovereignty. I invite you to read more about this project on page 9.

Finally, as with the rest of the School of Foreign Service in Qatar, CIRS has moved into its permanent home in the newly inaugurated Georgetown University building in Education City. In its new home, CIRS is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, enabling us to conduct better and more thorough research within the confines of our own, custom-designed space. With ample room for research meetings and public events, CIRS welcomes the community.

For more information on the lectures and events we have planned for the next few weeks, I invite you to visit our website at http://cirs.georgetown.edu.

Sincerely,

Mehran Kamrava
Director of CIRS
Interim Dean
Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar

---

**About CIRS**

The Center for International and Regional Studies at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar is guided by the principles of academic excellence, forward vision, and community engagement.

The Center’s mission revolves around five principal goals:

• To provide a forum for scholarship and research on international and regional affairs;
• To encourage in-depth examination and exchange of ideas;
• To foster thoughtful dialogue among students, scholars, and practitioners of international affairs;
• To facilitate the free flow of ideas and knowledge through publishing the products of its research, sponsoring conferences and seminars, and holding workshops designed to explore the complexities of the twenty-first century;
• To engage in outreach activities with a wide range of local, regional, and international partners.
Karen Armstrong was invited to share her thoughts on religious traditions. A former Roman Catholic nun who left a British convent to pursue a degree in modern literature at Oxford, Armstrong is a best-selling author, and UN Ambassador for the Alliance of Civilizations.

Armstrong began by defining the contradictory role of religion in today’s globalized world by saying that although it contributes towards the building of a global community and teaches tolerance among disparate people, it is also regarded as the main cause of global violence and conflict. “I’m convinced,” she said, “that religion has a major contribution to make to one of the chief tasks of our time, which must surely be to build a global community where people of all persuasions can live together in harmony and respect.” However, Armstrong noted, it is important to point out that “In fact, the cause of war is usually ambition, hatred, and greed, but, often, these self-serving emotions are given an idealistic or a religious coloration in order to sanitize them.”

Although she acknowledged the history of international conflict based upon religion, she argued that their specific motivations usually stem from the more individualistic concerns of a selfish few.

Speaking of the Axial Age between 900-200 BCE, Armstrong noted that this was a moment of history which was the center of humankind’s spiritual experience when all the major world religions had their origins. In China, during this time, Confucianism and Daoism were born; in India, Hinduism and Buddhism blossomed; in the Middle East sprung up the roots of monotheism, which would guide the teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; and in Greece, philosophical rationalism gave rise to Western philosophy, which became a religious movement in its own way. Armstrong explained that although these ancient traditions are distinct from each other they share certain values that have shaped our current understandings of existence and have much to say to us in our modern world.

As part of her scholarly inquiries into the history of religion, Armstrong said that within the English language, the word “belief” has changed its meaning over the centuries. Until the seventeenth century, the word was pronounced differently in Middle English and came from the German “to love” and “to commit oneself” as well as the Latin root of “desire,” or “libido.” The word “belief” did not have the same connotations of “blind faith” and acceptance of doctrine that it does today. Armstrong said that, ultimately, “religion, of course, is not about thinking things or believing things, but about doing things. What is the Qur’an but a call to action? When the Qur’an talks of faith it doesn’t mean that we have to accept a whole lot of ideas, but it follows it up always with its performing the works of mercy, or the salihat,” wherein the Qur’an asks people to do good and look after the poor and the vulnerable, to free slaves, and care for orphans and widows.

Concluding the lecture, Armstrong explained that every world religion has at its core the ethical principle of compassion. She said, “It now seems to me quite clear that unless as a species we learn to treat all peoples as we would wish to be treated ourselves whoever they are and whatever their beliefs, we are not going to have a viable world to hand on to the next generation and that any ideology that breeds or encourages hatred and contempt is failing the test of our time and failing humanity.”

Armstrong’s books have been translated into forty-five languages. In addition to teaching, she regularly comments on religious affairs in the United Kingdom and the United States and is a columnist for the Guardian newspaper. She was awarded a medal for Arts and Sciences by the Egyptian government for her services to Islam, making her the first foreigner to have been awarded this decoration. She is also a recipient of the TED prize for her efforts in establishing the Charter for Compassion.
Rabbi Harold White discussed the ways in which “Kabbalah” has recently entered into the public vernacular. He argued that this has trivialized the mysticism because to truly engage in Kabbalah one must be a scholar of scripture and familiar with the history and traditions of religious practice. He argued that even though we are products of the modern world, religion allows us to live a life filled with mystery and Kabbalah in particular is a celebration and enjoyment of that mystery.

Offering “a social sciences perspective which places the development of media within a broad, historical, cultural, and socio-political context,” Zayani delved into the intricacies of the Saudi media system, exploring how the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia came to be an important media player. “Although lacking the historical depth which characterizes other prominent media traditions in the region,” Zayani concluded that the rise of Saudi media has been remarkable.

Shushan illustrated key differences between Jordan’s foreign policy initiatives in the first and second Gulf Wars which, respectively, occurred in 1990-91 and from 2003 onward. In order to explain the drastic change to Jordanian foreign policy that occurred between the Gulf Wars, she stressed the importance of understanding the regime survival strategies employed by Jordan’s leadership; “whether we are in democratic regimes or non-democracies, leaders care first and foremost about retaining power,” she said.

Cooke explained that the historical reference to cultural and tribal purity, or asala, is a symptom of globalization and modernity, as nations attempt to rebuild cultural identities after years of colonial struggle. She noted that “the Arab world states, whose citizens are the first generation to grow up with a national rather than a regional identity, are involved in a future articulation of a largely unrecorded past that lies buried under the surface of identical newly global cities.” Many current heritage projects are state-sponsored.

The subject of Lippman’s lecture revolved around likely future shifts in the religious, strategic, and economic principles of Saudi Arabia. He predicted that “Saudi Arabia in twenty years, or at least by mid-century, will inevitably be a more open, moderate, and educated country. It will be more like the rest of the developed world.” Over the next two decades, he argued, there will be seismic demographic and economic shifts that will affect all aspects of life in the kingdom.

Mary-Ann Tétrault’s lecture was based on the phenomenon of transplanting foreign universities – particularly from the United States – into the Gulf. She finds serious compatibility issues between the effects of an American-style education and the Gulf society into which it is being transplanted. Long-term issues such as the question of academic freedom, censorship, and the role of women in society are just some of the cultural clashes that are occurring and may have long-term effects in the future.

Khalilzad spoke about the relationship between the United States and the Middle East within two different contexts. The first, he said, “is the framework of thinking about the Middle East after 9/11, which was a decisive moment in American history in terms of its approach to this part of the world” and the second is the “transition to a new approach, which I think is in formation.” The word “transition,” he said, “implies continuity and change” of current policies as the United States adjusts to shifts in the global order.

The Ambassador defined the broader Middle East as stretching from Pakistan in the east to Morocco in the west and argued that in order to understand the relationship between the United States and the Middle East, it was first necessary to begin with observations regarding the impact of the seismic events of September 11, 2001. Although the Ambassador pointed out that America is a heterogeneous country that is made up of a multitude of ideologies and schools of thought, he noted that “9/11 had a big impact on American thinking – on official American thinking.”

One significant change, Khalilzad argued, was that “9/11 made the United States think of this broad region geopolitically,” and as having real and lasting impacts on both national and international security. The challenges of the Middle East region, he said, have the ability to reverberate around the world. In today’s integrated world, regional problems have great consequences for the entire international community. “In the post 9/11 environment,” Khalilzad said, “working towards a region that would be more at peace with itself and with the world became a strong tendency orientation in the U.S. foreign policy debate discussion and doctrines.”

It was within this framework that Khalilzad said the United States ventured into Iraq. “I believe Iraq, although it still remains in a difficult transition, is in an improved situation than it was at times in its recent past.” This is because the United States worked to “encourage a process of democratization and a belief that democratization through elections and support of civil society organizations was going to lead to a decrease in the unhappiness of the people,” he argued.

Other issues that impact the stability of the Middle East region’s development, the Ambassador said, include the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the complex problems in Afghanistan; and the lingering threat of Iran. Taking all of these regional conflicts into account, Khalilzad spoke of how the United States has modified its approach to the Middle East. He argued that the Iraqi challenge is currently less than it was in the past, but the challenge of Iran and Afghanistan are becoming increasingly prominent. The challenge of terrorism and extremism has lessened in some areas, but, he warned, has spread and become stronger in other parts of the world. Other than these issues, East Asia has become an area of increasing geopolitical importance with the rise of China and India, as well as the challenges imposed by North Korea. The Ambassador said that “as a result of the shifts in the geopolitical issues in the world, there is going to be a greater focus on the issues of East Asia both in terms of diplomacy and in terms of military strategy for the longer term to adjust to the balance of power changes that are taking place.”

Looking to which issues will become important in the future, Khalilzad argued that “although political challenges remain, it is the future of the economy – particularly the U.S. economy – that has gained in relative importance.” He continued by saying that “the U.S. position in the world ultimately rests on its economic and military power, and its military power cannot be sustained without its economic power being such to be able to afford the kind of capabilities that its global role so far has required.”

Concluding the lecture, the Ambassador said that these political and economic problems will necessarily result in adjustments in future U.S. policy. These adjustments will include “a greater emphasis on stability in order not to produce more demands on resources and effort on the part of the United States,” he said.
Rogaia Abusharaf on Darfurian Activism in Doha

Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, a Sudanese anthropologist, is Visiting Associate Professor of Anthropology at Georgetown University in Qatar. She writes on culture and politics, anthropology of gender, human rights, migration and diaspora issues in Sudan, the Gulf, the UK, the US and Canada.

My current research focuses on Darfur and compares the debates and demonstrations that have taken place in the Sudan, the United States, the United Kingdom and Qatar. The disconnections, ruptures, and shifts in the flow of these narrations point to the disparities in the situational, local, regional, and transnational forces at work.

The predominant narrative of the conflict has been one in which mostly non-Arab rebels took up arms in Darfur in early 2003, accusing the central government of neglecting their welfare, and Khartoum mobilizing mostly Arab militias to subdue the insurgency. The government has also used the conflict to warn the Sudanese of the potential negative consequences of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 that halted the war in the south, provided for the equitable sharing of oil resources, and allowed for a referendum on independence to be overwhelmingly supported and actualized in January 2011.

Yet the deployment of the Arab vs. African formulation as the sole explanatory model divorced from other sociopolitical forces shaping society in Darfur is a serious distortion. Ethnicity when politically mobilized and manipulated, camouflages other fundamental dimensions of the conflict, such as banditry, land-tenure systems, land use, environmental degradation, arms proliferation and militarization, border politics, and systemic marginality. To overcome the rampant oversimplification of the conflict as exclusively the product of an unbridgeable ethnic difference, we must probe history and politics, as well as culture, and trace the development of a perniciously political militancy in the region that overwhelmed previous social and economic arrangements among peoples with a history of internmixing in a complex geography.

My ethnographic observations at Darfur-related conferences, rallies, meetings, and town hall events on college campuses in the U.S. and the UK testify to radically different discourses on political and cultural identities in comparison to that among Darfurians in the Sudan and among Darfurians exiled in the Gulf. The State of Qatar has been a fascinating locality from which to compare organized political activism around Darfur, with respect to migration and the diaspora. Qatar is host to one of the largest civic groups of Sudanese overseas, especially in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Here, neither racialization nor feminization figure as they did in diasporic communities in the US and the UK. Indeed, Darfurian intellectuals in Doha resist ethnicization. Although fully cognizant of the intermingling of ethnicity and politics, a Darfurian migrant I interviewed made it clear that the group had made a deliberate decision to identify itself as part of the Sons of Greater Darfur League, and they worked painstakingly to deconstruct the perceived homogenized Arab response towards the violence inflicted upon Africans.

Qatar has been the foremost political stage on which diplomacy has focused on reconstituting goodwill among the “segmentary lineages” pervading Darfurian politics today. With its extraordinary vision and discernible weight in world affairs, the Qatari government is constructing the infrastructure for peace in the Sudan, with strong backing from the parties involved. Sudanese migrants attest to the fact that the intersecting agendas of states and nonstate actors that had permeated the prominent political discourse in their war-torn society do not exist in Doha. Prepared to renounce the discourse of victimization, Darfurians in Doha exhibit greater commitment to deal with the problematic native politics; the prospects of reconciliation; citizenship; Darfurian-Darfurian dynamics; banditry; border disputes; water, land, and the environment; and Islamism. Dealing with these difficult predicaments is solidified by Qatar’s engagement in the tragedy, not only at the levels of its foreign policy but also at the level of Qatari and Sudanese civil societies. The Qatari Red Crescent, in concert with local branches that it has established in Darfur, has designated Darfur as an utmost priority. It has consolidated its links with the Sudanese Women’s League, as part of the Higher Popular Committee for Darfur’s Peace; the former, in cooperation with Qatari citizens, has been instrumental in various aid and rehabilitation assistance programs for Darfur.

Dialogues around social peace have grown to be the characteristic marker of Darfurian activism in Doha, without ignoring the principal causes of the crisis. In Doha, activists have abundant opportunities to contribute to presentations, focus groups, peace initiatives, debates, and interviews with key players in Darfurian politics, ranging from lunch with representatives of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), teaching courses on public anthropology to Qatari students, attending Red Crescent events held in collaboration with the Sudanese Women’s League, and talking to leaders of armed factions who arrived in Doha in search of reunification, to interviewing the first Darfurian to surrender himself to The Hague. As my interests in diasporic politics expanded to incorporate multiple sites of inquiry about migrants’ and exiles’ political lives, Darfurians in Doha offered me a unique opportunity to examine members of a political society who had previously been regarded as economic migrants, who had been pushed by dire circumstances at home and lured by financial rewards abroad.
“I truly don’t know any serious officer or special operator or civilian who has been in the war that has any confidence about it. We are not going to prevail in Afghanistan,” he said.

Although Obama’s rhetoric is very different from Bush’s, their policies remain very much aligned, according to Hersh. Unmanned drones continue to bomb targets in Afghanistan and continue to kill both combatants and civilians indiscriminately. Obama is fully aware of the damage being done and yet has not tampered with the existing system.

When it comes to American citizens being held in countries like Iran, “we complain bitterly in America about the lack of jurisprudence and the lack of a good legal system and, yet, how many people now are still in Guantanamo, suffering away?” Such double-standards continue to operate and are thoroughly counterproductive. “The truth is,” Hersh said, “if they weren’t Al Qaeda when we captured them, and most of them were not, as many of you probably understand, they are now after seven, eight, nine years of being incarcerated without any hearings or any rights.”

When it comes to American citizens being held in countries like Iran, “we complain bitterly in America about the lack of jurisprudence and the lack of a good legal system and, yet, how many people now are still in Guantanamo, suffering away?” Such double-standards continue to operate and are thoroughly counterproductive. “The truth is,” Hersh said, “if they weren’t Al Qaeda when we captured them, and most of them were not, as many of you probably understand, they are now after seven, eight, nine years of being incarcerated without any hearings or any rights.”

The insurGENCY is spreading and is becoming more violent. Opportunism and morally questionable acts, have been features of American governance for a long time. He said that “After WWII, we had a secret program of bringing and ‘de-Nazifying’ some of the German scientists who were valuable to our own energy and missile program.”

There was hope that much of the damage done during the Bush era would be fixed when the new administration was sworn in, but, not much has changed in U.S. foreign policy since Obama took office, he argued. Many questionable acts like torture, the use of secret prisons, assassinations, and extraordinary renditions have continued unabated.

Hersh expressed his disappointment in Obama’s inability to learn from the mistakes of the Bush administration. He argued that, in America, “We are anti-history […] Why else would we make the same mistake we always make?” Hersh concluded by saying, “I am stunned and appalled that this president did not do what he said he was going to do.”
Regional Perspectives:

CIRS held a working group meeting on November 7, 2010, to discuss regional perspectives related to the ongoing “Nuclear Question in the Middle East” research initiative that CIRS commenced in May 2010. The project is designed to look into nuclear proliferation concerns associated with the GCC states’ aims of establishing nuclear power capabilities in the region. Through close examination of the complex political and economic issues involved, CIRS aims to give due diligence to study of the topic.

The meeting was divided into broad thematic sections, including 1) regional security and arms control; 2) civilian nuclear energy programs; 3) Israel’s nuclear program and security in the Middle East; and 4) regional perspectives of Iran’s nuclear energy program.

The participants began by surveying the security climate across the region. They noted that the complexity of arms control and weaponization in the region is worth further in-depth study. In many cases, the countries of the Middle East have strategic alliances with various different countries and this produces complex political networks. The participants argued that what is unique about the state of security in the Middle East is that, despite always being seriously affected by foreign influence, many countries in the region have historically made strategic decisions against the advice of foreign allies. In the past, Iraq’s weapons program was closely associated with Western countries as a buffering measure against the Islamic Republic of Iran and, yet, Iraq had its own independent motivations and initiated various clandestine nuclear programs.

Further, the participants argued that the threat perception was “sub-regional” in that the countries of the Middle East are more concerned with neighbors’ security programs, rather than regional ones. Morocco, for example, is less concerned with Iran and Israel’s nuclear ambitions than it is with Libya’s. Threat perceptions, therefore, are based on geographic location and proximity of security hazards, and are the basis for driving regional security policies. The participants also considered the power of nuclear ambitions in the face of non-conventional terrorist threats.

Despite tremendous pressure exerted by Western powers, many countries of the Middle East have voiced their right to pursue nuclear ambitions. Many, however, do not have the necessary capacity, infrastructure, and technological capabilities. The countries that do, such as the GCC states, have opted for rational economic strategies by seeking contracts from Asian firms to build their nuclear plants, rather than relying on the expertise of their Western allies. The strength of the Israeli lobby has meant that the United States has been discouraged from engaging in these regional GCC initiatives.

The threat from Iran is often attributed as one of the main drivers behind the GCC states’ nuclear ambitions, the participants argued. Despite this credible threat, there are various other factors that are just as influential. Issues such as energy consumption, economic stability, climate change, and the depletion of natural resources in the GCC have become of paramount importance to the establishment of nuclear energy ambitions. Further to these practical issues, notions of prestige and image-building are also key drivers for the acquisition of nuclear power in the region.

The participants concluded the meeting by arguing that it was oil and gas prices that have caused the “nuclear renaissance” in the region. The interest in nuclear programs in this case is based on nuclear power rather than on the fuel cycle and enrichment possibilities for weapons.

International Perspectives:

Two months later, CIRS invited the international perspectives working group members back for a second meeting on January 9-10, 2011, to deliver their chapter submissions and to critique each others’ findings and conclusions. The papers will be collected by CIRS and submitted for publication by a university press.

The participants stated that nuclear energy will always be considered of dual character and although many countries claim that they will establish a peaceful civilian program, there always remains suspicion that the program can be used for purposes of proliferation.

Continued on page 12
Food security is an ongoing global concern clearly reflected in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization’s most recent estimates that close to a billion people are currently hungry. The international development community has been battling for decades to develop successful strategies for addressing the food needs of the world’s most vulnerable.

While food insecurity is often linked to underlying problems of poverty and underdevelopment, food security as a current public policy issue is not only of concern to lower-income states. Wealthier countries with ample resources are amongst the most active in considering alternate means for ensuring an adequate supply of food for their burgeoning populations. The six GCC states have adopted various approaches for addressing their lack of food security and food sovereignty. The three primary strategies being considered are: enhancing domestic agricultural sectors; expanding strategic food storage capacity; and investing in overseas land purchases.

Out of these three strategies it is the investment in overseas agriculture that is causing the most polarizing debate in available literature on the topic. On one side of the debate are those who posit that such investments can further global food production and lead to greater food security for the populations of both the investing as well as host country. On the other side stand those who argue that these investments are highly questionable, and threaten the livelihoods of fragile communities in the developing world. Both strands of the discussion are heavily laden with underlying assumptions, couched in the language of advocacy, and deterministic in their outlook. Given that the issue is one of significance to policy-making, one can understand that there will be degrees of endorsement behind rival opinions. However, with a lack of impartiality present in both sets of competing arguments, particularly within the context of the GCC, it becomes difficult to present any coherent analysis of the state of these overseas land purchases. The lack of empirical investigation that has been undertaken to authenticate the arguments of either side, means that much of what one reads seems speculative and unsubstantiated.

Proponents of these overseas land purchase schemes argue that they provide a win-win solution for all. The contention is that developing countries’ agricultural economies are in disarray, as over the decades their productivity has slipped due to a lack of effective investment in infrastructure and capacity, limited technological advancement, and poor management of resources. Given these conditions, if countries in the global south are to be successful not only in tackling their low agricultural productivity but also in feeding their own people, massive restructuring and overhauling of their agrarian economies is necessary. This argument asserts that overseas land investments that infuse funds, import foreign expertise, and deliver technological advancement to the ailing agricultural sectors in developing countries, will improve food security for the host as well as the investing country.

Advocates of overseas land investments stress that in order for these enterprises to benefit all parties, there is the need to institute a “code of conduct.” Such a code would comprise of an abiding set of just principles to ensure that investment in overseas farmland is a positive situation for both purchasing and host states, carefully taking into account the needs of affected communities. The main objectives of this code of conduct would be to ensure that the investments are tied into the economic development needs of the poor and most vulnerable communities in the host state. Investments should be made sensibly, sustainably, and pro-poor.

Those who are skeptical of the current overseas land investments point to previous such experiments which have been condemned for exacerbating socio-economic gaps in host countries. Much of the criticism of the current GCC-led land purchase schemes is framed within this broader discussion. There is an implicit assumption that these overseas land investments are shady deals which are being rushed through without any transparency or consensus-building. In articles on the subject the most popular term applied to GCC land investments is “land grab,” a term which can hardly be open to anything but a negative interpretation.

Civil society bodies in host countries have generally condemned such foreign-driven agricultural projects as being short-sighted and unsustainable. They point out that past experiences with such enterprises have lead to wider gaps of poverty and marginalization for local communities and farmers, and have created further imbalances in the overall economic development of the regions where they have been carried out. Other concerns raised include the lack of transparency over these current land deals, and the cloud of secrecy that keeps facts and figures out of the public domain. The fact that many of these land sales are being pushed through by governments whose interest may be in the bottom line of generating foreign investment, and who neglect to take into their confidence local people and affected farming communities, also adds to the sense of mistrust. In some cases the governments involved in putting their farmlands up for sale/lease to international parties are in themselves viewed as being corrupt, thus further fuelling suspicion over the motives behind the land purchases being undertaken.

The scope of the recent trend for overseas land acquisition is hard to gauge. Estimates of recent land sales in the developing countries of Asia and Africa vary from hundreds of thousands of hectares to several million. Data is scanty, available information sketchy, and much is left to speculation.

More in-depth reflection is required on both the economic dynamics causing the current global food crises, and the responses being taken by states faced with potential food shortages. Overseas land investments may be undertaken either as regular transnational business enterprises or designed specifically as a policy response. The criticism of current investments by the GCC states is not matched by a studied examination of the actual agro-ventures. There is a need for focused research into the global land-acquisition trend, and for a more in-depth understanding of the size and nature of current projects.

Article by Zahra Babar, CIRS Project Manager
The third and final meeting of the “Migrant Labor in the Gulf” working group was held on October 10-11, 2010. CIRS launched the initiative in 2008. The working group is composed of experts in the field of migrant labor who hail from a variety of different academic disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, history, and political science. The working group is also composed of the CIRS research grant recipients: Andrew Gardner from the University of Puget Sound/Qatar University, Arland Thornton, Nathalie Williams, Dirgha Ghimirie, Mansoor Moaddel, and Linda Young-DeMarco from the University of Michigan, Susan Martin from Georgetown University, Mary Breeding from the World Bank, and David Mednicoff from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

During the meeting, each participant submitted a draft paper. The goal of the meeting was for those taking part to critique each other’s work and advise the authors as they prepare a final draft for submission to a planned edited volume to be published by a university press in the near future.

The participants adopted different perspectives on migrant labor. Some focused on macro trends that drive migration and define labor patterns within the Gulf Cooperation Council and among sending countries. In addition, several participants employed ethnographic methods to analyze the lived experiences of the migrants themselves.

The term “migrant labor” was historicized in order to analyze how the relationship between the citizen and the migrant in the Gulf states has traditionally centered around the question of labor. Connections between the Gulf and other parts of the world were built around the pearling industry, trade, kinship relations, and religion. Migrant labor is usually depicted as a transient activity, and although many laborers are indeed short-term employees, this masks the fact that there are long-term and more culturally and socially-integrated forms of labor that have existed in the Gulf for generations. Importantly, historicizing migrant labor in the Gulf states is useful in pointing out all the actors that are often excluded from discussions on the topic. Racialized hierarchical systems can be traced back and attributed to the British colonial system along with the establishment of multinationals and the oil industry in the region.

Further, the participants examined the issue of gender in relation to migrant labor. Migrant labor in the Gulf tends to be highly gendered, where construction work and public sector work is dominated by males, and domestic work is performed by females. In general, and not just in the Gulf, domestic work falls outside of the purview of a country’s labor laws because it is not considered part of the market economy. However, the participants argued that including domestic work within the framework of labor was not necessarily a solution to the problems associated with this type of employment. Here, the participants agreed that migrants should not be examined solely in terms of labor, but their social relations, political beliefs, and social formations should be examined as well.

Another key discussion was based on GCC states’ nationalization plans. The researchers spoke about the importance of not overlooking these schemes as the development of local human resources is a main target for most Gulf nations in the future. There has been little research regarding these nationalization schemes because of the difficulties of their implementation. As the Gulf strives toward knowledge-based economies, long-term development is regarded as the responsibility of the national workforce. Although the nationalization strategies of the GCC countries differ, nationalization policies are geared towards breaking decades-long dependence on foreign labor in both the public and private sectors. In future, lower illiteracy rates, better global technological connectivity, and more women in leadership roles all pave the way for increased diversification of the Gulf state economies.

Members of the working group addressed several other significant issues such as the ‘kafala’ or sponsorship system, human trafficking, illegal migration, and regional regulation efforts. The participants relied on a variety of data sources, including in-depth interviews, field observation, survey research, as well as demographic and other statistical data. The edited volume will be the first of its kind to be produced within the region and will be of interest to both scholars and students of migrant labor issues.
Focused Discussions

Invited Scholars Discuss Topics of Interest

Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World
January 11, 2011

Matthew Gray, Senior Lecturer at the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, Australian National University in Canberra, lectured on “Explaining Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World.” His lecture was based on work that he conducted for his recent book titled, Conspiracy Theories in the Middle East: Sources and Politics (Routledge, 2010). He argued that because “conspiracy theories are real political language,” they are worthy of serious study. Although the proliferation of unverified stories is a social phenomenon that can easily fall into the delusional and exaggerated, such stories are nonetheless important indicators of current social fears and apprehensions and can reveal underlying ideas often ignored by mainstream discourse. Gray explained that conspiracy theories will continue to flourish in the wake of global television stations, new media, and communication technologies; it becomes very difficult for a lay listener or viewer to differentiate between someone speaking with formal, traditional authority and someone merely claiming to have authority,” he argued.

Wikileaks and Intelligence Reform
January 25, 2011

Carl Ford was Assistant Secretary of State and head of the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research under President George W. Bush. He gave a lecture on the topic, “Wikileaks and Intelligence Reform.” He began the discussion by saying that Wikileaks’ “basic assumption is that transparency should be complete and that every citizen should know everything that goes on in the government.” However, Ford argued that “complete transparency” is an idealistic principle that is sound in theory, but cannot be sustained in practice. “The fact is,” he said, “there are things that have to remain secret – not because we want to hide it from people, but because it is a practical matter, for national security interests.” He further argued that any idea of future intelligence reform has been dealt a major set-back. “The knowledge of the U.S. intelligence community and the quality of our analysis will suffer because of Wikileaks,” he said. “The information itself was not very important, but the damage it did to the process was what concerned most people in the intelligence community.”

Euro’s Future in the Balance
February 10, 2011

Ibrahim Oweiss, Professor Emeritus of Economics at Georgetown University, delivered a lunch time lecture on the subject of the “Euro’s Future in the Balance.” Basing his lecture on the question “what are the possible scenarios for the Euro’s future?” Oweiss explored the ways in which the Euro has shaped and will continue to shape the economies of the European Union countries. Although the Eurozone is a significant economic region of the world and has a combined population that exceeds that of the United States, the recent bailouts of Ireland and Greece by Germany have indicated a serious weakness in the zone’s strategy. “The future of the European unification project is on life support, while Germany’s fingers are on the power switch,” he said. Indeed, because “Germany has the only healthy economy in Europe,” Oweiss argued, “either all of the sovereign debts of Europe become German public debt or the Euro will collapse.” He concluded that despite the current state of the economies of the Eurozone, the Euro will remain one of the world’s key currencies.
Nuclear Question in the Middle East, continued from page 8

Because a civilian nuclear program can be modified into a military one regardless of the original intention, there are a number of strict international nonproliferation laws and treaties that countries must adhere to in order to allay international suspicions.

Deliberating different models of regime survival strategies, the participants indicated that these have a bearing on why some countries have nuclear programs, while others steer clear of such projects. According to such “nuclear logics,” countries that wish to internationalize and integrate into the global economy by attracting foreign investment tend to avoid acquiring nuclear capabilities. Inward looking models, however, tend to want to acquire nuclear programs as they are less dependent on the global economy and as such do not adhere to international treaties. Further to macro level analysis of states’ nuclear ambitions, the participants also discussed the more detailed minutiae of such projects. As part of this analysis, the participants spotlighted the social psychology and the role of individual leaders in nuclear decision-making. Thus the group concluded that personal characteristics of decision-makers are key variables in understanding why and when states pursue nuclear power.

The nuclear programs of many countries of the Middle East were presented as case studies, including Israel, Egypt, Libya, Turkey, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Countries such as the United Arab Emirates, for example, cannot rely on their own oil supplies for their high energy intensive petrochemical and water desalinization industries. The energy and electricity demands in such countries are extremely high. Many argue that these countries must pursue a combination of hydrocarbon, renewable energy sources such as solar and wind, as well as nuclear energy in order to meet their needs. In order to be in full transparency, the Abu Dhabi nuclear power program has been established in accordance with international treaties, abiding by protocols and openly inviting foreign know-how and observers.

Concluding the meeting, the working group participants discussed some overall themes that emerged from their discussions and proposed a general theoretical overview of the nuclear issue in the Middle East. As an overarching framework, the edited volume will address the issue of Middle East proliferation and nuclearization within the scope of the Iranian and Israeli shadows as well as the opaque relationship between civilian and security programs.
Focused Discussions

Popular Uprisings in the Middle East

Georgetown’s campus in Doha held an open discussion on February 8, 2011, to review the recent political upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt and their implications on the Arab world. The discussion, organized by Professor Karine Walther and CIRS, featured four experts from Georgetown’s Qatar campus.

The roundtable discussion titled, “Popular Uprisings in the Middle East: The Jasmine Revolution and Its Aftermath,” allowed members of the Georgetown community the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the events unfolding in Tunisia and Egypt. The speakers included Abdullah Al-Arian, a doctoral candidate in Georgetown’s History department; Sharif Elmusa, Associate Professor in the Political Science department; Daniel Stoll, Senior Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs; and Mohamed Zayani, Associate Professor of Critical Theory.

The first question posed by a member of the audience related to the role played by the Egyptian constitution in the event of a government transition. Commenting on the inherent problems with using Egypt’s current constitution to foster change, Al-Arian argued that in its present form, the constitution is an ineffective document. “The way that the constitution is structured is that it puts so much power in the president's hands that it’s basically impossible to get anything accomplished without President Hosni Mubarak,” said Al-Arian.

Elmusa echoed Al-Arian’s statement saying, “The regime has rewritten the constitution in such a way as to make it impossible for anyone else but the regime and the ruling party [NDP] to participate.”

“Demand for real political and institutional change is being hijacked by more social demands.”

In addressing how the constitution could prove useful, Stoll argued that the document provided a framework that could be used to implement change. “It’s a flawed document, but it’s a starting point,” said Stoll. Al-Arian agreed, adding that perhaps earlier versions of the constitution that vested less power in the Mubarak regime’s hands could be used as a “common frame of reference” to advance change in Egypt.

“In terms of development, things can only look up.”

In response to a question asking why the U.S. government had been slow to react and offer support to pro-democracy protesters in Tunisia and Egypt, Stoll answered that the Obama administration was perhaps acting cautiously. “It’s a political tightrope as to how a response is structured,” he remarked. Stoll explained that in the Egyptian case, the U.S. government was likely uncertain about whom to support since the Mubarak regime had successfully suppressed the emergence of a viable opposition leader.

Elmusa asserted that the U.S. government could perhaps do more by suspending the billions in aid it sends to the Egyptian military “without looking like they’re intervening.” In addition, he argued, this would allow the armed forces in Egypt to play a neutral role, rather than continue to act at the Mubarak regime’s behest.

Asked about the impact of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, Zayani cautioned against two looming threats for the region. “One is that countries will try to preempt this rather than engage in real change.” He continued, “The other thing that happens, and there are signs starting to come out of this in Tunisia, is that real demand for real political and institutional change is being hijacked by more social demands.”

Speaking to the question of the reasons that led to pro-democracy protests in Egypt, Al-Arian said that economic disenfranchisement due to decades of government corruption was largely at fault. “Imagine if you could get rid of all that [corruption]. So in terms of development, things can only look up,” concluded Al-Arian.

Article by Jennifer Ponard, Media Writer at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar.
My research sits at the intersection of history, international relations, and law and contributes to a burgeoning field of study, the history of international law. I came to this scholarly pursuit somewhat fortuitously. From a young age I loved history but nonetheless I always foresaw myself pursuing a career in law. In my senior year of college, I even opened a fortune cookie that opined I would “make an excellent lawyer.” Rather than tempt the fates or abandon my fondness for the past, I found a way to combine the two.

But my research is predicated on more than personal whim and fancy. Law is often understood to be ultimately definitive, even if open at times to dispute, because in most national contexts there exists a final legal arbiter, like the United States Supreme Court. But international law differs fundamentally from other types of law, not least because the international community has no final, high court to pronounce the law, much less a shared legislature to create law and a recognized authority to enforce law. The study of international law must therefore be different and, in my opinion, an interdisciplinary pursuit. I aim to produce work that is relevant for other disciplines, and I believe draw on the methodologies of but also to have intellectual genealogy of the virtues and pitfalls of one of the twentieth century’s most important but also contested legal principles. I wish to analyze the transition by which a number of trends that developed in the international context there exists a final legal arbiter, open at times to dispute, because in most nations extolled the “union” of Avignon and France as the first example of what would later be dubbed national self-determination; however, Avignon in fact created a precedent for many later annexations in which the popular will was used both cynically and chauvinistically. I wish to analyze the transition by which the will of the people went from being used in Avignon, where the population probably favored joining France, to many a later revolutionary and Napoleonic annexation, in places as far flung as Dalmatia, where it probably did not—and in so doing provide an intellectual genealogy of the virtues and pitfalls of one of the twentieth century’s most important but also contested legal principles.

I am also currently investigating the origins of the Alien Tort Statute (ATS), one of the greatest enigmas in American legal history. Originally enacted as part of the First Judiciary Act in 1789, it established United States courts as venues for “all causes where an alien sues for a tort only in violation of the law of nations.” After a nearly 150-year hiatus in use, with the landmark case Filartiga vs. Pena-Irala it became a means by which to seek redress for international human rights abuses. Not least because of the importance of originalist intent in American jurisprudence today, the logic behind the ATS is of both historical and contemporary significance. After the Revolutionary War, the erstwhile Thirteen Colonies maintained a robust trade and close economic relationship with Great Britain, and I believe the statute was intended to provide a legal framework for maritime trade and adjudication of disputes between independent states.

Georgetown University in Qatar is an ideal environment in which to explore these and other matters relating to the history of international law, because of the explicitly interdisciplinary nature of our programs and faculty. What is more, our excellent students and other matters relating to the history of international law, because of the explicitly interdisciplinary nature of our programs and faculty. What is more, our excellent students have already prompted me to look at international law in novel ways. They have repeatedly emphasized the extent to which many international legal principles spread from or were imposed by Western Europe and America to/on the rest of the world, astutely questioning the universalist pretensions of the law. They have therefore intuited what I think is the main insight to be drawn from studying the history of international law – the ultimate mutability, contingency and indeterminacy of international law.

Edward Kolla is an historian of European politics, culture, and international relations with a particular interest in the history of international law. He is currently preparing article manuscripts on the origins of the Alien Tort Statute and on changing conceptions of natural law during the Enlightenment and their repercussions for international law.
The Season in Events

Members of a CIRS panel discussing security and democracy after U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq

His Holiness Aram I, Head of the Armenian Church in Lebanon

Thomas Lippman with members of the audience after his lecture

Focused Discussion with Georgetown SFS Dean Carol Lancaster

Audience at a Distinguished Lecture

Georgetown University students at a Monthly Dialogue Lecture
Call for Occasional Papers

Georgetown University’s Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) is pleased to announce a call for contributions to its Occasional Paper series. CIRS publishes original research in a broad range of issues related to the Gulf region in the areas of international relations, political science, economics, and Islamic studies. Other topics of current significance also will be considered.

Papers should be a maximum of 10,000 words and cannot have been previously published or under consideration for publication elsewhere. Papers must adhere to the Chicago Manual of Style (15th edition) and all transliterations must adhere to the International Journal of Middle East Studies. All submissions are subject to a double-blind review process. Any copyright concerns are the full responsibility of the author. Please submit manuscripts to cirsresearch@georgetown.edu. Inquiries about the Occasional Paper series or other related questions may be directed to Suzi Mirgani, CIRS Publications Coordinator, at sm623@georgetown.edu.

Post-Doctoral Fellowship

Georgetown University’s Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) awards Post-Doctoral Fellowships. The fellowship supports a recent Ph.D. recipient in any discipline working on the area of the Middle East with priority given to those working on the Gulf. The Fellowship is for a period of one academic year. Compensation, benefits and other terms of employment are highly competitive.

Interested candidates should visit the website for more information: http://cirs.georgetown.edu/research/fellowships/114126.html

Visiting Scholar/Researcher

Georgetown University’s Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) awards nonresidential Visiting Scholar Fellowships. The position is open to scholars in all disciplines working on any area of the Middle East, with priority given to those working on the Gulf. This position is ideal for mid- and senior-level academics. Compensation, benefits and other terms of employment are highly competitive.

Interested candidates should visit the website for more information: http://cirs.georgetown.edu/research/fellowships/114127.html

CIRS Newsletter ISSN 2072-6961
© 2011 Center for International and Regional Studies
Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar
Education City, Qatar Foundation
P.O. Box 23689
Doha, State of Qatar

For event inquiries: cirsevents@georgetown.edu
For research and publications inquiries: cirsresearch@georgetown.edu
http://cirs.georgetown.edu | Tel +974 4457 8400 | Fax +974 4457 8401

Unless otherwise noted, all articles written by Suzi Mirgani, CIRS Publications Coordinator.