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CAIS GRADUATE STUDENTS EXCEL

Professor Amin Saikal, CAIS Director, and all staff offer their warm congratulations to the four graduate research scholars who had their doctoral degrees conferred in 2010: Dr Justin Leach for his work on Sudan's post-independence peace accords, Dr Wendy Levy whose thesis was entitled 'The Politics of Governance in Post-war Sudan: Problems and prospects of a unified state', Dr Hamish McGregor for his study of 'Nationalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran 1979-2007' and Dr Richard Scrivener, whose thesis was entitled 'Australian Iranian Relations and the Australian US Alliance: 1979 to 2003'.

The CAIS Graduate Coursework Program also passed a number of milestones with the first graduand of the Master of Islam in the Modern World (MIMW) and a significant number of graduates from the Master of Arts (Specialising in Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies), Master of Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies and the Graduate Diploma programs.

The Master of Islam in the Modern World was established at the Centre in 2009. Ms Penny Bowen was the first graduand of the MIMW program, receiving her degree in July 2010.

Graduating with a Master of Arts (Specialising in Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies) were Ms Hannah Blackwell, Mr Nicholas Gee, Mr Alan Hawley, Mr Daniel Lim, Ms Natalya Wells and Ms Shaheen Whyte.

Graduating with a Master of Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies were Ms Ingrid Laslett, Mr Ahmad Ma'rufi, Ms Alicia Mollaun, Ms Elizabeth Olson, Ms Nicole Reaper and Ms Ashlea Scicluna.

Receiving the degree of Graduate Diploma in Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies were Ms Ghadeer Al-Otaibi, Mr Robert Straun and Ms Seher Yekenkurl.



Mr Ahmad Ma'rufi at the July graduation with ANU Chancellor and CAIS Advisory Board Member, Professor The Hon. Gareth Evans



Graduating research scholars: Richard Scrivener, Hamish McGregor, Wendy Levy and Justin Leach

NEWS AND EVENTS

STAFF CHANGES

Dr Seyed M. Torabi will complete his fixed term appointment as Lecturer in the Persian Program in December 2010 and return to teach at Azad University, Tehran. CAIS Director Professor Amin Saikal extends his deep appreciation to Dr Torabi for his valuable services in 2010.

Dr Ghassan Al Shatter has been offered a position at the International Institute for Arabic as a Second Language at the University of Jordan. He will leave the Centre in February and the position of Convenor of the Arabic Program will be filled by CAIS Lecturer - Dr Ali Aldahesh. Professor Saikal also thanks Dr Al Shatter for his important contributions to the Centre.

VISITORS

Dr Larry Marshall, Centre for Dialogue, LaTrobe University, who accompanied a group of Young Muslim Leadership trainees; Professor Ramesh Thakur, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for International Governance Innovation, and Professor of Political Science, University of Waterloo, Canada; Professor Charles Sampford, Professor of Law, Queensland University of Technology; Professor Sultan Barakat, Professor of Politics, University of York; H.E. Ambassador Ronald Neumann, former US Ambassador to Afghanistan; Dr David Connery, Deputy Director, National Security College, ANU; Mr Abdul Celil Gelim, Director Bluestar Intercultural Centre, Canberra; Dr Ali Al Bishri, Cultural Attaché and Dr Abdulaziz Al Brithen, Director of Cultural Affairs, Cultural Mission of Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia; Mr Jawdat Ali, Counsellor Minister, Syrian Embassy, Canberra; Mr Roger Baylis, Baylis Associated Pty Ltd.

LECTURES AND SEMINARS

'Muslims cannot interpret the Qur'an', Dr Mehmet Akif Koç, 30 August.

'America, Islam and the "Ground Zero Mosque"', Professor Jack Miles, 9 September.

'Scenes from the sandy knoll', Dr Matthew Gray, 12 October.

'Democracy Promotion in an Authoritarian Zone', Professor James Piscatori, 19 October.

'Life in Occupied Palestine', Ms Anna Baltzer, 25 October.

'Afghanistan at the brink?' Professor Amin Saikal, 11 October.

POSTGRADUATE SEMINARS

'Afghanistan State and Development: A Case Study of Tax Reform from 2001 to 2009', Nematullah Bizhan, 23 July 2010.

SUMMER ARABIC COURSE

Dr Ghassan Al Shatter is conducting a six week non-award course in Elementary Arabic at CAIS over the Summer Semester. The course will run from 29 November to 19 January with a break for the holidays. The course covers the Arabic script, sound system and basic grammar rules. It will use a new method of audio-visual and audio-lingual approach and is designed to develop the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing by the use of dialogues, class interaction, oral and written drills.

POSTGRADUATE EVENTS

A postgraduate information evening was held at CAIS on 20 September. This event provided an opportunity for people interested in studying at CAIS to learn about the graduate program and meet academic staff.

A dinner was organised by CAIS graduate students on 26 October. Students of both the coursework and research programs joined CAIS staff for an enjoyable evening of exchanging views and experiences.

BOOK LAUNCHES

There have been two public book launches for books authored by CAIS academics in recent months.

Adjunct Professor Robert Bowker (right) authored *Egypt and the Politics of Change in the Arab Middle East* (Edward Elgar). It was launched by ANU Chancellor Professor The Hon. Gareth Evans on 23 June 2010.



Dr Matthew Gray's book, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics* (Routledge), was launched by Mr Peter Rodgers (right) on 12 October 2010.

Mr Rodgers is a former Australian diplomat and journalist. He was Australia's ambassador to Israel from 1993 to 1996.



CENTRAL ASIAN SPECIALIST

Dr Kirill Nourzhanov, Senior Lecturer and acting Deputy Director at CAIS has been heavily called upon in recent months in his capacity as academic expert on Kyrgyzstan. As the crisis surrounding the ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan intensified, Dr Nourzhanov was able to provide background information and an inside perspective of the situation. Spending his 2009 OSP study leave in Kyrgyzstan gave Dr Nourzhanov the opportunity to gather new information on the changing circumstances in that country. As a result he has been able to provide expert analysis to a broad range of audiences. In May he presented a public lecture to the Russian and East European Seminar Series at ANU and in July he led a Round Table Discussion on the subject and provided the content for an ABC Radio Documentary Program, *Rearvision*. As well as these events, Dr Nourzhanov has given lectures, media interviews and briefings on Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian issues.



Dr Kirill Nourzhanov (centre) with CAIS Graduate Scholar Mr Christian Bleuer (left) and a member of the round table discussion group

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS FOR 2011

Neal Robinson has been appointed as Professor at CAIS. Professor Robinson is a leading scholar in Islamic Studies and will be taking up his position in January 2011. He will also serve as Deputy Director of CAIS from 1 July 2011. His previous academic appointments include: Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Leeds, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Wales, and Professor of Islamic Studies at Sogang University, Seoul.



Professor Robinson was born and educated in the UK where he gained an Oxford MA and a Birmingham PhD. While a research fellow in Bradford, he won a scholarship to spend a sabbatical year at the Sorbonne working on classical Quranic commentaries. More recently he was awarded a twelve-month professorial fellowship at the University of Leuven, in Belgium, to research contemporary Muslim ideologues and intellectuals. He has been a visiting lecturer at the University of Essex and the Hastie lecturer at the University of Glasgow. He is a fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of the UK and Ireland.

Professor Robinson's publications include: *Islam: A Concise Introduction* (Georgetown University Press, 1999); *Discovering the Qur'an: a Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Georgetown University Press, 2004); and *Christ in Islam and Christianity: The representation of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (State University of New York Press, 1991) — as well as a number of articles. His current research focuses on contemporary political Islam. In addition to Arabic he reads Greek, Hebrew and Syriac.

Victoria Mason will be joining CAIS in mid-January 2011 to take up a joint position between CAIS and the School of Politics and International Relations, CASS, ANU. She joins CAIS from her previous position at Lancaster University, UK, where she taught Politics and International Relations of the Middle East and Human Rights in International Relations. Dr Mason has numerous publications including an edited book, several book chapters and a number of journal articles published in the *International Journal of Law*, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* and the *Journal of Sociology*. Her Middle



East research focuses on the Palestinian question, conflict and conflict resolution in the Middle East (particularly Israel-Palestine and Iraq) and human rights issues in the region. Her wider human rights research includes projects on state violence, the treatment of refugees, and issues of Islamophobia and anti-Arab discrimination in the West. Dr Mason is an associate member of the Richardson Institute for Peace and Conflict Research in the UK and is involved with the International State Crime Initiative run by Kings College London, Harvard and Hull Universities.

Zahra Taheri will take up the position of lecturer in Persian Language and Iranian Studies at CAIS in February 2011. Born and raised in Shiraz, Iran, Dr Taheri received her BA in Persian language and literature from Pahlavi/Shiraz University, her MA in Persian literature from The Research Institute of Persian Culture in Tehran, and her PhD in Near Eastern Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. She has taught Persian literature and language in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley, and the Department of Persian Studies at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (Japan).



Dr Taheri is the author of *The Presence and Absence of Women in Sufi Texts: Women in Persian mythical literature from the beginning of the Islamic era to 1900* (ILCAA Press, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2007); *The Ancient Silence of Mirrors: Alamtaj Ghaem-Maghamsi's life and poetry* (Nashr-e Sales, Tehran) and two collections of poetry: *Pegāh-e Nokhostin (The Primal Dawn)* 1997 and *Milād (The Birth)* 1990.

France Meyer has been appointed as Associate Lecturer in CAIS's Arabic program. Ms Meyer has a BA and an MA in Arabic Language, Literature and Civilisation from the Université de Provence, Department of Middle Eastern Studies, Aix en Provence, France.



Ms Meyer grew up in Morocco, and studied in France and later in Cairo. She was awarded a scholarship at the Institut Français d'Etudes Arabes (Institut Français du Proche Orient) in Damascus where she lived for two years. She is a professional literary translator of Modern Arabic Literature and has translated into French many articles and 14 novels, seven of them by Egyptian writer and Nobel Prize Laureate Naguib Mahfouz.

Ms Meyer has worked in collaboration with the Institut du Monde Arabe and is currently a translator and reviewer of Modern Arabic literature for several major French Publishing Houses (Albin Michel, Actes Sud). Her latest translation of Naguib Mahfouz's *Karnak Café* was published on 31 October 2010.

She will commence her position in mid-January 2011.

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN AN AUTHORITARIAN ZONE

by James Piscatori

Professor James Piscatori presented an ANU Public Lecture entitled 'Democracy Promotion in an Authoritarian Zone: The Case of the Middle East' on 19 October 2010. Professor Piscatori recently left ANU to take up the position of Chair at the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University. His lecture drew a capacity audience to ANU's Finkel Theatre. The following is an extract from his lecture.

The subject of exporting democracy has excited considerable international concern, even controversy. Neo-conservative America famously advocated a direct hand in encouraging the process of political liberalisation in the Middle East, but the broad idea of democracy promotion predates the second Bush administration, and has long informed the foreign policy of Britain, the European Union, individual Scandinavian countries, and even Australia with its Centre for Democratic Institutions working in the Asia-Pacific region.

The US and the EU have been particularly active with programmes that address economic and political developments in the region as a way of fostering democratisation. These include the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the Millennium Challenge Corporation of the US, and the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Neighbourhood Policy of the EU.

A policy of democracy promotion unfolded that built on earlier roots and promoted the economic and security self-interest of the US. Especially after September 11, a democratic Middle East would enhance the security of the US itself.

In the National Security Strategy for Combating Terrorism in 2006, the Bush administration named democracy promotion as the long-term strategy for winning the 'War on Terror'. It was also assumed, of course, that a less authoritarian Middle East would be an economically liberalised one, thereby advancing US global economic interests. Like Spain, Portugal, Czechoslovakia and others in the so-called 'Third Wave' of democratisation globally evident since the mid-1970s, the Middle East would also benefit from political and economic liberalisation.

As the term 'liberalisation' implies, the promotion agenda, especially in its neo-conservative guise, never settled on what is properly meant by democracy, but it appears to have been bound up with two indisputable benefits: first, electoral processes whereby multiple parties contend for power and losers cede way, gracefully or not, to winners; and



second, the development of civil society.

With regard to elections, the optimistic scenario sees political progress in the large number of elections that have taken place in the Middle East from the 1950s. Islamist parties routinely participated in them, and governments were impelled by the glare of international publicity to open up some political space. There is some evidence that elections lead to an acceptance of the rules of a participatory and pluralist system, thus helping to induce a more democratic political culture. However, electoral democracy, if it were in fact emerging, now seems checked by a 'liberalised autocracy' – a merely cosmetic concession to democratic procedures as a ploy to keep governments in power.

With regard to civil society, observers have noted that providing the tools to encourage NGO development – which is often what is in fact occurring through agencies such as the UK Department for International Trade, AusAID, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) – is not the same as developing civil society. These are two separate tasks, which only sometimes mutually reinforce one another: funding the first task (NGO development) may inadvertently discourage groups from furthering the second (civil society development). By nature, donor programmes to foster civic development have been supply driven, not demand driven. This substantially alters the incentives for grassroots mobilisation, turning it from a diffuse, bottom-up process or organisation that responds to the demands of those it is meant to be serving, to a centralised, top-down process of organisation that responds to donor supply.

It is no surprise that this policy came under

serious scrutiny when Barack Obama became president. Perhaps oddly for a Democratic reformist president, little is heard of democracy promotion. In fact, in his famous Cairo speech of 2009, which was to herald a fundamentally new relationship with the Muslim world, he said: 'no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other'. Designed to distinguish his administration from the previous one, this passage was, however, greeted in silence by his largely middle class audience at Cairo University. Indeed, some, including a number of dissidents in countries like Egypt and Iran, regard this new policy as standing idly by while regimes, such as that of Egyptian President Mubarak, become more authoritarian.

A closer look at the situation reveals remarkable similarities between the supposedly starkly different administrations. Naturally, one can see profound differences between the two presidencies, not least in the obvious determination of Obama to end both the 'bad war' of Iraq and the 'good war' of Afghanistan. In addition, there is an embarrassed recognition at how condescending and hypocritical a declaratory policy of bringing freedom to the world appears to a considerable portion of mankind. However, two similarities stand out.

First, rhetoric and ideology aside, both are remarkably alike in the limited and selective application of the democracy promotion agenda. The image that the Bush administration had of vigorously promoting democracy does not fit the facts, and it may give the misleading impression that it was everywhere implemented. The reality is that it consistently supported the Pakistani military coup leader Pervez Musharraf until he was forced out of power in 2008, and it sought out new War on Terror alliances with autocratic Central Asian regimes. Little criticism was heard of the Russian or Egyptian governments, or indeed of Arab Gulf states, as they clamped down on dissidents. Moreover, many throughout the world detected American hypocrisy in seemingly promoting democracy while seeking to thwart the electoral victory of Hamas in January 2006.

Similar statements can be made of the Obama administration. It has regular dealings with China, despite well-documented human rights abuses, and has cultivated ties with a strongarm Russian government in the hope of larger strategic cooperation.

The United States has barely issued a

QUR'AN-BURNING, THE 'GROUND ZERO MOSQUE,' AND RIGHT-WING TACTICS IN U.S. POLITICS

by Jack Miles

During the 2008 presidential election, Republican-controlled media had planted and cultivated the canard that Barack Obama was an illegal Muslim immigrant, thus to mobilise both anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment against a reformist candidate. In 2010, the same funders and media figures revived the canard and orchestrated a bogus 'Ground Zero Mosque' controversy to intensify it. The goal was transparently to trap the President into defending Muslims, thus lending new credibility to the earlier canard. This manufactured issue, spinning out of control and fomenting inconveniently extreme anti-Muslim prejudice in various forms, created the climate for the September 2010 Qur'an-burning fiasco. Result: major new credibility for the charge that the United States was at war with Islam; major new liabilities for the US effort to achieve national security and world stability; and further, perhaps terminal blunting of Obama's initially promising program of a major new initiative in relations between the United States and the *Ummah*.

Under the Westphalian system of nation states, in place in the West since 1648, it is generally understood that nations make war on nations but not over religion, while religions may compete with religions but only within the borders of nations that may or may not establish one religion to the exclusion of others. The nations of Europe, Britain most especially, have had established religions and paid the price. The United States, from the start, has had none and reaped the benefit, the original intent of the American Constitution being to protect true religion from corruption by the state.

The American president is barred by law from intervening at home either for or against any religion or exercise of religion. An anomalous situation, then, was created when an international crime syndicate, al-Qaeda, attacked the United States in the name of world Islam. It was clearly not in the interest of the United States to accept the syndicate as legitimate in this role, but even to speak of its illegitimacy involved the American President in speech that could be construed as unconstitutional in a domestic setting. Language for the international task at hand scarcely yet existed.

After the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks, then-President George W. Bush declared initially that the US was not at war with Islam. However, his language thereafter, especially 'Global War on Terror', when clearly only Muslim-sponsored terrorism was in view, had



a globalizing, alienating, and incriminating effect, one hugely heightened by the unwarranted US invasion of Iraq. The result was a widespread Muslim belief that the US was indeed at war with Islam.

Sen. Barack Obama, as a Democratic candidate for president presented a bold plan to roll back this misperception while withdrawing from Iraq. Obama's descent from a Kenyan father of ostensibly Muslim culture and his boyhood in Indonesia with his mother and an Indonesian Muslim stepfather seemed, *a priori*, unique assets for a historic new departure.

During the presidential campaign, the Republican opposition tried first to portray Obama as an angry black racist, but the candidate rose to the occasion with a brilliant speech that directly addressed the race question and stilled, even humbled the opposition. Next, the Republicans sought to mobilise anti-immigrant sentiment and anti-Muslim prejudice at once by portraying him falsely as both an illegal immigrant (not actually born in Hawaii) and as a secret practitioner of Islam. This time the response of the Obama campaign was indirect rather than direct: a campaign film seen by tens of millions in which the international elements in the candidate's experience were suppressed and the purely national elements vividly portrayed. The response worked as intended.

As he took office, Obama concentrated on the economic collapse that had overwhelmed the country late in the Bush Administration and on the passage of a national health care plan, while winding down the disastrous war in Iraq and seeking, so far without success, to stabilise Afghanistan politically to the point that American withdrawal would not

re-create the *status quo ante* for al-Qaeda. As for the once-promising new departure *vis a' vis* world Islam, its political cost seemed to have combined with domestic preoccupations to mute it.

As the 2010 mid-term elections approached, though Republicans had continuing economic malaise to capitalize on, boardroom conservatives were still on maximum alert against further financial reform. The electoral tactic they chose—one familiar from many previous Republican campaigns—was not to speak of finance at all but instead to mobilise backyard conservatives by reviving and intensifying the canard that Obama was an illegal Muslim immigrant, this time linking it to an Islamic cultural centre that was to be constructed near 'Ground Zero', the site of the 9/11 al-Qaeda bombings. The goal of the tactic was to provoke Obama into defending the centre in the name of American freedom of religion, thus lending credibility to the now more heavily promoted canard and inducing anti-immigrant and/or anti-Muslim voters to vote Republican in reaction.

The Republican strategy worked only too well. It took on a life of its own and triggered a wave of general anti-Muslim prejudice in the United States that went noticeably beyond anything felt immediately after the bombings themselves and that culminated in a Florida Christian pastor's plan for a mass public burning of Qur'ans on 9/11/10. The Qur'an-burning became a hugely inflamed international incident, so undermining American security at home and military strategy abroad that Gen. David Petraeus, commander of US forces in Afghanistan, denounced it and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates phoned the pastor personally to persuade him to call it off. The pastor finally did call it off, but it was too late: the damage had been done. In the pursuit of domestic electoral advantage, the right wing had lent substantial new credibility to the claim that the United States was at war with Islam, undermined the US effort to stabilise Afghanistan, and strengthened the opposition facing the fragile US-backed government in Iraq. President Obama had not risen to the occasion with a speech remotely comparable to his historic 2008 speech on race relations, and his languishing plans to 'turn the page' on the mistakes of the Bush Administration began to seem the least of the casualties.

Jack Miles is Distinguished Professor of English and Religious Studies at the University of California, Irvine.

US DEMOCRACY BUILDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

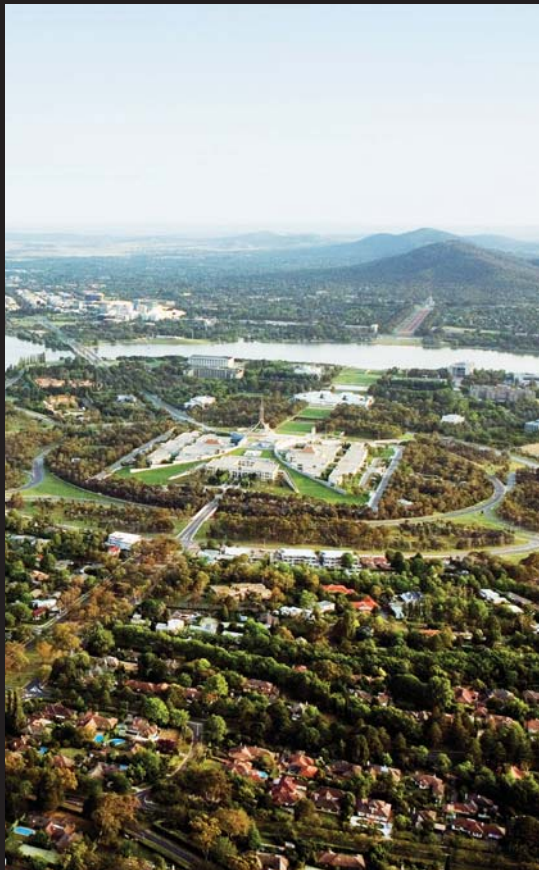
CAIS co-sponsored an international conference, 'US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East', held at The National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies (NCEIS), University of Melbourne, on 21-22 October 2010. The conference was the culmination of a collaborative ARC project that has examined 'US Democracy Building in the Middle East'. The convenor of the conference was Professor Akbarzadeh (NCEIS).

CAIS Director, Professor Amin Saikal, and former Deputy Director, Professor James Piscatori were major researchers in the project in collaboration with Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, NCEIS, Melbourne University and Dr Benjamin MacQueen, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University. These four researchers presented papers at the conference. The other speakers included Professor Marina Ottaway, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Professor Geoffrey Garrett, University of Sydney; Professor Bob Bowker (CAIS); Professor Juan Cole, University of Michigan; Dr Remy Davison, Monash University; Dr Leanne Piggott, University of Sydney; Dr Amy Holmes, American University Cairo; Dr Sarah Phillips, University of Sydney.

Professor Amin Saikal gave a paper entitled 'Iraq: Elite Fragmentation, Islam and Democracy'. In it he examined Iraq under pressure to embrace a type of pro-Western secular democratic transformation, while the psyche and behaviour of a majority of its citizens were heavily influenced by sectarian Islam. Also speaking at the conference was CAIS Professor Bob Bowker, who identified some of the factors giving rise to the durability of the Egyptian political system including, elite privilege, secular/Islamist divides and scepticism about reformist agendas and globalization.



Professor Saikal presenting his paper at the conference



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GLOBAL MEDIA REPORTING ON ISLAM

by Faizal Kasmani

Since the 1980s, Edward Said's *Orientalism* thesis has been influential in studies of Western media portrayal of Islam. Said argued that the modern occidental reaction toward Islam is dominated by a radically simplified type of thinking, in which Islam is characterised as oriental, inferior and monolithic, and is viewed with hostility and fear. These views, he argued, have been reflected and perpetuated by the Western media through its newspapers, television programs and films. Powerful concentrations of mass media in the hands of Western countries are believed to shape a lasting picture of Islam, most of it reflecting the interests of the society served by the media. Said's argument, however, is being seen as less relevant in the age of transnational news media, due to the complexities and dynamics of global reporting. This is because transnational news such as the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera represent competing paradigms and different approaches to news beyond the boundary of the nation state. Through communications cross-traffic in today's global media, a variety of views and voices can enter the frame and challenge the dominant sense in the realm of public discourse. There are more than 100 transnational news channels that reach global, regional and national markets around the world at present and the number keeps increasing. Particularly in the regional and national markets, the 24/7 satellite news channels reveal dynamic and rapidly expanding flows both within and across regions. These channels are owned by a range of different national and local commercial entities. This complexity and heterogeneity of the transnational news landscape again challenges ideas about Western media dominance and opens up a more complex and dynamic field of transnational media organisation than conventionally perceived.

Studies on transnational and global news networks show plurality and multiplicity of views in the coverage of Islam. These views are basically coming from two perspectives: namely the Arab based satellite news channel, particularly Al Jazeera, and the Western based global news channels, namely CNN and BBC. Even though from the production point of view, Al Jazeera practices the same style as the BBC or CNN, studies show that Al Jazeera stories give more priority to issues of Arab and Islamic concern such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Iraq war. This tendency is reflected in the terms Al Jazeera deploys in their news stories. For



example, in the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, BBC and CNN mainly describe Palestinian insurgent groups as 'militants' or 'suicide bombers', but Al Jazeera describes their actions as 'struggle' and 'resistance'. While both the BBC and CNN refer to Israeli troops as 'Israeli Defence Forces' or 'IDF', Al Jazeera refers to them as 'Israeli occupation troops'.

However, most of the channels with a 'global' reach are still major Western players – namely – CNN, BBC World, Bloomberg and Fox News, with Al Jazeera English and China's CCTV-9 as the only non-Western global news channels that could have the potential to reach audiences across regions. Yet, the global reach of Al Jazeera and CCTV-9 does not guarantee access to global audiences. Drawing from the satellite news landscape in the Australian market, CNN, Fox News and Sky News Australia are carried by major satellite television providers as general channels, with Al Jazeera only available at extra cost, and CCTV-9 can only be accessed through certain satellite television providers. This trend is similar in most satellite television markets particularly in Western countries with global players such as CNN and BBC World easily available while the availability of other regional and national channels is subject to certain conditions, rules or negotiations. The difficulty faced by Al Jazeera English, in entering the US market, is one of the best examples of this scenario. Since its launch in November 2006, Al Jazeera English has not been able to get a major deal with US cable operators to penetrate wider American market audiences. Since July 2009, Al Jazeera English has only been available in Toledo (Ohio), Burlington (Vermont) and Washington DC. This is believed to be partly because of its association with Al Jazeera's Arabic language news channel, which has the

reputation as 'the mouthpiece of terrorists' and 'the preferred outlet for videos from Osama bin Laden'.

Nevertheless, the privatisation and deregulation of the television industry in the 1980s, together with the emergence of satellite technology, have undeniably changed the landscape of global television. The diversity and complexity of global media flows do undermine the 'one-side' argument of the cultural imperialism thesis, which argues that the world's media and cultural production is dominated by US international communication policy. Although media networks from United States, Britain and European countries still remain dominant, there is a strong presence of global media flow from non-Western regions such as India, Korea, China and Middle Eastern countries.

It is yet to be seen whether a highly competitive global media marketplace is viewed as a positive step towards the portrayal of Islam. This is because global media competition could help to increase the range of points of view and diversity of discourses on Islam, but at the same time could also lead media organisations to 'dumb down' the news to attract the widest range of audiences and advertisers, thus creating a similar and homogenous coverage on Islam. In addition, there is also argument as to whether transnational news media are truly producing their content for a global market and audiences, or are still largely affected by the domestic context either through legislation or the social and cultural norms within the nation state. The claim that Al Jazeera operates independently of Qatar, for instance, could be met with scepticism as the network is said to have helped Qatar to emerge and impose itself on the regional scene. At the same time, although BBC News is regarded as one of the most global 24-hours news media alongside CNN, the main objective of the BBC as defined by the Charter of the BBC Trust, is still nation-centric – to represent the UK, its nations, regions and communities and bring the UK to the world and the world to the UK. More studies should be done to fill in the gap on the theoretical and communicative complexities of global news television. The complexity of communications satellite news, with flows of 24-hour news channels from the West and counter-flows from developing regions, helps to define and redefine the concept of the representation of Islam for global audiences.

Faizal Kasmani is a CAIS Graduate Research Scholar

THE ENCHANTMENT OF PERSIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

by Seyed Mohammad Torabi

For centuries the enchantment of the rich and dazzling Persian language and literature has inspired many cultured and artistic individuals to be attracted to Iran and its people. Some of the renowned figures of literature and art, especially from France, England, and Germany, praised the greats of Persian literature such as Ferdowsi, Khayyam, Sa'di, Rumi, Hafiz and their brilliantly composed works. Undoubtedly it was the influence of the *Ghazals of Hafiz* on Goethe that resulted in his *Divane Sharqi*, and in the same way Edward Fitzgerald was so influenced by Omar Khayyam's work *Ruba'iyat* that he followed the same method in *The Translation of Khayyam's Quatrains*.

As this short article does not allow even the naming of all the great writers of Persian literature, it will concentrate on Ferdowsi's influence on French poets and writers.

The first French Orientalist who named Ferdowsi and his poetic opus *Shahnameh* was Jean Chardin, the famous French traveller who ventured to Persia in 1665.¹

In 1788, Louis Langles, published a brief translation of the *Shahnameh* with a commendatory preface of Ferdowsi and was astonished that 'such a great poet had not been known in France up until this time'. He acknowledged that 'the Europeans have never created such a great work and have never become so near to Homer'.²

The Austrian linguist, Jacques du Wallenbourg, developed a love of Persian and was fascinated by the beauty of Persian poetry. In 1799, after finishing a translation of *Masnavi of Rumi*, his lodgings burned down before publication of this manuscript. He is reported to have said to his friend Bianchi: 'The burning and smoking of my own life would not be important if the translation of *Masnavi* was remaining for me'. After that event he left the *Masnavi* and turned to translate the *Shahnameh*. Du Wallenbourg continued this translation until his death in 1806, leaving the *Shahnameh* unfinished. In 1810, Bianchi published Wallenbourg's unfinished translation and noted: 'the translation of such a work from the literature of the orient would broaden and freshen the horizon of the artists and poets of Europe and lend inspiration to them for innovation and invention in the literature of Europe'.³

Soon after this Persian language and literature infused the culture of Europe with its literate perfume. Every day a new translation and a fresh figure entered the field of Persian text translation and criticism.

Jules Mohl, a native of Stuttgart, whose translation of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is still the most beautiful and eloquent in French, became so enchanted he was to travel to Paris to study Eastern languages. After Mohl had learnt Persian and translated the first volume of *Shahnameh*, the French government, which was aware of the significance of Iranian literature and poetry and its translation, asked him to complete the translation of the *Shahnameh*. Until his death in 1876, Mohl worked exclusively on Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, leading French literary critics and writers to consider Iran, the Persian language, and the *Shahnameh* as a central issue of discussion. French literary papers and their readers in Europe were well regarded for their ostentatious literary and artistic displays in the field of Iranian poetry. The *Shahnameh* was counted as 'one of the most outstanding works of world literature', 'the epic of epics', 'greater than the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*', 'one of the greatest and most beautiful works that human talent has created' and noted Ferdowsi as 'the Homer of Iran'.⁴

Sainte Beuve, the great Romantic writer and critic wrote:

*In my opinion reading the Shahnameh caused the French people to throw away their misplaced pride and arrogance... the Iranians who have a poetic character should enjoy the most praise... an example of the artistic works of this nation is the 'Shahnameh'...*⁵

Sainte Beuve referred to the rousing parts of the translation of the *Shahnameh* in his criticism and praised the soaring spirit and lofty character of Ferdowsi. He wrote of Sohrab:

*The life of Sohrab, which is the most beautiful story of the Shahnameh, has made its way into every country of Europe and has granted inspiration for many similar tales to poets and writers, but not one of them possesses the value of Ferdowsi's work, because in this tale he has poured expression, innovation, and the power of imagination and a great masterpiece of unequalled genius was created. To comprehend the greatness of the Shahnameh we must compare this work with the 'Henry Nameh' of Voltaire in order to perceive the disparity between the two – the measure of contrast between the glory and grandeur of the two is as between the Ganges and one of the small pools of Versailles.*⁶

Likewise Alphonse de Lamartine, under the influence of the masterpiece of Mohl's

translation of the *Shahnameh*, praised Ferdowsi in the journals *Civilisateur* and *Lives of the Great Men*. Lamartine, having selected the story of Rostam and Sohrab for translation and criticism, said: 'A translation of his work requires poetic skill and artistry'.⁷

In 1859, the translation and publication of the sixth volume of the *Shahnameh* by Mohl and Lamartine's praise of Iran, made Victor Hugo aware of Iranian literature, Ferdowsi and the *Shahnameh*. During the writing of *Legende des Siecles*, Hugo alluded to Ferdowsi as an influence. In 1872, Hugo had the opportunity to further sing the praises of Ferdowsi. He wrote: 'Years ago I saw Ferdowsi in Misour, he had taken a sunbeam and placed it like a sunbeam on his bow, like a prince who never suffers baseness or meanness to enter his court'.⁸

Through Mohl's forty year endeavour in translating the *Shahnameh* into French, almost all the educated individuals of France and more broadly Europe, had become aware of the literature of Iran. At the end of this time, great works of European literature were deeply immersed in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and the Iranian literary spirit. Many Europeans have boasted that they produced such poets as Ferdowsi, Hafiz, Sa'di, and Khayyam. Ernest Renan said: 'These great poets are the shining stars of Persian letters'.⁹

In 1892 Maurice Maeterlinck created his masterpiece *Pelleas et Melisande* under the influence of the story of Garsivaz and his daughter in the *Shahnameh*.¹⁰ His work was recognised as a resurrection of French literature.

From these few examples it is clear the French Romantics like Hugo, Lamartine, and St Beuve, as well as Symbolists like Maeterlinck, took inspiration from Iranian literature and credited their success to the Iranian poets.

Footnotes:

1. J. C. Chardin, *Voyage en Perse*, 1810. pp 127-8
2. L. Langles, *Contes, fables et sentences...analyse de Ferdoussy sur les rois de Perse*, Paris, 1789, p.118.
3. J. du Wallenbourg, *Notice sur le Shah-nameh de Ferdoussy*, Wiene, 1810, pp 8-14.
4. Ampere Tean-Tacques, *La science et les lettres en Orient*, Paris, 1865, p 372
5. Sainte Beuve, *Premiers lundis*, Paris, 1850 p 333.
6. *ibid*, p 344.
7. A. de Lamartine, *Vie des grands hommes*, Homere... Rustam, 1856 p 365.
8. *Les grands écrivains de la France*, 179/6.
9. E. Renan, *Melange d'histoire et de voyages*, 1898, p 145.
10. M. Maeterlinck, *Pelleas et Melisande*, 1956, p 13.

YEMEN: A VOLATILE STATE

by Amin Saikal

Yemen is shaping up as a source of major terrorist threat to the US and some of its allies. The organisation responsible for this threat is al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP, which operates out of the vacuum that has come to grip Yemen under the corrupt and dysfunctional government of Ali Abdullah Saleh. AQAP, formed in early 2009 as a result of a merger between the Saudi and Yemeni al-Qaeda, does not necessarily follow Osama Bin Laden's leadership. It has thrived on Yemen's deteriorating political, economic and security conditions to secure an effective niche for itself in the country.

Like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, Yemen is highly Islamic and tribalised. It is divided into numerous micro-societies, many of which have the capacity to function as self-contained entities, capable of protecting their inhabitants against outside intrusions. Furthermore, the country lacks a widely legitimate central authority – a fact that parallels Yemen with war-torn Afghanistan and Iraq, and seriously disrupted Pakistan.

Although North and South Yemen quietly united in 1990, the south Yemenis, who had been ruled by a Soviet-backed Marxist government, have not been able to embrace the political supremacy of the north.

A southern secessionist movement has posed a growing challenge to Saleh, who has historically drawn support from a north-dominated military, intelligence and bureaucratic power base. This southern secessionism is matched by a continuing armed struggle by Yemen's Shi'ite population in the north, on the border with Saudi Arabia.

Yemen's oil resources are drying up, and its economy has declined to the extent that a majority of its population survives well below the poverty line. The Saleh regime has become more dependent on foreign assistance. Saudi Arabia contributes hundreds of millions of US dollars a year to sustain it.

Despite its nationalistic rhetoric, the regime has become increasingly amenable to American financial and security assistance. US aid now exceeds \$US150 million a year but much of this is spent on security.

If once the Saleh regime showed interest in pluralism it has never been translated into action. The regime has become authoritarian, corrupt, and detached from the public. A gulf has grown between the ruler and the ruled – which against the backdrop of economic and security decline has changed Yemen into a very volatile state.

All this has made Yemen a breeding ground and haven for extremist groups. The US and its allies may feel desperate about AQAP, especially in light of its recent attempts to send suicide bombers and parcel bombs to target the US, but they may not be able to do much about it, unless they undertake to achieve a number of objectives.

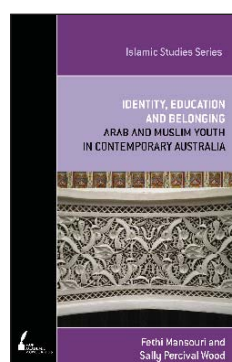
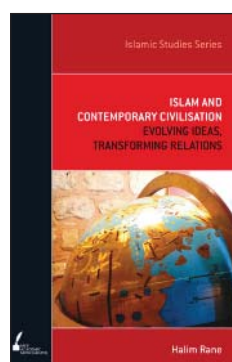
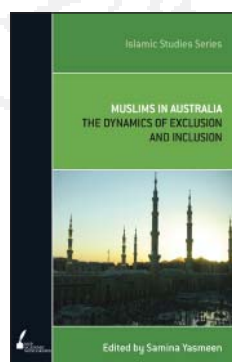
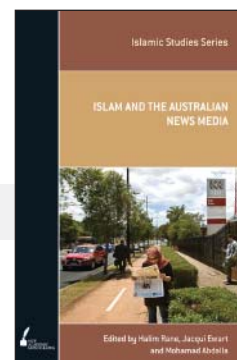
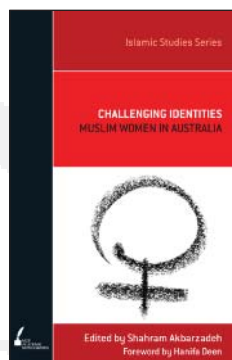
These include pressing the Saleh government to become inclusive by bringing about structural political reforms; injecting massive amounts of financial and economic assistance to improve living conditions for the majority of Yemenis and create ample job opportunities; rebuilding Yemen's security forces to cut across social cleavages; integrating Yemen into the regional and world economy.

However, these objectives are not easily achievable, partly because the Saleh regime is entrenched in its ways, and partly due to the US preoccupation with the costly Afghan and Iraqi fiascos, and its own economic difficulties. Unfortunately, the best that can be expected of the Saleh regime or the US and its NATO allies is short-term measures in the hope of averting AQAP's actions rather than long-term policy actions to address the root causes on which AQAP thrives. As such, neither party is in a position to reform Yemen in ways that can remove AQAP as a threat in the foreseeable future.

Source: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13/11/2010

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Seminar Series

30 August 2010

Dr Mehmet Akif Koç

Lecturer in Qur'anic Studies,
Ankara University



"Muslims cannot interpret the Qur'an"

Dr Koç began his lecture with a comment about visiting Rome, where he became aware that many Christian theologians hold the view that 'Muslims cannot interpret the Qur'an'. His response to this experience was to claim that many of these scholars would be unfamiliar with the huge body of literature covering the exegetical activities in Islamic history.

Western scholars of Islamic disciplines writing in English most commonly translate the terms of *tafsir* and *tawil* of the Qur'an as 'exegesis'.

Having defined *tafsir* (exegesis) as 'to make explicit what is implicit in the text of the Qur'an', Dr Koç presented an overview of the exegetical developments and debates throughout Islamic history. He outlined the various periods from that of the Companions of the Prophet, to the Successors through to the modern day interpretations.

Many of the *tafsir* reports go back to the Successor generation. Only a small portion of them go back to the Prophet and the Companions with the exception of Ibn 'Abbās (68/687). This indicates that the discipline of *tafsir* begins at the time of the Successors, namely the last quarter of the first century of Islam.

Dr Koç made the point that different milieus, priorities, trainings and qualifications lead to different conceptions and interpretations. He said, however, that early *tafsirs* are in an advantaged position to be understood in the historical and textual context of many verses. The Successors have an advantage in capturing the true meaning of the Qur'an as they had the privilege of living in the nearest period to the time of revelation and its direct addressees and surroundings. Later generations of exegetes do not have that same opportunity.

Dr Koç discussed the work of prominent scholars of the various periods and gave examples of how they resolved questions arising from interpretations of the Qur'an.

In the second part of his paper Dr Koç documented the main points of distinction between Islam and the West throughout the modern period. He believed Western notions of 'enlightenment', 'nationalism' and 'revelation' were all contentious issues for Islamic scholars of the period.

From the beginning of the 20th Century nationalistic movements were growing. The European continent and many parts of the world, including the Arab world, were suffering from this 'illness'. Some contemporary exegetes wanted to contribute to a solution of this problem. They questioned and challenged this universal problem through the exegeses of many verses. Similarly, some exegetes tried to interpret the Qur'an with the data coming from the natural sciences.

In response to these attempts, Dr Koç made the suggestion that the first or the nearest addressees to any text are the best and safest method. Otherwise, he said, anachronism is inevitable.

Dr Koç explained the compilation process of the Gospels as different from the collection of the verses of the Qur'an. The Biblical writings involve a human contribution along with Divine inspiration. This leads to the recognition of the different approaches to 'revelation' by the two religious traditions.

From the Muslim perspective, even the Prophet Muhammad did not play a role during the process of revelation apart from his transmission of it.

Fundamentalist interpretation starts from the principle that the Bible, being the word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally in all its details. So, commentators of the Bible enjoy greater freedom in relation to their Holy Book than the commentators of the Qur'an.

For instance, it is not uncommon to see the equivalence of 'exegesis by report' or 'exegesis by free opinion' in Biblical exegetical studies. This does not mean that Christians and Muslims pursue exactly parallel methods; their different perceptions about their respective Holy books lead to existential methodical differences.

Dr Koç concluded that the statement, 'Muslims cannot interpret the Qur'an', is fundamentally incorrect. He said to dispute this is to misunderstand Muslim exegetical tradition. This misunderstanding stems from inadequate comparison and confusion between two distinct revelatory traditions. In other words, having relied on the Christian, especially Catholic, understanding of 'revelation' and the concept of 'Holy Scripture', leads one to erroneous conclusions. Thus, to understand Muslim exegetical tradition correctly, one needs to read it in the light of its own dynamics.

Seminar Series

25 October 2010

Ms Anna Baltzer

Author and Activist



Life in Occupied Palestine: Eye Witness Stories and Photos

Ms Anna Baltzer's lecture was a documented account of her experience from her first visit to Israel then later to Syria, Lebanon, Iran and the Occupied Territories. During this time she began to hear a different narrative about the state of Israel from the one she had heard growing up as a Jewish American. Her first trip to Israel was sponsored by 'Birthright-Israel', a program that sends young non-Israeli Jews on a 10-day all-expenses-paid tour of the Holy Land. She claimed that nothing on that trip challenged her view of Israel as a tiny victimised country that simply wanted to live in peace but couldn't because of its 'aggressive, Jew-hating Arab neighbours'. However, it was through her experiences in the Middle East and the Occupied Territories that she began to confront the reality of Palestinian history and life.

Baltzer claimed there was far more to Israel's past and present policies than she was taught in the US. Her own understanding of the

conflict was broadened through research and personal experience as she attended presentations by local activists reporting on their lives in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (one place where the 'Birthright-Israel' tour bus had not stopped). After extensive study and first hand experience she has documented aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian situation in a book entitled *Witness in Palestine: A Jewish American Woman in the Occupied Territories*. In her lecture Ms Baltzer gave her account of Israel's actions in Palestine.

Ms Baltzer claimed that past and present military attacks, house demolitions, land confiscation, imprisonment without trial, torture, and government-sponsored assassination were not carried out for the protection of the Jewish people, but rather for the creation and expansion of a Jewish state at the expense of the rights, lives, and dignity of the non-Jewish people living in the region.

Ms Baltzer also claimed that Israel's ongoing 40-year occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem is illegal and violates the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as more than sixty United Nations resolutions. She adds, Israel has violated more UN resolutions than any other country in the history of the organization.

Ms Baltzer suggested that Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and in Israel are denied equal rights to Jews in the same areas purely on the basis of their religion and ethnicity.

Examples of Palestinians rights being denied include the Israeli military controlling the movement of nearly four million Palestinians through a system of checkpoints, roadblocks, and segregated roads. By the same means, Israel also limits the supply of food, water, medical supplies, and other basic necessities to Palestinian civilians; the Israeli army and government exercise virtually unchecked freedom to detain, threaten, arrest, imprison, torture, and assassinate Palestinians, often without charge or trial; the Israeli government sponsors the mass transfer of Jewish Israeli citizens from Israel to Jewish-only colonies,

known as settlements, built illegally on internationally recognised Palestinian land in the Occupied Territories.

On the other hand, Israeli settlers suffer practically no legal consequences for building new illegal (according to international and Israeli law) settlements, for expanding existing ones, or for threatening or physically attacking Palestinian civilians.

Israel's human rights violations since September 2000 have left more than four times more Palestinian civilians dead than the total number of Israelis (both civilians and soldiers) killed by Palestinians.

The Wall, or 'Security Fence', that is currently under construction by Israel in the name of preventing terrorism, in fact weaves through, not around, the West Bank, effectively separating hundreds of thousands of West Bank Palestinians from their land, jobs, hospitals and schools, and from each other.

Ms Baltzer concluded by saying Israel's policies of occupation and colonisation have been consistent with a steady pattern of transferring the indigenous Palestinians out of Israel/Palestine, and confiscating their land, water, and resources for Jewish Israeli use. This process, similar to the ethnic cleansing carried out in North America, Australia, and the former Yugoslavia, began before Israel's creation in 1948, and continues today.

According to US, UN, European, and Palestinian research and relief agencies, Israel's restrictions on transportation are a major cause of widespread malnutrition, unemployment, and poverty among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

Every year, the US government funnels billions of American tax-dollars to Israel, which are used primarily to purchase American-made weapons to arm the occupying Israeli army and settlers.

Seminar Series

12 October 2010

Dr Matthew Gray

Senior Lecturer, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, ANU



Scenes from the sandy knoll

Dr Gray's lecture began with an outline of the problem of defining conspiracy theories: if conspiracies do really occur, then what is the difference between true political intrigue or plotting, and a 'conspiracy theory'? Dr Gray pointed to the structural problems of the latter: that a conspiracy theory often is overly-grand, negative or even catastrophist, and lacks scientific methodology and especially falsifiability.

He then looked at five political sources of conspiracy theories, arguing that they provided insights into Arab politics and problems in the region: 'they are not', he stressed, 'a sign of anti-Westernism, anti-modernisation, or anti-Semitism' – or just delusional rants. 'They are a real form of political language', he added, 'with real political sources and real political meanings, and as such, they deserve serious academic attention'.

The first element of them, he argued, is the impact of history. In some cases, historical memory recalls a real conspiracy, and uses that to build or legitimise a current conspiracy theory. In other cases, the political mood or mistrust created by an historical

event lingers to the present time, making a conspiracy theory more believable. The lingering mistrust of foreign powers – given the Middle East's history of colonialism and external interventionism – was cited as an example of how history lives on in the region and still has impacts in the current day.

Second is the problem of ideological division in the Middle East. Conspiracy theories are used to discredit alternative ideologies, or prop up extant ones. Dr Gray gave examples of regime ideological rhetoric about pan-Arabism, and of course the case of how Islamic extremists use conspiracy theories, to show this dynamic in action.

The third issue, related to the second, is the distance between states and societies in the Arab world. Dr Gray argued that leaders are oftentimes seen as aloof from society, and increasingly, as acting in their own interests or even against the interests of society. This gives great legitimacy to conspiracy theories about states, regime elites, and leaders: conspiracy theories about leaderships plotting or secretly acting against society, for their own advantage, are legion.

Fourth, Dr Gray showed how the state, especially more repressive regimes, often narrate, sponsor, or endorse conspiracy theories as a way of propping up their rule or enhancing their legitimacy or support levels. Dwelling on examples of a recent speech by the Libyan President Mu'amar Gadhafi, and an older speech by former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War, Dr Gray showed how leaders seek societal support or acquiescence – or simply try to appear knowledgeable or in-charge – through the use of such rhetoric.

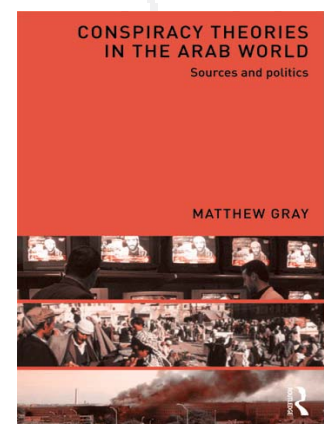
Dr Gray noted the conspiracist language common among non-state actors. Transnational extremists were again cited as an example, along with international media such as the Qatar-based television station Al-Jazeera. The internet and other communications technologies have contributed to the ease of communicating such theories, he argued, and have also given more space to marginal ideas or non-

traditional intellectual leaders to seek a louder voice. He spoke at this point about how the 'Al-Jazeera bombing memo' had several sources and signified several political problems, including of a transnational actor as victim of a conspiracy theory but also as transmitter – and sometimes opponent – of them.

Dr Gray ended the lecture with some final thoughts on the challenge of measuring conspiracy theories, and the problems of generalizing too much about them. Still, he concluded, the central point remains that conspiracy theories are a real symbol and tool of political language, and are important.

Dr Gray's book, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics*, was launched by Peter Rodgers. Mr Rodgers is a former Australian diplomat and journalist. He was Australia's ambassador to Israel from 1993 to 1996. He is the author of two books on the Middle East: *Arabian Plights: The Future Middle East* (Scribe, 2009) and *Herzl's Nightmare* (Scribe, 2004) and a former journalist and winner of the Graham Perkin Australian Journalist of the Year Award for his reporting on East Timor. Mr Rodgers noted the echoes of history in the Middle East, and how commonly conspiracy theories in the region seemed rooted to historical dynamics and grievances.

Dr. Gray's book is available online through major retailers or through Routledge. For details see <http://www.routledge.com/books/>



DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN AN AUTHORITARIAN ZONE

continued from page 4

reprimand to the Mubarak regime which is increasingly as repressive of bloggers and other forms of social networking dissent as the Iranian regime, and King 'Abdullah of Jordan was recently hailed as an important ally of the US and voice in the elusive Arab-Israeli peace process without a word said about his dissolving of Parliament in November 2009 half-way through its four-year elected term. It is clear that the Obama Administration does not wish to encourage Palestinian elections, which ostensibly were due in 2010. The point is that, regardless of the larger grand goals and ideational aspirations, the US in particular formulates its foreign policy by asking the wholly predictable question: what will guarantee its security? In part, this is thought to occur when some regimes share power, have elections, or allow a vibrant expression of civic culture; but very often, it is thought to occur when regimes, on which the US is dependent for resources or regional support, remain authoritarian. Leftist critics often denounce the latter as neo-imperialist, with the US seeking to sustain regimes and their military backers. What is clear is that the constant is the security of the United States, not the mission, to paraphrase Ronald Reagan, of the 'shining city on the hill' speaking freedom to tyranny.

And this brings us to the second similarity – Islam. Contrary to what is often thought in the Middle East, the policy of the US for several decades has been to say that Islam is not the problem. Its basic values are seen as compatible with democracy; the problem, it is argued, lies in radicalised interpretations of Islam. Some observers have suggested that, given the acute sensitivities of the region, the US should eschew all dealings with Islamic groups and movements, though it would be more accurate to say that Islamist groups, such as Hamas or Hizbullah, have been viewed as especially problematic.

Both administrations, then, have seemingly made a concession to Muslims in the region and elsewhere, but have folded an agenda of 'winning hearts and minds' into their larger Realist goal of seeking security. Not unlike *Radio Free Europe*, the launching of *Radio Sawa* ('Together'), *Al-Hurrah* ('Free') television, and local-language *Sesame Street* programmes, all of which target younger audiences in the Arab world, aims to acquaint them with American culture and bringing them

over to American values. Both administrations rely on the Congressionally-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and USAID in particular to support particular 'Islamic' groups, *madrasa* reforms, and democracy workshops. Federal aid is going to restore mosques, save ancient Qur'ans and Islamic manuscripts, even building schools. Leaked documents indicate that the government has contemplated supporting religious leaders who might be seen as encouraging a more conciliatory form of Islam – figures such as the Egyptian Amr Khalid and the American convert Hamza Yusuf. The Bush White House called this 'Muslim World Outreach'. It is true that US government has overwhelmingly gone to secular groups (one figure puts it at 98 per cent of USAID funding from 2001 to 2005) and the First Amendment prohibition on governmental promotion of religion suggests that the policy may have inherent limitations.

Yet, the Obama administration has more quietly, but nevertheless, supported projects such as these and endorsed the stated ambition, as the NED explained to Congressional budget committees, of 'ending the political abuse of religion' in the Islamic world and encouraging a moderate form of democracy. Farah Pandith, appointed as the Secretary of State's Special Representative to Muslim Communities in June 2009, has focused on youth engagement and people-to-people opportunities. The White House has been touting educational and research exchanges, as well as the science envoys it has been sending to Muslim majority countries. A Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship sought to build partnerships between business communities in the US and Muslim countries.

Two institutes in Western capitals have been particularly favoured in both presidential periods – the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy in Washington and the International Forum for Islamic Dialogue in London which publishes the widely distributed newsletter, *Islam 21*. The Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy even notes that its mission is intended to overcome the *fitna* (disorder) within the Muslim world over whether Islam and democracy are compatible. By using this term, it confirms its willingness to enter internal debates. The NED notes the mission of the Forum in London: 'To build

a core group of educators among Muslim youth who will disseminate enlightened views relating to Islam, democracy, pluralism and universal rights and establish a network of liberal Islamic thinkers... [it] articulates a reformist, pluralist, humanist and modernist Islamic discourse on public life...'

While this is considered a 'soft' approach to democracy promotion, it is hard to distinguish it from the propaganda exercises that formed such an integral part of the old Cold War. Moreover, it puts the US in the position of the theological arbiter – dangerous ground if ever there was one.

The policy dilemma of outside powers is thus acute when it comes to the 'export of democracy': If they encourage a reformed, supposedly more liberal Islam, they run the risk of alienating Muslims who would resent such outside interference. If they encourage limited reform in the hope of controlled political change, they run the risk of sustaining the authoritarian status quo in the region. If, however, they push hard for democratisation, they run the risk of unleashing forces that may overturn valuable allies.

In this complex reading of Middle Eastern societies, it is clear that Islamist groups and parties have been important players. It is true that their lustre has dimmed recently, and many, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are consumed with internal differences and debates. They retain a considerable hold on public opinion, however. A more public form of outreach to such groups, many of which have routinely engaged in electoral politics, might help at least to make the point that the United States is serious about questioning the seemingly entrenched authoritarianism of the region. This is all the more important given that secular opposition is largely absent from these societies. In addition, assistance to Muslim oriented civil society groups – importantly, without the added agenda of using them to advance a particular form of moderate Islam – can help to build up social trust and so serve as avenues of reform.

Into this admitted uncertainty, foreign powers, international institutions and NGOs now increasingly step, confident of the virtue of their mission. But, in ways that have been apparent for some time, this is a minefield.

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MATTHEW GRAY

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FEATURE ARTICLES

'Israeli-Palestinian peace blurs in tangle of disputes', *The Canberra Times*, 11 October 2010.

'Israel's actions a PR bonanza for Palestinians in Gaza', *Crikey*, 2 June 2010. [<http://www.crikey.com.au/2010/06/02/israels-actions-a-pr-bonanza-for-palestinians-in-gaza/>]

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

'Abu Dhabi and the UAE: The global, regional, and local contexts', NYU Abu Dhabi meeting, Sydney, 12 May 2010.

'Current and Emerging Trends in the Middle East: What the West needs to know', Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, 21 May 2010.

'Contemporary Islam: The Middle East', Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, 24 May 2010.

'The Middle East as seen from the Ivory Tower', Department of Defence, Canberra,

26 May 2010.

'The Politics of Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World', Macquarie University, Sydney, 28 May 2010.

'The Middle East and the Global Economy: Curse or cure?', Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies (CDSS), Australian Defence College, Canberra, 2 June 2010.

'Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf', Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference 2010, University of Melbourne, 28 September 2010.

'Scenes from the Sandy Knoll: Conspiracy theories in the Arab world', ANU Public Lecture, Canberra, 12 October 2010.

'Iran and the Middle East – Policy Implications for Australia', Executive Level 2 Development Program, National Security College, ANU, Canberra, 14 October 2010.

INTERVIEWS

21 media interviews and briefings, including for SBS television news, ABC television, SBS radio, various ABC radio stations, 2CC, 60 Minutes New Zealand, Radio Australia, 6PR.

KIRILL NOURZHANOV

FEATURE ARTICLES

'Kyrgyzstan is on the brink', *The Canberra Times*, 15 June 2010.

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

'The Political Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Main Actors and Consequences', *Russian & East European Seminar Series*, ANU, 24 May 2010.

'The Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Implications for Australia, the region, and the world', Round table discussion, CAIS, ANU, 5 July 2010.

'Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus', RMC Duntroon, Canberra, 6 August 2010.

'Political and Social Banditry in Russian Turkestan', *Weaving the Silk Roads*, Inner Asian Studies Conference, University of Sydney, 20-21 November 2010.

INTERVIEWS

'Kyrgyz-Uzbek Conflict', ABC Radio, 14 June 2010.

'Kyrgyz-Uzbek Conflict', *Asia Connect* ABC Radio, 15 June 2010.

Rear Vision, ABC Radio, 21 July 2010.

'Great Game in Central Asia', ABC Australia Network TV Newline, 22 July 2010.

'Russo-Japanese row over the Kuril Islands', *Asia Connect* ABC Radio, 4 November 2010.

'Russo-Japanese row over the Kuril Islands', ABC Network TV, 8 November 2010.

RESEARCH, PUBLICATIONS, OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

M MEHDI ILHAN

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

'Gallipoli Campaign: An Analytical Study of the Prisoners of War', International Conference on Social Sciences, Kuşadası-Izmir/Turkey, 8-9 October 2010.

Chair for panel: 'International Relations and History', *International Conference on Social Sciences*, Kuşadası-Izmir/Turkey, 8-9 October 2010.

'Teaching Turkish History in Australia', presented at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Department of History, 30 September 2010.

'Courtesy in Turkey: Basic Turkish Phrases and Conventions', Classics and Ancient History Program, ANU, 22 November 2010.

'An Overview of Turkish Presence in Anatolia and Thrace', Classics and Ancient History Program, ANU, 23 November 2010.

ALI YUNIS ALDAHESH

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

'Teaching and Learning Arabic in Australia: The convergent and non-government funded

experiences', *Arabic Language Between Extinction and Development – Challenges and Prospects Conference*, Al Azhar University, Jakarta, 22-25 July 2010.

ROBERT BOWKER

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

'Palestinian Refugees', School of Politics & International Relations, ANU, 5 August 2010.

'Middle East Security Issues', Royal Military College, Duntroon, 13 August 2010.

'Mugged by Reality: Democracy promotion and Egyptian political reform during the Bush era, and the options for President Obama', *US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East Conference*, University of Melbourne, 21 October 2010.

'Egypt and the Politics of Change', Durham University, UK, 9 November 2010.

NEMATULLAH BIZHAN

JOURNAL ARTICLE

'Afghanistan's Uncertain Road to Stability', *Asian Currents*, October 2010, pp 8-9.

INTERVIEW

'The Taliban and the stoning of a woman in the north of Afghanistan', 2SER, 17 August 2010.

CHRISTIAN BLEUER

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

'Migration and the Creation of New Identities in Eastern Bukhara and Southern Tajikistan', *Weaving the Silk Roads*, Inner Asian Studies Conference, University of Sydney, 20-21 November 2010.

GRIGOL UBRIA

LECTURES, SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

'The Soviet National-Territorial Delimitation of Central Asia, 1924-1936', *Weaving the Silk Roads*, Inner Asian Studies Conference, University of Sydney, 20-21 November 2010.

BOOK REVIEW

Zhumabai Zhakupov, 'Shala Kazak: Proshloe, Nastoiashchee', Budushchee, Almaty, Kazakhstan: Almaty, 2009, *Asian Politics and Policy*, Vol. 2 No. 4, October-December 2010, pp 693-697.

Australasian Association for Communist and Post-Communist Studies Tenth Biennial Conference 2011

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- North-East Asia in the wake of the Soviet demise

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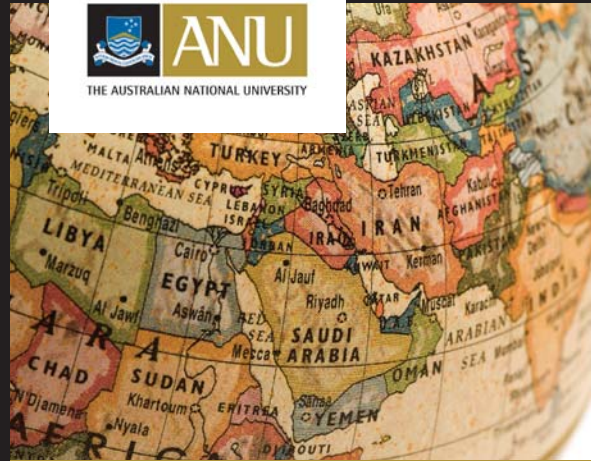
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