Ibrahim Fraihat, Senior Fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution’s Doha Center and an adjunct assistant professor at Georgetown University in Qatar, delivered a CIRS Monthly Dialogue lecture on “Managing the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry” on October 27, 2015.

With a background in conflict resolution, Fraihat offered an analysis of how to reduce tensions in the Middle East region using two different approaches. The first isolates each individual conflict as an exclusive case requiring specific solutions targeted at particular nations. The second approach takes a more regional stance, and perceives of Middle East conflicts as somewhat interrelated. This approach posits that many of the current conflicts, including those in Yemen and Syria, are the result of proxy wars, and are linked, in one way or another, to larger regional rivalries. Fraihat argued that the second approach was more useful in its holistic view of regional conflicts being the result of spillover tensions generated elsewhere. He explained that “most, if not all, of the conflicts in the region are linked in one way or another to Tehran and Riyadh, or to the Saudi-Iranian relationship...If you are able to reduce the tension, or achieve some rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, then by the time you bring them to the table to sit and talk and have some understanding, then probably 50 percent of the conflicts will disappear.”

Fraihat gave a complex characterization and background to the history of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, arguing that there have been peaks of hostility related to specific regional incidences over the years. Leaving aside the legacy of a centuries-old Arab-Persian enmity, more recent regional concerns were stoked with the onset of Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution and the rise of a rival political and Islamic power prepared to challenge Saudi regional hegemony. Concerns about Iranian dominance led Saudi Arabia to support Iraq in its war against Iran in the 1980s. A further escalation of antagonisms began in the aftermath of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, which, effectively, changed the regional order, and led to a power vacuum in which Saudi Arabia and Iran vied for geopolitical influence.
Greetings from Doha.

Over the past few months, CIRS has embarked on a number of new and exciting research initiatives, produced several academic publications, and hosted a series of public lectures, inviting members of the Qatar community, and beyond, to engage with experts on the Gulf and Middle East region.

This fall, we have been actively working on a number of projects, and engaged in several ongoing and overlapping research initiatives, including in-depth studies of “The Geopolitics of Natural Resources in the Middle East,” “China and the Middle East,” “Art and Cultural Production in the GCC,” “The Gulf Family,” “Re-Emerging West Asia,” and “The Changing Security Dynamics of the Gulf.” These initiatives are designed using empirically-grounded, theoretically informed research where the goal is to fill in existing gaps in the literature and to contribute original knowledge to the field.

In addition to our evolving research program, CIRS welcomes the publication of a new book by Mohamed Zayani, Associate Professor of Critical Theory at the Georgetown University in Qatar and the 2014-2015 CIRS SFS-Q Faculty Fellow. The book is titled *Networked Publics and Digital Contention: The Politics of Everyday Life in Tunisia*, and is published by Oxford University Press, 2015. CIRS also published new Summary Reports that emerged from two CIRS research initiatives on “Arab Migrant Communities in the GCC,” and “Gateways to the World: Port Cities in the Gulf.” Additionally, CIRS just released a new *Occasional Paper* titled “Studying Disadvantaged Youths in the Middle East: A Theoretical Framework.” The paper is authored by Manata Hashemi, Farzaneh Family Assistant Professor of Iranian Studies at the University of Oklahoma, and the 2012-2013 CIRS Post-Doctoral Fellow. As always, our in-house publications can be downloaded for free from the CIRS website. For more information on these recent CIRS publications, please refer to page 3 of this newsletter. This newsletter contains further detailed information about each CIRS activity and research initiatives conducted over the past few months, as well as articles highlighting recent lectures, events, and faculty development initiatives.

We warmly welcome feedback from our readership, whether it is through Facebook, Twitter, or by e-mail. I, and the rest of the CIRS team, look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at our upcoming lectures. We invite our readers to follow CIRS news and activities by logging on to the CIRS website at: http://cirs.georgetown.edu.

Sincerely,

Mehran Kamrava
Professor
Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies
School of Foreign Service in Qatar
Georgetown University
Mohamed Zayani’s most recent book tells the compelling story of the concurrent evolution of technology and society in the Middle East. It brings into focus the intricate relationship between Internet development, youth activism, cyber resistance, and political participation. Taking Tunisia as a case study, it broadens the focus from narrow debates about the role that social media played in the Arab uprisings toward a fresh understanding of how changes in media affect existing power relations. Based on extensive fieldwork, in-depth interviews with Internet activists, and immersive analyses of online communication, this book redirects our attention from institutional politics to the informal politics of everyday life.

This report describes the CIRS research initiative on “The Evolution of Gulf Global Cities.” Glittering skylines, high urbanization rates, and massive development projects in the Gulf have increasingly attracted the attention of urban development scholars and practitioners. This project examines dynamics of urban configurations in the Gulf in order to understand the city as a political, cultural, and social space. By engaging with urban sociologists, social geographers, political scientists, city planners, and architects, this multi-disciplinary research project links macro-level knowledge of urbanization and modernization projects in the Gulf, with the micro-level understanding of everyday spaces of living and human interaction.

There are two predominant theories regarding disadvantaged youth in the Middle East. The first argues that socioeconomically disadvantaged Middle Eastern youth are more prone to radicalization and thereby constitute a threat to national and international security. The second theory states that young people engage in a deliberate calculation of means and ends in order to attain the power and wealth necessary for upward mobility. This paper synthesizes the two approaches and assesses the social conduct of poor youth from the perspective of aspirations-bounded rationality. The paper proposes that youth create strategies to improve their lives that are conditioned by experience and observation of those who inform their social worlds.

Migration to the GCC has attracted increasing journalistic attention, and a growing body of scholarship from academics. What has gone almost completely unnoticed, however, is the regional, intra-Arab aspect of the phenomenon. The historical setting and the processes through which Arab migratory patterns have taken place, and their economic, sociological, and political consequences have all been different from other similar patterns. This report examines the dynamics involved in the emergence of Arab migrant communities in the Gulf region, focusing on how they came about, their overall sociological compositions and economic profiles, and the causes, processes, and consequences of their interactions with, and integration within, the host countries.
Jeannie Sowers Discusses “Environment and Human Insecurity in the Middle East”

CIRS invited Jeannie Sowers, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of New Hampshire, to deliver the inaugural Monthly Dialogue of the 2015-2016 academic year on September 29, 2015. The lecture, titled “Environment and Human Insecurity in the Middle East,” highlighted how human wellbeing and health are affected by environmental challenges. Important issues include the provision of urban infrastructures for water and sanitation and the impacts of man-made climate change on the Middle East and North Africa on water resources.

Sowers introduced the notion of an ecological shadow to highlight how environmental challenges often require decision-making across multiple scales. An ecological shadow, she explained, is the “environmental harm from patterns of production, consumption, and disposal that is displaced elsewhere. This displacement can be to other people, it can be to other places, it can be, of course, displaced to other countries,” as well as to future generations. The conceptual distancing of ecological harm is a serious and widespread problem all over the world, and is, essentially, a prerequisite of economies driven by mass production and consumption. Industrial and industrializing nations often defer negative ecological costs upon those who are most vulnerable to ecological shifts, including those weakest on the political scale, such as poor communities and other species.

“This whole field of inquiry about ecological shadows has been very closely tied to research on environmental justice.”

Sowers argued that there are many everyday issues that are neglected when considering environmental challenges. One example is the ubiquitous plastic water bottle that is widely produced, consumed, and discarded in the Middle East. Despite the seemingly innocuous use of plastic water bottles, the material is a hazard, both at the level of its production and disposal. Around eight percent of the global production of fossil fuels is used to sustain the plastics industry. Even if Middle Eastern countries made serious efforts to encourage or enforce the reuse and recycling of plastics, there still remains a problem with the material’s non-biodegradability. The seemingly small and everyday issue of plastic water bottles, thus becomes a wider issue of environmental politics related to the political economy of plastic, and the ecological shadow it casts.

Inadequate government policies regarding the collection and disposal of waste means that the accumulation of garbage, and especially plastics, have become problems for the surrounding environment with consequences for human health. Waste problems also persist in “developed” countries. Despite some success with recycling efforts, “the dominant strategy of waste management in the United States remains simply putting it somewhere else,” Sowers said.

Landfills can perhaps be tolerated by countries with empty landmasses, but for a small country like Lebanon, this solution is unsustainable in the long term. With the closure of the main landfill on the outskirts of Beirut, there was a build-up of solid waste on the streets of the city, and an outcry by the affected residents. “For environmental studies, this whole field of inquiry about ecological shadows has been very closely tied to research on environmental justice, which, of course, calls our attention to the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and harm for a given activity, or a given product,” she said.

Beirut’s “You Stink” campaign is an example of the convergence of political failure, the environmental effects of mass production and consumption, and the resulting social activism that calls for environmental justice and government accountability. “The campaign,” she said “mimics many of the strategies, the tactics, and the discourse that we see not only in other environmental campaigns in the Middle East and North Africa, but also in the Arab uprisings more broadly.”

In conclusion, Sowers asked: “what can we do to reduce the intensity of these shadows?” She noted the need for technocratic resource management; increasing resource efficiency for any given product; engaging in demand management; increasing mechanisms for environmental accounting by exposing hidden costs to consumers, producers, and governments; and environmental regulation and taxation. None of these suggestions will work successfully unless there is a unified, systemic, and inclusive approach to ecological shadows. “In order to have social engagement, you have to start dealing with patterns of economic and political exclusion,” Sowers concluded.

Jeannie Sowers is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of New Hampshire. She holds a PhD from Princeton University and a BA from Harvard University. Selected publications include Environmental Politics in Egypt: Experts, Activists, and the State (Routledge, 2013), The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt (co-edited with C. Toensing, Verso, 2012), and articles in Development and Change, Climatic Change, Middle East Report, and International Environmental Agreements. She is on the editorial boards of the journals Global Environmental Politics and Middle East Report.
On June 14-15, 2015, CIRS held a second working group to examine “Re-emerging West Asia.” The project’s geographic focus includes the countries of the Gulf, the Levant, and the three South Caucasus states. Scholars gathered to receive critical feedback and commentary on draft chapters that have been written for the project. At the meeting a range of topics were covered, including a historical overview of the region’s geopolitics, pipeline politics, civil society, the power of non-state actors, and finally, the rise of oligarchs and white-collar criminal networks in the South Caucasus.

Opening the session was a discussion on the impact that history and empire has had on the structure of the region. West Asia has been defined by the rule and collapse of three great imperial powers, and more recently, the problematic rise of the transnational Islamic State. While the post-Soviet countries of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia have remained mostly internally stable after the fall of the Soviet Union, a new regional hegemon to replace the USSR has not emerged. The modernization project has been difficult due to the need for an ideological and cultural hegemony that can be extended to large sections of the populations. The scholars suggested a need for a more nuanced definition of nationalism in relation to the modernization project in the South Caucasus. Discussants also stressed the need to highlight the different experiences of autonomous regions in West Asia have had with the colonizing powers, and the impact this has had on territorial bids for self-determination in the post-Soviet era.

Russia’s soft power relations in the South Caucasus thrive through religious institutions, such as the orthodox churches in Georgia and Armenia, as well quasi-governmental organizations that are equivalent to the role of NGOs in civil society. The participants suggested that Russia engages in the South Caucasus region by reaching out to close constituencies in order to gain support. They mentioned the existing contradictions between certain post-Soviet countries’ support of Russia as a state but dislike for the Putin government. These inherent contradictions highlight the differences between European value-based engagements in the region in comparison to Russia’s engagement model based on political coercion. The participants also stressed the need for further elaboration on alternative forms of soft power such as ethnic nationalism, the Russian language, and the diasporas within Russia.

In the post-Soviet era, issues of ethnicity in Iran and Azerbaijan have influenced political and social relations. In Azerbaijan, ethnicity has been used as a political lever in devising policy, whereas in Iran, it has taken a back seat. This can be explained by understanding the roots of state legitimacy. Azerbaijan finds legitimacy in its nationalism as opposed to Iran which bases it on religious sentiment. As for the Kurdish question, Iran and Turkey have struggled to provide this population with the legitimacy it needs. ISIS’s encroaching power and seizing of territory in areas such as Kobane has meant that Turkish-Kurdish relations need to be re-examined in light of these new regional security threats.

In regards to the pipeline politics of the region, the South Caucasus is an area where Turkey, Iran, and Russia have competed for centuries. The significance of this region not only lies in its natural resources but also in the multiple routes that connect the South Caucasus with the larger Caspian Sea reserves. Power leverage differs between the three countries. Iran has ample energy resources and is in a good geopolitical position, Turkey has no resources but has a unique location and soft power, and Russia has both energy reserves and hard power. With recent voting developments in Ankara, Turkey’s newest proposed pipeline project “Turkish Stream” has been facing issues of third-party access to the trans-Adriatic pipeline.

Until the recent elections, Turkey’s AKP party was able to present itself as a new political force with a distinctive foreign policy in the region. The AKP’s Middle East focus was on desecuritization and the consolidation of Turkey’s regional status in relation to its neighbors. Turkey was able to brand itself by using soft power through its foreign aid programs and by accepting over 1.5 million Syrian refugees. The participants questioned whether AKP’s behavior could be classified as “Neo-Ottomanism” and whether neighboring countries buy into this narrative. The discussants emphasized the need for a more thorough analysis of the refugee crisis Turkey is facing, and the distinctions between it and other Middle Eastern states who have chosen to close down their borders.

The participants also discussed issues of white-collar crime and the rise of oligarchs, noting that the emergence of the economic elite in Armenia has largely distorted the country’s reform efforts. During the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict the state relied on these oligarchs for tax collection and the provision of services. In addition to oligarchs’ influence in the political economy some also resorted to violent means to realize their demands. In the case of Georgia, even though their economic variables are very similar to those of Armenia, a divergence has taken place when comparing the corruption levels in the two countries. According to the World Bank, corruption and white-crime levels plummeted after the 2004 Rose Revolution. Even though the revolution itself does not explain the decrease in crime and corruption, it was able to temporarily break down the corrupt structure, and allowed younger and newer people to assume positions in government. n
“THE GEOPOLITICS OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE MIDDLE EAST” WORKING GROUP I

CIRS convened the first Working Group for the research initiative on “The Geopolitics of Natural Resources in the Middle East” on September 27-28, 2015. The session was attended by ecologists, geologists, economists, political scientists, and other scholars with expertise on environmental issues in the Middle East. The purpose of the meeting was to present key geopolitical and environmental concerns, and to identify gaps in the existing scholarship on the subject. Over the course of two days, participants debated a number of topics that not only covered a general overview of geopolitics and natural resources in the region, but also included case studies on environmental conditions in specific countries.

The meeting opened with a debate on applying the theoretical framework of “geopolitics” to the topic of natural resources in the Middle East. Straddling vast reserves of oil and natural gas, this region has been vulnerable to a host of geopolitical forces since the beginning of the twentieth century. Major powers, including European countries, the United States, and Russia, have historically attempted to remain influential in the resource-rich states of the Middle East, and these dynamics of external intervention relating to regional resources have had a substantial impact on the region’s political economy. More recently, shifts in the energy sector accompanied by a decrease in global oil prices may impact the geopolitical arrangements in the region. The participants considered the possibility of waning US interest in the Middle East as a result of diminishing dependency on Gulf hydrocarbons due to the American surge in domestic shale oil and gas production. Asian powers, including China and India are emerging as key consumers of Middle Eastern hydrocarbons, which could also have geopolitical consequences for the region.

Additionally, the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) brings attention to the role of transnational non-state actors and regional natural resources. The participants discussed ISIS's conquest of territory around the Tigris-Euphrates river system, paying attention to the question of whether ISIS is strategically attempting to build a “water” empire or whether it is primarily interested in controlling territory and oil. There was a consensus to conceive of geopolitics, in the context of this research initiative, as a general metaphor for examining the multiple transnational, regional, and domestic dynamics through which politics intersects with the management of environment and resources in the region.

There has been a continuing sense of instability in the region, particularly since the Arab uprisings and the growth of ISIS. The oil-rich regimes of the Gulf, including Bahrain—the primary Gulf state to experience its own significant Arab uprising—were largely able to maintain political stability, and contain attempts at anti-regime political mobilization. The participants highlighted the difference between the GCC and other Arab countries in relation to the Arab Spring, and attributed the Gulf states’ relative stability to their status as wealthy oil and natural gas states, and the institutional path dependencies and resilience of the regional rentier bargains.

In addition, natural resources have also affected economic diversification in the region. Gulf economies are built around capital derived from an abundance of natural resources and an unlimited access to relatively cheap migrant labor, as a result of which the theory on economics of scarcity does not appear to apply to this context. Scholars discussed the kind of economy that could actually be built as a result of these particular conditions prevalent in the GCC. There has been an assumption that rentier states are doomed to fail in terms of achieving substantial economic diversification, as the existing political economy does not encourage innovation or high labor productivity. GCC countries have attempted to encourage economic diversification by initiating state projects on innovation and focusing efforts on creating knowledge-based economies. Many Gulf states also rely on portfolio diversification and Sovereign Wealth Fund investments as a means of moving away from dependence on hydrocarbon based revenues.

As is the case globally, the Middle East has increasingly been adversely affected by climate change. Some of the environmental concerns facing the region include critical groundwater depletion, water salinity, increasing temperatures, and pollution. Additionally, the paucity of rivers and lack of hydropower and coal deposits have proven to be persistent obstacles faced in the region. For much of its history, people in the Middle East have relied upon livestock made up largely of sheep and goats because of their ability to handle the climate. However, things changed with the discovery of oil and natural gas reserves, and states stepped in to manage the resources with fossil fuels becoming vital to rentier politics. Growing urbanization has led to rural marginalization and degradation of traditional agricultural hubs in the Middle East. Rising income levels have also caused rapid lifestyle changes and the development of consumer culture in the GCC which has a direct impact on environmental resources, straining existing water and energy sources, and leading to discussion of how to curtail waste and consumption patterns. While discussing the political ecology of renewable and non-renewable

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Firat Oruc is the CIRS SFS-Q Faculty Fellow for the 2015–2016 academic year and Assistant Professor of English and Humanities at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. He received his PhD in Literature from Duke University in 2010. Previously, he taught in the Comparative Literary Studies program at Northwestern University (2011–2013) and the departments of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles (2010–2011). His recent work has appeared in literary criticism journals such as English Language Notes, Criticism, and Postcolonial Text.

Oruc’s current research examines the connections between national identity and translation by investigating the construction of a state-sponsored world literature canon as a national “culture planning” project in Turkey. With the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk introduced a series of radical cultural reforms aimed at leaving the Ottoman/Islamic past irrevocably behind. These measures promoted identification with Europe as “the universal civilization,” while simultaneously emphasizing Turkish identity as the foundation for the new nation. One of the most significant Kemalist revolutions was dil devrimi, or “the language revolution,” which mandated that all “old, fossilized” Arabic and Persian words be abandoned completely and replaced by un-Turkish equivalents. In this research project, Oruc focuses on the ways in which this architectonic language revolution shaped the translation of “World Classics” into modern Turkish in line with a strong commitment to the ideals of humanism and secularism.

Reem Al-Ansari is an Assistant Professor at Qatar University’s College of Law, and the 2015–2016 CIRS Qatar University Fellow. She received her LLM from the University of Michigan Law School, Ann Arbor, and earned her PhD from the Law Center at Georgetown University in Washington D.C., marking her as the youngest Qatari lawyer and doctorate degree holder in the state. In addition to lecturing, Al-Ansari is the Director of the Legal Research and Studies division at the ROLACC Role of Law and Anti-Corruption Center in Doha, Qatar. Previously, she worked at the World Bank headquarters in the (GAC) Governance and Anti-corruption unit, and is the recipient of two EED awards for education excellence.

Al-Ansari is currently working on a research project tackling the issue of money laundering from the national level, focusing on the Qatari law no. 4 of 2010, and on international level through analyzing the FATF recommendations and mechanisms. The research analyzes the mechanisms used by the World Trade Organization (WTO) to deal with trade corruption, taking money laundering as a case example. The analysis examines the relationship that exists between the WTO and illegalities in trade, the various interventions used by the WTO, and how effective these mechanisms turn out to be in practice. Trade corruption involves a myriad of illegal activities, including money laundering, which is classified under the broad heading of trade-based money laundering. The research indicates that the rules and regulations relating to money laundering in the WTO need to be subject to a system of harmonization. Al-Ansari suggests that this can be done through adopting important rules and regulations related to best practices as they appear in other statutes in connected entities.
CIRS held the first Working Group for its research initiative on “Art and Cultural Production in the GCC” on August 30-31, 2015. Participants included academics, art historians, museum specialists, as well as a selection of curators and visual culture experts. Over the course of two days, the participants discussed a number of relevant issues and identified existing gaps in the literature. Topics discussed included, amongst other things, the viability of art as soft power in the GCC region, the role of the Gulf states as patrons of the arts, and authenticity, cultural appropriation, and censorship in the region.

Opening the discussion, participants considered the viability of art as soft power amongst the GCC states and the role artists play within these societies. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, the value of a work of art is not set by artists themselves, but by the field of production that produces its value. Hence, when trying to understand how art and cultural production in the Gulf can be utilized for soft power gains, one must not only recognize the direct producers of the artwork but also the matrix of agents and institutions, including critics, curators, collectors, and patrons involved in valuing the art. In the case of the Gulf, artistic development has taken place in Sharjah and Kuwait since the 1960s and 1970s, yet only recently has international attention formally recognized art and cultural development in the Gulf region as being financially lucrative. This has been largely stimulated by the patronage of the arts, whereby certain Gulf states such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, have begun heavily sponsoring and funding such initiatives. By recognizing the different actors involved in the game of soft power, it becomes easier to understand the intersectionalities that exist between internal and external interests in relation to art and cultural production within the region.

In terms of art, authenticity and cultural appropriation in the Gulf, the discussants explored the relationship between authenticity and professionalism, and how this ties into issues of citizenship and nationality. If heritage sites in Abu Dhabi and Qatar were to be perceived as art installations, the issue of cultural appropriation becomes deeply problematic considering such places evoke the idea of a mono-identity by marginalizing notions of the other. A certain level of disconnect exists between the arts and the community the art is being created in, which also extends to the relationship of museums with their surrounding communities. The philosophy behind museums is that they should be embedded within their communities by providing a necessary intellectual and cultural service. For example, in Bahrain, the Pearling Pathway is an artistic initiative that consists of twenty-one different historical sites such as mosques, schools, and underwater oyster beds that depict traditional Bahraini communities’ lives before the discovery of oil. Likewise, in Oman, Qasab Castle is a newly-converted museum that is funded from the top down and yet managed from the bottom up, in terms of economics and local employment. Nevertheless, these two examples are often the exception, considering most museums in the Gulf often struggle with engaging non-museum entities.

Feasibility and sustainability plans, something most European museums have to go through in order to apply for national funds, are a rarity in the case of Gulf museums. Most feasibility studies are conducted internally, which largely limits community engagement and venues for discussion around such subjects. Similar issues can be perceived when charting the development of contemporary Gulf cinema. Gulf cinema has been a small, but thriving affair since the 1970s, however more recently, there has been a rush of financial support and social interest for young filmmakers from the region. After an initial enthusiasm, film festivals and film school programs have been downsized dramatically or closed completely. This has partially been due to censorship issues and because correct feasibility and sustainability plans did not take place before the initiatives were launched.

When it comes to understanding the role of the Gulf states as patrons of the arts, the discussants problematized the type of vision each art institution and museum was shaping. For instance, at the signing
CIRS held its second Working Group for the “The Changing Security Dynamics of the Gulf” research initiative on May 13-14, 2015. Academics gathered for a second time to discuss their research findings and gather critical feedback on their chapter submissions from their fellow working group members. The topics that emerged covered a wide range of issues, including the politics of succession in Gulf monarchies, the rise of ISIS, the nexus of business and politics, and the emerging energy landscape.

The scholars debated the strengths and limitations of a succession model in Gulf politics. Research findings show that, in the case of Oman, despite the absence of a son or a publicly designated heir, the political mechanism in place allowed for senior elders to choose the next heir to the throne when a death occurs. In Saudi Arabia, succession tends to be a more complicated process, as sons in line could be skipped based on senior Saudi leaders’ choices. The participants suggested a broader analytical context in order to contextualize the two case studies and to further explain the rapid pace of change taking place in Saudi Arabia. The United Arab Emirates’ behavior as a small state was also examined. Due to the size and capacity of the Emirati army and airforce, relative to other small states in the region, small state theory could not be applied to the UAE’s foreign policy decisions that encompass both soft and hard power. The participants speculated if the generational change in power coincided with the distinctive shifts in foreign policy and how this contributed to the UAE’s “activist foreign policy” within the region.

Undoubtedly, in the wake of the Arab uprisings, the Gulf regimes in power have been facing severe policy dilemmas. During the 1980–2003 period, the three Gulf wars altered the positioning of the GCC states vis-à-vis Iran and Iraq, and accelerated their integration into the Western military and security umbrella. The emergence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the occupation of Iraq demonstrated how non-state violence was replacing interstate conflict as the primary threat to regional security and stability in the Gulf. More recently, the threat to regional security posed by the Islamic State is confronting all the Gulf states. Saudi Arabia is particularly at risk from the ideological threat that ISIS presents. ISIS impacts both the internal and external security interest of the GCC, due to the existence of a network of IS cells within the Gulf states, and also as a result of the flow of Gulf nationals who are joining IS fighting forces.

In addition to the rise of ISIS, the United States’ perceived reluctance to intervene more aggressively in the Syrian civil war has also contributed to the GCC states taking a more active role in regional security. At the current juncture there is an unprecedented willingness by GCC states to embrace military leadership in the region. Yet there is no coherent or coordinated response by the six states. From 2011 onwards, there was a distinctive shift in the foreign policies of Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The participants suggested that this new form of interventionism displayed by some of the GCC states brought with it severe risks that could directly impact Gulf security. For example, GCC interventionism in North Africa has come with extensive financial commitments.

The production of oil and shale gas in the United States as a result of fracking and horizontal drilling has had significant strategic implications for the energy landscape in the Gulf. The participants hypothesized whether the United States’ changed energy outlook corresponded with a reduction in its military and strategic engagement in the Middle East. India, for example, has an overwhelming dependence on oil from the Gulf, whereby oil imports constitute eighty percent of their annual need. Moreover, approximately $32 billion in annual remittances are sent back to India every year from the six million Indian expatriates living in the Gulf. Despite these strong energy and commercial ties, India has been significantly absent from engagement in the Gulf region.

Diversification of economies in the Gulf has been a long stated goal for the Gulf Cooperation Council, but in light of falling oil prices, the need has become even more essential. In fact, economic diversification may be difficult in the Gulf due to the protective business system in existence. In most of the six Gulf states the business communities have a history of political influence and often support the sociopolitical order in place. In recent years, Gulf ruling family members have entered the business and private sector in growing numbers. This can be attributed to the growing amount of ruling family members who are unable to assume positions in politics, thus pursuing economic ventures. As the Arab Spring has shown, the business elite continue to benefit from the political status quo. Protests and political unease in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman were initially triggered by youth’s anger and resentment towards the unequal distribution of rent as well as rising unemployment. Inevitably, ruling elites will face conflicting priorities between the nation’s interests in promoting youth employment, social services, and personal stakes they may have as businesspeople. Finally, the participants questioned the nature of the new ruling bargain in the Gulf. If ruling families continue to believe that security requirements trump democratization processes, what are the implications for Gulf societies in the future?
Noor Al Malki Al Jehani on “Strengthening the Family in Qatar: Challenges and Required Actions”

Noor Al Malki Al Jehani, Executive Director of the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), delivered a CIRS Monthly Dialogue on “Strengthening the Family in Qatar: Challenges and Required Actions” on May 25, 2015. Al Malki gave an overview of the historical evolution of family policies in Qatar, resulting in “the family cohesion agenda,” in the Qatar Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy of 2011-2016. As an introductory note, she stated that “while I think that Qatari families should be the primary targets of policymaking in Qatar, these policies should also take in consideration the wellbeing of all families in Qatar,” including expatriates who make up a majority of the population.

“While I think that Qatari families should be the primary targets of policymaking in Qatar, these policies should also take in consideration the wellbeing of all families in Qatar.”

Al Malki pointed out that although people tend to view the notion of family through their own personal sets of beliefs and experiences, the family structure continues to be the defining basic unit of most societies. This is “because healthy, functioning families play an essential role in individual, human, social, and economic development,” and the dissolution of this structure places a heavy burden on governments, she said.

Historically, the Qatari family structure has evolved differently to that of the predominant nuclear family. The formation of the Qatari family is governed by Islamic principles, and incorporates responsibility towards members of the extended family, including inheritance rights. The historical structuring of the Qatari family is also based on tribal affiliations. “The tribe might have lost some of its authority over its member families, and its economic role, but it is still a major force in family life, and is supported by the continuing practice of intermarriage and a unique system of tribe and family-based neighborhoods,” Al Malki explained.

The family as the basic unit of society became enshrined in the Qatar constitution with the establishment of the State of Qatar in the second half of the twentieth century. The first official family policies were introduced in the 1960s, and revolved around the implementation of social security laws to provide monetary and housing assistance to the most vulnerable in society, including low-income families, widows, divorcees, and orphans. In the 1980s, “Qatari men were growing richer, and they started to explore the Middle East and other countries,” leading to increased marriages between Qatari men and non-Qatari women, Al Malki explained. It was during this time that the government took a step to directly intervene by introducing a law to regulate marriage to non-nationals, with the exception of GCC citizens, as a response to “growing problems related to nationality claims,” she said.

In the 1990s, Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser played a major role in the social development of Qatar as President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and the founder of a number of private organizations including the Family Development Center, the Family Consultation Center, and the Foundation for the Protection of Children and Women. These organizations were tasked with a mission of community development by focusing on strengthening the wellbeing of the family, and promoting the rights of women and children in Qatar. Sheikha Moza’s influence was not limited to Qatar, and she established the Doha International Family Institute, with a mandate to promote the family at the national, regional, and international levels to research policy and outreach.

In order to achieve family cohesiveness in the Qatar Vision 2030, “the strategy seeks to address some of the trends affecting Qatari families, such as the rising divorce rates, high proportions of women who marry late or remain single for life, the growing levels of family violence, the dependence on domestic helpers when caring for children, family-work conflict, and the alarming rate of personal debt among Qatari families.” Al Malki noted that the strategy focuses on familial dysfunction, and fails to adopt a more comprehensive approach to strengthening the family. “Family strategies are multi-sectorial in nature; they cannot be implemented by one ministry alone,” she argued. “The lack of community-based and non-governmental organizations is a major challenge.”

Al Malki concluded by making some recommendations for the future, including an increase in government and private sector funding for civil society organizations, as well as an ease of the strict laws governing the establishment of such entities. As a first step, she recommended establishing degrees in family studies to be given at educational institutions in order to build national expertise. “Achieving Qatar’s Vision of cohesive families requires a partnership between the government, civil society, the private sector, and, first and foremost, families themselves,” she concluded.

Noor Al Malki Al Jehani served as the Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs from 2009-2011, and prior to that was the director of the Women’s Department of that same council. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors for Qatar Foundation for Social Work, and was a member of the Qatar National Human Rights Committee from 2003 until 2011.
CIRS held a Faculty Research Workshop on June 8, 2015, for Harry Verhoeven, Assistant Professor at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, to discuss his forthcoming book *Why Comrades Go To War: Post-Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*. The book is co-authored with Philip Roessler, Assistant Professor in the Government department at the College of William and Mary. *Why Comrades Go To War* emerges from 6.5 years of field research in Congo, Rwanda, Angola, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Tanzania, South Africa, Belgium, Italy, the UK, and the US. It draws on a unique set of elite interviews with the protagonists of the most lethal conflict since World War II.

To review the manuscript, CIRS brought together a group of experts on the themes and countries discussed in the book. These included David Anderson of Warwick University; Naomi Chazan of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Ibrahim Elnur of the American University of Cairo; Afyare Elmi of Qatar University; Theodor Hanf of the American University of Beirut; CSR Murthy of Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi; and Peter Van der Windt of New York University in Abu Dhabi. The discussions were moderated by Mehran Kamrava and Zahra Babar of CIRS. Providing practical help at the workshop was SFS-Q rising senior Umber Latafat.

*Why Comrades Go To War* discusses how, in October 1996, a motley crew of ageing Marxists and unemployed Tutsi youth coalesced to revolt against the regime of Mobutu Sesé Seko, Zaire’s president since 1965. Backed by Rwandan and Ugandan firepower, the rebels of the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Zaire (AFDL) marched over one thousand kilometers in seven months to crush the dictatorship. The revolutionaries and their foreign backers heralded the overthrow of Mobutu in May 1997 as an opportunity to restore stability and democracy in the heart of the continent. Across the world, the liberation of Zaire (renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo) was hailed as a second independence for Central Africa as a whole. In 1998, United States President Bill Clinton toasted AFDL leader, Laurent-Desire Kabila, and his regional allies from Rwanda, Uganda, and Eritrea—all of whom knew each other well, having developed a unique camaraderie and high degree of personal trust on the region's battlefronts and in East Africa's leftist universities—as a “new generation of African leaders” who had the potential to usher in an “African Renaissance.”

Within fifteen months of its overthrow of Mobutu, however, the Pan-Africanist alliance that was supposed to transform Central Africa from its dark days of political violence, corruption, and tribalism fell apart. The AFDL’s collapse triggered a cataclysmic confrontation that became the deadliest conflict on earth since World War II, drawing in eight African countries, and pitting some of the continent’s strongest militaries against each other. The fratricide between the heroes of the war of liberation against Mobutu would devastate the Congolese population and drive one of the world’s least developed countries further into the abyss. This book, drawing on hundreds of interviews with protagonists from DRC, Rwanda, Angola, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Eritrea as well as diplomats, politicians, and observers from Belgium, the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and France, offers a novel theoretical and empirical account of Africa’s Great War. Bridging the gap between comparative politics and international relations, we argue that one cannot explain the breakdown of the AFDL and the outbreak of the second Congo war without understanding the two-level game that arises in post-liberation states, in which elite bargaining within the new regime and the regional balance of power intersect and are mutually constitutive.

Harry Verhoeven is Assistant Professor at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service in Qatar. He is also an Associate Member of the Department of Politics and International Relations of the University of Oxford. His research focuses on elite politics, conflict, and the political economy of the environment in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region. He was the founder of the Oxford University China-Africa Network (OUCAN) in 2008-2009 and remains a Co-Convenor of OUCAN. He completed a doctorate at the University of Oxford. Verhoeven has provided consultancy services to and collaborated with the World Bank, UNDP Sudan, Chatham House, Small Arms Survey, and several governments. His most recent book is *Water, Civilization, and Power in Sudan: The Political Economy of Military-Islamist State-Building* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
CIRS held its second working group on “The Digital Middle East” research initiative working group on April 11th and 12th, 2015, in Doha. The participants gathered to discuss their research papers and to obtain feedback from their fellow working group members. The topics discussed during the two days covered a variety of issues relating to the digital world across the region. The discussants provided critical feedback on each of the papers, and found linkages between the different subjects addressed through this research initiative.

The scholars debated labor and productivity within the digital realm, and how, increasingly, social media users and content developers actually “work for free.” Observations centered on the fact that users and developers often overlap in social media. Through this “community of practice” both sets of actors are united in their skills, exhibiting traits of egalitarian behavior in the digital sphere. In the context of the Middle East, developers usually have a dual role, whereby they engage in remunerated work during the day and then assume activist roles during their free time, when they work for free. By doing so, developers often hope to create digital companies that are lucrative enough to sell as a whole, as opposed to selling only the product of their paid labor. In this case, the value of the developers’ labor is being captured by aggregators such as Facebook and Google. Discussants also suggested the need for further research exploring the overall economic impact of ICT in the region, and whether the Internet can actually be translated into productivity outcomes. Even though the Internet is fast become a universalizing process, the specifics of its relevance to the Middle East is yet to be fully studied.

Another element of discussion was how multi-modality in the digital sphere has led to changing behavior patterns in relation to the development of friendships and personal relationships in the Middle East. The nature and function of friendships have significantly changed as a result of instantaneous connections made online. The discussants observed behaviorisms such as de-individuation, or the erosion of self-awareness within a group setting, was becoming more prevalent as a result of new technologies. The advancement of technology and media has also acted as a catalyst for women's political development, not only post-Arab Spring but also after the 1979 revolution in Iran. Even though technology has often facilitated women in advancing their rights within society, paradoxes remain underexplored. Game studies have traditionally focused within a predefined model world. The global flows of gaming remain underexplored. Game studies have traditionally focused on consumption in regions such as the US, Europe, and Japan, neglecting the Middle East. As a result, the discussants presented a theoretical framework in a broad historical and cultural context by exploring videogames as places of hybridization. Many developers in the region create videogames through personal motivations and not as an economic interest.

In the case of intellectual property laws in the Gulf, states often struggle with developing a legal framework that deals with issues of copyright and piracy. The discussants observed that several GCC states have attempted to “domesticate” foreign intellectual property laws in an effort to protect traditional knowledge rights. GCC states use intellectual property laws to their advantage by placing a heavy emphasis on digital archiving and protection of traditional knowledge and heritage.

Continued on page 15
On October 4 and 5, 2015, CIRS held a second working group meeting under its research project on “China and the Middle East.” Contributors were assembled to receive commentary on their draft chapters on a range of topics, including the nature of Chinese foreign policy interests in the region, China’s increasing security engagements in the Middle East, the applicability of the “Chinese Model” to Middle Eastern states, and China’s role in the Iranian nuclear deal negotiations. Case studies were also presented on Israel’s role in the development of Taiwan’s military and defense capabilities, on the Sino-Saudi relationship, and on Sino-Turkish relations.

Chinese policymakers tend to present the world through four concentric geographic circles, and rank countries in order of importance to Chinese interests based on their proximity to China. China’s primary attention is devoted to ensuring the security of its domestic realm and sovereign territory, followed by prioritizing relations with countries on its immediate borders. Subsequent Chinese foreign policy engagement is active depending on whether a state is located close to its immediate periphery. In spite of its geographic remoteness, the Middle East is growing in importance to China. In the Chinese imagination, the Middle East is in fact an extension of the Chinese periphery, and particularly if seen through the lens of its cultural and historical connectivity to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. Additionally, internal discussions in China on the spillover and impact of extremism and terrorism that may threaten China’s domestic security, Chinese scholars and analysts clearly identify linkages with the Middle East. The Middle East is also increasingly central to China as a source of energy, and Chinese economic investments in the region have been growing over the past decade.

Despite the growing importance of the Middle East, China continues to demonstrate a reluctance to step outside the parameters of its traditional role in the region, or to change its standard policy line of offending no one, maintaining or attempting to maintain cordial relations with everyone, and avoiding direct conflict or confrontation with any of the states in the region. The participants discussed the obvious mismatch between Chinese interests in the region and China’s efforts to protect those interests, and suggested that, in the Middle East, China punches below its weight. However, despite the fact that there are no obvious signs of China taking a stronger military presence in the Middle East, there are indications that Chinese security-related activities are expanding. Chinese peacekeeping forces have been deployed in the Middle East, combat fleets have been active in the Gulf of Aden, and China has taken part in joint military exercises. With the growing presence of Chinese economic investments and infrastructural projects, the security of Chinese citizens has become of paramount concern and there are now several Chinese private security contractors operating across Middle Eastern states.

China is developing more robust partnerships within the Middle East and has expanded its diplomatic efforts, with Beijing mediating Iran’s nuclear settlement with the West. China has a long-standing history with Iran, as it acknowledges Iran’s leading role in the years ahead. Chinese engagements in the Middle East are also informed by the necessity of avoiding antagonizing the United States. Up until 2013, China adopted a policy of trying to keep both the United States and Iran happy. However, after 2013, Beijing adopted a more proactive role in resolving the ongoing hostility between Iran and the West. Propelling this change were China’s strategic calculations in maintaining stability of Gulf energy supplies, an increasing wariness around the possibility of a full scale militarized conflict between the United States and Iran, as well as the ascension of Xi Jinping to the Chinese presidency and the impact on China’s global engagements.

The scholars also discussed the applicability of the “China Model” of political and economic governance to the context of the Middle East. Despite the similar authoritarian and state-centric modes of governance in China and most of the Middle East, the Chinese Model cannot be easily replicated in the region primarily because of the lack of state capacity, weak institutional structures, and the different economic preconditions existing in Middle Eastern states compared to China. While the China Model may remain appealing to Middle Eastern elites as an ideal type, the necessary requirements for establishing it are lacking in the Middle East.

The participants presented case studies on the evolution of Taiwanese-Israeli military cooperation, how Islam has informed the Sino-Saudi relationship, and the changing dimensions of Turkey’s relations with China. While Israel has publicly prioritized its relationship with the PRC, it has also actively engaged with Taiwan on developing Taiwanese defense systems, often through private or backdoor engagements.

The meeting concluded with a broader discussion examining “Islamic connectivities” that have historically existed and have informed the Sino-Saudi relationship. Group discussion touched upon the role of various non-state actors and groups, including Islamic missionaries in China and the ways in which Islamic symbols are employed and utilized by the two states.
Members of the CIRS and Georgetown University in Qatar faculty traveled to Singapore on June 2–4, 2015, where they engaged in a series of bilateral research meetings with partner institutions, delivered public lectures to the local intellectual community, and collaborated on future research agendas with Singapore-based scholars, policymakers, and government officials.

On June 2, 2015, Mehran Kamrava was invited to give a public lecture at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University on the topic of “Iran’s Nuclear Talks.” Kamrava argued that the Rouhani presidency has brought significant changes to the Iranian political landscape, not least of which include the negotiations with the P5+1 over Iran’s nuclear program and a concerted effort to end Iran’s international and diplomatic isolation. Rouhani has been able to construct an unprecedented domestic consensus among the key stakeholders within the Iranian body politic. But significant hurdles remain. Domestically, Rouhani’s popularity is being tested by shortcomings in the prices of oil and the administration’s inability to move forward with many infrastructural projects. Internationally, tensions with Saudi Arabia are at an all-time high, with the kingdom marshaling regional and international support against a potential US-Iranian rapprochement.

Along with a team of scholars from the National University of Singapore and the Middle East Institute, Zahra Babar and Suzi Mirgani took part in a round table discussion on “Contemporary Migration Research in the Arab Gulf and South(east) Asia: Interdisciplinary and Transnational Approaches,” on June 3, 2015. In her talk on “The Gulf and Global Migration,” Babar shared her areas of research interest, and stated that over the past six years she has worked primarily on different aspects of labor migration in the GCC states. She has increasingly been interested in contextualizing the study of labor migration in this sub-region of the Middle East within the broader context of global migration systems, and the regimes that govern and discipline them.

During her talk, Mirgani gave a brief outline of a project she mentored, along with Georgetown University in Qatar Professor Ganesh Seshan, titled “Advancing Financial Education for Transnational Families,” in which a group of Georgetown students designed and administered a series of educational videos for low-income migrant laborers in Qatar. The project designs and pilots a financial literacy curriculum aimed at migrant households in Qatar and the GCC, and produces a set of instructional videos on financial education using the contents of the curriculum.

On June 3, 2015, the CIRS and Georgetown delegation was invited to attend the official launch of the Global Business Leadership and International Relations Advanced Professional Qualification Programme, designed to “equip business and corporate leaders with knowledge and skillset for internationalisation of their businesses. It seeks to lay a sound foundation for these leaders to drive the next phase of Singapore’s economic transformation and growth.” The program is jointly launched by Georgetown University’s McDonough School of Business and the Human Capital Singapore (HCS) Academy.

Part of the delegation was Anatol Lieven, Professor at Georgetown University School in Qatar, who was invited by the EU Centre to deliver a public lecture on “The Only Future for Ukraine Lies in Compromise—The Role of the European Union and Russia,” on June 4, 2015. Lieven argued that the origins of the Ukrainian crisis lie in moves in 2013 by the Russian government and the European Union (EU) to force Ukraine to make a clear choice between a Russian and a western geopolitical and economic orientation.

On the final day of the research trip, the delegation was invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to attend a working lunch on June 4, 2015, where Georgetown scholars and officials from the ministry discussed current affairs in their respective regions. The CIRS and Georgetown delegation was invited to the ministry to speak to locally-based embassy staff and government officials on the topic of “Security in the Gulf,” especially in light of the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the United States, and how changes in the political stance will lead to a reconfiguration of the current security architecture in the region.

CIRS and Georgetown University Research Delegation Visits Singapore

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Finally, the participants made observations regarding how many Middle East governments and societies were moving towards online platforms. Data on e-governance in the GCC show the similarities and differences amongst the Gulf states in their progress towards online governance. Results showed that the smaller less affluent states of Bahrain and Oman had better e-governance portal sites offering a wide array of services for the general public. Data also showed that e-governance world rankings were difficult to maintain without a proper all-encompassing digital structure. Additionally, citizens and recipients of e-governance services were often suspicious and untrusting of e-services, arguing that cybercrime laws were not stringent enough to protect their information online. Similarly, the same was said for Gulf citizens’ experiences in e-commerce whereby many were reluctant to engage with this new form of business transactions. Other similarities and differences were drawn between the souk and e-commerce websites. However, the participants argued that the establishment of an inordinate amount of shopping malls in the region should be considered as the intermediary between the two commercial examples.

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**THE DIGITAL MIDDLE EAST**

*CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12*

Zahra Babar, Associate Director for Research at CIRS, moderated a panel on forced migration at the “Fifth Global Meeting of Chairs and Secretariats of Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) on Migration” hosted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the League of Arab States on October 21-22, 2015 in Cairo. The meeting brought together 70 participants representing the 18 existing RCPs, along with representatives from a variety of United Nations agencies, to collectively review key developments within the global migration landscape, and to reflect on the role that RCPs play in addressing the challenges of contemporary migration. Additionally, this meeting served as a platform to launch the newest RCP, the “Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration.” The ARCP brings together all twenty-two Arab States and aims to enhance cooperation between states on migration issues in the Arab world. Babar served as the moderator for Session 6 titled “Forced Migration—Changing Trends, New Responses.”

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Zahra Babar at International Organization for Migration and League of Arab States Conference
of the contract for the Louvre Abu Dhabi, there was significant concern from the artistic community about the importation of western art considering most of these art collections were curated by foreign art consultants. Similarly, in Dubai, art fairs and auctions are market-driven due to the narrative that Dubai is a crossroads for art acquisition in the region. In the case of museums in Sharjah and Kuwait, the vision is focused on supporting local artists through the provision of free art space and educational programs for skills enrichment. The participants also discussed the educational aspect of the art industry in the Gulf, whereby many art programs train students adequately, but fail to create a critical academic community that is able to nourish a culture beyond state patronage. It is also necessary to examine who is teaching the new generations of artists in the region, since many of the experts are not based locally and are transient.

In regards to censorship in the arts, the Gulf region has had several instance were art fairs and exhibitions were censored due to cultural sensitivities. In the young Gulf, states the dynamics of the contemporary art world are always in flux. Individuals and collective actors play a crucial role in determining how the art market regulates what is permissible and what is not. For example, certain instances of censorship have targeted pieces of public art because of the level of exposure they have to the public eye. The discussants questioned the nature of public art in Gulf cities that are not pedestrian-friendly, which in turn encourages architectural pieces and buildings to often be the only existing example of art in public spaces.

The discussants concluded that in the absence of oil fortunes, the Gulf states of Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait, have had to rely on alternative funding opportunities unrelated to the state, pushing them to engage with various community members in order to fund artistic initiatives through cash donations or collection loans.

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**Suzi Mirgani presents at the 2015 Middle East Institute Conference in Singapore**

On September 3, 2015, Suzi Mirgani presented a paper on “Tweeting Terrorism: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Media Spectacles” at the Middle East Institute Conference in Singapore. She highlighted how the pervasiveness of mobile technology, social media connectivity, and corporate media network competition mean that many of the recent tragic terrorist attacks against urban, commercial spaces are inevitably turned into global media spectacles. These attacks happen for home audiences in real time to the twin delight of extremists, whose message is reverberated internationally, and the media, which is provided audience share and advertising revenues. Mirgani argued that the mainstream of capitalism and the extreme of terrorism do not always inhibit each other, but often align symbiotically to produce new markets and new networks. She further elaborated on how the conflation of corporate capitalism and terrorism can be most acutely read at the symbolic level in many of the images and recorded footage that emerge during global terrorist attacks.
Spotlight on the Faculty: Uday Chandra

My research examines modern states, markets, and notions of civilization and progress from the perspective of ordinary men and women who bear the brunt of them. Through a range of methods (ethnographic, archival, and statistical) and disciplinary prisms (political science, anthropology, history, and sociology), I make sense of these social-scientific abstractions in light of the everyday lived experiences of my research subjects. Geographically, my research has focused so far primarily on South Asia, but increasingly, I find it impossible to avoid contextualizing my empirical findings vis-à-vis other postcolonial contexts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well as the interconnected worlds of the Indian Ocean and Eurasia.

I must blame my broad, eclectic intellectual inclinations on my liberal arts education at Grinnell College. Grinnell set my mind free, allowing me to pursue a varied curriculum of study in fields as varied as mathematics, political theory, and history. Officially, I majored in economics, but spent the remaining three-quarters of my college career understanding why homo economicus was a miserable caricature of humanity. As an undergraduate, classical antiquity fascinated me because it encouraged a thorough exploration of what it means to be human beyond the smug certitudes of the modern age that the natural and social sciences today inevitably reflect. My honors thesis traced how economics, once a branch of moral philosophy, came to gradually abandon ethical or “normative” concerns to impose on me and my peers.

In graduate school at Yale, I was exceedingly fortunate to work with one of the greatest scholars of our day, James C. Scott, whose deep and abiding interest in the interplay between power and resistance inspired me to ask a big, bold question about politics and to answer it creatively. Having followed the rise of a Maoist movement in Nepal and India, I wanted to learn who participated in this insurgent movement and why. What might have been a brief, survey-centered expedition, unexpectedly, became a long-drawn engagement with the “tribal” or adivasi politics that lay at the heart of the Maoist movement. As I worked in an NGO, learned the local languages, and listened to the personal narratives of poor tribal villagers in the forests of eastern India, I began to grasp why young men and women in these remote rural communities took up arms against their own elders and state officials. Far from seeking to overthrow the state, the rank and file in the Maoist movement wished to remake their communities anew according to their moral-political visions of social change. In doing so, the politics of adivasi resistance also endeavored to remake state-society relations in these forested margins of modern India. Yesterday’s Maoist rebels are democratically-elected political representatives today. The erstwhile regime of customary laws, negotiated between tribal elders and colonial officials in a bygone era, lies now in the dustbin of history. Studying the social bases of the Maoist movement, I thus ended up with a deeper insight into the relationship between the modern state and “tribes” in India and beyond. If tribes have perpetually negotiated the contours of state power, states, too, have recursively shaped the nature and dynamics of tribal societies.

My postdoctoral research has focused on two underexplored aspects of my doctoral project: 1) the circular migration of tribal and other rural youth between their villages in eastern India and their worksites in megalopolises such as Delhi and Mumbai, and 2) the emergence of a vernacular Christian cosmopolitanism in tribal communities at home and in diaspora over the past two centuries. Taking a bottom-up approach again, I ask, firstly, how participation in urban labor markets transforms the everyday lives of young men and women and their rural communities, and, secondly, how social groups deemed “backward” have surprisingly written themselves into a global history of Christianity in ways that challenge us to rethink the politics of conversion and the lived meanings of religion in the Global South. Christian “civilizing missions,” often dismissed as handmaidens of colonial empires, may be vehicles of social mobility and avenues for cosmopolitan engagements for those at the margins of ex-colonial societies.

In Doha, I am increasingly drawn into comparing the political economy of labor migration within India with that of overseas migration from South Asia to the Gulf. Such comparisons are vital for understanding how labor markets bind individuals, households, and entire villages and regions into complex power relations with far-away host societies. Equally, these comparisons push us to situate the dynamics of migration today within a wider canvas of historical movements of both labor and capital across the Indian Ocean.

At Georgetown University in Qatar, I teach courses that offer a broad, comparative, and interdisciplinary understanding of politics and society. Beyond the abstract concepts and jargon-filled prose of the modern social sciences, I hope to inculcate in my students a passion for exploring the richness and complexities of human societies. These exploratory adventures might lead them to discover new vistas that take them far beyond the mere circumstances of birth and the deadweight of ingrained habits.
resources and how the GCC landscape has been shaped by its fossil fuel industry, participants raised the need to develop a more robust literature on environmentalism, environmental attitudes, and environment behavior in the Gulf as only a fragmentary collection of data on these topics exist. Since large numbers of foreigners reside in the Middle East, the discussants also stressed the need to learn more about the attitudes and behavior of non-nationals in Gulf in relation to conservation and environment.

In addition to a general overview of the region, the Working Group included country specific studies to highlight certain environmental problems. Mining of a less known natural resource - the sand, to meet the increasing demands of the global construction industry was examined. According to statistics, sand in Morocco is being extracted at a greater rate than it is being renewed. This has a severe impact on the environment resulting in degradation of coastline, destruction of wetlands, rising sea levels and subsequent flooding. Hence, sand mining poses a threat to the Arab World where most of the capital cities are located on the coast. The issue of aorestation and “greening projects” in the United Arab Emirates was also discussed. Dubai has a vision to establish the first Middle East rainforest for educational and cultural purposes by 2020. However, most of the species being used for that purpose are exotic ones that rely on too much water which exacerbates the already water-stressed conditions in the Emirate. During the Working Group experts discussed the need to counter current greening trends in the GCC and invest more energy in researching how indigenous species that use less water and have the ability to withstand high temperatures could be more broadly planted. Across the Middle East there is also a need to invest in genetically engineered crops that have stress-tolerant genes to withstand the frequent droughts that have been recently plaguing the region.

The discussants noted that the Middle East is a very water scarce region, expected to experience acute water shortages in the near future as a result of population pressures and climate change. Rising temperatures and decrease in precipitation have adversely impacted the water levels. There are more heat waves, prolonged droughts and destructive floods in the region than before. For example, Yemen is facing a serious water crisis with UNICEF anticipating the country to run out of water by 2020. The majority of the population in Yemen lacks access to safe water, and water borne diseases are widespread. There are studies which attribute the current state collapse to the severe water crisis in the country. Water scarcity is the most direct environmental issue for the Middle East, and has a major impact on food security as agricultural production depends on water availability. Water shortages are devastating for the Yemeni economy as the country is also increasingly food insecure and need to enhance domestic agricultural production. In order to address water and food security concerns, GCC countries have established institutions to increase domestic production despite the precarious nature of their water resources, and also to develop overseas farmland in order to secure their food imports. For example, Qatar, amongst other GCC states, has acquired farmland in Sudan and well as in other destinations, although to date none of these efforts has led to active agricultural production overseas.

While the participants in the Working Group addressed a multitude of topics ranging from geopolitics to environmental problems in the Middle East, they all acknowledged that there is limited scholarship and data available on the environment in the region from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Through this research initiative the hope is to fill some of the existing gaps in literature.
There was a new and sour turning point in the Saudi-Iranian relationship during the events of the 2011 Arab uprisings that fueled the conflict in Syria, further increasing regional tensions.

“A central question about the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, and especially one asked from the perspective of the Western media, is whether or not the conflict is sectarian in nature. While sectarianism has been used to fan the flames of the rivalry, and to advance certain agendas, this is an over-simplification that only serves to reduce a longstanding antagonism into a simple sectarian binary. Importantly, the fraught Saudi-Iranian relationship has evolved over the years for a number of different reasons, including those related to national interests, economic development, and gains in geopolitical power, but not all can be properly identified or agreed upon by scholars, analysts, and policymakers. There is a variation of views and opinions on both sides, making the rivalry difficult to manage. “Even within the parties themselves, there is no clear understanding about what the conflict is really about,” Fraihat argued.

Fraihat gave several strategies for addressing the finer points of the rivalry, including mediation, dialogue, confidence-building measures, credible peace plans, zones of peace, developing areas of interdependence, and restoring the balance of power. “At the end of the day,” he said, “there is no alternative to the parties talking,” and this is the key first step to mediating any rivalry. Switzerland, Norway, and Qatar have a history of mediation, and they could act as effective hosts for any potential negotiations. This would mean, however, that Saudi Arabia and Iran must be willing to engage with each other in a serious manner.

“At the end of the day, there is no alternative to the parties talking.”

Another opportunity for mediation is the intervention of a powerful third party. Turkey, the United States, and Pakistan all play a role in the region in one way or another. In addition, Fraihat said, “Iraq here has a huge role to play in minimizing and reducing the tension and contributing to better management of the conflict.” This can only occur if the implicated powers agree to build a free, independent, and democratic Iraq.

In conclusion, Fraihat argued that, when it comes to solving regional tensions, analysts tend to talk about official “track 1” solutions between governments, but the potential of building peace between the two countries can also be advanced with “track 2” diplomacy—unofficial dialogue between influential societal figures like academics and religious leaders to build relationships and encourage new thinking that can inform policymakers. Finally, a conducive “track 3” approach is to encourage citizens of Saudi Arabia and Iran to engage with each other at the grassroots and communal level, which is another approach that could lead to a sustainable peace between the two countries.

Ibrahim Fraihat (formerly known as Ibrahim Sharqieh) previously taught international conflict resolution at George Washington University and George Mason University. He has published extensively on Middle East politics, with articles appearing in Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Financial Times, Al-Hayat, and the Christian Science Monitor, on the CNN and Al Jazeera websites, and elsewhere. He is the author of the book Unfinished Revolutions: Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia after the Arab Spring (Yale University Press), and the co-author of Libya’s Displacement Crisis: Uprooted by Revolution and Civil War (Georgetown University Press). Professor Fraihat received a PhD in conflict analysis and resolution from George Mason University in 2006.
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CIRS Newsletter ISSN 2072-6961
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Education City, Qatar Foundation
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Doha, State of Qatar

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