**HRH Prince Alwaleed annual meeting 2016 report**

**Introduction:**

On behalf of Prince Alwaleed Foundation, the Centre of Islamic Studies at the [University of Cambridge](http://www.cam.ac.uk) extended the invitation to the Center representatives of the six Prince Alwaleed Centers[[1]](#footnote-1) to meet with HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal on May 6, 2016. The meeting was held in Cambridge University. I had previously attended a meeting in Harvard University on February 7th, 2012. This is the second meeting I attend since I started my tenure as director of CASAR in September, 2011. This meeting was my much anticipated chance to display CASAR’s developed programs that resonate with the mandate set by HRH in 2003.

**Attendees:**

The directors of Alwaleed Centers:

Professor Johnathan Brown - Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, University of Georgetown

Professor Yasir Suleiman - Alwaleed Center of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge

Professor Hugh Goddard - Alwaleed Center for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, University of Edinburgh

Professor Lisa Hajjar - Alwaleed Center for American Studies and Research, American University of Beirut

Professor Ali Asani - Alwaleed Center for Islamic Religion and Cultures, Harvard University

Professor Magda Shahin - Alwaleed Center for American Studies and Research, American University in Cairo

Ambassador Francis Ricciardone, the incoming president of AUC also attended the meeting upon the invitation by HRH Prince Alwaleed.

**The program started with a Research Colloquium,** at which the Cambridge Center researchers presented their work. Papers presented were the following:

* Perspectives on citizenship in pre-conflict Aleppo
* Intimate strangers: perspectives on female converts to Islam in Britain
* Islamophobia: the Lumpers versus the Splitters
* Muslim prisoner’s experiences of coping, adaptation, and belonging in high security prisons: some new and some familiar challenges

The approach of the Alwaleed Center in Cambridge seemed focused on tackling the social and cultural repercussions of Islamophobia, giving very little to no regard to Political Islam. As a research center, it was understandable that the work presented emphasized the academic and conceptual direction with less focus on practical aspects in the topics discussed. The presentations were detached from the political scene taking over our world as a result of the powerful reign of political Islam.

**Each Center had then the opportunity to present its work in 10 minute presentations**, followed by a discussion. In their presentations, the centers were keen to cover some highlights of their work.

As expected from Alwaleed Centers of Harvard, Edinburgh, Cambridge & Georgetown, their work was more academic, theoretical dealing with the implications of Islamophobia in their regions. Political dissertations concerning Islam were presented very subtly in a religious and humanitarian context rather than a political one. AUB was also more into the academic side focusing on Transnational American Studies.

It was highly appreciated by the representatives of the Foundation and later by the HRH the Prince himself that CASAR AUC focus was inclined to deal with the dynamics of US Foreign policy issues and their repercussions on Egypt and the MENA region, while giving due focus on Political Islam in the region. In its presentations, CASAR also made clear that the cultural and academic focus of the center was covered in its academic as well as its outreach program.

**CASAR’s AUC 10 minute PowerPoint presentation** addressed the two main areas of CASAR’s activities, namely the political and the academic, cultural coverage. It was emphasized that throughout our activities in both areas, collaboration with national Egyptian universities and local stakeholders has been key. Our out-reach efforts have raised the Center’s profile and exposure at the national level. We also highlighted our collaboration with CASAR AUB in exchanging speakers coming to the region and holding joint conferences between the centers in Beirut and Cairo respectively. This cooperation culminated in aconference on Transnational American Studies held in Cairo (April 2013).

We also explained how it was imperative for us to revamp the entire website to accurately reflect our efforts in written and visual documentation giving chances for scholars to use the material in the reports we submit on each event individually. This project was unprecedented at CASAR. We also mentioned how upon the launch of this major project, we have had several compliments from scholars and media personnel in particular expressing their satisfaction about the facilitated organized access to our work. In our constant thrive to reach beyond the AUC community we also referred to CASAR’s Videos link on YouTube featuring our latest lectures for more convenience. And finally apart from the website, we announce our lectures, call for papers, activities and events through our Facebook page that provides ample interaction with the public. CASAR team stressed the undeniable fact that Social Media is indisputably a wonderful tool that facilitates our Center’s exposure to the public interested in our events as we strive to develop an ever-growing audience interested in CASAR’s activities.

Snapshots of the website were displayed while we navigated the audience through our work. Also snapshots of the new impressive headquarters of CASAR and its accessible location were displayed pleasing the foundation delegates since now the Center resides inside the building named after HRH Prince Alwaleed.

We also highlighted our latest outreach efforts and presented a list of our most recent speakers hosted by CASAR, including Ambassador Dan Kurtzer, who served as the United States ambassador to Egypt and as the United States ambassador to Israel; who is also a professor of Middle East policy studies at Princeton University; Sarah Sewall, who is the Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights at the U.S. State Department; Fawaz Gerges, who is a Professor of international relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science; and Shebly Telhami who is the Anwar Sadat professor for peace and development at the University of Maryland and many others.

We also distributed the two books published on our activities covering Egypt-U.S. relations, while referring a third book reflecting and analyzing the work done by AUC CASAR to date.

**The meeting with HRH Prince Alwaleed** was attended by the new incoming AUC President Francis Ricciardone and was extremely successful. The Prince appreciated the progress of AUC CASAR over the last few years. He thanked Ricciardone for taking the time to come to the meeting. The prince was pleased that AUC’s president to be attended the event, despite the fact that CASAR was only “a tiny program at AUC.” To the prince, that showed how the president was very much aware of the work of CASAR and its objectives. President Riccardione emphasized that AUC was thankful and appreciative of the prince’s choice of AUC as host for one of his centers and assured the prince that CASAR had his full support. Ambassador Ricciardone stressed that he was keen on making CASAR the pole of attraction for scholarship between East and West.

I explained how we aimed for our Center to thrive to become the best in its concentration in the Arab as well as in the Muslim world and solicited the prince’s advice and support for our future endeavors and strategic directions. I expressed my gratitude to the new leadership of AUC and the interest it showed in the work of CASAR. With Ambassador Ricciardone’s approval, I extended an invitation to HRH and Princess Lamia and my fellow directors to hold the next conference at AUC CASAR.

Wanting to focus more on our future directions, I briefly sketched our accomplishments to the Prince, of which he seemed highly appreciative. I explained that our current programming and national reputation will form the basis on which we will formulate our future plans. We aimed at developing the outreach program on a fresh focus of actionable policy-oriented activities that help explain the dynamics of U.S. policies and relations in the region. I added that one long-term goal of CASAR was to change the attitude prevalent in the region, particularly among our youth, toward the US. We need to become active participants instead of continuously considering ourselves victims of a conspiracy theory.

CASAR hopes to attract scholars from the region in addition to the American scholars to develop fresh insights as to ways to best work *with* the region and the people, not only *on* the region. It was in this sense that we seek a fully integrated political role of CASAR in the region to become participant in reinterpreting and discussing U.S. policies and not only promulgates American culture abroad, where we were kept on the receiving end. And as the HRH Prince Alwaleed intervened, CASAR should be a two-way street, which Ambassador Ricciardone entirely endorsed, so did I.

I concluded my presentation by reiterating that as CASAR had established its reputation and role at the national level, CASAR was more ready than ever to move forward to the next, more complex, level. CASAR wishes to design – together with its counterpart in the GCC – a future-oriented agenda for Arab-American relations.

I emphasized that CASAR was the only political center that could provide a solid platform for the regional perspective of our relations between the region and the US. The region lacked a “homegrown platform” where its policy-makers, scholars, its different stakeholders and especially its youth conduct strategic dialogues on Arab-U.S. relations. I stressed that it was high time to have a serious and organized discourse on this relationship from the region’s perspective. I also referred to the proposed collaboration with Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

The day concluded with a panel discussion on the topic “Cultural Understanding: Prospects and Challenges in the World Today.”

1. Prince Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding in Georgetown (USA),

   The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program at Harvard University (USA),

   The Alwaleed Center at the University of Edinburgh (UK),

   The Centre of Islamic Studies at the [University of Cambridge](http://www.cam.ac.uk) (UK),

   **Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR) at the** [**American University of Beirut**](http://wwwlb.aub.edu.lb/%7Ewebcasar/)AUB (Lebanon),

   **Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR) at the** [**American University in Cairo**](http://www.aucegypt.edu/ResearchatAUC/rc/casar/Pages/default.aspx) (Egypt). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)