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VOLUME 22 NUMBER 2 | 2015

* The views expressed in articles are those of the authors, not necessarily those of CAIS

THE LEVANT CRISIS CONFERENCE

The one-day conference, ‘The Levant Crisis: Syria, Iraq and the Region’, was convened to discuss the causes, the roles of the many antagonists, regional actors and groups and other critical aspects of the conflict. The conference was jointly presented by the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs (The Bell School) and the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (CAIS) on 11 December 2015. The event was opened by ANU Vice-Chancellor Professor Ian Young, who commented on the great capacity of the ANU to present important collaborative conferences such as this one.

Speakers included (pictured above) an expert on sectarianism, political Islam and studies of religious institutions, Dr Raihan Ismail; The Bell School Director and Professor of International Relations, Michael Wesley, ANU VC Prof. Ian Young; CAIS Director and Professor of Politics, Amin Saikal; former Ambassador to the Middle East, Mr Bob Tyson; CAIS research scholar, Katja Theodorakis. Also speaking were: intelligence and security expert, Dr John Blaxland; former senior diplomat and CAIS research scholar, Mr Ian Parmeter; Middle East specialist, Dr Vanessa Newby; an expert on insurgent ‘information operations’ and movements, Dr Haroro Ingram, and Russian specialist, Mr Kyle Wilson.

These experts in their fields gave both current and informative analysis of the crisis in the Levant and comprehensively debated the causes of the crisis, the role of regional and outside actors and the future trajectories for Syria and Iraq. The conference provided fresh insights into a very complex and difficult set of conflicts which are of great concern to both those acutely affected and, to governments and agencies around the globe. The conference was televised and will be available for viewing in the near future.

continued on page 16
This event in Kyrgyzstan's capital city of Bishkek brought leading scholars and analysts from Australia and Central Asia to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Academy in Bishkek to discuss current and emerging issues in the region related to Afghanistan. The mission of the OSCE Academy is to promote regional cooperation, conflict prevention and good governance in Central Asia through offering post-graduate education, professional training and intellectual exchange.

This workshop held on 30 November and 1 December was part of the Australian Research Council (ARC)-funded research project entitled ‘Afghanistan and Central Asia: Regional security dynamics in a new strategic environment’. The scholars and practitioners who attended the workshop explored how Afghanistan and its neighbours (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) respond to the emerging security, economic and social dynamics of the region. Their contributions provided new insights into how the Central Asian republics manage threats and tensions in the region, especially after NATO’s substantial combat withdrawal from Afghanistan. Four scholars from CAIS came to the OSCE Academy to exchange opinions and compare notes with eminent colleagues from Afghanistan and Central Asia on different aspects of security and development in the region. Attending the conference were Professor Amin Saikal, the Director, DrKiril Noushravan, a senior lecturer, Dr Christian Elleuer, a research fellow, and Dirk van der Keij, a research scholar whose project is on Chinese foreign policy in Central Asia. The informed discussion worked towards promoting better understanding of the complex and rapidly evolving situation and contributed to relevant policy debates in Afghanistan, Central Asia, the rest of the world.

The resulting presentation and lively discussion will be integrated into a forthcoming report to be published early next year on the theme of Afghanistan’s relations with Central Asia and Russia.

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Iraq's ever-changing creed and political philosophy are defying security forces, veterans and the sweltering heat to protest against poverty, unemployment and a venal political elite.

It's been a long, hot summer in Iraq, and so the Islamic world draws to a close. Protesters in Baghdad's Tahrir Square are preparing for a final mass demonstration on 18 September before Eid and the holy month of Muharram, sweeping away the last of the foreign troops whose presence has both comforted and enraged Afghans and aid workers alike for the last 13 years. There was a low-key drawdown ceremony for the US-led international Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at the heavily defended NATO bunker on Sunday. The Taliban, or those who claim to represent Washington's former Nemesis (or them) responded by mocking the foreigners, claiming that once more the Graveyard of Empires was living up to its name, and sending them packing in undignified retreat. They've been quite these last few days, the last mass attack being a few days ago in central Kabul, an IDE against a minivan filled with unarmed young recruits for the army, and in Helmand, a rocket on a wedding party that killed 24. This Friday's demonstration — and the government's response to it — could be a watershed moment for Iraq.

Iraq's political leaders are being made to feel the heat

by Jacky Sutton

Iraqis of every creed, sect and political philosophy are defying security forces, veterans and the sweltering heat to protest against poverty, unemployment and a venal political elite.

In a pageant as compelling as the massed crowds of pilgrims heading towards Karbala to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein or to Mecca to make Haj, demonstrators from towns, cities and villages across the country are coming to the capital to join their fellow citizens.

The slogans vary from narrowly-interest-based ones, ('Give us clean water and a job') those articulating a broader aspiration ('We want democracy and an end to corruption'). The demonstrators are not surrendering, they say, but will announce on Friday that they are going to use the time to take stock of what they have achieved and organise a comprehensive manifesto so that the legitimacy and enthusiasm of the protests is not dissipated through a lack of strategic direction.

They have already forced drastic political concessions from prime minister Haider al-Abadi, who include a pledge to reform Iraqi's sectarian quota system that is held to be partly responsible for facilitating the mass protests from the Sunni heartlands of the west of the country.

For the last few weeks, Iraqis of every creed, sect and political philosophy have been defying security forces, Daesh and the sweltering heat to take to the streets and protest against rampant corruption and the sclerotic political system imposed by the US-backed coalition in 2003 in the name of democratic change.

Iraqis have endured a decade and more of squandered opportunities, raised and dashed expectations, and the humiliation of having their country run by criminals answering to paymasters as far apart ideologically as Washington and Tehran - with Ankara, Riyadh and Damascus thrown into the mix for good measure.

They are Sunni, Shia, Kurdish, Yazidi, Christian, Turkmen, Shabak — men and women, young and old, from all corners and frustation against poverty, unemployment and a venal political elite.

The temperatures this year have topped 50 degrees Celsius and, despite billions of dollars being poured into infrastructure over the last 12 years, OPEC's second oil producer can't provide the power to keep generators running. When it gets too hot, the government simply calls a holiday and schools and offices shut down.

In addition, Iraq's community of people with disabilities (PWDs) has been out in force, raising their voices to protest the government's indifference to the multiple exclusions that they face.

There are over one million PWDs in Iraq, according to the Iraqi Alliance of People with Disabilities (IADO), many of them veterans from the Iran-Iraq war or survivors of terrorist attacks. Although Iraq signed the international disability convention in 2013, its laws and its officials' behaviour reflect the patronising attitudes of the 1960s, when people were considered 'handicapped' and were shut away from opportunity and sight.

Iraq's second 'Arab Spring' started as a reaction to the death of Muntazar al-Hilli, a young student from Basra who was shot dead in mid-July by security forces at a peaceful demonstration against the lack of basic services such as electricity and water. His death, like that of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia and Khader Saeed in Egypt, was a catalyst for mass action and civil society organisations sprang into action. There had been protests before, in 2011 and 2013, but these were met with sectarian division, and limited, superficial concessions by then prime minister Nouri al-Maliki.

But the game changer was for the Al-Maliki, whose sectarian politics is blamed for providing a ripe environment for the emergence of Daesh, was the collapse of the Iraqi army, once an icon of national pride, and the loss of Iraq's third largest city, Mosul, to Daesh. This was followed by the massacre of more than 800 young and unarmed recruits, most of them from al-Maliki's powerbase in the Shiite southern provinces. A year of protests by families demanding to know what happened to their loved ones set the scene for a fresh round of vitriol against Iraq's largest ever and most powerful Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, famous for his political reticence but arguably the most influential person in the country, to back the protesters.

This Friday's demonstration — and the government's response to it — could be a watershed moment for Iraq. Despite government warnings that external forces were behind the mass protests, there was no one single organiser. Rather, Facebook has provided a common platform for mobilising people onto the streets and expressing ideas about slogans and demands. It is also the platform for consolidating positions now that politicians have felt the impact of the 'Iraqi Street' and are seeking to co-opt dissenting groups in the business-as-usual pork barrel style of Iraqi politics - by creating "special advice" roles and organising lavish round tables in five star, air-conditioned hotels.

But Iraqis are no fools, and they have had enough. Police and security forces have been handing out bottles of water to protesters and helping those in wheelchairs get through to the squads. The exodus of young people, many to their deaths in the treacherous waters of the Mediterranean, has raised crisis proportions and Daesh is just one of a dozen militia groups wreaking havoc on future planning at all levels.

This Friday's demonstration — and the government's response to it — could be a watershed moment for Iraq. And it will be followed, on Monday, by the Baghdad City of Peace Carnival, organised for the fifth time in a row by Iraq's young people in defiance of a senior class that has let them down. And which proudly announces on its Facebook page that it provides safe spaces for people with special needs.

Jacky Sutton writes this article from Iraq on 18 September 2015.

It's cold here in Kabul, but there is no snow. This is good news for we expats, sitting in the blowing wind in our social centre on the UN compound, catching the white rays of the New Year's winter sun and discussing upcoming rest breaks to Goa or grumbling about yet another deadline. Behind us the Khee-e Kuhnah Khoram Mountain looms brown against the azure sky, lifting above her saw-toothed, swarthy sisters. The brown against the azure sky, jutting above the ever-present smog in a throat-tickling haze that overhangs us like a shadow.

A chill wind blows constantly, but there are no clouds to catch the planes that lumber across the deep arc of the horizon, bearing away the last of the foreign troops whose presence has both comforted and enraged Afghans and aid workers alike for the last 13 years. There was a low-key drawdown ceremony for the US-led international Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at the heavily defended NATO bunker on Sunday. The Taliban, or those who claim to represent Washington's former Nemesis (or them) responded by mocking the foreigners, claiming that once more the Graveyard of Empires was living up to its name, and sending them packing in undignified retreat.

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Pakistan-India Relations: Troubled Times in a Nuclear Neighbourhood

by Aly Zaman

During his election campaign in 2013, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had talked of the cultivation of substantive and sustained improved relations with India as a cornerstone of his proposed foreign policy agenda. Upon winning the elections and becoming the prime minister for a third time, Sharif vowed to pick up the threads of the relationship from where they had been sundered in 1999, when the Pakistani army scuttled his peacemaking efforts with his Indian counterpart, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, by launching the disastrous Kargil conflict in Kashmir. However, with Sharif’s government half way through its term in office, Pakistan’s relations with India remain mired in mutual suspicion and animosity. The latter part of 2014 witnessed the most intense artillery exchanges between the armies of the two countries along the common border of Kashmir since the conclusion of a 2003 ceasefire.

Nawaz Sharif had openly proclaimed his trumping electoral win as a popular mandate for normalising relations with New Delhi and emphasised the need for greater economic cooperation and expanded trade as essential conditions for the attainment of his foremost policy objective of reviving Pakistan’s anemic economy. Right from the outset, however, he had to contend with powerful and sustained resistance from the military, including through periodically raising the temperature along the Line of Control. The military also stymied Sharif’s attempts to detach trade from politics and pressurised him into holding off on granting Most Favored Nation (MFN) trading status to India until a new government had been formed in New Delhi after elections in 2014.

Relations between the two countries soured dramatically in 2014. India’s new Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, continued the considerable political course in accepting Modi’s invitation despite opposition from the military. Disappointingly, however, it was not long before the initial promise of an upswing in relations was replaced by an all-too-familiar environment of mutual acrimony. Artillery exchanges between the Indian and Pakistani armies on the disputed border in Kashmir became regular and often lethal. Both sides blamed the other for initiating hostilities that led to dozens of military and civilian fatalities and considerable displacement and suffering among the people from their homes along the border. Although there has been a cautious resumption of diplomatic contacts in 2015, especially a meeting between the two prime ministers in July in which they agreed to revive discussions on terrorism and security issues, the relationship remains tense and periodic military artillery exchanges continue intermittently. New Delhi is sceptical of recent professions made by the Pakistani military and civilian leadership to discontinue the practice of distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ militants and cites the continued tolerance for India-oriented jihad outfits as evidence of Islamabad’s unwillingness to live up to its anti-terrorist rhetoric. For its part, Pakistan accuses India of lending covert assistance to the Pakistani Taliban, supporting terrorist elements in Pakistan’s commercial heartland of Karachi and assisting secessionist forces in Pakistan’s restive Balochistan province.

An Indian ground incursion into Pakistan would carry even greater risks of escalation. In view of the prevailing superiority in conventional arms, Pakistan’s strategic planners have sought to maintain “minimum credible deterrence” through a first-use nuclear doctrine aimed at preventing a conventional Indian attack by threatening the first use of nuclear weapons. In contrast, India has declared its adherence to a no-first-use nuclear policy but its senior political and military officials have consistently claimed that Pakistan’s nuclear capability will not deter India from waging a conventional war. Pakistan has sought to blunt India’s conventional superiority — more pronounced than ever before owing to India currently being among the world’s largest arms importers — by expanding its nuclear arsenal, including through the incorporation of low-yield tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) and minimised warheads. Pakistan’s nuclear programme is believed to be the fastest growing in the world with the potential to stockpile enough fissile material to boost its arsenal from its estimated existing strength of between 110 and 120 nuclear weapons to as many as 200 by 2020.

Apart from the growing conventional imbalance with India, another factor driving Pakistan’s accelerated fissile production capacity is the expanding strategic partnership between the United States and India, especially in the realm of nuclear cooperation. A breakthrough agreement during President Obama’s state visit to India in January 2015 ended a prolonged bureaucratic deadlock on a nuclear deal initially signed in 2006. Although ostensibly intended only to facilitate civilian use of nuclear energy, the agreement permits India to import uranium, thereby enabling it to put its domestic stocks of uranium to military use without having to divert them from its civilian nuclear programme. Pakistan has warned that the agreement will have an inimical effect on nuclear deterrence and strategic stability in South Asia. In view of Pakistan’s strategic relationship with China, which includes nuclear cooperation, there is the potential for Beijing to hedge against an Indian decision to increase its military and nuclear-related assistance to Islamabad, further increasing the risk of a major arms race in the subcontinent.

Considering the current downward spiral in India-Pakistan relations and Pakistan’s decision to offset its conventional imbalance with India through increasing reliance on nuclear weapons, the need for strategic restraint and nuclear non-proliferation by both countries has seldom been more urgent. By giving its nuclear arsenal a battlefield component through the incorporation of TNWs, Pakistan has considerably lowered the threshold for nuclear weapons use. The costs of a nuclear war in the subcontinent could be catastrophic not only for the region but for the world. The Pakistani military’s decision to introduce tactical nuclear weapons into its war-fighting plans is a continuation of its traditional conciliatory diplomacy towards India, whereby it has been able to rattle up support to cross-border militancy in Kashmir secure in the conviction that the nuclear deterrent would ward off a retaliatory Indian attack. Yet, the response of India under Modi to a major provocation seen to emanate from Pakistan is likely to be much more vigorous than ever before. By calling Pakistan’s nuclear bluff, however, India might in turn expose itself to a nuclear attack.

A frightening scenario of this sort further underscores the need for India and Pakistan to move closer to each other through increasing reliance on communication, thereby obviating the potential for accidents and miscalculations that could have devastating consequences on a global scale. Both countries should make a fresh start by clarifying the parameters of their nuclear doctrines in the light of existing ground realities. There should also be greater transparency on the strength of their respective arsenals as well as on the deployment of nuclear warheads. Consultative meetings of nuclear authorities should be arranged on a regular basis so that mutual concerns could be aired and avenues for their redressal explored. At the end of the day, however, progress on nuclear risk reduction will remain conditional on an improvement in the relationship between India and Pakistan. As long as contentious areas such as Kashmir and terrorism remain unresolved, the situation remains an enduring risk of even a limited conventional conflict escalating into a nuclear exchange.

Aly Zaman is a Research Scholar at CAIS. He has submitted his doctoral thesis for examination.

Mr Carr explained in his address why he was now a ‘friend of Palestine’. He said that in 1977 when he and Bob Hawke launched the ‘Labor friends of Israel’, there were 25,000 settlers in the ‘occupied territories’. Now there are 500,000 settlers and the Palestinian people are subject to mass arrests, violence and impossible living conditions. Mr Carr argued that in view of the settlements and settler violence, he was now pitching the case of the Palestinians, with one religious and racial commitment to non-violent resistance, not a third intifada. They must build international support and engage with the righteous Jews who know the full story of what had happened in the world for a quarter of a century.

In 1977, members of the Labor Party did not know the full story of what had happened in the original occupation. Now Israeli historians, with a measure of Israel’s openness, have gone to the archives of their army to tell the full story of how massacres were used during the foundation of Israel in 1948 to drive out 700,000 Palestinians. Now the occupation has lasted 47 years and up to 60 per cent of the Israeli cabinet is on record as opposing a two-state solution.

The International community is backing the recognition of Palestine, with 138 nations supporting it. At the same time, Israel is at risk 47 years and up to 60 per cent of the Israeli cabinet is on record as opposing a two-state solution.

I spent nearly a fortnight in Moscow and St Petersburg in October, during which I was able to have discussions on Russia’s intervention in Syria with several Russian think tankers and journalists, as well as some resident foreign observers.

Russia’s objectives in Syria

The following picture of Russian aims in intervening in Syria emerged from my discussions in Moscow:

Preservation of the Assad regime, with which Russia and previously the former Soviet Union have been closely linked since Bashar al-Assad’s father, Hafez, came to power in 1971, and with which Russia has a formal treaty of friendship and cooperation.

Preservation of Russian access to its naval facility in Tartus, the only Russian military base outside the former Soviet Union.

Preventing the US and its Western allies from carrying out another Libya-style operation in Syria through toppling Assad (several Russian interlocutors emphasised the importance of this factor: the Putin administration believes Russia was ‘boxed in’ by the international community’s non-aggression policy on Resolution 1973 in 2011, on which Russia abstained in order to allow limited humanitarian military intervention in Libya but which NATO abused to provide military support to the rebels in ousting Gaddafi).

Demonstrating to Arabs and others (including in other parts of the world) that Putin, in contrast with Obama, stands by his allies and is capable of resolute action in contrast with perceived US dithering.

Preventing development of a dangerous security vacuum in the region if the Assad regime fell (if Sunni hardliners – Islamic State and others – came to control the whole of Syria as well as significant parts of Iraq, the contagion could easily spread and have adverse repercussions in Russia’s Muslim-majority provinces).

Russian spokesmen have also made point that the intervention will be limited to air strikes and logistics/training support for the Syrian army. They emphasise that there is no intention that Russian ground forces will become involved in significant operations, and there will be no ‘mission creep’.

I all spoke with in Moscow were adamant that Russia would not have intervened if it had not believed that the Assad regime was losing its capacity to survive and in growing danger of collapse.

And its aims in the wider Middle East

All argued the Middle East is a second order priority for Russia in geopolitical terms. The US, the West broadly and China formed its main geostrategic focus. Some saw its interests in the Middle East as essentially tactical rather than strategic.

None believed Putin had an overall plan to try to resume a Soviet-style rivalry with the US, in which Russia and the US would again vie with each other in cultivating rival clients in many parts of the world, including the Middle East.

Russia simply could not afford that sort of foreign policy, which would involve major investments of people and money in third world countries. Putin, who all argued is a foreign policy realist, was not silly enough to believe it could. So a major Russian play for the Middle East would not make sense, even taking into account the opening provided for Moscow because of the many errors and missteps the US had made in the region in the past 15 years.

Yes, that said, Russia is benefitting from its appearance of resolve compared with apparent US dithering, and is doing interesting things in the Middle East.

One analyst made the point that even the fact that conservative Arab states don’t like Russia’s support for Assad does not prevent them from dealing with it. Saudi Foreign Minister al-Jubeir (representing the Gulf Arab states in this as well) is in regular personal dialogue with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. Putin and King Salman have agreed in principle to visit each other’s capitals.

Russia’s relations with a major US partner in the region for decades, are moving ahead strongly, with a visit to Cairo by Putin and multiple bilateral ministerial meetings this year.

Russia’s regional outreach includes Iraq as well, manifested through the recent announcement of an intelligence-sharing arrangement involving Russia, Syria, Iran and Iraq. This would have been particularly galling to the US, given the blood and treasure it has expended in that country in the past 12 years. These notionally pro-US states are clearly using their Russian diplomacy to send messages of dissatisfaction to the US.

We’ll have to see where all this leads. But one Moscow analysts made the point that one of Putin’s underlying foreign policy aims was an unambiguous throw-back to the Soviet Union – ensuring that no international decisions of importance should be taken against Russian interests.

How Russians are reacting

It was clear in Moscow that the regime is spinning the Russian intervention well through a major media campaign. Public statements emphasise that the aim of the intervention is to counter Middle East terrorism in situ before it can come to Russia – so protection of the Russian public is the underlying goal.

The campaign also plays to nationalism. The narrative is that the US and allies (including of course Australia) botted their intervention in Iraq and Syria against Russia and professionals are now doing the job. Television news shows aerial photographs of Russian bombs hitting targets. Weather forecasters on Russian television even comment that clear skies in the Middle East mean it is a good day for bombing.

For now, the intervention seems to have brought public support – polls in mid-October showed about 70 per cent in favour, with Putin’s personal approval rating at 90 per cent.

How long will this last? Russians I spoke with made the point that there is no indication that the campaign is waning.

Russia’s intervention in Syria

There are three major factors that would affect Russian planning:

- Russia would have to be wary of becoming bogged down in Syria. The aim must surely be to stabilise Assad’s situation, push continued on next page

Palestine and Middle East Peace

The International community is backing the recognition of Palestine, with 138 nations supporting it. At the same time, Israel is at risk of being cast as an apartheid state and will become increasingly isolated in the world community. At the same time, Palestinians must commit to non-violent resistance, not a third intifada. They must build international support and engage with the righteous Jews who condemn the takeover of Zionism by the fanatics.

Mr Carr concluded with the point that to accept permanent occupation and colonial rule for the Palestinians, with one religious and racial commitment to non-violent resistance, not a third intifada. They must build international support and engage with the righteous Jews who condemn the takeover of Zionism by the fanatics.

Palestine and Middle East Peace


Mr Carr explained in his address why he was now a ‘friend of Palestine’. He said that in 1977 when he and Bob Hawke launched the ‘Labor friends of Israel’, there were 25,000 settlers in the ‘occupied territories’. Now there are 500,000 settlers and the Palestinian people are subject to mass arrests, violence and impossible living conditions. Mr Carr argued that in view of the settlements and settler violence, he was now pitching the case of the Palestinians, with one religious and racial commitment to non-violent resistance, not a third intifada. They must build international support and engage with the righteous Jews who condemn the takeover of Zionism by the fanatics.

Mr Carr concluded with the point that to accept permanent occupation and colonial rule for the Palestinians, with one religious and racial group enjoying thevote and the majority being denied it, would be unthinkable. He said such colonial rule has never survived and won’t in the case of Israel and the Palestinians.

Islamic Finance Lecture

Professor Mahmoud El-Gamal, Chaired Professor of Islamic, Economics, Finance, and Management, Rice University, Houston gave a lecture on ‘Islamic Finance: Religious identity, petrodollars, and legal arbitrage’ on 30 July 2015. The lecture was hosted by CAIS, the Research School of Finance, Actuarial Studies and Statistics and the Research School of Economics, ANU College of Business & Economics.

In his lecture, Professor El-Gamal explained how Islamic finance as a contemporary form of religious-legal arbitrage, caters to a narrow market segment, and, fails to contribute substantially to financial inclusion of Muslims, who remain among the most excluded financially. He said this is not surprising in light of the genesis and modes of operation of this industry which were established during the twentieth century and were mainly based on medieval and ancient legal stratagems to circumvent ancient prohibitions, which predate Islam.

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back the rebels, and then look at winding down the operation or getting out. It will be one of the key questions where we'll be looking to Russian and world opinion that the intervention has achieved its objectives.

These operations are expensive, and the Russian budget is facing difficulties from low oil prices and the Western sanctions. GDP is down three percent this year, the 2015 Budget in deficit, and there are reports of severe budgetary measures being planned for next year. Russia still has healthy foreign reserves – over $500 billion (not that much less than Saudi Arabia’s reserves of $735 billion) – so the situation not yet dire. But the trend is for budget deficits for years to come – a worry in itself and exacerbated by next point.

Western sanctions on export of energy technology to Russia are now having a significant delaying effect on its medium and long-term energy development projects. Many of western Siberry’s oil/gas fields are declining, and Russia needs reinvestment, redevelopment and the discovery of new resources just to maintain its current production levels. This has adverse implications for Russian revenue from energy exports for years to come if the sanctions are not eased soon.

So far, the Syrian intervention seems to have been effective in taking some of the pressure off the Syrian army, but the end for Putin is not yet in view.

The aim is probably to enable Assad to preserve his hold on the broad swath of territory from south of Damascus, up to the Mediterranean coast and across to the Al-Jawz and Qamishli-Asad regime, even with Russian help, probably wouldn’t try to push further at this stage. It would be highly significant if the regime could consolidate its hold over this area as it is the most productive part of the country (in normal times) and includes about 75 per cent of Syrian population. With effective control there, Assad would be in a position to survive for some time, and eventually to try to win back the rest of the country.

A Ukrainian connection?

But there’s another factor. Russians I spoke with believed the intervention had a link with Ukraine, and speculated on a possible Russian-Western deal on Syria that could have a flow on to Ukraine and the easing of Western sanctions on Russia.

The essential idea is that Russia and the US would agree on a Syrian government of national unity involving Alawites and ‘moderate’ Sunnis. The Russians would be prepared to sacrifice Assad (allowing him a dignified exit), thus giving the US a foreign policy win.

The notional deal assumes that Russia would be able to maintain its interests in the region intact in the context of any future Syrian arrangements, and that Tehran would go along if it could maintain a working relationship with the new leadership and leave the regime in place.

The third point of this triloga is that Russian-Western good will emanating from the Syria agreement would facilitate maintenance of the current mix in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, enabling broad fulfillment of the Minsk II agreement. That could mean that the Europeans – and even the US – might be prepared to ease sanctions.

This would be an extremely clever trick if it could be pulled off.

None of the people I spoke with thought it could – at least in the form envisaged by Russia. Though a deal to coordinate action on Syria would be in the interests of both Russia and the US, there was too much distrust between them for agreement to be forthcoming.

Despite that caveat, Russia now appears to be pushing Assad to have presidential and parliamentary elections. These are not needed at this time (there was a presidential election only last year, and parliamentary elections – last held in May 2012 – are not due till next year). But the elections could be a prelude for new Syrian constitutional arrangements allowing a significant role for moderate Sunnis.

Interestingly, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and US Secretary of State Kerry (plus their Sao, Furiy and Turkish counterparts) are still talking about some form of agreement over Syria – suggesting none of them has given up on the idea.

Interestingly also, Putin had talks with German Chancellor Merkel, French President Hollande and Ukrainian President Poroshenko earlier this month, Hollande seems impressed with the reduction in fighting in eastern Ukraine and is reported to have told Washington that “Russia and the US have a chance to come to a case for easing sanctions.

Time pressures

So, all of that, to what extent is Russia now in control of what happens in Syria? Putin puts a lot of faith in his clear strategy, or is his policy evolving?

Some I spoke with thought Putin could have his hand forced, and feel compelled to wind down the operation, if it became evident that Russian public opinion was turning against the intervention.

As well, Russia will be watching anxiously the performance of the Syrian army with Russian air and logistics support reinforced by Iranian and Lebanese Hizballah elements on the ground. Can they sustain the capture of territory that Assad can control without direct Russian involvement? If they can’t, the intervention strategy would need a rethink.

Putin will certainly want to avoid mission creep, and the Russians want things to start to take on a medium to long term character – for budgetary as well as public opinion reasons.

He may also be banking on some sort of agreement on Syria emerging from the Lavrov-Kerry talks.

There is perhaps another clock ticking. Despite the poor personal relations between Putin and Obama, Putin has said that his relations with the US administration from 2017 will be worse – Harry Clinton and the Republican candidates are all saying they would be firmer with Russia than Obama has been.

On that reasoning, Russia has about 15 months to work out a deal on Syria, and for that matter with the US where the bilateral environment becomes even more challenging.

Jan Parmenter is currently a Research Scholar at CAIS examining Russian policy towards the Middle East in the Putin era. Prior to this he worked on Middle East issues with a number of US government agencies for almost 40 years. His overseas assignments included duties in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Russia and Lebanon, the last as Ambassador.

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The Oil Kingdom’s Gambit

by Maria Syed

Oil is synonymous with Saudi Arabia, there is no mention of one without the other. And not just oil for the Kingdom as it is tied intricately to all aspects of life driving the economic engine, and underpinning the political and social base of the state and society, Saudi Arabia is home to 20 per cent of world’s oil reserves, the biggest producer and exporter of oil, and to most Western Oil companies the backbone of Saudi Arabia’s economy, accounting for roughly 80 per cent of its budget revenues (2015). Oil has contributed to more than revenue generation. Oil production has underwritten the regime’s contract with its people.

Recent commentaries have once again underscored the direct relationship between oil and the Kingdom, suggesting that all is not well for Saudi Arabia. These expert assert that the Kingdom will decline as oil runs out. While domestic demand for oil has soared due to a growing population, international demand is predicted to fall. To confirm veracity of these claims, an assessment is in order.

The ‘peak oil’ debate has postulated that no major discoveries are made, the extraction rate of crude oil will see a steady stump after reaching its maximum output. Within this school of thought there are pessimists and optimists, those that uphold that the world’s extraction rate is almost at peak oil stage and those who state that this point is yet to come respectively. Time and again such concerns have been expressed about Saudi Arabia. However, there is also a consensus that technological advancements can help increase production capacity. The best evidence of this view is seen in the shale revolution in the US that experienced its peak oil stage as early as the 1970s. As technological advancements are found they may well advantage Saudis as well. Though technological progress may come in the form of alternative energy sources and not necessarily in hydrocarbons. Furthermore, with the largest proven reserves of oil and the fourth largest reserves of gas in the world, Saudi Arabia is not running out of hydrocarbon reserves any time soon.

Russia, as the second largest holder of the world’s oil reserves, is the most likely country to deploy its reserves, because of its high production rate.

In order for Saudi Arabia to generate oil revenues, international demand for oil needs to be there. In Europe, renewable sources are not so prevalent, thus the Kingdom can still rely on Europe. As for the US, they are relying on alternative energy sources, thus reducing the demand for crude oil. Saudi Arabia, along with other oil-producing countries, seemed threatened with the possibility of renewables replacing fossil fuel. The shale revolution in the US gave new hope, as the world’s biggest importer of crude oil would drastically reduce its demand thus creating reverberations in the international oil market. But in 2013 China became the world’s largest net importer of petroleum driving the global energy demand. India’s demand for oil is also increasing quickly, keeping it as the future for oil is protected for some time yet.

Saudi Arabia’s high domestic demand makes it the sixth largest consumer of oil in the world. As for the Middle East. Concerns were raised that if domestic demand did not decline, the Kingdom would turn into a net importer of oil. Saudi Arabia, acting quite pragmatically, has decided to cut down on use of fossil fuels by switching to alternative energy sources. By cutting down on the use of fossil fuels, it will make oil available for exports. The Kingdom has set some grand plans to export electricity eventually through renewable energy sources. It has set a target of meeting twenty per cent of its electricity needs through solar energy by reaching a target of generating 41 gigawatts of solar energy by 2032, an ambitious target by all accounts. The Saudis also lead the world by economic investments in research and development. As the world transitions into a new energy era, Saudi Arabia wants to retain its position in the global energy market.

The Kingdom is also planning to invest heavily in nuclear energy to meet its energy needs, driven partly by concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. Saudi Arabia has negotiated with a number of countries for cooperation in nuclear energy, investments have also been made in research and development to work with the establishment of King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology. Saudi Arabia is trying to outmaneuver the emerging challenges. The oil glut the world is experiencing currently is a deliberate policy on its part. Saudi Arabia, in close coordination with its OPEC partners, has tried to drive other competitors out of the supply market, most noticeably the shale oil producers, targeting Russia and Iran at the same time. Since the last quarter of 2014 oil prices have been slashed while keeping the production high so as not to lose market shares. As a result the oil price plummeted to a low of $45 per barrel in January 2015 in $15 in mid-2014, and has seen only a slight increase since then. Although this caused Saudi Arabia quite a loss, it affected the US more as rigs shut down and drilling declined due to severe losses incurred by both the US and Canada.

The IMF recently indicated that if the slump in oil prices persisted it will have deleterious effects for oil-producing countries including Saudi Arabia. In fact the picture sketched for Saudi Arabia seemed quite grim with the possibility of it exhausting its financial assets in the next five years if it did not make adjustments and improvements to its current spending policies. To alleviate these concerns, the Kingdom made a pledge to the US to cut oil output to a level that would comply with OPEC. This was made in an attempt to stabilize the oil market. It is also dealing with extraneous challenges. It is fighting for its share of the oil market. It is also fighting with emerging competitors, statements have come from Saudi officials indicating a likely increase in oil prices. Simultaneously, announcements have also been made by the Saudi finance minister about possible cuts to unnecessary expenditures. Though these are highly speculative as it will be some time before substantial cuts are implemented. Yet, such cuts are all the more necessary. Reduced oil revenues would mean that the Government would have to reduce spending. Moving away from a hydrocarbon-based economy and diversification would be prudent. Diversifying income away from oil would also allow development of other sectors that will open up employment to accommodate the growing domestic labour market.

Far from sitting idle and exhausting its oil revenues, Saudi Arabia is devising new strategies, taking pre-emptive and counter-measures to cope with emerging challenges. It is fighting for its share of the oil market. It is also dealing with extraneous factors with ingenuity. Rather than seeing a diminution, the Kingdom is working toward an expansion of its power base.
GRADUATIONS AND AWARDS

Congratulations go to all CAIS students graduating in December.

Dr Adel Abdel Ghafar, was awarded his PhD in December for his thesis on ‘The Political Economy of the 2011 Egyptian Uprising’. Adel (pictured right) presented the student address at the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences graduation ceremony on 15 December 2015.

KHALIFA AL-FALASI PRIZE

Jon Rookes is graduating with a Master of Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies-Advanced. Jon wrote the sub-thesis component of his degree on the topic ‘Authority and Leadership among Islamists in Afghanistan’. He was awarded the Khalifa Al-Falasi Prize for best overall marks in Masters Advanced in 2015.

Graduating with a Master of Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies were Jamie Horsfield and Matt Simpson.

HIGHER DEGREES BY RESEARCH (HDR) – THESIS SUBMISSIONS

Aly Zaman, Brenton Clark and Adrian d’Hagé submitted their theses for examination in Semester 2.

Aly Zaman, a recipient of a CAIS scholarship, has been researching the topic: ‘The Domestic Impact of Patron-Client State Relationships: American Patronage and Pakistan’s Political Economy during the Cold War’.

Brenton Clark’s thesis is entitled ‘The Islamic Republic of Iran’s Relations with the Republic of Tajikistan in the Post-Soviet Period’. Brenton is currently working as an analyst on Middle East Policy in the UAE.

Adrian d’Hagé has been researching ‘The Influence of Religion on US Foreign Policy in the Middle East’.

GRADUATE PLACEMENTS

Dr Lee Schrader, a recent graduate from the CAIS HDR program, has been awarded a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), American Patronage and Pakistan’s Political Economy during the Cold War’.

Two research scholars, Firoozeh Khoshnoudiparast (pictured right) and Dirk van der Kley (left), have been awarded the valuable Endeavour Scholarship for overseas research. The Endeavour Scholarships, funded by the Australian Government, support the internationalisation of the Australian higher education and offer high-achieving Australian opportunities to increase their knowledge and expertise in their field. Firoozeh applied to attend the University of South Florida to continue her research on ‘The Diplomatic Theory of International Relations: Iranian Diplomacy and Negotiating Behaviours’. Dirk is attending the Xinjiang Academy of Social Science in Urumqi, China where he will conduct research for his doctoral thesis on Chinese economic policy implementation in Central Asia.

CAIS RESEARCH STUDENTS AWARDED PRESTIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIPS

Sana Astrah won the College of Arts and Social Sciences in the Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT) 2015. She went on to the final round and won the People’s Choice Award with her presentation ‘Am I hurting God?’, based on her research ‘Glasnost and Public Violence in Punjab, Pakistan’. Sana also completed the Vice Chancellor’s Leadership Program - a semester long training program for graduate students who are in senior leadership positions in ANU student organisations such as the Postgraduate & Research Students’ Association of which Sana is now a member.

Maria Syed, was one of two College of Arts and Social Science students to be awarded a Dean’s travel scholarship to attend the Council for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) National Forum held at The University of Melbourne on 15-16 October.

Jessie Moritz received a grant from the ANU Vice-Chancellor’s HDR travel fund to present a paper on women’s protest movements in Bahrain at the Middle East Studies Association Conference in Denver, Colorado in November 2015.

RESEARCH SCHOLARS’ ACTIVITIES

Katja Theodorakis joined CAIS as a postgraduate research scholar in June 2015. She recently graduated with a Bachelor of Development Studies with Honours from ANU. Her Honours thesis, supervised at CAIS by Prof. Amin Soikal, was entitled ‘Absent Protagonists? On the need to reorient our thinking about the Orient’. Her current research is exploring the topic: ‘Caliphate Calling: Understanding the appeal of radical Islam as a challenge to liberal modernity’.

Katlyn Quenzer is on fieldwork in Lebanon, the UK and US on her research topic: ‘Writing the revolution: A study of the intellectual history of Palestinians, 1967-1974’.

Dirk van der Kley will be undertaking field research for his PhD thesis on Chinese economic policy implementation in Central Asia. Dirk will be based in Bishkek for field research in late 2015. After which he will be in China. Dirk was fortunate to receive a grant from the ANU Vice-Chancellor’s HDR travel fund to assist him with his research.

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FIELDWORK

Sebastian Klich is undertaking fieldwork in Semester 2. He will travel to Northern Iraq, Karabakh, and Somaliland to conduct research on unrecognised states.

Caroline Ladewig is currently on fieldwork in Muscat, Oman; she is investigating her research topic: Power, Politics and Pedagogy: Female Teacher Education in Oman.

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ARABIC PROGRAM

I wanted to learn a second language and as ten per cent of the community I live in speaks Arabic, this was the obvious choice. I live in Melbourne, however there are no non-award Arabic language courses available through Universities here. I am a consultant advising government and the public and community sectors. Having a second language gives me access to new markets. Expanding my capacity to communicate with diverse Australian and international communities is also generally a rewarding experience.

This is a fabulous course. Arabic is a challenging language for an English speaker, however this course is the way to learn it. Both France Meyer and Leila Kouayy are very good at what they do and are available when needed. The lessons are considered and each builds on the one before. The online format works well, and on occasions where there are technical hiccups, these are sorted out promptly. I am really looking forward to second year."

Samantha - Online Arabic student

ONLINE ARABIC

The development of the Online Arabic program has progressed to the next stage with the inclusion of Introductory Arabic in 2015 and the preparation of Intermediate Arabic to be offered in 2016. The students enrolled in the Introductory course have found it to be extremely valuable and many are looking forward to enrolling in next year’s program.

The Arab Current Affairs and Media Arabic course, which is part of the Online Arabic program, remains very popular to students with an Advanced level of Arabic proficiency. This course allows students to read, listen and comprehend the Modern Standard Arabic typically used in Arabic-language newspapers and Internet sites, and on Arabic-language radio and television.

ADVANCED ARABIC

Students of Arabic learn much more than the language as they progress through the various levels of the program. In Second Semester 2015, CAIS offered the Introductory Course to Arabic Literature. In order to enrol in this course students must have attained an advanced level of Arabic so as they can study Arabic prose and poetry at a sophisticated level.

“My time learning Arabic at ANU has been extremely valuable. In the 3 years I have spent in the course, I have not only gained a conversational level of Arabic, but also learned about the culture and history of the Middle East. The Arabic teachers are passionate and interesting people. I am extremely grateful to Huda Al-Tamimi in particular, I cannot imagine a more generous and dedicated teacher. I have learnt so much about Islam, politics and culture from her and I consider the many hours I have spent in her classes to be among the most valuable time I have spent at university. I would highly recommend learning Arabic at ANU, it is a unique and rewarding experience.”

Geraldine - PhD (Arts)

PERSIAN PROGRAM

Congratulations to Mari Ruuskanen and John Casey who graduated in December. Both Mari and John have taken Persian to the Advanced level and have participated in all opportunities available to them through the program. John is graduating with a BA majoring in Persian and Mari is graduating with a Diploma of Languages majoring in Persian.

ONLINE PERSIAN

CAIS lecturers Dr Zarah Taheri and Dr Omid Behbahani in conjunction with the CAIS Educational Development Studio (EDS) team have been working hard to present both the online and on-campus streams of Persian language. Early in 2015 Intermediate Online Persian was added to its list of courses offered in the CAIS Persian Program. It will be followed by Advanced Persian Online which is currently being created by Dr Behbahani, and a new member of the EDS team, Mr Hashim Saiedi. The implementation of the Online program has enabled many more people to study the Persian language both from within Australia and overseas.

PRIZES FOR PERSIAN LANGUAGE AND IRANIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

There are three prizes within the Persian Program awarded annually. The Saiid Foundation for the Promotion of Persian language and literature donates two prizes, the Khayyam Prize, for the best results in Introductory Persian and the Hafez Prize, for the best results in Intermediate Persian. Dr Hashem Etminan, Chief Executive of the Iranian/Persian Cultural Foundation in Canberra, donates a prize for the best results in the Iranian History and Culture course. In 2015 the Khayyam Prize is to be awarded to Benjamin Clark, the Hafez Prize will go to Alexa Pelkovitz and the Hashem Etminan prize will be awarded to Jordan Rocke.

CAIS PERSIAN STUDENT EXCELS

William Bullock Jenkins has been awarded the 2016 Erasmus Scholarship. He will spend a year at the University of Leipzig in Germany followed by another at the London School of Economics studying for a combined masters in Global Studies and Economic History. William has been an integral part of the CAIS Online Languages Project designing courses since 2013. William studied Arabic and Persian at CAIS, as well as Urdu and Hindi as an undergraduate. Having taken Arabic at high school, WI arrived at ANU ready to immerse in its literature and proceeded to excel in further Arabic studies and to be one of the most eloquent and knowledgeable non-native speakers of Persian to graduate from CAIS. He won the Shapar Rad Prize for Persian in 2010. Will graduated in 2014 with a double degree BArts and a BAsia-Pacific Studies HONS. He was awarded a First Class Honours degree for his thesis, a study of Iranian political economy and regional influence, which was supervised at CAIS by Dr Matthew Gray and Dr Zarah Taheri (pictured right with Will).

STUDY IN IRAN — A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

“In 2013 Iran was one of the many countries I travelled to in the region, I knew relatively little about Iran but found it to be a truly fascinating place. The landscapes varied from deserts to jungles to snowy mountains and the cities ranged from traditional mud buildings to modern metropolises. The people were very welcoming and I found a progressive mindset existing alongside the more conservative aspects of society. I knew I would want to return at some point, and so when I found that Persian language was offered by ANU I decided to take it up.”

Iran’s geopolitical significance to the wider Middle East and potential for greater engagement with the West provided additional incentives to study the language. Being enrolled in Persian at CAIS gave me the opportunity to study an intensive Persian language course at Shahedeh Beheshti University in Tehran for four weeks each August of 2015. I was immersed in the language from the moment I arrived at the airport where I was met by university staff who only spoke Persian. They took me to the dormitory accommodation which was provide for us where I was placed with students from Russia, Turkey and Iraq, an arrangement which meant that Persian became the lingua franca of the room. For somebody who had begun studying the language less than six months earlier, it was a steep learning curve but a beneficial one. Following an exam to determine our levels of proficiency, we were placed into suitable classes and began to take four and a half hours of language classes every morning from a number of different teachers. In addition to class time we also had field trips to historical sites and other attractions were organised by the university. I also found opportunities to converse with native speakers while shopping in a bazaar, walking in a park, riding the metro, climbing a mountain, trying out traditional food or going to a tea house. These activities were not only great for learning the language, but also to gain insight into the contemporary culture and how Iranians see their prospects for the future.”

Benjamin Clarke

This page is generously sponsored by the Embassy of the State of Kuwait
TURKISH STUDIES PROGRAM

CASI reintroduced Turkish Studies into the program at the commencement of 2015. Dr M. Murat Yurtbilir was appointed in January 2015 to teach both Turkish language and courses in Turkish history and politics. Dr Yurtbilir has taught two sequential courses of Elementary Turkish in 2015 as well as two non-language courses: 'Turkish History: Ottoman State to Modern Turkey' and 'Modern Turkey: History, Culture and Regional Relations'.

In 2016 he will offer Elementary Turkish plus a new non-language course: 'Turkish Politics and Foreign Policy'.

In August this year, the Turkish Embassy selected two CASI students enrolled in the Turkish Studies program to attend a study trip in Turkey, as part of a scholarship offered by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The trip, comprised of a group of thirty postgraduate students from seventeen countries, took the students to Istanbul, Canakkale, in the Dardanelles and finally to Ankara. One of the CASI post-graduate students, Susan Douglas, has written about her trip.

Turkey is steeped in history, which was steadily revealed to us as we travelled across the country. In just one week we saw thousands of years of culture, Society, religion. The city of Istanbul epitomizes this experience. In the Hagia Sophia (right) there are these layers, in what was once a cathedral for the Byzantine Empire, a mosque during the Ottoman Empire and finally a museum for the Turkish Republic. In Canakkale, we experienced both ancient and modern Turkey, by touring both the battlefields from the First World War as well as the ancient cities of Troy and Assos. In Ankara, we were able to see a city and a landscape strikingly different to the coastal Canakkale and Istanbul. Ankara exemplified the modern Turkey, as its political and administration centre, but we saw evidence of both Ottoman and ancient life in the museums and old fortresses.

As part of the tour, we attended many lectures organised by the Ministry. In Istanbul, we met with the Turkish Cultural Foundation and the Turkish Federation of America, who gave us a talk about the culture of Turkey. At Kadir Has University, we attended a lecture by Dr Mustafa Akyol on the history of the Republic of Turkey. In Ankara, we met with the Deputy Directorate General for Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mustafa Ozcan, in the Ankara Palais, as he gave a talk about the foreign policy of Turkey, with a special emphasis on its relations with Armenia. It was an amazing and unforgettable experience. I was able to access a Turkish perspective not readily available as a regular tourist.

AMIN SAIKAL

BOOK

BOOK CHAPTER

FEATURE ARTICLES
‘The Islamic State strategy v the Western approach’, The Sydney Morning Herald, 9 July 2015.
‘The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Another Intifada?’, The Sydney Morning Herald, 18 October 2015.
‘Middle East extremism will defy military solutions’, The Age, 25 November 2015.

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‘The View from the other side of the hill: Iraq, Afghanistan and the War on Terror’, Or ‘Opa’ Lessons and Challenges for the Australian Army since 1990 conference, ADFA/UNSW Canberra, 24-25 June 2015.
‘Non-Arab Powers: Iran and Turkey’, Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies, Australian Defence College, Canberra, 26 June 2015.
‘Guest speaker, ACT Chief Minister’s Iftar Dinner, 9 July 2015.
‘Conflicts in the Middle East’, Emeritus Faculty Colloquium Lunch, ANU, 5 August 2015.

Roundtable Discussion with Senior US Government Analysts on Global political leadership, strategic and economic issues’, National Security College, ANU, 13 August 2015.
‘The Middle East: An Arena of Conflict within Conflicts’, Research Seminar Series, School of Political Science and International Studies, University of Queensland, 21 August 2015.
Panelist: ‘Iran Nuclear Deal: Game changer?’, ANU International Relations Society, ANU, 7 October 2015.
Briefing to Greens Senators on Australia’s involvement in Syria and the Middle East, Australian Parliament House, Canberra, 16 September 2015.
‘Islam and the Middle East’ [in Persian], Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation, Tehran, Iran, 1 November 2015.
‘Middle East: The Regional Troubles’ [in Persian], Imam Sadiq University, Tehran, Iran, 2 November 2015.
‘The Afghan-Pakistan and Afghanistan-Iran Relations [in Persian], Tabataba University, Tehran, Iran, 12 November 2015.
‘Educational Cooperation Roundtable [in Persian], Ferdowsi University, Mashad, Iran, 4 November 2015.

Robert Bower

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‘Iran Nuclear Deals Serious Syria Diplomacy Possible’, The Lowy Institute, 14 August 2015. [lowyinterpreter.org/post/2015/08/14/iran-nuclear-deal-opens-door-for-syria.aspx]
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‘Transition away from Syria’s Assad regime a fiction, The Age, 1 October 2015.

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‘Security dynamics in the changing Middle East’, Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies, Australian Defence College, Canberra, 30 June 2015.
‘Diplomacy and the media in Middle East conflicts’, UNSW Security Studies Seminar, Bowral NSW, 31 October 2015.
‘Middle East Outlook’, ASAN Middle East Institute, Seoul, ROK, 6 November 2015.[lowyinterpreter.org/post/2015/11/09/middle-east-outlook.aspx]
Numerous interviews for ABC 7.30 Report, ABC Radio and TV, SBS and The Age.
RESEARCH, PUBLICATIONS, OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

MATTHEW GRAY
JOURNAL ARTICLE

FEATURE ARTICLES

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
Briefing to DPR on Middle East/Gulf issues, Canberra, 11 June 2015.
‘Security dynamics in the changing Middle East’, Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies, Australian Defence College, Canberra, 30 June 2015.
‘The economic capacity and significance of the Middle East’, Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies, Australian Defence College, Canberra, 7 July 2015.

KRILL NOURZHANOV
BOOK CHAPTER

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
Political Islam Seminars, CAIS, September and November 2015.

ZAHRA TAHERI
LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

MINIYA NASSER-EDDINE
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‘Once Again, Australians are Fighting in the Middle East: Why?’, Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1 September 2015. [internationalaffairs.org.au/australian affairs/2015/09/02/once-again-australians-are-fighting-middle-east-why]

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Israel-Palestine conflict’, Royal Military College First Class Cadets, Duntroon, 8 October 2015.
Guest Speaker, ‘Woman of Achievement Dinner’, Zonta International Women’s Night, 8 October 2015.

OMID MALEK BEHBHANI
OUTREACH
Semin Behbhani Poetry Memorial, CAIS, 21 August 2015.
Panelist: ‘Eurasia-Silk Road-Byzantium: In search of Professor Samuel Loewen’, Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, Sydney, 26-27 November 2015.
Panelist: ‘ManiFest – Lectures on Manichaeism’, Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, Sydney, 1 December 2015.

ZAHRATUL ISLAM
LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
Co-convening and presenting: Political Islam Seminars, CAIS, September and November 2015.
‘Islam and Extremism’ Nanabahad, College, 30 October 2015.

M. MURAT YURTBLIR
FEATURE ARTICLES
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ZAI ALASALAM
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SHUHRAT BARATOV
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IAN PARMETER
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KATJA THEODORAKIS
JOURNAL ARTICLE

SEBASTIAN KLICH
BOOK CHAPTER

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

IAN PARMENTER
FEATURE ARTICLES
‘How Russia Returned to the Middle East’, published as part of a Special Report by Moscow-based online journal Russia Direct entitled ‘Russia’s New Strategy in the Middle East’, 29 October 2015.

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
‘The Middle East: Policy Implications for Australia’, presentation to senior officers and partner-country defence officers at Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies, Canberra, 7 July 2015.

JACKY SUXTON
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LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

DIK VAN DER KLEY
LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

ELISABETH YARBAKHSH
LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (The Middle East & Central Asia)
College of Arts and Social Sciences
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
AUSTRALIA

Professor Amin Saikal AM FASSA
(Director)
t: (61) 2 6125 4982
f: (61) 2 6125 5410
e: cais@anu.edu.au
w: cais.anu.edu.au

CAIS Bulletin
ISSN 1322 0462
The Bulletin is published bi-annually by the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (The Middle East & Central Asia).

Its aim is to provide information about the Centre’s activities and to disseminate knowledge about the regions of its coverage. Articles and commentaries appearing in the Bulletin do not necessarily reflect the views of CAIS.

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e: anita.mack@anu.edu.au

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The Editorial Board
Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (The Middle East & Central Asia)
College of Arts and Social Sciences
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Canberra ACT 0200
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Enquiries
T 02 6125 1061
E cais@anu.edu.au