



THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

# **Cairo Debates: Understanding Arab-American Relations**

**Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdul Aziz Alsaud  
Center for American Studies at the American  
University in Cairo**

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A summary of the Center for American Studies & Research at the American University in Cairo's programming (forums, colloquia, seminars, and conferences) from 2012-2017 as part of the center's community engagement program.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR) was founded at the American University of Cairo (AUC) in 2005. The center is one of six academic centers established by Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal to further visionary education plans designed to break down barriers between the Arab World and the West and encourage dialogue and cross cultural understanding. In addition to AUC, the Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation's consortium includes centers at the American University in Beirut, Harvard University, Georgetown University, Cambridge University, and Edinburgh University. To achieve their lofty goals, the centers have worked to advance scholarship on Islamic and Middle Eastern studies, support dialogue and debate across culture, promote youth engagement, and dispel the stereotypes and misconceptions which plague the relationship between the United States and the Arab World. CASAR plays an especially important role due to Egypt's traditional role as a leader within the Arab World and its importance to U.S. foreign policy in the region.

Since its inception, CASAR's mission has been to further mutual understanding between the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the United States, both by producing high caliber academic research on this complex political and cultural relationship and by providing superior education to AUC students. This task has become increasingly important following the events of the 2011 Arab Spring. The popular uprisings and subsequent transitions and/or repression highlighted the need for regional governments to listen to the voices of the so termed "Arab Street" and move towards democratization. During a period marred by domestic percolation, regional turmoil, and wavering U.S. foreign policy commitment, CASAR has served as an important center for dialogue and scholarship. The base of the relationship between Egypt and the United States, one built on a mutual commitment to pursuing regional stability and countering violent extremism, remains unchanged. However, CASAR stresses the necessity of pursuing enhanced economic,

social, and cultural engagement with the U.S. through private and public sector partnership, knowledge exchange, and capacity building, rather than solely through military and/or development aid. The center dedicates a sizeable portion of its outreach to examining the political relationship between the U.S. and the Arab World, particularly Egypt.

Additionally, CASAR emphasizes the need for reciprocal scholarly engagement between the United States and the Arab World. The center offers a platform for internationally renowned scholars to present and discuss their work with audiences and experts from the region. Furthermore, it promotes scholars from the MENA region who contribute to the field of American Studies through detailed and judicious research on the United States. As the United States continues its roles as global hegemon, it is crucial scholars from regions where it exerts considerable (if not undue) influence engage in fruitful critique. It also provides students with the opportunity to study American history, literature, and cultural motifs, which international employers consider a valuable commodity. The cross-cultural competence CASAR students gain through coursework and extracurricular activities greatly enhances both their international marketability and their critical thinking skills. This knowledge will be integral to students pursuing a career in politics and diplomacy, business and finance, sociology and anthropology, and journalism. CASAR believes that promoting reciprocal scholarship and cultural exchange better equips students and researchers to grapple with questions raised in a globalized world.

Over the last seven years, developments in the United States and the Arab World have caused considerable strain on these relations, and CASAR has remained at the forefront of analyzing and engaging with these changes. As the veneer of excitement surrounding the 2008 election of President Barack Obama and 2011 Arab Spring protests began to fade, academics and practitioners alike were increasingly left with more questions than answers. The Obama administration's foreign policy towards the Arab World left much to be desired, and the shocking 2016 election of Donald Trump presents causes for excitement and concern in the region. The continued violence in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen has repeatedly called into question the U.S.' commitment to the

Middle East and initiated a regional power struggle between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Against the backdrop of state collapse, the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to fester. In Egypt, persistent economic malaise and resurgent Islamist movements in the resistive North Sinai underpins the importance of international economic and military cooperation to ensure stability and development. The international community watched the resurgence of racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia play out in the 2016 U.S. elections, while questions of civil liberties and human rights plagued the MENA region in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. During this unstable and transitory period, CASAR's work as a forum for dialogue, debate, and cooperation gained additional importance. The center has developed an international reputation as a progressive and judicious voice on the importance of improving Arab-U.S. relations in a way which maximizes the benefits of this historic connection for all parties in this rapidly changing world.

CASAR runs an active outreach program designed to engage AUC students and faculty, practitioners and experts in fields related to Arab-U.S. relations, and the general public. Activities within the AUC community and the larger Egyptian society are a vital aspect of achieving CASAR's mission of enhancing mutual relations between the MENA region and the United States. The center's lecture series provides an opportunity for renowned diplomats, politicians, academics, and artists to host public forums and panels. These events are often hosted at AUC's historical Tahrir campus and open to the general public. In addition to expert lectures, dialogues series and colloquia allow international voices to discuss issues of mutual importance and field the questions of the diverse stakeholders in attendance. CASAR has partnered with notable international organizations, such as the Middle East Institute in Washington D.C. and the American Institute in Washington, to host highly successful international conferences, which bring together high ranking diplomats, academics, and policy makers from around the world. CASAR is also highly committed to partnering with universities throughout Egypt and has an active outreach program to ensure participation outside of the AUC community. In the past, the Center has partnered with the Academic Research Circle (ARC) at the Faculty of Women at Ain Shams University, Helwan University, and the

American University in Beirut to offer cross-disciplinary conferences on topics pertaining to American politics and culture. Most importantly, CASAR's events offer a student-centric focus, which ensure AUC undergraduate and graduate students have the opportunity to directly participate in activities. In the past, undergraduate students have had the opportunity to travel to the U.S. on center funded trips. Additionally, graduate students from AUC's Middle East Studies Institute and Public Policy and Administration Department actively participated as research assistants at CASAR's most recent international conferences, providing students with an important opportunity for professional development and networking.

It is as part of this commitment to community engagement and open access that CASAR has designed this booklet to combine summaries of its events, seminars, conferences, and dialogues over the past seven years. It is our hope that it will provide readers' with valuable insight into CASAR's work, as well as serve as a useful tool for researchers, policy makers, and students seeking to better understand Arab-U.S. relations. In this booklet, CASAR's events have been organized thematically, allowing readers to examine the various voices and opinions relating to a particular topic and emphasizing the discursive reactions to important domestic, regional, and international events. It is our sincere hope that this booklet will disseminate CASAR's work over the last few years far beyond the AUC community and further the Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation's goal of breaking down the barriers between the United States and the Arab World.

Dr. Magda Shahin, PhD

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Magda Shahin', written in a cursive style.

Director, Prince Alwaleed Center for American Studies and Research

# U.S.FOREIGN POLICY

## *Introduction*

Since the 1940s, the relationship with the Arab World has been an integral aspect of U.S. foreign policy, and has played an important role in shaping the interactions between Arab states and the rest of the world. A strong relationship with Egypt has underpinned Washington's policies, particularly after the 1967 Camp David Accords, and Cairo continues to be an important partner and U.S. ally. As Dr. Mark Miller, the Emma Smith Morris Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware, explained in his lecture, the major tenants of U.S. foreign policy towards the region, namely its commitment to the state of Israel, securing access to oil, and fight against extremism have remained consistent, but the relationship has been strained since the start of the 21st century. President Obama's vaunted 2008 speech in Cairo initially ushered in an era of optimism that relations would improve, but ultimately failed to manifest change. U.S. foreign policy toward the region was complicated by the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Protests led to the ouster of longtime U.S. allies in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, and Washington was criticized for uneven responses to popular protests in Syria, Libya, and Bahrain. As the Obama administration increasingly retracted from the region, Russian and Chinese influence has grown and regional rivalries between Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran have resurfaced. While it is too early to decisively ascertain the Trump administration's policies towards the Arab World, the initial months of his presidency have left regional leaders both optimistic and concerned.

The past seven years have also been an important time for Egyptian foreign policy and multilateral diplomacy in the region. Under President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Egypt's domestic political scene has stabilized, allowing the country to once again assume its

traditional leadership position in the Arab World. Since 2013, Cairo fostered closer relationships with Russia and China, while playing an important role in the international efforts to stabilize Libya, find a peaceful resolution to the Syrian conflict, and combat the so called Islamic State (IS). With its commitment to fighting violent extremism, Egypt remains an important U.S. ally and a close partner of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. As the Arab World emerges from a tumultuous decade, Egypt's economic growth will allow it to return to regional prominence. Undoubtedly, Washington's policy objectives will impact the region, and CASAR believes that Egyptian-U.S. relations will be a mainstay of Washington's engagement with the Arab World. However, CASAR's events have also examined U.S. foreign policy towards Russia and China, as the relationship between the major powers has a profound impact on the Arab World. It has also allowed Egyptian citizens to debate and discuss these countries' foreign policy and role in the greater Middle East. Through these events, CASAR has provided AUC students and the public with an opportunity to further examine U.S. foreign policy, both as a field of academic study and as a driving force behind political decisions which continue to impact the daily lives of citizens of the Arab World.

Over the course of the last seven years, CASAR hosted eleven events which addressed changing U.S. foreign policy in the Arab World. The events included guest lecture from notable experts, including Ambassador Nabil Fahmy, former Egyptian Foreign Minister; former *Financial Times* and *Washington Post* correspondent and diplomacy expert, Nicholas Kravov; *New York Times* bureau chief, David Kirkpatrick; Dr. Fawzi Gerges, inaugural director of the London School of Economics' Middle Eastern Studies Center. To ensure wide public engagement, CASAR partnered with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University, the Brookings Institute, and the Middle East Institute in Washington. During the discussions held at these events, five reoccurring themes dominated discussions on U.S. foreign policy and its impact on Arab-U.S. relations: the content of President Obama's foreign policy doctrine, the United States' changing role in the MENA region, the influence of

non-American powers, the centrality of Egyptian-American relations to U.S. foreign policy, and potential foreign policy developments under the Trump administration.

### *The Obama Doctrine*

President Obama's foreign policy towards the Middle East has confounded practitioners and academics alike, and determining the content of his foreign policy agenda was discussed heavily in CASAR's numerous outreach events. In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring, discussions focused on Washington's response to the unforeseen popular protests, and the administration's differing approach to the violent confrontations which occurred in Libya and Syria. Obama's initial response to demonstrations in Tahrir Square angered Egyptian protestors, who believed vaguely worded statements of support allowed him to hedge his bets between the popular movement and long-term ally Hosni Mubarak. By not openly offering support, his administration did not risk backing the unsuccessful party and straining relations. The frustration demonstrators felt towards this tepid response manifested in the revival of anti-American chants and songs from the 1960s. However, this undecided approach characterized the Obama administration's response to regional developments throughout his presidency, particularly during the second term. While the U.S. played an active role in the regime-change mission in Libya, President Obama only acted under publically pressured by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, after he managed to formulate a multinational coalition. When the administration could not secure the Arab League requested no-fly zone over Syria due to Russian opposition, it took no unilateral action. The Obama administration's foreign policy towards the Arab World was initially hesitant towards the 2011-12 popular demonstrations and responded unevenly towards the conflicts in Libya and Syria.

The Obama administration's aversion to acting unilaterally, particularly in Syria and Iraq, increasingly underscored the president's

desire to disengage from the Arab World. There is no consensus on President Obama's rationale for this approach. Opponents described his policy 'leading from behind' and abdicating American international leadership. Others saw it as an acknowledgement of the failed invasion of Iraq and the real limits of American influence abroad. Some speculated that this disengagement occurred because Washington viewed the economic significance of the Asia-Pacific region as more germane to American economic interests. Supporters claim his policies were a direct result of his predecessor's foreign policy blunders and a calculated step to recalibrate U.S. foreign policy. Experts noted that the American public opposed another costly military operation in the Middle East, but the president's attempts to avoid entanglement in the region emboldened other actors. Notably, President Obama's failure to enforce his own "red line" after the Assad regime used chemical weapons weakened Washington's credibility. The administration also failed to recognize the threat posed by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq until the organization seized Mosul and threatened to gain control of Erbil. This delay allowed IS to amass considerable financial, territorial, and military assets, which undoubtedly has made attempts to defeat the organization more challenging. The true scope of the regional did not become apparent to Washington until it spurred mass migration out of the Arab World and into Europe. Even when President Obama began fighting the Islamic State, he showed a preference for multilateralism, which resulted in a disjointed effort. It also soured American relations with long-time allies like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which felt Washington was more concerned with accommodating dangerous strands of political Islam than eradicating terror. Obama's focus on East Asia and clear preference for coalition building when engaging in the Middle East muted the effectiveness of American policy in Syria and Iraq.

While many discussions centered on Obama's reaction to the crisis in the Levant, his policies towards Libya, the Arab-Israeli crisis, and Iran were also indicative of a disengagement from the region. After the U.S.-led coalition expanded its mandate from 'protection' to 'regime change' in Libya, Washington's limited involvement in the political transition period hastened its devolution into a failed

state. The severity of the domestic infighting and lawlessness did not become apparent to the Obama administration until the 2012 attack on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi; subsequently IS linked groups gained control over sizeable swaths of territory. Likewise, President Obama's unwillingness to invest significant resources in the MENA region prevented him from furthering the peace process between Palestine and Israel. Though he initially showed a commitment to addressing the conflict and a better understanding of its nuances than his predecessors, he ultimately failed to make headway. When faced with opposition from the recalcitrant Netanyahu regime, President Obama chose not to exert the political capital necessary to ensure good-faith negotiations. Obama himself considers the P5+1 nuclear agreement as one of the crowning achievements of his foreign policy agenda. The agreement, which was reached after years of intense multilateral negotiations, limits Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The administration's willingness to engage with Tehran and conclude a nuclear agreement opposed by many constituents stemmed from Obama's desire to avoid future military conflict with Iran. The negotiation process sidelined important regional actors, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which exacerbated tensions between the Arab World and Washington. President Obama's preference for a limited engagement in MENA and approach to handling the evolving situation in Libya, Iran, and the Arab-Israeli conflict was inadequate.

In addition to disengagement from the Middle East and multilateral approaches to conflict management, the Obama Doctrine is characterized by an insistence that regional actors assume leadership positions in handling regional conflicts. President Obama did not initiate UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorizing the use of force against the Gadhafi regime until he was assured of Arab participation in this coalition. Likewise, he felt the international bombing campaign against IS drew legitimacy from the participation of Sunni Arab states like Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The administration armed and trained moderate Syrian rebels without providing them military assistance in their fight against the Assad regime. At his CASAR-sponsored lecture, Dr. Ayouty, former Director of the UN Bureau for Africa and the United Nations Institute for Training and

Research, noted that under previous regimes, Kurdish rebels or the Saudi state could have relied on American leadership in the fight against the Islamic State or the Houthi insurgency. However, President Obama preferred to encourage a more proactive regional engagement. During his 2015 lecture at AUC, Dr. Fawzi Gerges proclaimed this policy an opportunity for innovative regional approaches to conflict management, but ultimately failed to produce tangible successes.

In the aftermath of the Obama presidency, the successes and failures of his foreign policy doctrine are widely debated. Whether his decisions were informed by a desire to avoid his predecessor's failures, a belief that America's future interests lay in the Asia-Pacific region, or an unwillingness to become involved in another lengthy military engagement in the Middle East, his policies ultimately destabilized the region. Washington's sluggish response to the rise of the Islamic State and unwillingness to commit to state-building in Libya allowed violent extremism to gain a foothold across the Levant and North Africa. The Arab-Israeli conflict is entrenched, and Tel Aviv continues settlement expansion across the Occupied Palestinian territories. While the Iranian nuclear deal was met with optimism by American Democrats and the European Union, it has strained the relationship between Washington and key Arab allies. Participants at CASAR events ultimately concluded that the reduction of U.S. influence in the Arab World under President Obama proved destabilizing.

### *American Influence in the Region*

While the Obama Doctrine called for limited engagement in the Middle East, multilateral responses to crisis, and regional leadership, questions remain as to the extent of U.S. influence in the Arab World. During the Cold War, the region was an important battleground for the Soviet Union and the U.S. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990, the U.S. emerged as the world's sole superpower and unquestioningly exerted hegemonic power over the region until the start of the 21st century. However, the 2003 invasion of Iraq radically

altered the region's perception of the U.S. and called into question Washington's capacity to dictate the outcome of events in the Arab World. Its influence was further marginalized by the 2011-2012 popular protests, which ousted traditional allies from power and shed light Washington's willingness to support authoritarian regimes when it suited U.S. interests. President Obama clearly wished to limit the U.S.'s role in the region, but international actors continued to look to America for leadership. Many of the discussions at CASAR's events after 2011 focused on whether or not the U.S. still exerted hegemonic influence on the Arab World.

Many participants in CASAR's events saw Washington's influence over the region as diminished. Since the 1990s, the U.S. had enjoyed global hegemony by virtue of its military, economic, and cultural might. However, all aspects of its power are currently in decline. The drawn-out wars in Afghanistan and Iraq placed the American military's inadequacies on display for the world. At CASAR's 2015 conference, 'The American Century in Retrospect,' Dr. Mostafa El Sayed, professor of Political Science at Cairo University, explained that the conflicts have also drained the country's financial coffers to the tune of over \$4 trillion. IS' stunning success against the Iraqi military, and the country's subsequent return to sectarian politics, underpins the failures of the American policies since the 2003 invasion. Financially, the 2008 recession decimated the U.S., and it was emerging, medium sized economic powers which stabilized the global economy. Washington's military, political, and financial failures limited its ability to dictate the outcome of foreign countries' affairs.

Most importantly, the U.S. no longer has the cultural legitimacy necessary to act as the global superpower. Dr. Mounira Soliman explained that the international perception of America as a beacon of independence, individualism, and liberty, a hallmark of the mid-20th century has shifted to popular feelings of bitterness, disappointment, and resentment. The disastrous invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq showed the fallibility of Washington's decisions, and well documented social and racial strife eroded the belief of the 'ideal'

American society. Critiques of the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) doctrine, advocated for by the U.S., EU, and UN Secretary General Kofi Adnan in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars and Rwandan genocide, were vindicated by the NATO coalitions' failed actions in Libya. Counselor El-Sherbiny, director of the United Nations division of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that as critics predicted, a mission to protect human rights morphed into a mission to insure regime change against a long-time U.S. adversary. Many claim that without the military and economic power or the cultural legitimacy the U.S. had previously enjoyed, their power to act unilaterally and dictate events in the Middle East has been severely curtailed.

Those who no longer believed the U.S. was the regional hegemon further supported this belief by examining the actions of other state and non-state actors. Russia made its position on Syria clear, and continued using its veto to block any Security Council action which would endanger the Assad regime, a practice perfected by the U.S. in its relationship with Israel. Moscow increasingly pursued its own agenda with military action in Syria, claiming legitimacy by virtue of Assad's invitation. China has also gained a foothold in the region through increased economic investment and openly sided with Russia on when issues regarding Syria came before the Security Council. As Washington disengaged from the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, regional power struggles emerged, pitting Saudi Arabia against Iran and Egypt against Turkey. During a 2015 workshop, Dr. El-Sayed argued that key regional actors no longer treated the U.S. as a regional hegemon. For example, Saudi Arabia initiated 'Operation Decisive Storm' in Yemen without prior U.S. approval. Turkey, a fellow NATO member, refused to permit American troops to enter Iraq from its territory, while allowing foreign fighters to cross into Syria. By the end of the Obama administration, Israel had given up the pretense it was a willing partner for peace, and Netanyahu went as far as announcing the construction of new settlements in the West Bank while Vice President Biden visited the country. His decision to address the U.S. Congress without consent of the executive branch further underscored waning U.S. influence. Non-state actors, particularly Hezbollah and the Iranian National Guard, still openly

operate in Syria, despite Washington's opposition. Many felt the conduct of actors across the Arab World highlighted the decreasing power of Washington across this region.

However, those who believe the U.S. remains the central power in the Arab World pointed to its hard and soft power and the lack of a viable alternative to support their position. As Dr. Allison Hodgkins, professor of International Security and Conflict Management at AUC, explained at a CASAR's workshop, the U.S. boasts of the most robust economy, defensible borders, a large population, and strongest military in terms of conventional and nuclear capacities. While Washington's role in the Middle East has decreased under the Obama administration, this was a result of a calculated foreign policy reorientation in response to domestic apathy towards the region, as opposed to a loss of power. Dr. Hodgkins also emphasized the appeal of American soft-power, which still manifests through the use of English as the international language of communication and the prevalence of American culture. Photos of the popular demonstrations in Tahrir Square captured the numerous American fast food restaurants, and many of the region's youth still aspire to emigrate to the U.S. While American influence may have decreased since its heyday, Washington is still capable of enforcing its will abroad and inspiring international youth.

Furthermore, those who hold that the U.S. still exerts hegemonic influence over the region point to the lack of a viable alternative option. While Russia and China may have expanded their regional footprint, CASAR director, Dr. Magda Shahin, acknowledged that neither is willing to take any action which would damage relations with Washington for fear of losing access to American and Western European markets. While the two emerging powers have allied against U.S. dominance, the relationship has not been tested. Regional powers are clearly clamoring for more influential roles, but none have emerged as a viable regional hegemon. Saudi Arabia and Iran's proxy wars have reached a stalemate, and neither is likely to secure a decisive victory. Similarly, Washington and its allies decision to arm and support Kurdish rebel factions in the fight against IS sidelined Ankara's role in Syria. Erdogan views this approach as dangerous in

light of Turkey's history with its resistive Kurdish population. Without a viable second option, many believe that Washington remains the de facto power in the Middle East.

Regardless of whether the U.S.' power remains hegemonic in the Middle East, participants in CASAR's events acknowledged that American influence in the region had decreased. At present, the world economy is moving towards multipolarity, and a new world order appears to be on the horizon. Such a world order would likely include numerous poles of economic power, with an enhanced role for international organizations and transnational corporations. Despite the growing international economic diversification, the U.S. is still the world's sole superpower in terms of military capacity and will assuredly remain a driving economic force for the coming decades. Whether as a result of decreased U.S. influence or interest in region, new actors have emerged and their impact on the Arab World provides important room for debate. However, CASAR's analysis anticipates that the United States will continue to play a central and influential, even if not fully hegemonic, role in the region.

## *The Arab World and Emerging Powers*

As Washington's relationship with the Arab World has shifted, the importance of emerging international and regional powers has grown considerably. In a 2015 presentation, CASAR's director, Dr. Magda Shahin, questioned whether rising regional powers in the Middle East would have a voice in dictating matters or whether the traditional 'Sykes-Picot' modality of superpowers deciding the regional order would prevail. While many of CASAR's conversations focused on the relationship between Arab states and Russia and China, the other BRICS countries<sup>1</sup> have also expanded their footprint. Riyadh's quest for regional power is the motivating factor behind its more assertive foreign policy, and Egypt has stabilized its economy to return to its traditional, influential position. Increasingly, the non-Arab countries in the Middle East, Iran, Turkey, and Israel, have attempted to influence events across the Arab World. This has raised questions as to their legitimacy and the possibility of expanding and diversifying the accepted voices in the region. The impact of these emerging players on the Middle Eastern stage will impact, if not dictate, the solutions to current conflicts, and the region's ability to engage with the changing environment will be a key factor going forward.

Russia's involvement in the Arab World is nothing new; Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser contributed to the start of the global Cold War by inviting the Soviet Union's influence into Egypt politics. The close partnership between the U.S. and the GCC was forged to prevent Communist incursions in the Persian Gulf. Russia has been a close ally of both Syria and Iran since before the fall of the Soviet Union, and Moscow relies heavily on its leased naval base in Latakia, Syria for access to the Mediterranean. However, its 2015 bombing campaign signified the start of a more assertive Russian policy in the Middle East. Dr. Reda Shehata, former Egyptian Ambassador to Russia, tied this change to Russia's more assertive

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<sup>1</sup> 'BRICS' is a moniker given to the rapidly industrializing states of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

foreign policy in general, beginning with its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. This foreign policy was adopted due to Euro-American exclusion of Russia in the post-Soviet era, and the expansion of NATO in extreme Eastern Europe, which Moscow views as an existential threat. Since 2011, Prime Minister Putin has looked east towards Eurasia, the former Soviet republics, and the Middle East as potential partners for economic growth and military security. Within this framework, the continuation of a pro-Russian regime in Syria is of utmost importance to Moscow's political agenda. Not only does Russia rely on its naval base, the Assad regime has been an important client for the Russian arms and natural gas trade. It is also concerned about the spread of violent extremism, particularly due to the number of nationals from the resistive Chechnya province thought to have joined IS. Moscow's willingness to oppose regime change, particularly in the aftermath of the failed operations in Libya, has garnered considerable support from opponents of the 2011 revolts, and its military assistance was invaluable to Assad's 2016-2017 gains. From the Arab perspective, Russia has succeeded in presenting a legitimate second alliance option for those tired of overt American interference in the region. Moscow plays to the overtly-American sentiment prevalent across the Arab World and provides countering voice the voice within the region.

Looking to the future, participants at CASAR events hypothesized that Russia's role in the Arab region will likely be determined by its relationship with the United States. While Moscow's intention to stay a key player in the Arab World is clear, its ability to meet this objective is hampered by its poor economic situation. Dr. Shehata explained that Russia and the United States share many of the same priorities in the region, such as combatting violent extremism and pursuing stability. Should the two countries manage to coordinate through good faith negotiations, diplomatic cooperation, and a willingness to readdress Washington's policies towards Eastern Europe, the cooperation between Moscow and Washington would have numerous potential benefits for the Arab World. Russia maintains a strong working relationship with both Israel and Iran, and could be a potentially powerful voice in negotiating a peaceful resolution

to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Cooperation could also go a long way towards addressing nuclear non-proliferation in the Arab World. If Russia and the U.S. pressure their respective ally (Israel and Iran) to forgo nuclear ambitions, Egypt's goal of a nuclear free zone in the Middle East could be realized. However, a breakdown in relations between Washington and Moscow or aggressive unilateral actions by either party could have dire consequences. The situation in Syria is already complex, and the lack of communication between the two powers risks the situation spiraling out of control. Already, the U.S. has accidentally bombed Russian troops in Syria; further incidents could expand the conflict. Russia's newly assertive policy towards the Arab World is based on very real national security objectives and provides potential for a second influential voice in the region, but the impact of its policies will likely be determined by Washington and Moscow's ability to negotiate and share the space.

China has also expanded its role in the Arab World in a more subtle and inclusive manner designed to maximize its economic interests. The Chinese government has invested heavily in the region's economic growth, and its 'One Belt One Road' policy prioritizes a network of different partnerships on the basis of heavy infrastructure development, increasing financial and manufacturing platforms, and exporting technological development. In addition, its highly popular Confucius Institutes provide a medium for language and cultural exchange. China's expanded role in the Arab World reflects Beijing's belief in furthering the global free trade agenda, which it views as economically advantageous to all parties. An illustrative example of this approach is its decision to invite Egypt to the 2016 G20 World Summit, during which China sought to expand the inclusiveness of the global economic order. China's interest in the region has been met with optimism by Arab leaders, because Beijing is perceived as a fellow 'developing nation' without the intrusive agenda of other powers. Beijing's economic involvement is notable for the lack of conditionality and domestic interference which has characterized Washington's approach towards the region. It has also shown a willingness to block the U.S.'s attempts at regime change in Syria through its Security Council veto power. China's growing role in the

Arab World has provided new avenues of cooperation and discussion for academics and practitioners.

Participants at CASAR events believed China's influence in the Middle East will likely grow as it continues to exert itself on the global stage. While Beijing is adamant that it has no desire to become a superpower, its large population, robust economy, and pragmatic politics assure its voice's importance. While much has been made of a China/Russia alliance versus the U.S., experts on Chinese foreign policy have noted divergent interests. While they seek to diminish unchecked American influence, both governments have avoided expressing policy positions on contentious issues (i.e. the China Sea or Russia's annexation of the Crimea). The willingness of Beijing and Moscow to articulate a coordinated regional policy remains in question. In addition, China has not invested the military capital in the Middle East that characterizes Russian and American involvement. Counterterrorism is not currently a priority in China, and Washington's counterterrorism policies in Southeast Asian aroused the suspicion of the Chinese government. Despite the questions about China's desire to become a hegemonic influence, there are numerous beneficial avenues for its growing involvement in the Arab World. It has cultivated a working relationship with Israel and Palestine, which would be an asset in working towards a peaceful settlement to the region's most enduring conflict. Beijing has also indicated its receptiveness to embracing Arab leadership in regional issues, as shown by its inclusion of Egypt at international summits. Finally, China has forgone the traditional route of conditioning economic assistance on mandated institutional reform, which provides it with legitimacy among the Arab public and its leadership. As the region moves forward, China's influence can continue to augment its influence with pragmatic and mutually beneficial economic assistance.

Saudi Arabia is well-placed to influence the outcome of events in the Arab World. As the birthplace of Islam and home of the religion's most important holy sites, it is viewed by Muslims around the world as an important thought leader. Its small population, expansive petroleum reserves, and well-equipped military provide

the economic and military resources necessary to become a regional power. Riyadh's foreign policy has grown assertive since the start of the Arab Spring. It views regional regime change and a resurgent Iran as a security threat, particularly in the aftermath of the uprising against the Bahraini monarchy. The Kingdom has actively supplied Syrian rebel groups with military and financial support in their battle against the Assad regime, and militarily backed the Bahraini monarchy in the face of sustained popular demonstrations. Its position in Syria has brought Riyadh into direct conflict with Iran, which views the Assad regime as a crucial ally needed to maintain access with Hezbollah in Lebanon. While Saudi initially mobilized the GCC to secure a political solution in Yemen during the Arab Spring, it subsequently responded militarily to the Houthi insurgency. Participants in CASAR's 'Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective,' which was co-hosted by the Middle East Institute in Washington, discussed the trajectory of Saudi Arabia's role in the region. In their estimate, Riyadh viewed increased Iranian influence along its southern border as an existential security threat, and its coalitions' actions in Yemen reflect this understanding. The conflict has raised some very real questions as to the Saudi's military capacity, while draining its financial resources at a time where the Kingdom is attempting to diversify its economy. Its feud with Qatar and reports of familial opposition to Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salam's policies also cast doubt on its current capacity to lead the Arab World. Despite these challenges, Saudi Arabia will continue to impact the region, particularly with regards to solutions for the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts. However, participants in CASAR's lecture series felt strongly that Riyadh must compromise with Iran to achieve peaceful resolutions to the wars, which may involve accepting an Iranian voice in the Arab World.

Iran's interests towards the region are also apparent, although participants at CASAR's events differed as to whether or not they saw these ambitions in a positive or negative light. Some viewed Iran's intentions as meddlesome, while others considered this an opportunity for a constructive expansion of the regional order. While Iran's influence grew when the Shia majority in Iraq gained control following the U.S. invasion, the Arab Spring and subsequent

nuclear deal provided additional impetus. Egypt was significantly weakened in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and could not wield its usual influence over the region. Political infighting over support for the Muslim Brotherhood and competing Islamist factions in Syria divided the GCC, at a time when the world oil market plummeted. Iran supported the Assad regime from the onset of the conflict, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was emboldened as Russia's influence on the conflict grew and Obama failed to enforce his "red line" against Assad. Iran views the survival of the Assad regime as integral to its own foreign policy, both as an important client for weapons and as a conduit between Tehran and Hezbollah. The lifting of sanctions against Tehran following the 2015 conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) provided Iran with extra resources to invest in the region, and drew the ire of the GCC. While the extent of Iran's capability to support the Houthi insurgency has been debated, the current conflict in Yemen is indicative of the regional power struggle between Tehran and Riyadh. As with Saudi Arabia, participants in CASAR's 'Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective' conference anticipated Iranian participation in settlements for Syria and Yemen. Should Tehran harbor constructive, rather than meddlesome, ambitions towards the region, its participation could be welcomed by Arab States. However, the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia may continue to destabilize the region for years to come if Tehran does not act in good faith.

To a lesser extent, Turkey and Israel have also attempted to expand their influence in the region. Ankara has been at the forefront of the movement to overthrow the Assad regime, and continues to host high-ranking members of the Free Syrian Army. Proximity, mass refugee migration, and the mobilization of Kurdish forces in northern Syria have made the Syrian conflict an important foreign policy issue for the Turkish government. They are also a committed ally in the fight against IS, particularly after being the victim of numerous IS-linked attacks. However, Turkey has shown a willingness to antagonize most of the other major players in the region, particularly when it involves Kurdish organizations. Dr. El Sayed noted Ankara's unwillingness to permit American troops enter Iraq through its territory, and its downing

of a Russian military plane led to a high-profile diplomatic crisis in late 2015. The European Union has questioned its complicity for mass migration into Europe, and the EU-Turkey migration agreement issue remains thorny. Arab States, Egypt chief among them, have lambasted Ankara's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other destabilizing Islamist movements. Though, President Erdogan has turned his focus to amassing domestic power over the last year, Ankara remains committed to aspects of the current crisis in the Levant. In particular, Turkey will likely oppose options for peaceful resettlement which privilege the Kurds, as they are mindful of their own resistive minority or those which provide a transitory role of the Assad regime after expending political capital calling for his overthrow. Similarly to Iran, Turkey has the potential to play a role in regional politics, but will need to convince the Arab World that its intentions are not sinister. Withdrawing its support for Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood would be an important first step.

Israel is not as openly involved in regional politics as Turkey or Iran, but nevertheless disproportionately impacts the trajectory of the Arab World. Dr. Walter Mead, the Hudson Institute's Distinguished Scholar in American Strategy and Statesmanship and James Clarke Chace Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College, noted that American foreign policy towards the region is traditionally driven by the security of Israel. U.S. support for the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East preceded the international Zionist movement. As early as the 1880s, Washington supported creating such a state to stem the flow of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe without leaving the population completely dispossessed. Washington's support for Israel consistently factors into its fluctuating relations with the Arab World and negative perception from Middle Eastern citizens. It has also been the impetus behind the country's close relationship with Egypt and Jordan, the two Arab countries which have concluded comprehensive peace agreements with Israel. When President Obama entered office, the international community was optimistic that he could propel the stalled peace process forward. As the relationship between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu further deteriorated, they attempted to undermine each other on the international stage.

Netanyahu believes Iran's nuclear ambitions are an existential threat to Israel and has actively pushed the U.S. towards a military engagement. He opposed the 2015 nuclear agreement and attempted to undermine its success by mobilizing Republican opposition in the U.S. In 2015, Dr. Hodgkins noted that it is becoming difficult for the American president to unabashedly support Israel when it acts in ways which destabilize the region. Though President Obama's decision to abstain rather than veto a Security Council resolution against Israel was unprecedented, the size of the military support agreement he signed was equally unprecedented. Moving forward, Israel will likely attempt to undermine the nuclear agreement with Iran, which could have devastating affects if unraveled. Furthermore, continued Israeli intransigence towards the peace process will hamper efforts to end the conflict, but may risk diminishing the support of the American public.

CASAR's outreach events over the last 5 years have grappled with the changing roles of actors in the Middle East. While the region was first dominated by the U.S.-Soviet rivalry, then by American hegemony, a host of new international and regional actors have emerged. Russia's actions in Syria underscore its commitment to protecting its influence, no matter the cost. China's economic investments show the region's importance to Beijing, and the Arab World has optimistically embraced its less meddlesome approach. Riyadh is attempting to pick up the mantle of regional leadership, which has brought it into direct conflict with Iran's similar ambitions. The trajectory of this regional power struggle will inform agreements to settle conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Turkey's investment in the Middle East remains less overt, but Ankara will attempt to wield influence over the Levant, particularly in regards to the Kurdish question. Until a peaceful solution is reached between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel's relationship with Washington will complicate relations with the Arab World. According to Dr. Shahin, the number of actors in the Middle East is rapidly expanding, and it is important to analyze these players' policies, their relationships with the U.S., and the impact they will have on American policy towards the region, as well as on the relations between Arab States.

## *Egyptian-American Relations*

Participants in CASAR events unanimously reinforced the importance of a stable and secure Egypt to American foreign policy in the Middle East. While Egypt's importance may have decreased since its apex, a healthy relationship between Cairo and Washington is still the cornerstone of American foreign policy. This relationship is important because Egypt is the most populous Arab state and a traditional leader in the region, as well as a key ally in the U.S. sponsored War on Terror. Additionally, Egypt controls the Suez Canal and has maintained a peace agreement with Israel for over 40 years. It is widely believed that Egypt has the potential to assume a leadership position towards the Libyan conflict and the Arab-Israeli crisis as it stabilizes domestically. Despite its importance, relations between Cairo and Washington frayed under the Obama administration. During a series of conferences and lecture, CASAR discussed the causes of this breakdown and steps for revitalization.

Though Egypt shared the international community's optimism at the 2008 election of Barak Obama, pessimism set in even prior to the 2011 Arab Spring. As Dr. Mounira Soliman, former assistant director of CASAR, explained, demonstrators took note of the administration's ambiguously worded comments, which were clearly designed to avoid actively choosing between a long-term political ally and a popular call for democratic reform. While Washington did eventually announce its support for the Tahrir protests, many felt it did so only after the movement's success was assured. The Obama administration's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, even after the Egyptian people had challenged the legitimacy of President Morsi, further eroded the relationship. Dr. Gerges suggested that President Obama's handling of the Egyptian revolution managed to alienate both secularists, who felt they were sold out to the Muslim Brotherhood, and Islamists, who believe American support did not go far enough. Washington did not improve its position by sanctioning President El-Sisi's administration repeatedly for human rights abuses and withholding non-military aid. Washington's overall policies towards the region, especially its

continued support for Israel, destabilizing intervention in Libya, and indecisiveness in Syria, have also been detrimental. Despite these circumstances, both parties wish to improve the relationship and cooperate more closely on regional issues.

During CASAR's 2013 workshop 'Egypt-U.S. Relations in a New Era: Challenges and Possibilities,' leading politicians, diplomats, and academics attempted to diagnose root causes of the relationship's breakdown in order to extrapolate concrete steps forwards. While the discussion occurred prior to the ouster of President Morsi and the subsequent strain of Washington's policies towards President El-Sisi, their findings are incredibly pertinent. Ambassador Mohamed Anis Salem discussed the trajectory of Egyptian-American relations in his paper, 'Egypt - U.S.: A 'Strategic Relationship' in Need of Repair.' Through this presentation and subsequent conversation, participants observed other fundamental causes of the cooled relationship. First, the lack of an institutionalized mechanism for dialogue has deferred the pursuit of mutual goals and personalized the relationship between leaders. In such a situation, the personality clash between Presidents Obama and El-Sisi can shake the relationship to a greater extent than in alliances with better modalities for communication. Second, Israel has always been the silent third partner in Egyptian-American relations, causing tricky domestic considerations in Egypt. As long the Egyptian public views American military and economic aid as contingent on support for Israel, the government must minimize the importance of the aid relationship. Finally, a lack of transparency in the relationship has left both parties frustrated. Washington feels Egypt is not doing enough to curb human rights abuses and move towards democracy, while Cairo chafes under America's meddling. These challenges must be reconciled in order to formulate a more productive relationship going forward, as neither party would prefer an ad hoc, military only relationship in the vein of Pakistani-American relations.

Throughout discussions, participants in CASAR's events emphasized interests shared by the Egyptian and American governments. Both parties have a vested interest in maintaining the

strategic balance of force in the region. As a result, Washington offers support for Egypt's positions in regional and international bodies, while Egypt serves as an important intermediary between the Arab World and the U.S. Egypt's commitment to maintaining the Camp David Accord, in particular, simultaneously assures Israeli security and allows Cairo to speak on behalf of the Palestinians. Both sides are committed to combatting the spread of violent extremism and radical ideologies. To further this goal, the U.S. has assisted Egypt in modernizing and developing its military capacities, while Egypt cooperates with America in fighting terrorism. Additionally, both parties understand the importance of access to the Suez Canal, which is one of the most important international trade routes. Safe and secure passage through the canal is vital to the economic interests of both states. Finally, both countries have a vested interest in ensuring Egypt's economic and social stability. The events in Syria, Libya, and Yemen have shown the dangers state-collapse in the region, and Cairo and Washington share a commitment to preventing such an occurrence in Egypt. As the country continues to stabilize politically, an important bilateral interest is growing Egypt's economy. To achieve these shared objectives, CASAR outlined important aspects of military, political, and economic cooperation.

Egyptian-American military cooperation has formed the cornerstone of the bilateral relationship, and this partnership has functioned even when other areas of the relationship have been strained. Dr. Gerges affirmed that it was the Department of Defense's coordination with the Egyptian military which resulted in a ceasefire during the 2011 revolution, rather than conversations between the executive branches. Egypt has provided the United States with the ability to move freely in the region by allowing it access to its airspace and the Suez Canal. In return, America's support of the Egyptian military has taken the form of arms sales, transfer of military technology, and joint military exercises. Dr. Megahed El Zayat, advisor at the National Centre for Middle East Studies, found that Egypt was among the top 5 recipients of U.S. military aid and joined the army's biannual "Bright Star" exercises and other joint military exercises between 2011 and 2014. Participants agreed that military relations

should remain the stable backbone of the bilateral relationship, particularly in terms of a commitment to fighting extremism in the North Sinai. However, they cautioned that the relationship should not focus only on the military sector, but needed to be revitalized in the political and economic sectors.

The political relationship between executives, legislators, and civil society has been the sector most challenged by the Arab Spring and subsequent events, and regenerating lines of communication and trust are paramount. Director General of the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peace-building, Ashraf Swelam, explained that in 2011, U.S. believed the military and the Muslim Brotherhood were the two entities capable of providing stability. The former could maintain border security, particularly in the Sinai, and the latter might play a constructive role in curtailing the role of the Salafists, jihadists, and other Islamic groups. Washington's misplaced trust in the Brotherhood has proved costly. To reinvigorate the political relationship, participants at the 'Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective Conference' focused on the need to expand beyond the executive. The relationship should include institutionalized partnerships between the judicial and legislative branches, civil societies, and religious leaders. Modalities for this form of cooperation already exist. In 2015, a framework was created to provide Egyptian university students with scholarships to attend American universities, and funding from USAID was successfully used to revamp El Moez Street in downtown Cairo. For this to be successful, however, Washington must allow Egypt to dictate its own development priorities and be sensitive to the local context. At the same time, Congress is unlikely to completely remove human rights benchmarks from its assistance packages, and Cairo must show a willingness to take incremental steps towards reform. Extending cooperation across a wide and representative sector of Egyptian-American political and civil society will be an important step towards improving the bilateral relationship.

No less important is the opportunity for the two countries to foster enhanced economic cooperation, especially outside of

development aid. At CASAR's "Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective" conference, participants stressed the considerable economic sacrifices the Egyptian government had already made in order to secure an International Monetary Fund loan. Providing substantive assistance to bolster the Egyptian economy would be of the utmost importance. Furthermore, Cairo needs to formulate economic policies based on sustainability as opposed to popularity in order to create economic growth. American corporations could be encouraged to invest and manufacture in Egypt instead of exporting resources. For example, industries relying on inexpensive energy (cement, fertilizer, etc.) could be encouraged to produce for the lucrative market of 90 million Egyptians. More than 1,000 U.S. firms already do business in Egypt, in areas ranging from energy to manufacturing to services. Egypt is host to some of the most prominent U.S.-based multinational firms, including Coca-Cola, IBM, ExxonMobil, Citigroup, and Microsoft. U.S. firms have more than \$20 billion in investments in Egypt, although much of that is the result of energy investments by a single firm, Apache. The economic partnership should also prioritize bilateral trade, as opposed to simple financial assistance. According to Dr. OmneyaHelmy, professor at Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Egypt has fallen on the list of U.S. trade partners and currently stands at number 53. Bilateral trade would open new markets for U.S. based transnational corporations, while stabilizing the Egyptian economy and providing employment and economic opportunity to the sizeable youth population. Jon Alterman, from the Center for Strategic International Studies in Washington, explained that the level of tension in the relationship between Egypt and the U.S. was unprecedented since the Camp David Accords. He reiterated that a close bilateral relationship is necessary for the region's stability and should begin with Egypt.

However, Egypt is by no means dependent on American economic aid, which is no longer as consequential as it was in the past. Dr. Shahin clarified that Egypt has viable alternatives to the United States' economic aid, and these aid are currently very low compared to Egyptian GDP. In this regard, military aid to Egypt must be considered a very separate category from economic aid. While criticism was

addressed to the weaning economic aid, participants at CASAR events clearly supported the continued American military aid to Egypt. Most importantly, Cairo and Washington need to communicate on what forms of economic assistance would be mutually beneficial. Too often, development and economic aid benefit the donor country, at the expense of the recipient. As Dr. Magda Shahin noted, Washington has focused aid on democratization and good governance, as opposed to economic growth, infrastructure development, and bilateral trade, which are Egypt's priorities. A participatory approach to economic assistance, which focused on bilateral trade and investment, would aid the government's efforts to stabilize the economy and facilitate private-public business partnerships.

Despite the chill in Egyptian-American relations after 2011, both parties remain committed to maintaining and improving the relationship. The first step in this process involves institutionalizing modalities for communication. Both parties need to be frank about their interests, and work on maximizing interests of shared concern, such as countering violent extremism and stabilizing Libya. The military-military relationship has long been the foundation of bilateral cooperation, and it is important to continue this coordination, particularly in the North Sinai. However, CASAR advocates for an expansion of the partnership to include better methods for economic and political coordination. A functioning relationship between actors in the judiciary, civil society, and transnational corporations is needed to further cement the Egyptian-American relations.

### *U.S. Foreign Policy under President Trump*

To say the election of Donald J. Trump on November 7, 2016 shocked the international community is an understatement. It left policy makers and academics scrambling to elucidate the potential content of his foreign policy towards the Middle East. In the Arab World, the public regarded his victory with a mixture of optimism and concern. Many blamed former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton for

Obama's failed foreign policy in the region, particularly her advocacy for intervention in Libya and perceived support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Her election would have represented a continuation of the Obama Doctrine, albeit with the potential for a slightly more hawkish approach. It was widely believed that Trump's administration would at least provide a welcomed departure from the status quo. Many felt his acumen as businessman and reputation as a deal-maker could propel stalled conflicts forward. However, his campaign rhetoric was cause for concern throughout the Arab World, particularly his call for a blanket 'Muslim ban' on entry into the U.S. and the recognition of Jerusalem as the sole capital of Israel. As a political novice, there were few indicators as to what are his foreign policy objectives.

CASAR noted the fundamental incongruences which ran through Trump's stated foreign policy objectives towards the Middle East. On one hand, he lambasted President Obama for being soft on terror and promised to eradicate the Islamic State. On the other hand, he promised to disengage from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq and not send additional American troops to the Middle East. His condemnation for the nuclear agreement with Iran appealed to the Arab Gulf, but he also decried the GCC as freeloaders who did not contribute enough financially to their defense. How would this antagonistic stance toward Iran affect his promise to improve relations with Russia, Tehran's close ally? His protectionist economic policies did not bode well for countries such as Egypt which wanted to enhance trade partnerships, but his emphasis on no-interference in domestic policy appealed to the region. Trump's seemingly incoherent policy was further complicated by his persona itself. The outspoken and bombastic persona which endeared him to supporters lacked the carefully crafted statesmanship traditionally charactering international diplomacy. Discerning the priorities of the Trump administration and navigating his new approach to diplomatic relations were the chief priorities of regional policy makers.

While it is too early into his presidency to delineate a clear 'Trump Doctrine,' CASAR elucidated overarching themes which have informed Trump's early foreign policy. He is as much a

unilateralist as President Obama was a multilateralist, and early bombing campaigns in Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan underscore this approach. He also appears committed to unraveling his predecessor's legacy to the greatest extent possible. This does not bode well for the longevity of the Iran nuclear agreement, and its unraveling could have a destabilizing impact on the region. However, President Trump values personal relationships with leaders, and has formed a good working relationship with President El Sisi, King Abdullah of Jordan, and King Salman of Saudi Arabia. His administration has seemed keen on letting regional leaders assume responsibility for their own security, but wants to remain involved in regional politics. He has thus far upheld the major tenants of U.S. foreign policy, so the security of Israel, access to oil reserves, and counterterrorism seem likely to remain the foundation of the relationship between Washington and its allies. As a close ally in the War on Terror, Egypt's relationship with the U.S. is likely to improve, and those close to Trump acknowledge Cairo's importance as an ally. However, Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy to from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thereby unilaterally recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, was highly unpopular across the Arab World. President Trump's foreign policy will go a long way in determining the region's ability to move towards equilibrium and prosperity.

### *Conclusion*

Since the Arab Spring, U.S. foreign policy towards the Arab World has been in flux. Under the Obama administration, there was a discernable pivot towards the Asia-Pacific region, which called into question Washington's commitment to the Arab World. Many have wondered whether the age of American hegemony has ended, or if the U.S. is simply recalibrating its foreign policy after overreaching in Iraq with devastating results. While the U.S. continues to wield considerable influence in the Arab World, a host of other powers have emerged with their own ambitions and policy objectives. Their

competing priorities must be reconciled to address the conflicts raging in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. The Islamic State has changed the face of extremism in the region, and it will not be defeated through military might alone. Addressing the multi-faceted socioeconomic, educational, and political conditions which give rise to extremism will determine whether such ideologies can be eradicated. The Arab-Israeli conflict, which will be discussed further in the following chapter, persists despite hopes that President Obama would move forward the peace process. President Trump has inherited a tumultuous Middle East, which has grown weary of Washington's lofty promises and failed delivery. Rebuilding trust between the U.S. and the Arab World should be a priority.

In 2017, Ambassador Nabil Fahmy noted with optimism that both the U.S. and the Arab World are experiencing periods of great upheaval and uncertainty. The divides opened during the 2016 presidential elections have yet to be bridged, and America is engaged in a period of soul-searching. The demographic and economic challenges which gave rise to the Arab Spring have yet to be resolved, and democratic transition processes have been uneasy. Yet, this period of change presents an opportunity to imagine new approaches to recalibrate Arab-U.S. relations. To do so, Washington will need to decide on the extent of its commitment to the Middle East, and Arab states will need to collaborate to define their vision for the region in the coming years. The international rise of populist movements is evidence of peoples' discontent with the status quo and desire to build a better future. Should these movements be harnessed towards a more participatory approach to governance, they could translate into beneficial social and political change and improved relations. However, increased nativism, suspicion, and xenophobia could further destabilize the current world order. Embracing open communication, cooperation, and mutual respect would drastically improve the trajectory of Arab-U.S. CASAR shares Ambassador Fahmy's optimistic outlook as both Washington and the Arab World stand on the precipice of change.

***Included below is an alphabetized list of CASAR events pertaining to The Arab World and the United States Foreign Policy. For complete coverage and comprehensive reports on each event, please refer to CASAR's official website.***

1. Amr El-Sherbiny, "Egypt and Multilateral Diplomacy," (December 9, 2013).
2. "Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective," Joint conference with the Middle East Institute in Washington, (January 29-30, 2017).
3. Delegates from the American Institute in Washington, "A Round Table Discussion about Egypt-US Relations with Delegates from the Arab-American Institute in Washington" (January 17, 2016).
4. "Egypt-U.S. Relations in a New Era: Challenges and Possibilities," Multiday Workshop, (June 23, 2013 & May 7, 2013).
5. Fawaz Gerges, "American Foreign Policy towards the Middle East: Change and Continuity," (March 30, 2015).
6. Magda Shahin and Reda Shehata, "Examination of the Positions of the U.S. and Russia at the UN General Assembly: A Regional Perspective," (October 10, 2016).
7. Mark Miller, "U.S.-Egyptian Relations: Where Are They Headed?" (October 18, 2012).
8. Mostafa ElSayed, "U.S. -Latin American Relations under Obama," (March 11, 2015).
9. Nabil Fahmy, "Diplomacy in a Changing World with a Special Emphasis on the Middle East," (April 27, 2017).
10. Nicholas Kravlev, "The Impact of American Diplomacy in the 21st century," ( November 12, 2015).
11. "The American Century in Retrospect: Rethinking US-Middle East Relations" (April 23-25, 2015).
12. Walter Mead "American Foreign Policy and the Middle East," (December 4, 2014).
13. Yassin El Ayouty, "The Obama Doctrine on Middle East Conflicts," (October 18, 2015).

## **Regional Developments**

### *Introduction*

As an American Studies research center in the Arab World, CASAR is at the forefront of analyzing regional developments. Over the course of the last seven years, changes within the Middle East have provided ample opportunities for academic research and debate. The Arab Spring surprised much of the international community, calling into question previously held assumptions about the region. It raised important questions about the quality of governance across the Arab World and underscored the need for change. It also ignited violent conflict from Libya to Yemen, which require regional cooperation and political capital to reach peaceful resolution. Central to the questions of revolution and conflict management has been regional economies, particularly the challenges and opportunities facing Egypt in this regard. At the same time, the enduring Arab-Israeli conflict and questions of terrorism have continued to perplex and challenge those specializing in international relations. CASAR provides a forum for Arab and international experts to engage with diverse audiences on the most nuanced regional issues.

The Arab-Israeli crisis has long served as the basis for the region's relationship with the United States and the international community. Egypt, the first country to conclude a peace agreement with Israel, has led Arab and international efforts to peacefully resolve the situation. Over the last six years, the Netanyahu government's position towards the Palestinians has hardened, endangering the viability of the traditional two state approach. Hopes that the Obama administration would propel negotiations forward were unfounded, and he chose not to invest the political capital needed to conclude a peace agreement. The devastating civil war in Syria and the rise of the Islamic State have diverted international attention, leaving the Arab-Israeli conflict to fester. CASAR hosted a number of international experts at forums and discussion panels to debate the viability of a two-state solution,

analyze the American perspective on the conflict, and examine modalities of peaceful resistance.

The Arab Spring caught the international community by surprise and its causes and effects remain central to understanding the Arab World. As the initial optimism has diminished, it has also raised important questions on good governance, the process of democratization, and sustainable change in the region. The major sources of discontent, namely a lack of inclusivity and transparency in governance, high youth unemployment, and increased access to information through the internet and social media, are not easily resolved. It is increasingly important to grapple with these issues and formulate coordinated regional approaches to turn demographics and economics into opportunities rather than challenges. The events of 2011-12 also destabilized the traditional regional order, allowing non-Arab actors the opportunity to seize larger role and raising questions about which countries' influences should be tolerated. Egypt, along with Tunisia, has been most successful in transitioning to a more inclusive democracy, but the process has not been without its challenges. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's short-lived ascendancy debunked many assumptions about political Islam and the feasibility of mixing religious and politics. CASAR's events since 2011 have provided a platform in the heart of the Arab World to academically analyze the Arab Spring and the path forward.

“Combating violent extremism” remains the buzz word which defines relations between the Arab World and its allies in the United States and Western Europe. Since 2001, the global War on Terror has preoccupied Washington, and this trend will likely continue under President Trump. Similarly, battling insurgency and extremism is a pressing domestic challenge for Arab countries across MENA. The struggles of the Assad regime and ineffectualness of the Iraqi army allowed the Islamic State organization to gain considerable swaths of territory in the Levant, and Islamic insurgent groups across the world pledged their allegiance to the organization's former leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Egypt is at the forefront of the fight against the Islamic State, and is battling insurgents in the North Sinai. The

security situation is further complicated by Egypt's porous border with Libya and the latter's political instability. Islamic State-linked extremists claimed a number of attacks against Egyptian Copts and military personnel, culminating in the murder of hundreds of civilians at a North Sinai mosque. CASAR's outreach programs focused on modalities for combatting the spread of extremist ideologies and the role of regional states in the battle against terrorism.

When addressing the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Arab Spring, and terrorism, CASAR stressed the need for comprehensive, multi-faceted solutions. Stopgap measures will be insufficient and will further compound already existing challenges. This includes the need to focus on socioeconomic and political capacity building, rather than solely military solutions. Likewise, discussants emphasized the need for Arab states to assume a leadership position in discussions surrounding these topics, rather than external actors. Approaches which appear to be dictated by foreign actors would likely be unpalatable within the Arab World. However, all believed that the United States, the United Nations, and other international actors must also play an important role. CASAR's outreach programs have provided an important forum for infusing Arab voices into these discussions.

CASAR's outreach programs have also created a platform for a comprehensive analysis of the Arab World's economic situation, with particular focus on the Egyptian experience. While these events focused on the challenges Egypt's economic faces, and the economy's relationship to potential future instability, they have also examined the Egyptian economy's successes and suggested future modalities for cooperation and investment. The suggestions focus on strengthening the Egyptian economy for all sectors of society and moving away from dependence on international development assistance. Instead, it calls for international direct investment and enhanced trade to stabilize the economic situation. With the knowledge that the Arab Gulf States are moving through a period of tough economic adjustment, CASAR proposes Egypt increasingly looks towards neighbors in Africa, Asia, and Europe for trade. The outreach discussions have successfully

created new economic partnerships across the Southeastern Mediterranean region. CASAR feels strongly that the Egyptian economy has stabilized, and the country is on a path to economic prosperity.

### *Arab-Israeli Crisis*

CASAR's work on the Arab-Israeli conflict analyzed the key historical moments which have characterized the peace process thus far, the political considerations and ambitions of key actors and leaders, and the potential for a peaceful resolution. All participating discussants noted that the conflict had proven uniquely challenging because of a confluence of factors, but remained optimistic that could be solved. It will require leaders with the courage to make compromises and invest considerable political capital in convincing their constituents of the necessity of these sacrifices. Participants further noted that Egypt was well positioned to assume a leadership role in future mediations. Three main themes emerged during CASAR's outreach on the Arab Israeli conflict: reasons for the enduring conflict, the timing of negotiations and the relationship between leaders, and parameters of a potential solution.

Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer, professor of Middle East Studies at Yale University, explained that on paper, the Arab-Israeli crisis appears almost unsolvable because the two nationalist movements have mutually exclusive narratives. Both parties believe they are entitled to exclusive use of the same land and have suffered injustice and exile at the hands of the other. The issues which have proven most contentious in past negotiations, namely the status of Jerusalem and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the territory, are deeply personal and emotional questions. These considerations limit the ability of Palestinian and Israeli leaders to compromise and advance negotiations. In recent years, this has been compounded by domestic changes within Israel and Palestine. The ultra-Orthodox voice in Israel has gained considerable power, and this segment of the population

has traditionally been resistive to the peace process. Similarly, the Palestinian leadership has fractured, and competition between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip precludes a unified Palestinian voice.

In addition, the international community has lacked the resolve to propel negotiations forward. Despite his initial lofty ambitions and international optimism, President Obama was as unsuccessful in mediating as his predecessors. While the permanent members of the Security Council and Germany presented a united front in negotiations with Iran, they have not been able to do so with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Washington's close alliance with Israel and its considerable domestic lobby further exacerbates the situation. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring regional leaders and the international community's interest in the conflict has been usurped by the crises in Syria, Yemen, and Libya. The U.S. and Western Europe remains preoccupied with its War on Terrorism, particularly the Islamic State. Egypt underwent a period of domestic transition, limiting its ability to act as an advocate of the Palestinian people, while Saudi Arabia's focus is on its own regional power struggle with Iran. Even within the GCC, divisions have erupted over the role of Hamas. The majority of the Gulf States and Egypt view the organization as a destabilizing presence, while Qatar continues to support it. Without a regional or international consensus, there is little ability to alter the status quo.

Finally, Dr. JaisburPuar, associate professor of Gender & Women's Studies at Rutgers University, noted Israel's success in portraying itself as a liberal bastion of human rights in the region. She explained that by 'pinkwashing' its stellar record on gay and female rights, Israel reorients the conversation away from occupation and its abuses of the Palestinians. The narrative draws on global trends of Islamophobia, reification of human rights, and civilization theory to depict Israel as a liberal and civilized nation in conflict with conservative and violent Palestinians. Dr. Puar found that this approach divides liberation and resistance movements, placing queer and women's rights activists in the position of having to either support a seemingly progressive Israel or an occupied but oppressive Palestine. The division of potential

activists has hindered the international communities' support for Palestine. Despite these challenges, participants at CASAR events unanimously believed a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict could and would be reached.

Among the most important indicators of successful negotiations are the timing of the talks and the relationships between the leaders. Ambassador Kurtzer explained, conflicts are not solved until they are 'ripe,' and both parties independently believe that unilateral action will be unsuccessful and the status quo is more painful than a negotiated settlement. For example, the success of the Camp David Accords has often been attributed to Egypt's ability to prove it could credibly injure Israel in the 1973 War. Ambassador Kurtzer pointed to the Madrid Conference and subsequent Oslo Accords as an example of a time when both Israel and Palestine saw continuation of the status quo as damaging. For the Palestinian leadership, the first intifada underscored the unacceptability of the continued occupation and the peoples' unwillingness to wait for its leaders or the international community to solve the problem. For the Israelis, the election of Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister introduced a new voice into the picture. As a career military leader and strategic thinker, he firmly believed a continuation of the occupation would prove more dangerous to his country than a peace agreement. The political changes within Palestine and Israel allowed the parties to come to the table at the Madrid Conference with a sincere desire to work for peace.

Ambassador Kurtzer also noted that the international political atmosphere at the time provided conditions for fruitful negotiations. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in an era of cooperation between the former Cold War adversaries. Not only did Russia co-sponsor the Madrid Conference with the U.S., it hosted the first multilateral negotiations session. At the same time, the fallout from the Gulf War significantly disrupted regional politics. The cooperation of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria in the international coalition against Saddam Hussein's Iraq both amplified their voices and presented a unified front at negotiations. Ambassador Kurtzer also addressed the current atmosphere, and explained that prolonged conflicts are cyclic

in nature. He viewed the violence that erupted in 2014 as a predictable event after the relative calm which prevailed between 2009 and 2015. This reoccurring cycle of calm followed by violence is what will ultimately compel the parties to negotiate.

Discussants also highlighted the importance of the personalities of and relationship between regional and international leaders as key to the success of negotiations. In the past, committed leaders with a military background, such as Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israel's Yitzhak Rabin, have successfully steered negotiations. In 2015, Ms. Lara Friedman, director of policy and government relations for 'Americans for Peace Now' expressed optimism that President Obama would make a lasting mark on the peace process due to his charisma. Despite his failure to advance negotiations, his decision to abstain from a 2016 Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlement expansion represented a marked departure from traditional U.S. foreign policy. Many felt his poor relationship with Prime Minister Netanyahu hampered his efforts in this regard. After the election of President Trump, participants at CASAR's Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective conference expressed cautious optimism that his personality may be well-suited for addressing this conflict. As a successful businessman, Trump views himself as a peerless negotiator willing to think outside the box to secure a deal. He is popular within Israel, and many of his advisers have strong relationships with Israeli officials. His willingness to work with Russia's Putin and initial affinity for Egypt's El-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah also provided reasons for optimism. However, his lack of political experience and apparent disavowal of a two state solution have been concerning. Participants in CASAR events viewed the personal relationship between Arab, Israeli, and key world leaders as indicative of the potential for negotiations to succeed.

Should negotiations reconvene, CASAR reaffirms the international consensus that a two state solution is the only viable option. Despite the oppositional stances on land, security, Jerusalem, and the right to return, discussants believed the Israelis and Palestinians could find common ground provided both sides could compromise. Ambassador Kurtzer noted that the Israelis and Palestinians could

feasibly each claim that the entirety of the areas was their historical homeland. However, the majority of peoples do not control or occupy the entirety of their historical territory, and both parties need to realize this fact. Ms. Friedman also explained that while Egypt received the entirety of the Sinai back following the Camp David Accords, the Palestinians would likely be satisfied with 70% of the territory lost in 1967. The premise of Britain's plans in 1937 and U.N. Resolution 181 were that both parties have competing yet legitimate claims to this region, but these claims are amenable to negotiations and land swaps. This approach would also render the question of settlements moot. The already existing settlements would need to be considered in the equitable division of the territory into two states, but once the decision is made, the Israeli government will have a vested interest in preventing additional settlement expansion. Though the division of territory will require sacrifices on both sides, the solution is relatively simple.

Likewise, Ambassador Kurtzer and others felt the question of security and defensible borders had a simpler solution than many pundits believed. While the Israeli government has often refused to relinquish control over the Jordan Valley or the Golan Heights, these positions are largely political posturing. Israeli generals have stated that no border is impermeable, and an Israel with set borders and responsible governments as neighbors is easier to defend than maintaining the current occupation. In addition, security fears over hostile neighbors were raised prior to the peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt. In both cases, negotiated security cooperation resulted in stability in the border region, which was mutually beneficial. The only cases in which Israel's territorial concessions have exacerbated security issues have been the ones in which it acted unilaterally without a reliable partner. In the aftermath of a peace agreement, it would be in the newly established Palestinian government and its allies' interest to ensure constituents respect the terms of the agreement. Finally, the establishment of a Palestinian state would eliminate the central conflict between the parties, thus rendering the chances for additional conflict less likely. The continued marginalization of the Palestinian people is a rallying cry across the Arab World, and the Israeli's willingness to make peace would heal its strained relationship within the region.

The status of Jerusalem and the right of refugees to return are thornier issues with deep religious and cultural significance for both parties. Opinions as to the best approach for Jerusalem differed among participants, but all acknowledged it should be the final issue addressed and would require international assistance. Some advocated for the traditional plan to officially dividing the city between the two new states or declaring it an international city under the auspicious of the United Nations. However, Ambassador Kurtzer proposed that if neither side would make concessions on their claim to Jerusalem, the issue should remain only partially solved. His idea, which is based on the Canadian 'Jerusalem Old City Initiative,' proposed negotiations could focus on administering the territory, criminal and civil codes, governance, and residency status. However, it would allow both parties to maintain their territorial claims over Jerusalem, while acknowledging that in the interim, they would simply cooperate on administration. The right of return presents similarly complex issues since both entities view it as an existential question. For Israel, the potential that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would return to its territory threatens its identity as the Jewish state. For the Palestinians, the right of return is every bit as meaningful as the creation of a separate state. While discussants did not provide specific policy proposals on refugee resettlement, they highlighted the Working Group for Refugees, which was created during the Madrid Process as an example of progress. This represented the first attempt by the two parties to discuss the refugee issue as an aspect of a larger political agreement, rather than as an intransigent starting point. Though the specifics of a negotiated settlement for Jerusalem and the right to return would be complex, the groundwork and basic framework could be put into place.

Finally, participants in CASAR's events discussed the expanding number of actors that could potentially play a role in peacebuilding processes. Many felt the U.S.' monopoly of the peace process had been detrimental because it sidelined new and innovative voices. Attendees at the 'Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective' conference discussed the potential for emerging powers such as Russia or China to assume a leadership position. Participants emphasized

Egypt's potential to play an important role in the peace processes due to its historical influence in the Arab World and its long history with both parties. Cairo has proven to be a loyal ally to Israel and provides a template for a successful peace agreement with subsequent security cooperation. At the same time, it is a true friend of the Palestinian people, and would have the legitimacy to coordinate on behalf of its Arab allies. Other regional entities with a strong relationship with Israel (i.e. Jordan) or a storied history of small state mediation success (i.e. Algeria and Oman) could also play important roles. In addition, participants examined the role of civil society as an outside force which would influence leaders' decision making processes. Dr. Puar discussed the success of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement at raising European and American awareness about Palestinian oppression. While its work is fiercely opposed and falsely called anti-Semitic, the BDS movement has become an important avenue for civil society activism. Likewise, Ms. Friedman emphasized the role of Jewish peace groups in Israel and the United States as another example of grassroots activism designed to propel leaders to the negotiation table. Finally, discussants emphasized the importance of people-to-people activities to lay the groundwork for negotiations. While this was common in the post-Oslo era, the practice has nearly become obsolete. Providing space for ordinary citizens to participate in civil society would give them ownership over the peace process and facilitate politicians' ability to reach a politically feasible agreement.

While the Arab-Israeli conflict has slipped from the front page of international newspapers and conference agendas, it continues to be the cornerstone of the Arab World's relationship with its neighbors and with the United States. Despite the Obama administration's failure to propel the peace process forward, CASAR noted numerous reasons to feel cautiously optimistic about the future of the two state solution. Throughout its outreach events, CASAR discussed potential modalities for reaching a two state solution and noted common ground existed between the two parties, but there seemed to be little political will to enter into good faith negotiations. The international community needs to hold Israel accountable for its continued occupation, and the Palestinian Authority needs to prove it has affective control over

its constituents. Likewise, the process is hampered by Washington's insistence on monopolizing mediation efforts without infusing new ideas or allowing other entities to partake. Expanding the role of regional actors, such as Egypt, and civil society would legitimize the peace process in the eyes of constituents and provide Israeli and Palestinian leaders with political coverage to make necessary concessions. Most importantly, CASAR echoes Ambassador Kurtzer's sentiments that it is far too early to consider a two-state approach dead when there has not yet been a sincere effort to reach an agreement.

### *The Arab Spring*

The popular protests which spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 took the international community by surprise, and largely eclipsed the Arab-Israeli conflict. As academics and policy makers attempted to ascertain the tone and tenor of these movements, Arab leaders faced an uncertain future. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Tunisia's Zine Bin Ali stepped down amidst major public protests, while violent confrontations backed by some form of international assistance led to the ouster of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh. In Syria, the regime's reaction to protests against Bashar Assad ignited a civil war, which has become a regional and international proxy war and one of the great humanitarian crises of our time. The Arab Gulf escaped the protests largely unscathed, with the exception of Bahrain, which required the GCC's assistance to quell unrest. In both Morocco and Jordan, the monarchs made unprecedented reforms in order to starve off growing dissent and potential mass mobilization. The events of the "Arab Spring" (a term which in and of itself is contested and politicized) altered the regional balance of power, called into question traditional alliances, and raised questions as to the Arab World's path forward.

During this time, CASAR hosted numerous public outreach events to engage the leading academic and political minds from within

and outside the region on the phenomenon which is the Arab Spring. Discussants analyzed the systemic causes of popular discontent, the roots of which were sown prior to the start of the 21st century. They focused on the role of emerging technology and social media as key catalysts for change in the Arab World and their continued impact on governance in the future. The conversation also focused on the road forward, as countries like Egypt created new constitutions and reflected on the meaning of participatory democracy in the Middle Eastern context. This included difficult conversations about hotly contested topics such as the role of political Islam, the role of women in society, and the role of international actors in the Arab World. The conversation also focused on Egypt's position as it emerges from half a decade of transition, and whether its very real economic challenges constituted a threat to its stability. Through these conversations, CASAR has emerged as a leading focal point for scholarship on the Arab Spring.

In the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring, the most pressing question on everyone's minds was what caused the unrest. Where did the popular resentment come from and how did mass mobilization occur without the policy world's anticipation? His Excellency Marwan Muasher, former deputy Prime Minister of Jordan and vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, opined that the uprisings of 2011 were inevitable after decades of unsustainable despotic rule across the region. The Arab Street had long faced an unsavory choice between the unchecked power of the political elite and an opposition movement cloaked in religious ideology. For Muasher, the Arab Spring represented a convergence of secularists, youth activists, and intellectuals who provided the populace with an alternative vision. In remarks at the 2017 'Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective' conference, Dean Fahmy noted that the large youth population and lack of economic opportunity was a driving factor behind the protests. He also recognized the eroding impact decades of non-participatory governance, unchecked corruption, and perceived lack of accountability had on the social contract between citizens and their government. The confluence of a large and disenfranchised youth population, alienation between the government and nationals, and the

apparent emergence of an alternative to authoritarian or religious rule propelled citizens of the Arab World into the streets.

CASAR also examined the importance of social media and emerging technologies on the trajectory of the Arab Spring and other international protest movements. In a 2012 lecture, Dr. Joe Hayden, professor at the University of Memphis' Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, linked social media to the greater reshaping of the political landscape caused by the convergence of populism and technology. This, in turn, placed the power in the hands of the people, as opposed to the political and economic elites. Through Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, Egyptians helped popularize and support the response to Mohamed Bouazizi's suicide in Tunisia, while Tunisian activists assisted the April 6th Movement and 'We Are All Khaled Said' platform in Egypt. Similar social media campaigns were employed by activists in Iran to spread awareness about fraud allegations after their 2009 elections and by 'Occupy Wall Street' protestors in the United States. Hayden noted that when the Egyptian government attempted to shut down social media sites or the internet entirely, activists partnered with the international community to disseminate information; long after the government blocked Twitter, #Egypt remained the top hash tag worldwide. Dean Fahmy explained that authoritarian regimes used to rely on their ability to censor information available to the public, but the internet revolution had democratized the spread of knowledge. The availability of a myriad of sources analyzing and critiquing governments' motivations and conduct stripped away the veneer of their infallibility and opened up avenues for debate. While old forms of media (newspapers, television channels, etc.) were bureaucratic, and therefore easy to regulate, social media lacked an organizational structure. The internet and social media's fluidity and ability to capture events as they occurred have forever altered the relationship between governments and constituents and played an integral role in mobilizing dissent during the Arab Spring.

In the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring, academics and policy makers analyzed the international community's response to the events. As Dr. Mounira Soliman explained in 2015, the Egyptian

people felt abandoned by Washington's lackluster initial response to the 2011 Tahrir protests, and this disappointment manifested into a distinctly anti-American tone. While the political establishment in Washington struggled with their commitment to longtime ally Hosni Mubarak, the American populace supported the revolution. Dr. Hayden cited a poll which showed over 50% of Americans surveyed supported the Arab Spring, which reminded them of the revolutionary roots of the United States. For the first time since the American Civil Rights movement, the globe witnessed a youth-led movement which incorporated opposition to the economic status quo and social critique. The protest's social media presence spurred allies in the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement and across European capitals to pressure their leaders into taking a stance against Mubarak and the crony capitalism he stood for. It was this popular pressure which ultimately prompted the Obama administration to abandon Mubarak and place itself on the side of the Arab Street. While Washington's response Egypt's Arab 2011 uprising was largely viewed favorably (if unduly delayed), its interference in Libya and its decision to abandon the people of Syria and Bahrain were staunchly criticized during CASAR's events. They also questioned the UN's endorsement of the R2P mandate in Libya, and the international community's subsequent reluctance to commit to reconstruction. As Dean Fahmy noted, the Arab Spring and Washington's response underscored the Arab World's need to decide its own priorities, rather than have its agenda dictated by major powers. Analysis of the response of the international community, particularly the United States, allowed participants at CASAR's events to examine the roots of the relationship between the Arab World and major powers.

As early as 2012, CASAR began extrapolating lessons learned from the Arab Spring, and it has continued its work in this regard, long after the initial optimism over the Arab Spring settled into the reality of restructuring traditional governance models. Former Jordanian Ambassador Muasher explained that he preferred to refer to the events of 2011 as the 'Arab Awakening' because he believed the term 'Arab Spring' reflected an unfair assumption of swift and seamless transition to democracy. He cautioned against the failure of the 1930s Arab

Awakening, during which the intellectual class failed to inspire and sustain support from the middle and lower classes. In his opinion, the most important aspect of this ‘Arab Awakening’ and the path forward for the Arab World lay in its pluralism. In particular, he noted the participation of women in Tunisian demonstrations and Copts at Egyptian protests. Moving forward, this pluralism needed to become a defining aspect of Arab governments to avoid the autocrat regime versus religious rule dichotomy which had previously crippled reform. Dr. Hayden focused on the popular rejection of crony capitalism and the need for transparency and economic opportunity for youth populations during the transition period. Dean Fahmy cautioned that government reform is a protracted process, but advocated for transparency and accountability throughout. Finally, Muasher expressed optimism that regional leaders had internalized that they could no longer rely on “secular and religious holiness” to legitimize their rule. If Arab leaders could no longer justify their position with reference to a lack of dissent (caused by effective repression) or Islamic principles, civil society oversight, effective governance, and a true social contract with the people could gain primacy. These lessons, CASAR believes, are applicable not only to states which witnessed a revolution, but those whose leaders needed to pursue an aggressive reform agenda to avoid this inevitability.

In 2016, Dr. Magda Shahin and Ms. Yasmien El Ghazaly, a graduate student at AUC’s Cynthia Nielson Institute for Gender and Women’s Studies, addressed the role of women during Egypt’s transitional period. Drawing on Minister Muasher’s insistence that the democratic transition would only be as effective as it was participatory, they examined women’s influence on the domain of public space and Egyptian constitutions before and after 2011. Dr. Shahin and Ms. El Ghazaly situated their research within the larger framework of Women’s Studies in Egypt with the explicit acknowledgement that gender discrimination in Egypt is perpetuated by law. The groundbreaking 1956 constitution attempted to acknowledge and protect women’s ability and position in society. However, much of the progress was undone by the 1971 constitution, which conditioned women’s equal rights on the basis that these rights complied with

Sharia law. Numerous speakers at CASAR events noted that this approach ultimately made the subjugation of women a matter of law. The 2012 constitution, drafted after then-President Morsi granted himself nearly unlimited executive powers, was written without the participation of a cross section of Egyptian society, and women were conspicuously absent. Only 6% of the ruling Islamist party, which dictated the majority of the 2012 constitution's content, was female, and largely ignored the voice of the Freedom and Justice Party, which included 65% of all female Parliamentarians. As a result, many Egyptians believed the 2012 Constitution was written by and for men. Though advocates for gender equality initially expressed optimism for the 2014 Constitution, it ultimately did little to advance women's rights in Egypt. Article II, which conditions the enforcement of the constitution on its compatibility with Sharia law, remained in place, and the quota system often lumped female representation with other protected minority groups. Dr. Shahin and Ms. Ghazaly noted that feminist liberation politics had historically played a central role in national emancipatory politics, but delineating the role of women in society is a traditional battlefield for regressive Islamist politics. In order for Egypt to embrace the pluralistic governance system imagined by Dr. Hayden, CASAR believes the voices of Egyptian women need to be amplified and supported starting with the removal of legal oppression. The empowerment of Egyptian women will be indicative of the empowerment of women across the Arab World, and ultimately will come to define the success or failure of the 2011 Arab Spring.

After 2011, some traditional powers in the Arab World entered a period of transition, thus limiting their influence on the region. This allowed other voices, most notably the voices of Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia to emerge, resulting in destabilization. In recent years, however, the international community returned its attention to Egypt as a leader and stabilizer for an increasingly fractured Middle East. As a result, many have posed the question of 'how stable is Egypt?' Dr. Shahin noted that the Arab Spring is often falsely viewed as the origin of regional instability. However, she opined that the seeds were sown during the Reagan administration, when the rise of the transnational

Islamist movement threatened those in power and prompted Arab leaders to adopt U.S. supported policies of repression. Decades of poor and oppressive governance failed to stymie the rise of political Islam and transnational jihad, but it did destroy the relationship between governments and constituents. Between 2011 and 2015, uprising fatigue and near economic collapse threatened to turn Egypt into a failed state. However, Dr. Shahin expressed optimism that Egypt had regained its stability and confidence. It managed to avoid the civil war and state disintegration which marred other countries' post-2011 transition, retained effective control over its borders, and secured a loan from the International Monetary Fund to improve economic conditions. Thus, Dr. Shahin believed Egypt has emerged from its transition period, but the international community needs to cooperate to bring stability to the region, lest the continued power vacuum in Libya and occupation in Palestine spillover. The Arab World will not fully stabilize until the Arab-Israeli conflict, Libyan crisis, and Syrian civil war reach political resolutions, until the threat of transnational extremism is defeated, and until autocratic governments transition to open, pluralistic society. Egypt can play a leadership role in these processes; however, CASAR calls upon the U.S. and EU provide assistance.

### *Terrorism*

Since 2001, the U.S.' War on Terrorism and Arab World's attempts to combat violent extremism have driven regional and international relations, and the power vacuums left during the Arab Spring gave rise to new organizations. While the success and popularity of counterterrorism measures have varied, it is a foundational aspect of the interregional and international relations. The rapid rise of the Islamic State and the manifestation of its particularly violent ideology have dominated academic and policy circles since 2013, particularly after a string of attacks by its supporters in Western Europe. While the Islamic State is an autonomous entity, CASAR's outreach program

holistically examined the group as part of the global jihadist movement. It has focused on the root causes of terrorism and is committed to finding comprehensive solutions. However, CASAR firmly believes that the War on Terrorism cannot be won through military action alone, but requires extensive political, economic, and social reforms.

Dr. Fawaz Gerges, the Emirates Chair in Contemporary Middle East Studies at the London School of Economics and noted terrorism expert, addressed the Islamic State's relationship to the global jihadist movement, which began in the 1960s. Situating IS within a longer narrative shows the group is neither unique nor unexplainable. He traced the ideological roots of terrorism to the 1970s alliance of ultra-conservative 'Salafists'<sup>2</sup> and radical Egyptian 'Qotbists'<sup>3</sup> in Afghanistan. The primary goal of this movement is to rid the Middle East of Western influence as a precursor to rejecting the nation-state and establishing a caliphate. Though most terrorist organizations today do not agree on strategy, it is important to view the global jihadist movement as a political movement with clear objectives. Dr. Gerges cautioned against minimizing the importance of radical religious extremism as a social movement, noting that the United States has unsuccessfully spent \$4 trillion since 2001 in an effort to exterminate terrorism. The two major attributes of the global jihadist movement are its adaptability and its own self-defeating nature. Historically, the movement adapted to changing political and social situations, survived the death of key charismatic leaders, and mutated depending on location. While Egypt's President Nasser initially thought the 1965 execution of SayedQotb would eliminate his violent teachings, his death empowered radicals and sparked outrage. Ultimately, it inspired Ayman Al-Zawahiri to form an underground terrorist cell, which merged with Al Qaeda to orchestrate and carry out attacks in North America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Similarly, the U.S. invasion

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<sup>2</sup> The Salafist movement is an ultra-conservative branch within Sunni Islam that advocates a return to the traditions of the first generations of Islam.

<sup>3</sup> Followers of SayedQotb, an Egyptian Islamic theorist and the leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s.

of Afghanistan and Iraq may have destroyed the command capacity of Al Qaeda, but it inspired the formation of similar organizations across the world.

However, discussants noted that these movements are also capable of self-destruction through over ambitious or losing the support of the local population, usually by acting too violent. Al Qaeda's attack on 9/11 reflected Osama bin Laden's belief that the United States would retreat from the Middle East if directly attacked and that such a sensational act would attract many additional followers. However, he did not anticipate Washington's direct military response or the horror nearly all Muslims felt at the loss of civilian life. The movement lost its base in Afghanistan, the majority of its leaders, and its legitimacy, which significantly weakened its power. This mirrors the downfall of previous jihadist groups, such as Islamic Jihad in Egypt, after its 1997 massacre on tourist sites in Luxor alienated the Egyptian people. When examining the Islamic State, it is important to bear in mind that they are a mutation of the larger global jihad movement with the capacity to self-destruct through overreach.

The Islamic State's roots can be traced to Sunni resistance to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Like the foreign mujahedeen who flocked to Afghanistan after the Soviet Union's invasion in the 1980s, it attracted thousands of young men from who viewed Washington's actions as illegal and illegitimate. The movement gained popularity from 2003-2006 due to the absence of a functioning political system many Sunni Iraqis' support for Al Qaeda's resistance of the foreign occupiers. However, the movement ultimately lost legitimacy with the Sunni community for its excessive use of violence against the Shia minority and Sunnis who chose to work within the political system. Without popular support, Al Qaeda in Iraq was almost completely eradicated by 2010, but the following years' events in Iraq and Syria rejuvenated the movement. In Iraq, Prime Minister Nour Al Malaki's (2006-2014) policies further entrenched the government's overt sectarianism and drove many Sunni men, particularly those who had once served in Saddam Hussein's military, into the arms of extremists. In Syria, the Islamic State capitalized on Assad's lack of effective

control and the political infighting among rebel groups to seize large swaths of territory with oil reserves. The political and socioeconomic situation across the Levant since 2003 provided introduced overt Islamic jihad, and the Islamic State capitalized on poor governance in Iraq and Syria to rise to prominence.

Dr. Gerges attributed the Islamic State's success to a number of overlapping elements. First, the United States adopted a minimalist strategy in Syria under Barak Obama, which allowed other countries to establish a foothold in the region. Turkey, in particular, allowed foreign fighters to enter Syria through its territory, and there have been accusations that various Gulf countries provided the IS-linked group with financial support. The organization has been particularly successful at spreading to countries without an effective governing entity, specifically Yemen and Libya. Second, the Islamic State is capitalizing on the civil war within the global jihadist movement, which pitted the Al Qaeda leadership against the Islamic State's deceased leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>4</sup> While the Al Qaeda leadership wanted to focus on direct attacks against the United States and tolerated the presence of Shia Islam, al-Baghdadi focused on eradicating Shi'ism and expanding territorial gains. Dr. Gerges noted that the latter branch lacks the ideological purity Al Qaeda, which regularly publishes manifestos justifying its actions. However, the Islamic State has focused on attracting membership through success rather than religious argument. The appeal is their ability to inflict pain, commit spectacular acts of violence, and control large swaths of territory. The Islamic State portrayed itself as the strongest armed entity in the Syrian civil war, and this has been a successful recruiting strategy, particularly for foreign fighters. The confluence of international inattention, the civil war within global jihad, and their recruiting strategy enabled the Islamic States' rise to prominence.

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<sup>4</sup> AbūBakr al-Baghdadi was the leader of the Salafi jihadist militant terrorist organization known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. He was seriously wounded and died after an air strike in March, 2015.

Despite the movement's initial success, discussants felt the Islamic State was in the process of losing power. Its military capacity was drastically decreased by the international coalition's bombing campaign. As a result, the Assad regime and the Iraqi army have successfully liberated areas which were once under its control. Ankara has strengthened its border security, which has prevented foreign fighters from continuing to enter Syria. Second, the Islamic State has lost the support of the majority of Sunnis in Syria and Iraq. While its underlying ideology remains popular with some, its brutality towards minority populations and Sunnis who oppose its practices soured public perception. As with Al Qaeda in the late 2000s, the public no longer sees IS as a defender against the regimes' atrocities, but as a vicious actor in its own right. Without the support of local Sunni populations, the IS' power will likely fade.

CASAR also focused on strategies for combatting the spread of global Islamic jihadist groups. The success of the Egyptian military in North Sinai highlights the military aspect of this goal, but CASAR's work emphasized the need for a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach. Politically, inclusive governance without foreign intervention would decrease the appeal of extremists groups, as would investment in additional educational opportunities. It is also imperative to provide enhanced employment opportunities for the region's large youth population. The lack of employment opportunities has been cited by many foreign fighters as a pull factor for joining the Islamic State. As Professor Gerges noted, the most important tool for combatting groups such as the Islamic State is societal in nature. Such groups crumble without the support of the local community, and defeating the popularity of organization's ideology is of utmost importance. To that affect, Al Azhar University<sup>5</sup> continues to use its position as an intellectual leader to debunk the distorted religious ideology promoted by the movement. The needed for a societal approach is particularly important in Iraq and Syria, where violent

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<sup>5</sup> Al-Azhar University, founded in 970, is Egypt's oldest degree-granting university and is renowned as Sunni Islam's most prestigious university.

conflict has erupted along sectarian lines. CASAR believes it is equally important to combat the dangerous rise of Islamophobia in Western Europe and United States, as exclusion from the social fabric has propelled young men and women towards radical ideologies. Through discussing the Islamic State as a continuation of the global jihadist movement, CASAR sought comprehensive modalities for combatting extremism.

CASAR has also hosted lectures on the rise of extremist ideologies within the United States, which often receive considerably less discussion. In a series of lectures, Dr. Mostafa Bayoumi, professor of English literature at the Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, examined the rise of Islamophobia and the growth of social prejudice in the United States and Europe. He highlighted the relationship between social media, technology, and contemporary structures of prejudice, particularly in relation to the West's Muslim population. Though the impact of the internet on the global jihadist movement has been widely studied, there is considerably less academic discussion on its impact on populist and nationalist extremists such as Anders Behring Breivik. Dr. Bayoumi<sup>6</sup> explained that internet use can create a confirmation bias, because users seek information they already believe to be true and which supports their world view. Confirmation bias predated the internet, but the sheer number of websites catering to different interest groups facilitates selective exposure to information. Researchers have confirmed that individuals' views harden when they perceive others share this opinion. For example, Breivik's manifesto included numerous essays on right wing ideology and bomb making, which he had accessed online. He spent hours practicing shooting skills through multiplayer video games, published regularly on the anti-Muslim blog sphere, and extensively researched conspiracy theories on Wikipedia. Though his situation was extreme, the internet

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<sup>6</sup> Fjotolf Hansen (Anders Behring Breivik) is a Norwegian rightwing terrorist. In February 2011 he committed a series of violent attacks on 'liberal' institutions. On 22 July 2011 he detonated a van bomb in Oslo, killing eight people. Then he killed 69 participants at a Worker's Youth League summer camp.

and social media has become an important, largely unregulated space for those adhering to right wing ideologies. Dr. Bayoumi believed the most important step for de-radicalizing the internet is to tone down the perception of threat from the ‘other.’ However, he acknowledged that the internet is not be the best forum for this discussion, which is why it is an important aspect of CASAR’s outreach program. Dr. Bayoumi also highlighted the importance of exposing oneself to a variety of news sources, engaging with different perspectives, and valuing face-to-face contact over online discussion as for decreasing the threat of violence. The link between the internet, social media, and violence impacts the rise of right-wing ideology across Western Europe and the U.S.

CASAR also focused on the growing anti-Muslim sentiments, which played an important role in the 2012 and 2016 elections. While the seeds of anti-Muslim rhetoric dated back to 2001, they did not become an important election issue until 2012. During the 2012 campaign, Republican candidates, including Senators Rick Santorum (PA) and Michele Bachmann (MN) referred to a ‘stealth jihad’ to replace the U.S. constitution with Sharia law. The narrative was so popular that nearly half of states have considered enacting legislation to ban Sharia law, and the construction of an Islamic cultural center in lower Manhattan became an election issue. Dr. Bayoumi noted that the Muslim community began to occupy a space normally reserved for the foreign enemy. However, he attributed this approach to the Republican Party’s fears over changing demographics and loss of Christian religious identity, rather than as a result of political strategy. He reminded the audience that the Democratic Party largely ignored the existence of Muslim Americans during the 2012 election campaign outside of discussions on national security. While in 2012 politicians drew media exposure for sensationalist statements about Muslim Americans, the issue did not generate popular support until 2016. President Trump openly challenged the idea that Muslims could integrate into the American culture and called for an overall Muslim ban. Participants at the ‘Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective’ conference reacted with dismay to the acceptability of such Islamophobic statements and the imposition of the travel ban.

CASAR has expressed its own concern at the rising prejudice towards American Muslims over the last five years.

CASAR's outreach program engaged with both the global jihadist movement and the rise of Islamophobia within the United States and Western Europe. When discussing the Islamic State and its subsidiaries, CASAR emphasized the need to acknowledge the historical context of the movement. Understanding the organization within the decades old global jihadist narrative allows for a more comprehensive study of IS. Through lessons learned from the rise and fall of Al Qaeda and other organizations, CASAR believes the movement will be defeated when its target audience, namely Sunni Muslims in Iraq and Syria, withhold their support, which is already occurring. CASAR is also concerned with the rise of Islamophobia and the role it played in the 2012 and 2016 elections. Continued oppression of minority populations will have a destabilizing factor on the United States in the future.

### *Egyptian Economy*

Academics and policy makers agree that economic stagnation, high youth unemployment, and a lack of confidence in the governments' economic management were crucial factors which prompted the Arab Spring and a driving force behind the recruitment success of extremist groups. In Egypt, which has the largest population in the Arab World, these concerns are particularly pressing. Since 2011, CASAR events analyzed the trajectory of the Egyptian economy and debated the necessary steps to generate growth. In the aftermath of the 2016 pound flotation and subsequent IMF loan, CASAR events have discussed prescriptive steps for the government and international community to improve the economic situation. This includes recommendations for diversifying trade and industry, improving educational opportunities, and forming economic partnerships with underused neighbors.

In a 2016 lecture hosted by CASAR, Dr. Teddy Brett, professor

of International Development at the London School of Economics, assessed the root causes of Egypt's economic woes and offered prescriptions to alleviate the situation. He began by explaining that since the decolonization period, the state has dominated Egypt's economy. Like other African countries, this approach is unable to keep up with the demands of a growing population and led to economic exclusion and marginalization. As a result of its history, the Egyptian economy was already in a downward spiral before the events of 2011, but the military's emergence as a stabilizer boded well for the economy. Dr. Brett countered the mainstream narrative that democracy and economic development necessarily went hand-in-hand, noting the success of the Chinese, South Korean, and Bhutanese markets despite the perceived lack of civil and political liberty. Going forward, he proposed the Egyptian government should implement a program of 'redistribution and growth,' characterized by growth policies, distribution policies, and the political endorsement of strong leadership. Other recommendations included lowering the birth rate, significantly investing in the infrastructure, social and health sectors, and implementing accountability measures against crony capitalism.

While participants at CASAR's 2017 'Arab-U.S. Relations in Perspective' conference adopted a different approach towards questions of governance, they shared Dr. Brett's recommendations for the economy. They echoed the importance of improving the Egyptian education system and increase the scope of the curriculum. In particular, they urged the government to orient curriculum to 21st century professional skills, such as critical, analytical, and creative thinking. Participants also discussed the need to protect against crony capitalism and to decrease reliance on unsustainable government subsidies. Dean Fahmy reminded the participants that the Egyptian government had already begun austerity measures, which were unpopular and needed international support. Dr. Shahin encouraged international partners to invest in heavy infrastructure projects, rather than focus all aid money on projects related to 'good governance.' She also reminded participants that the security of Europe depends on the stability and prosperity of its Mediterranean neighbors. With that in mind, she urged the European Union, NATO, and other international

partners to consider investing in Egypt's economic growth. Other participants at the conference emphasized Egypt's need to partner with nontraditional trading partners to enhance economic cooperation. Since 2016, CASAR has worked with international partners to lay the groundwork for this approach.

One such example is exploring and outlining potential for partnerships with Cyprus and Greece, Egypt's neighbors in the Eastern Mediterranean. In September 2017, CASAR collaborated with the Institute for International Relations, Panteion University, and the Center for Energy Policy at the University of Nicosia to host an international workshop on avenues for cooperation and modalities for turning innovation and research into partnership and synergies between Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus. This conference was the first of its kind and was held in response to the trilateral summits between the three countries and leaders calls for increased economic participation. The fruitful event provided a number of proposals for tangible joint economic projects and joint research between the three participating universities. In particular, Dr. AmrSeragEldin, professor in the Department of Petroleum and Energy Engineering at AUC, suggested that the three countries create an integrated electric grid, which would provide for the virtual storage of shared renewable energy. Connecting the grids would capitalize on the differing weather patterns across the Mediterranean, allowing all to benefit from regional wind patterns. Dr. TheodorosTsakiris, professor at the Center for Energy Policy at the University of Nicosia (Cyprus), discussed the transportation of the Aphrodite natural gas field's entire net export capacity to Damietta, with the intention to have export capacity to European markets before the end of the decade. This would provide a sizeable boost to Egypt's liquefied natural gas market and increase Mediterranean cooperation. CASAR views the future of the Egyptian economy as highly dependent on fostering energy cooperation with neighboring states, beginning with its neighbors in the Eastern Mediterranean. This reflects the Egyptian government's priorities as it prepares to discuss economic development and security concerns at its sixth cooperative summit with Greece and Cyprus. Though Egypt continues to face economic challenges, CASAR

expresses its optimism over prevailing stability and innovative economic programs initiated across the country.

### *Conclusion*

Over the last seven years, the Arab World has witnessed inordinate change, and this provides numerous causes for optimism. The international community continues to laud Tunisia's democratic reforms, and Tunis has become synonymous with progress and liberalism. Egypt has emerged from the Arab Spring ready to reassume its leadership position in the Arab World, which could temper the destabilizing ambitions of Turkey and Iran. While Cairo's 2014 constitution failed to make the strides towards the greater gender equality advocated for by activists and questions remain on the El Sisi regime's human rights record, it avoided the civil war and societal disintegration which plagued other Arab states in transition. Furthermore, Egypt has made great strides in its war against violent extremism in the Sinai and has proven itself a consistent U.S. ally in this regard. The Trump administration's recognition of Egypt's stability and regional importance opens the door for cooperation with regards to Libya, Syria, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is clear the Egyptian economy is stabilizing, which will allow the El-Sisi government to turn its attention to issues of governance. These developments are positive, and CASAR is optimistic that the pursuit of such cooperation could mitigate the instability which has plagued the Arab World.

However, CASAR joins academics and policy makers in expressing concern as to other developments since 2011. First, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been forgotten, as the humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen occupied international attention. The Arab World observed the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and 50th anniversary of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and this conflict cannot continue to be ignored. The Arab-Israeli conflict is at the center of the Arab World's relationship with the United States, and allowing the occupation to fester is akin to ignoring a

lit fuse. Second, social media and the internet have forever changed the relationship between governments and constituents, and the next generation of Arab leaders may struggle for legitimacy in the absence of effective governance. Third, the international discussion on terrorism has increasingly focuses only on transnational jihad and eschews comprehensive socioeconomic and political reform in favor of military operations. While the military aspect of the War of Terror is important, an ideology cannot be defeated with guns. CASAR urges the international community to follow the lead of Egypt, which has employed a multifaceted approach to combatting violent extremism, including the participation of Sunni religious leaders, civil society, and Parliament. It also recognizes the dangers of ignoring rising nativism and xenophobia in the United States and Europe. Islamophobia, racial profiling, and marginalization of immigrants will only cause further alienation among minority populations in the Western world and risk future violence. It also recognizes white supremacy as an invasive form of violent extremism, which needs to be combatted in the same vein as transnational jihad. Finally, CASAR notes with concern the failure of many Arab states to embrace pluralistic and participatory governance. Ultimately, the ability of governments across the region to embrace their diverse populations and gain legitimacy through good governance rather than oppression will define the success of the Arab Spring. Over the last seven years, numerous states have enacted counterterrorism laws which infringe on civil and political liberties, including freedom of the press and freedom from arbitrary detention. It is incumbent on Arab leaders to reject governance through violence and regenerate a strong social contract with their citizens. At the same time, the international community needs to respect the sovereignty of the Arab World. The last seven years have provided numerous reasons for cautious optimism, but the path towards stability and prosperity will be neither quick nor easy.

***Included below is a list of CASAR events pertaining to Regional Developments. For complete coverage and comprehensive reports on each event, please refer to CASAR's official website.***

1. Daniel C. Kurtzer, "Prospects for the Two-State Solution: Is an Israeli-Palestinian Peace Settlement Possible?" (February 4, 2015).
2. Fawaz Gerges, "American Foreign Policy towards the Middle East: Change and Continuity," (March 30, 2015).
3. Fawaz Gerges, "ISIS and the Jihadist Movement: Change and Continuity," (March 29, 2015).
4. JasbirPuar, " Ecologies of Sensation Sensational Ecologies Sex and Disability in the Israeli Occupation of Palestine," (March4, 2013).
5. JasbirPuar, " Palestinian Solidarity Organizing in the United States: Academic Freedom Pinkwashing and Jewish Anti-Zionism as the New Anti-Racism," (February28, 2013).
6. Joseph Hayden, "The Arab Spring and the American Awakening: Influences on American Politics and the 2012 Elections," (October 21, 2012).
7. Joseph Hayden, "The Revolution Will be Tweeted," (October 22, 2012).
8. Laura Friedman, "Conversations with a Washington Insider: Americans for Peace Now's Laura Friedman," (March 14, 2016).
9. Magda Shahin, "How Stable Is Egypt?" (March 3, 2013).
10. Magda Shahin & Yasmeen El Ghazaly, "Notions of Nationalism, Public Spaces and Women in Egypt, Contemplating Between Constitutions After 2011," presented at the Social Justice in the Arab World since 2010: Changing Conditions, Mobilizations, and Policies conference, (February 4, 2017).

11. Marwan Muasher, “The Arab Awakening: One Year On,” (June 14, 2012).
12. Mostafa Bayoumi, “Ranters, Racists, and Revolutionaries: Muslim Minority Politics and How Technology Facilitates Both Hate and Healing,” (November 26, 2012).
13. Teddy Brett, “Political and Economic Reform in Egypt: Suggestions and Recommendation,” (May 11, 2016).
14. “The Emerging Strategic Co-operation between Egypt, Cyprus and Greece: Energy and Security, Greece-Cyprus Energy” conference, (September 25, 2017).

## **U.S. Domestic Developments**

### *Introduction*

As tumultuous as Arab World's experiences over the past seven years have been, the United States witnessed its own share of uncertainty and domestic disaccord. As an American Studies center located in the heart of the Arab World, CASAR's outreach program involved both education on and discussion of political and social developments in the U.S. The events of the 2011 Arab Spring called into question President Obama's policies towards the Middle East in the run-up to the 2012 U.S. presidential elections. While Obama defeated the Republican candidate, former governor Mitt Romney, by a relatively comfortable margin, it was clear the American peoples' optimism had dwindled. He entered his second term lacking the sweeping popular mandate which characterized his 2008 inauguration. The international community held some hope that Obama's policies towards the Arab World would differ dramatically since he would not be constrained by considerations of a reelection campaign. However, this did not come to pass, and his Administration increasingly retracted from the region and its instability. The rise of the IS and growing concerns about migration to Europe refocused Washington's attention on the Arab World. It underscored the vacuum created by waning U.S. interest and the power-struggle it initiated among regional and international actors. Obama's foreign policy failures were key issues in the contentious 2016 Republican and Democratic primaries and subsequent general elections. Donald Trump's unexpected victory raised questions and concerns about the nature of the U.S. primary system, the role of religion in American politics, and the polarization of American society. Between 2011 and 2017, CASAR hosted twelve discussions and lectures on political developments within the U.S., which featured prominent regional and international scholars and policy-makers.

CASAR's work with regards to the 2012 U.S. presidential

election focused on a number of issues, which would reemerge as key to outcome of the 2016 elections. The election cycle began with a highly contested Republican primary race, and numerous speakers highlighted the state-by-state approach towards primary elections and its impact on the electoral process. Despite the early success of Rick Santorum (former Pennsylvania senator) and Newt Gingrich (former Georgia congressman and Speaker of the House of Representatives), former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney emerged as the Republican candidate. CASAR's work also examined the increasing polarization within Congress, noting that the American people's opinion of their leaders had plummeted. Governor Romney, known as a moderate with a history of bipartisan cooperation was a popular choice with the party's leadership but many conservative voters thought he was too liberal. Speakers also focused on the role of the media in reproducing narrative and methodological approaches for polling. Of particular interest to pollsters was the growth of certain sectors of the American population, particularly African American and Hispanic American voters, youth, and the "creative class" of white collar workers. CASAR connected the issues of political polarization, youth participation in democracy, and accurate media portrayal with similar discussions in Egypt and the Arab World. Ultimately, many of the concerns raised during CASAR's 2011-2012 events impacted the 2016 election.

After President Obama's victory in November 2012, CASAR focused on the domestic and foreign policy ramifications, particularly with regards to the Arab World. His attempts to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict proved fruitless, and the breakdown of his personal relationship with Prime Minister Netanyahu further entrenched the latter's position. Though many hoped the Obama administration would develop a coherent policy towards the Syrian conflict during his term, this did not come to fruition. Instead, Washington armed certain rebel groups and attempted to constantly minimize its role in Syria. Though the American military intensified its involvement in Syria after the rise of the Islamic State and sharp increase in the number of Syrians fleeing to Europe, it never fully assumed a leadership role. This allowed Russia to exert its influence of the conflict's trajectory, and

regional actors- primarily Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia-rushed to fill the power vacuum. While security and counterterrorism cooperation continued, Cairo and Washington's relationship frayed following the events of 2013, and the Egyptian street chafed under perceived American interference in domestic affairs. President Obama struggled with partisanship in Congress, which stymied much of his legislative agenda; even his seminal 'Affordable Care Act' only passed after a prolonged government shutdown. While attention was focused on the act's passage, CASAR noted the worrisome growth of U.S. debt and its potential to destabilize global markets. As the United States' attention turned towards the 2016 presidential elections, it was clear the winner would inherit a divided constituency, an unstable domestic financial situation, and an international community which questioned the worth of American leadership.

### *2012 Presidential Elections*

While the 2012 U.S. presidential elections occurred in early November, candidates for the Republican ticket began campaigning as early as 2010. With the incumbent president as the sure Democratic candidate, national attention turned towards potential opponents in what many considered a fairly open race. Ms. Erin Vilardi, creator of the Vote, Run, Lead civic engagement program, analyzed the American primary system during a lecture in 2012. She explained that purpose of the primary system is to encourage local engagement, ensure the transparency of the candidate selection process, and foster party loyalty. Vilardi noted that the Constitution does not provide for or regulate the primary electoral process, thus allowing individual states (and major parties within each state) the power to initiate their own approaches. As a result, the state-by-state approaches differ, but each is allotted a set number of 'delegates' who vote at the national conventions. The three electoral approaches are open elections (non-registered party members may participate), closed elections (open only to party members), and caucuses (less regulated and more common in

sparsely populated states). Some states allocate their entire delegate vote to the victor, while others link the number of delegates to the percentage of the vote won. Ms. Vilardi emphasized that each approach had its benefits and drawbacks. For example, closed primaries reward the party faithful but exclude the independent voters required for victory in November; the ‘winner-takes-all’ allocation of delegates mirrors the national elections but may prompt candidates to ignore states where they are unlikely to perform well. By focusing on the U.S. primary process, CASAR shed light on an aspect of the electoral process which is often misunderstood, in order to explain how the major party candidates are chosen.

Discussants at CASAR events also highlighted the increasing political polarization, which occurred during President Obama’s first term and its impact on coalition building. In a panel discussion entitled ‘The U.S. Election Process and the 2012 Presidential Race,’ former Congresswoman Connie Morella noted the rise of ‘single issue’ coalitions in Congress and the lack of civility. In the past, landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act was the result of cooperation between Republicans and Democrats. By 2012, groups such as the Tea Party had coalesced to focus on single issues and disavowed bipartisan law-making. While such groups have their supporters, Congresswoman Morella emphasized the dangers of entrenching this polarization. At the same event, both former Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder and Congresswoman Morella linked the polarization to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United* and redistricting trends. The 2012 election was the first presidential election after the Supreme Court’s decision, which allowed corporate actors to anonymously donate large sums of money in support of political candidates. As a result, appeasing corporate interests goes hand-in-hand with raising the necessary campaign funds to the detriment of the political process. Both congresswomen noted that the special interest groups funding these campaigns tend to focus on single issues and demand candidates not make any compromises. It also alienates the average voter, who cannot compete with the influence corporations can purchase. They also discussed recent re-districting, a process by which state legislatures redraw district boundaries to enhance their

political party's influence. Without an independent oversight body, re-districting marginalizes a given state's minority party voters, which is dangerous in a democracy. CASAR supports Congresswomen Morella and Schroeder's belief that the American democratic process works best when there is an emphasis on bipartisan cooperation and limited corporate influence.

Discussants at CASAR events also linked the rising partisanship to the media's role in the election process and noted similarities with concerns about the press in the Arab World. In 2012, Mr. John Zogby, renowned author and founder of the Zogby poll, found that Americans expressed low trust in governing institutions and in the media. Despite their suspicions, most Americans received their news via the same traditional media outlets they mistrusted. He noted the similarities between the U.S. and Egypt in this regard: in both countries citizens felt their governments and media had failed them. Despite this disappointment, the media continues to shape the discourse surrounding the election process. Congresswoman Schroeder believed that the decline of traditional newspapers was felt during the 2012 election cycle. While newspapers have biases, reporters produce well researched and nuanced articles about politics and candidates, especially in comparison to television news programs and social media content. As voters continued to search for "trustworthy" news sources, she feared they risked conflating trustworthiness with the reproduction of their own opinion. Zogby urged those interested in the U.S. elections to carefully assess the validity of their news sources, particularly if polling data is presented. Egypt, he explained, faces the same problem since mobile penetration has exceeded 80% and social media use is rampant. He outlined hallmarks of a serious political poll, namely that it includes the institution, which conducted the study and the number of participants. The role of the media in the 2012 U.S. presidential underscored prevailing tension between the public's mistrust in the media and its role in shaping discourse.

To compete in the 2012 elections, both the Republicans and Democrats needed to assemble a coalition of voters, and participants at CASAR events discussed the emerging trends. Ms. Vilardi emphasized

the conflict within the Republican Party during the primary elections. Many party members, particularly those self-identifying as Evangelical Christians, believed Governor Romney was not conservative enough and supported Senator Santorum. To appeal to these voters, the Republican Party platform needed to include conservative positions on social issues while still appealing to moderate Republicans and independent voters. Dr. Mostafa Bayoumi explained that the 2012 Republican primary elections were the first time the loyalty of Muslim Americans became a campaign issue. Rather than focus on the threat of extremism abroad, Republican candidates such as Senator Rick Santorum and Senator Michelle Bachman repeatedly raised the threat of ‘homegrown’ terrorists and the creeping infiltration of Sharia into domestic politics. While not mainstream issues for the presidential candidates, CASAR noted this disturbing development. Mr. Zogby outlined the four voter groups key to President Obama’s reelection: Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, youths, and the ‘creative class.’<sup>7</sup> In 2008, this coalition propelled Obama to victory in twelve states which had voted for President Bush in 2000 and 2004. He noted that Hispanic voters were among the more socially conservative Democrats but supported the party’s immigration policies. Youth voters expressed the lowest levels of confidence in institutions but nevertheless supported President Obama. While these groups’ overall support for President Obama decreased between 2008 and 2012, it remained high. Zogby explained that the Obama’s ability to maintain the support of these key demographics in the twelve swing states would likely determine the outcome of the election.

The emergence of American youth as a key political demographic both mirrored discourse in the Arab World and had foreign policy ramifications. CASAR’s director, Dr. Magda Shahin, discussed the role of youth in the 2011 Arab Spring. Unemployment and corruption disproportionately impact youth populations, thus spurring

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<sup>7</sup> He used this term to encompass wealthy white collar voters employed in academia, law, medicine, and the arts. In comparison, the majority of wealthy white collar voters in the business world supported the Republican Party.

them to advocate for political change. In a similar vein, American youth express low confidence in governing institutions, which they views as weighing personal interests over that of constituents. As Dean Nabil Fahmy noted, youth populations are impatient by nature and demand immediate change. In America, youth voters' views differ substantially from previous generations, particularly with regards to foreign policy. Mr. Zogby explained that the majority of Americans between the age of 18 and 32 had an active passport and nearly half anticipated working outside the United States at some point in their careers. Youth voters turned out in higher numbers than usual to support President Obama in 2008, and Zogby predicted their voice would be equally important in 2012. In particular he explained that American youths had a different perspective on foreign policy than previous generations; they advocated for multilateral diplomacy and felt America's power abroad was limited. As such, they called for a foreign policy approach that worked within the United Nations framework and favored horizontal cooperation with grassroots civil society organizations over unilateral action. While this approach could have a positive impact on Arab-U.S. relations, Mr. Zogby cautioned that it put youth voters at odds with older Republican voters who feel threatened by decreasing American military might. As in the Arab World, CASAR recognizes that the worldviews and voting patterns of youth will impact the future of U.S. foreign policy for decades to come.

Ultimately, President Obama defeated Governor Romney by a sizeable margin in the 2012 elections and earned a second term. His victory was narrower in 2012 than 2008, so he lacked a sweeping national mandate, and the international community had grown cynical of his grand statements and limited follow through. Thus, he did not return to office backed by the same domestic and international optimism that had accompanied his first term. Equally importantly, CASAR's outreach events highlighted American domestic trends, which would heavily impact the contentious 2016 elections: the opaque primary election system, increased partisanship, lack of trust institutions (particularly the media), and pushback against the coalition assembled by President Obama. The issues raised in 2012,

compounded by the outcome of President Obama's second term, would result in the surprising success of Donald Trump in 2016.

### *Obama's Second Term*

In the aftermath of President Obama's reelection, CASAR held a number of events designed to anticipate his second term's impact on the Arab World. This included analysis of whether his Administration would develop a coherent policy towards Syria, succeed in ending the status quo in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and reorient the trajectory of the Egyptian-American relationship. CASAR also focused on key domestic developments within the United States, such as the 2013 government shut down and subsequent debate on growing national debt. Finally, CASAR engaged with the legacy of the Obama presidency and the road forward for both the Arab World and the United States. By 2016, it was clear that whoever succeeded Obama would inherit a frayed relationship with the Arab World and a divided domestic constituency.

In 2012, Mr. David Kirkpatrick, New York Time's Cairo bureau chief, offered insight into the Obama administration's foreign policy objectives at the start of his second term. Kirkpatrick noted that President Obama clearly viewed America's influence in the Arab World as limited and was hesitant to embroil the U.S. in protracted conflicts. The Syrian conflict also drew uncomfortable parallels with the conflict in Afghanistan in the late 20th century, and the Obama administration was concerned about arming rebel factions that could use these weapons against American interests in the future. He explained, however, that key members of the Obama administration, namely then-Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, signaled a willingness to arm rebel groups. Mr. Kirkpatrick was unsure whether this indicated a substantive change in Obama's foreign policy or a warning sign to the Assad regime, but it was clear the administration realized it could not remain on the sidelines of the Syrian conflict indefinitely.

In addition, CASAR addressed President Obama's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict during his second term and expressed cautious optimism that this would be on the agenda. CASAR has long supported the Arab-Israeli peace process and cautioned against neglecting the situation in Palestine when other regional crises have emerged. Mr. Kirkpatrick emphasized that President Obama's 2012 nominees for Secretary of State (Senator John Kerry) and Secretary of Defense (Chuck Hagel) were a positive sign. While both were supporters of the state of Israel, the Netanyahu government had hoped for more staunch allies. President Obama gave every indication that peace process was high on his agenda, and participants at CASAR events expressed tentative optimism that he could propel the peace process forward now that he was unencumbered by reelection considerations. However, Kirkpatrick predicted negotiations would fail without the inclusion of Hamas, particularly if Fattah and the Palestinian Authority's participation was predicated on refusal to cooperate with Hamas. He proposed that the Morsi government could serve as a conduit between the United States and Hamas, in the hopes of establishing lines of communication with Hamas. Finally, CASAR reasserted that the determinative factor in the Arab-Israeli peace process was the willingness of Palestine and Israel to enter into good faith negotiations and make tough concessions. While the personality of the American president and the political capital they are willing to invest will impact the success of negotiations, it is a secondary factor. As a result, CASAR expressed concern that the Netanyahu government would not find it politically advantageous to conclude a peace agreement without considerable pressure from the Obama administration.

In a 2012 panel entitled 'Obama's Second Term: What's in It for the Middle East,' Dr. Riham Bahi, professor of Political Science at Cairo University, joined Mr. Kirkpatrick to offer recommendations for how the Obama administration could foster better relations with Egypt during his second term. Dr. Bahi encouraged Washington to support the Morsi government despite their qualms about the Muslim Brotherhood, because he was democratically elected. Kirkpatrick stated that Egypt's economic growth required President Morsi open

the country to tourism and foreign investment, not attempt to impose socially conservative governance or restrict pushback from civil society. However, the United States could not influence the Morsi government without a strong working partnership. He explained that Egypt held considerable leverage over the United States in terms of dictating the parameters of the relationship. President Obama was well aware that Egypt's location at the intersect of three continents, control of the Suez Canal, and peace agreement with Israel allow it to negotiate from a position of strength. He also expressed hope that the conclusion of a nuclear treaty between Iran and the major powers could alleviate the Arab World's fears of a hostile nuclear power in their midst. This, in turn, could increase communication between the East and West. Both Mr. Kirkpatrick and Dr. Bahi saw President Obama's second term as a time to regenerate relations between the two countries, underscoring that the process would require Washington consider Cairo its equal.

From October 1-16, 2013, the American government shut down as questions about the debt ceiling and the Affordable Care Act (also known as Obamacare) came to head. The latter represented President Obama's seminal domestic legislation and fulfilled his campaign promise to overhaul the U.S. healthcare system. While many pundits attributed the government shutdown to Republican opposition to this policy, CASAR examined the deeper economic questions raised by the looming debt ceiling. In a 2013 lecture, entitled 'The U.S. Government Debt and the Future of the Dollar,' CASAR hosted Dr. Ali Soliman to shed light on the domestic financial situation. Dr. Soliman is a professor in the Department of Economics at the British University in Cairo, the former chief executive office and general manager of the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector, and an AUC alumnus. Soliman began his lecture by highlighting the historic root causes of the current budget crisis, which extends beyond America spending more than it collects in taxes. For generations, the United States spent beyond its means, but the international community, particularly China enables this behavior by loaning enormous sums of money. As of 2013, the national debt had surpassed \$17 trillion, which Dr. Soliman noted is a larger deficit than the entire European Union

combined. In the 1990s, the United States realized a small budget surplus, but the deficit grew steeply under the Bush administration due to tax cuts and the financially draining wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The current debt crisis reflects America's tenuous position as the global economic superpower and underscores the partisanship within Congress.

The current debt crisis also raises a host of problems, which will be felt far beyond America's borders. First, the dollar is a reserve standard and serves as the legal tender for many countries. When the U.S. government shuts down, the strength of the dollar weakens and shakes the confidence of international markets. Dr. Soliman opined that another government shutdown could trigger a global recession. In addition, the United States owes one-third of its debt to foreign banks (in comparison to the two-thirds it has borrowed from national banks and institutions), and there is considerable concern that U.S. economic growth may not sustain interest payments. The United States relies on its ability to borrow money at the relatively low interest rate of 2.5% and uses 11% of its annual expenditure for interest payments. However, should the U.S. default on a payment, they would lose their prime interest rate, and the national debt would increase rapidly. Dr. Soliman noted that over the last 10 years, similar phenomena triggered the debt crises in Spain, Greece, and Iceland. A similar collapse of the American economy would have devastating effects on the international market. The continuation of America's debt crisis threatens to destabilize the economic well-being of countries around the world, but different political factions cannot agree on a path forward.

Dr. Magda Shahin commented that the IMF, pressured by the United States, prescribed and forced harsh 'adjustment policies' in the 1980s and 1990s for developing countries to adopt but seemed unwilling to do the same for the U.S. Dr. Soliman agreed and discussed President Obama's proposed solution to the debt crisis, which triggered the government shutdown. In 2010, he formed the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility (Simpson-Bowles Commission) to create a plan for eliminating the national debt by 2035. The commission's

report called for a drastic reduction on spending for the military and health programs and increased taxes. Dr. Soliman explained this plan was rejected by Congress, which led to the 2013 shutdown and current instability. CASAR expressed concern that the attention focused on the Affordable Care Act obscured the looming debt crisis. CASAR called for additional discussion on the American debt ceiling and its potential impact on the global market, particularly as growing domestic partisanship indicated Congress would not take the difficult but necessary steps to control spending. President Obama's second term was marred by tension surrounding the health of the American economy and the impact growing national debt would have on future generations, both of which became important 2016 campaign issues.

President Obama's second term did little to fulfill the hopeful mandate which ushered him into office in 2008. While the P5+1 nuclear agreement decreased tensions with Iran, it exacerbated divides in the normally solid partnership between Washington and the GCC. President Obama never articulated a clear policy towards Syria and instead focused primarily on combatting the perceived threat of the Islamic State. The Arab-Israeli crisis festered, and the breakdown of the personal relationship between Obama and Netanyahu emboldened the latter to increase illegal settlements in the occupied territories. By 2016, the viability of a two-state solution, let alone the practicalities of such an agreement, was in question. CASAR expressed worry over the breakdown of the Cairo-Washington relationship after President El-Sisi assumed power. While the historic nature of the partnership and common interests ensure the necessity Egyptian-American cooperation, President Obama's decision to withhold military aid in 2013 and subsequent condemnation of human rights abuses in Egypt will not be soon forgotten. In the 2016 election, Republican candidates heavily criticized President Obama for sidelining traditional allies and abdicating U.S. leadership in the Arab World. Domestically, the Affordable Care Act remains a controversial piece of legislation and featured prominently in the 2016 election, as did the rising debt ceiling. CASAR's outreach events throughout President Obama's second term explored the foreign and domestic policy questions which impacted the 2016 presidential race. They also highlighted the impact

that American foreign policy has on the trajectory of the Arab World and condemned which neglects the region's interests.

### *2016 Presidential Elections*

Though many in the Arab world leaned towards Trump due to their mistrust of former Secretary of State Clinton, they nevertheless awoke on November 9th, 2016 to a surprising result. The unlikely rise of Donald Trump as a viable, major party candidate raised more questions than answers. Domestically, the results shed light on issues of race, gender, class, immigration status, and religion that Americans had long tried to ignore. On the global scale, it reflected a growing trend towards nativism and populism, which marked a stark departure from the globalism and interventionism of the early 21st century. In the Arab World, it once again raised the possibility that a Washington outsider with a revolutionary new approach would regenerate Arab-American relations with an emphasis on cooperation rather than domination. However, concerns about President-elect Trump's lack of foreign policy experience, Islamophobic campaign rhetoric, and position on the Arab-Israeli conflict could not be ignored. Unlike Secretary of State Clinton, whose policies towards the Arab World, both the good and the bad, were well known, assessing Donald Trump's intentions towards the Arab World thwarted the assumptions of policy-makers and academics.

Prior the run-up to the election, CASAR hosted six major events discussing the U.S. electoral process, candidates' platforms, and the impact of the 2016 elections on the Arab World. This included analyzing the role of religion the impact of the media on the elections. At CASAR events, discussants expressed fears over the election's divisive rhetoric and allegations of misconduct against both candidates. It also hosted a mock election simulation, which provided AUC students with an opportunity to cast their ballots after a simulated debate between candidates. This event acknowledged CASAR's belief that the impact of the U.S. elections extends far beyond American territory, and would

play a constitutive role in determining the region's trajectory over the next four years. In the aftermath of President Trump's election, CASAR joined the international community in cautiously observing the Trump administration's transition period in order to ascertain whether his more proactive statements would translate into policy or stay confined to campaign rhetoric.

In separate events held in early 2016, Ms. Laura Friedman, director of Government and Policy Relations for Americans for Peace Now, and Dr. Shibley Telhami, the Anwar Sadat professor of Peace and Development Studies at the University of Maryland, presented the background of the 2016 presidential elections. Dr. Telhami explained that President Obama's margin of victory narrowed in 2012, meaning the 2016 Democratic candidate would face a harder battle to the Oval Office. However, he noted changing demographics, particularly the growing number of youth and minority voters, favored the Democratic Party. Friedman focused on the American public's perception of the electoral process and key foreign policy issues which could impact the primaries. Importantly, she explained that most Americans were tired of the seemingly endless debates preceding the primary elections, because candidates do little to clarify policy positions. For example, numerous Republican candidates declared their intent 'to be tougher on ISIS,' without detailing what this approach would entail. As a result, many Americans did not see the primary debates as valuable; however, this usually changes once a candidate is selected and elaborates on their policies. Friedman also highlighted reconciling the American public's foreign policy objectives as an obstacle successful candidates would need to address. According to polls, the American people favor strong, military rhetoric towards the Islamic State but are against the current protracted and costly military disputes. Therefore, most Americans oppose committing troops or other modes of direct armed intervention against IS but expect military victory. Successful candidates must formulate a foreign policy platform which rectified these opposing interests, provided policy details, and engaged youth voters.

Dr. Telhami and Ms. Friedman also examined impact of

the Arab-Israeli conflict's impact on the 2016 electoral cycle. Dr. Telhami explained that the American perception of the Arab-Israeli crisis diverged substantially between Republicans and Democrats, with independent (non-party affiliated) voters holding a more moderate. He noted that according to a 2015 Nielsen Scarborough survey, affiliates of neither party viewed the issue as decisive, but it carried considerably more importance for Republicans than Democrats. Overall, Republicans held favorable opinions of Prime Minister Netanyahu, believed Israel's interests were given adequate consideration by Washington, and imagined the United States as a neutral broker in the peace process. Importantly, Republican Evangelicals overwhelmingly supported the state of Israel for religious reasons, advocated for the U.S. to favor Israel in the peace process, and expressed comfort with maintaining the current occupation if it furthered Israeli interests. Friedman also addressed this disconnect and acknowledged Republican candidates, who require support from the Evangelical lobby, place more emphasis on their support for Israel than Democratic candidates. Among Democrats, explained Telhami, there was growing, albeit still low, support for the Palestinian cause, a desire to see the U.S. act neutrally in the peace process, and a belief that Israeli interests carried too much weight in Washington. Ms. Freidman also noted that the Obama administration intended to continue pursuing the peace process during his final year in office and this would dictate its impact on the 2016 election. Particularly, she predicted that should President Obama alter the status quo in the Security Council,<sup>8</sup> the Arab-Israeli conflict could become a central election issue. Divergent Republican and Democrat understandings of the Arab-Israeli conflict seemed likely to influence the 2016 elections, but CASAR expressed concern that there was little substantive policy difference between the parties on this issue.

In 2016, CASAR hosted Mr. Mohamed El Menshawy, Washington-based columnist for Egypt's Al-Shorouk newspaper, who

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<sup>8</sup> The U.S. traditionally vetoed all Security Council Resolutions critical of Israeli policies. In 2016, after CASAR hosted Ms. Freidman, the United States abstained from a vote condemning Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank.

discussed the Republican and Democratic Parties' viable candidates midway through the primary campaign. As previously observed, the United States' primary system is complex and regulated at the state level, meaning different states' policies highly impact the outcome. During the 2016 election, the Democratic Party's super delegates<sup>9</sup> and open primary elections<sup>10</sup> were widely debated, and some pundits believed both negatively influenced the election cycle. El Menshawy noted that the expectations for the Republican and Democratic Parties' primary elections differed; in the former, a moderate was expected to emerge from an overly crowded field, while Secretary of State Clinton was predicted to handily win the latter. However, Congressional polarization, distrust in establishment institutions, and disenfranchised voters ultimately upended these calculations. He discussed the candidacies of Donald Trump (R-noted billionaire and television personality), Ted Cruz (R-Senator from Texas), John Kasich (R-Governor of Ohio), Hilary Clinton (D-former Secretary of State and Senator from New York), and Bernie Sanders (D-Senator from Vermont). One of the most important trends which emerged during the primaries was the establishment versus non-establishment debate. Large swaths of American voters voiced their displeasure with the status quo by flocking to candidates portrayed as 'anti-establishment.' For the Republicans, the emergence of Donald Trump, a billionaire businessman with no political experience and a history of scandals, as front-runner best personified this phenomenon. He used his inexperience as an advantage and portrayed himself as a plain-

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<sup>9</sup> Super-delegates are members of the party leadership who cast a vote in the primary. These votes are not awarded based on the outcome of state elections, although they traditionally have not nullified the primary results. In early 2016, most were committed to Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, which made it appear Senator Sanders trailed by a far larger margin than he actually did.

<sup>10</sup> In open primaries, voters who were not previously affiliated with a party can vote in the primary election. In 2016, there was considerable concern that registered Democrats or independent voters would vote in the Republican primaries in an effort to defeat Donald Trump.

spoken outsider who, if elected, could ‘drain the [D.C.]swamp.’<sup>11</sup> For the Democrats, the success of Bernie Sanders, a relatively unknown senator whose brand of democratic socialism is revolutionary by American standards, embodied the anti-establishment trend. His economic and social policies appealed to youth and working class voters and forced Democratic front-runner Hilary Clinton to defend her progressive credentials. The American peoples’ distrust in governing institutions facilitated non-traditional candidates’ success in the 2016 primary elections.

Another integral factor in the 2016 elections discussed at CASAR’s outreach events was the role of religion. While the United States Constitution formally provides for the separation of church and state, this has not translated into the separation of religion and politics, a fact that became increasingly clear after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United*. As Congresswoman Morella explained, the decision allowed special interest groups and religious groups, the right to contribute nearly unlimited funds to election campaigns. This increased already powerful religious lobbies, particularly the Evangelical Christian lobbies’, influence on candidates. According to El Menshawy, the religious right initially favored Republican Senator Ted Cruz because he shared their views on key political issues: abortion, civil rights vs. natural rights, Supreme Court vacancies, and education curricula. However, his defeat forced Evangelical Christians into an uncomfortable alliance with Donald Trump, whose religious credentials were weak. Dr. Adam Duker, Chair of the Abdulhadi Taher Program of Comparative Religions at AUC, explained that Evangelical Christians felt the ‘social justice’ policies enacted under the Obama administration eroded their identity.<sup>12</sup> As a result, Mr. Trump’s anti-

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<sup>11</sup> Donald Trump defined “the Swamp” as long-serving politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats, and lobbyists in the American capital. In his opinion, this group pursued “globalist” policies which put American interests last. As part of his campaign platform, Mr. Trump promised to limit their influence.

<sup>12</sup> Some examples include overturning the ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ policy (which had previously prevented openly queer individuals to serve in the military), legalization of gay marriage, and the obligation for employers to provide birth control under the Affordable Care Act.

abortion stance and pledge to appoint a religiously conservative Supreme Court justice outweighed his personal infidelities and past derision for religion.

Dr. Duker also noted that Secretary Clinton called for a repeal of the Hyde Amendment (which prohibited federally funded abortion clinics) and supported transgender civil liberties, which Evangelicals found particularly threatening. Not only religiously-rooted issues galvanized Evangelicals; many championed Trump's 'Make America Great Again' rhetoric and blamed an influx of immigrants for the Obama administration's progressive policies. When faced with a country moving in a direction they disapproved, the nationalist/populist agenda appealed to primarily white Evangelicals across America's heartland. Minority religious voters' views differed substantially, and Dr. Duker predicted Trump's social conservatism would outweigh his immigration policies and attract Hispanic-American voters. However, others hypothesized African and Hispanic American voters would flock to the Democratic Party as Mr. Trump's rhetoric increasingly displayed racial undertones. The final religious issue that reverberated particularly strongly in CASAR's events was Mr. Trump's open hostility to Muslims. While Muslim-Americans' loyalties first became a political issue in the 2012 presidential elections, scapegoating this population became central to Mr. Trump's campaign. His calls to revoke Muslim Americans' first amendment rights and to institute a travel ban to prevent all Muslims from entering the United States were popular. CASAR expressed its concern about religion's growing influence on American politics, particularly in the insidious and exclusionary form endorsed by the Trump campaign.

As Mr. Trump's statements continued to arouse international concern due to their racist, misogynistic, and bigoted content, the role of the American media became central to understanding the election results. Donald Trump's inflammatory statements were the topic of constant reporting, thereby providing him 50 percent more news coverage than any other Republican candidate in the primaries. Many credit this exposure, along with his considerable name recognition, as key to for his primary victory. American distrust for mainstream

media also impacted the election's outcome. In 2012, Mr. Zogby addressed the American peoples' distrust of mainstream media and indicated that more people turned to social media for information. At that time, he expressed concern that people would rely on information which confirmed their opinions, rather than seek out independent news sources. This proved true during the 2016 elections, and Mr. Trump routinely attacked mainstream media for spreading 'false news.' Both Republicans and Democrats flocked to blogs or news sources openly aligned with specific ideologies for their information, thus creating 'echo chambers' where they heard few, if any, dissenting voices. Finally, participants at CASAR events debated the quality of reporting and the media's role in setting the political agenda. Dr. David Lubin, professor of Government at the American University in Washington D.C., condemned the American media for stirring controversy and focusing on negative rumors rather than substantive issues. This approach paid more attention to rumors and allegations of corruption than the candidates' policy objectives. Mr. Hafez El Mirazi, chair of the Kamal Adham Center for Television and Digital Journalism, took a more neutral approach. While the media does assist with agenda setting, it is in the business of reporting on controversial issues which attract an audience. He believed politicians, not the media, had an obligation to ensure their statements are designed to further bipartisan dialogue instead of simply mobilizing their constituency. Participants at CASAR's outreach events presented differing critiques about the media's impact on the 2016 election, underscoring its importance to the outcome.

CASAR's programming on the 2016 elections also addressed the economy's role in constructing the political alliances needed to win the primary and national elections. Recovery from the 2008 financial recession was uneven and swaths of the American public have not reaped the benefits. This is particularly true among urban minority communities and in rural America, which was disproportionately impacted by decreased job opportunities in manufacturing and rising opioids addiction. During the primary elections, Mr. Trump and Senator Sander's differing brands of economic populism appealed to those who felt marginalized by globalization. Mr. Trump formed a coalition

among the conservative working class in rural and manufacturing areas, where his anti-immigration stance was well received. While moderates supported Governor Kasich and the religious right preferred Senator Cruz, Mr. Trump's ability to garner support in traditionally Democrat-controlled areas proved insurmountable. Senator Sanders received surprisingly high support from the working class in the Rust Belt<sup>13</sup> and youth, the latter of which cited concerns over rising economic inequality and social injustice as key issues. Secretary Clinton ultimately prevailed due to the overwhelming support of minority voters and older urban Democrats, but the Democratic Party's platform included more progressive stances to court Sander's supporters. During the national elections, Mr. Trump received overwhelming support from rural voters, white men, and voters over the age of 50. Secretary Clinton received the majority of minority and female votes, those with a college education, and urban voters. Many felt the decisive factor in Mr. Trump's victory was the support of white working and middle class voters who favored his economic module despite past association with the Democratic Party. The sustainability of the changing political alliances which drove Mr. Trump's victory remains contested, but CASAR is certain economic concerns will continue to feature highly in the 2018 midterm elections.

On November 8th, 2016, Mr. Trump emerged from the fiercely contested election with a stunning electoral victory, but lost the popular vote to Secretary Clinton. This marked the second time since 2000 that the Democrats won the popular vote but lost the election, causing many to call for the Electoral College's abolishment. At a CASAR event hosted in late November 2016, Dr. James Sunday, professor of Political Science at AUC, explained the domestic response to President-elect Trump's unlikely victory. First, the result contradicted polling data, which gave Secretary of State Clinton an 84% chance of victory in the week before the election. This, combined with her popular vote victory, caused considerable anger among her supporters.

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<sup>13</sup> A moniker for the historic manufacturing region across the northern Midwest, including the cities of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, and Erie.

Second, the 2016 election was unique because of the ideological factors at play, namely President-elect Trump's 'othering' of female and minority voters. Dr. Sunday reminded participants that Trump's first foray into politics involved his support for the 'birther movement,' which was a racially inspired attempt to question the legitimacy of the Obama presidency based on allegations he was not born in America. Ambassador Aly Erfan, professor of practice at AUC, highlighted the combination of revulsion and profound anxiety Americans reported in the days after the election. Many questioned how millions of their fellow Americans could vote for someone so openly racist, sexist, and Islamophobic. Participants at CASAR's post-election events highlighted that these were questions the American people would need to address in the coming years. In terms of the international ramifications, Ambassador Erfan underscored the global uncertainty as to the content of Trump's policies. The president-elect had no previous experience, and it was impossible to determine the extent to which he believed his own campaign rhetoric. Trump's background as a businessman and willingness to change his politics when it suited him (he was a Democrat for decades before becoming a Republican) could indicate the more inflammatory aspects of his campaign were merely for show. However, Ambassador Erfan expressed concern over his bellicose position towards China and intention to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, as both would have global ramifications. The unexpected election of Donald Trump to the American presidency raised concerns across the international community. CASAR joined the voices urging caution and patience, while acknowledging that the results raised questions about the role of religion and media in politics which the American people would need to address going forward.

### *Conclusion*

While the international community has paid considerable attention to the Arab World's tumultuous experience since 2011,

the United States also experienced its own period of uncertainty. Discussions about the U.S. primary system foreshadowed the contentious debate on whether the structure of the primaries determined the outcome of the 2016 election. Both parties have made cosmetic reforms, but it is likely the process of choosing candidates will remain contested moving forward. American's distrust in its media remains problematic, and President Trump consistently refers to unfavorable press as 'fake news.' While the media has clearly scrutinized his presidency quite closely and should be subjected to criticism, further erosion in this relationship is dangerous. In the absence of neutral media outlets, Americans increasingly will turn towards ideologically aligned sources, regardless of their veracity. CASAR encourages robust dialogue on media ethics and modalities for enhancing media-civil society partnerships.

The coalition that elected President Obama: youth, minority, and the 'thinking class' prompted a backlash from those feeling left behind. The rise of the Evangelical right, spurred by the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, is case in point. Faced with a government which supported increasingly liberal social policies, this group was willing to support Donald Trump despite his moral shortcomings. While in the past, Evangelicals focused on the moral character of their candidate, they have recently supported candidates with sordid backgrounds, including accused child-molester Roy Moore. As a candidate, President Trump preyed on the economic marginalization of blue collared white workers and blamed their plight on immigration. Since the 2016 elections, racially or religiously motivated hate crimes have increased, and white supremacist groups feel emboldened. The increasingly religious and racial political undertones have alienated many moderate Republicans, which will impact the 2018 midterm elections. At the same time, chasms within the Democratic Party also continue to grow, and the party has failed to internalize lessons from its surprising 2016 defeat. Youth voters, overwhelmingly left leaning, support a brand of democratic socialism that older Democrats oppose. Some argue the party's social policies have veered into divisive identity politics, while others claim the party's standard-bearers are more conservative than their constituents.

The level of partisanship grows and the civility of discourse falls, further entrenching political divides within and between parties. Nearly all of President Trump's legislation has come via executive orders or bills passed along party lines, meaning there is virtually no cooperation between Democrat and Republican lawmakers. Without a bipartisan approach to governance, these political divides-which predated the 2016 election-are unlikely to heal.

On a global scale, the international community expresses its uncertainty about the Trump administration, and polls indicate he is highly unpopular among citizens of European and Asian countries. He has not initiated a trade war against China or rolled back U.S. support for NATO, which were areas of initial concern. However, his decisions to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, and institute a travel ban targeting Muslim-majority countries angered many. In recent weeks, President Trump has indicated wavering support for the United Nations and a willingness to act unilaterally against the advice of longtime allies. His foreign policy objectives are not yet coherent, and at times his positions have seemed out of step with members of his cabinet, confusing academics, policy-makers, and world leaders. Despite these concerns, President Trump has improved Washington's relationship with Cairo, Riyadh, and Moscow, which could be the first step in addressing tensions in the Arab World and Eastern Europe. CASAR continues to cautiously assess President Trump's impact on international politics as he enters his second year in office, despite expressing its opposition to its decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel.

***Included below is a list of CASAR events pertaining to U.S. domestic developments. For complete coverage and comprehensive reports on each, refer to CASAR’s official website.***

1. Adam Asher-Duke, “Religion and the U.S. Elections: Trump versus Hilary,” (October 27, 2016.)
2. Ali Soliman “U.S. Government Debt and the Future of the Dollar,” (November 25, 2013).
3. Constance Morella and Patricia Schroeder, “The U.S. Election Process and The 2012 Presidential Race,” (October 8, 2012).
4. David Kirkpatrick & Riham Bahi “Obama’s Second Term: What’s in it for the Middle East?” (February 24, 2013).
5. David Lublin, “The Impact of Media on the U.S. Presidential Election,” (September 19, 2016).
6. Erin Vilardi, “American Primaries and Caucuses,” (April 2, 2012).
7. James Sunday & Aly Erfan, “U.S. Elections....What Now?” (November 11, 2016).
8. John Zogby, “The 2012 U.S. Elections: Political Landscape and Potential Impact in the Middle East,” (May 8–9, 2012).
9. Laura Friedman, “The Middle East and the 2016 U.S. Election,” (March 13, 2016).
10. “Mock U.S. Elections Simulations,” (November 7, 2016).
11. Yassin Al Ayouty, “The Post Obama Oval Office and the New Egypt,” (October 15, 2015).

## **Localizing Transnational American Studies**

### *Introduction*

As an American Studies center located in the heart of the Arab World, CASAR is committed to enhancing understanding between Egypt, the Arab World, and the United States. These relationships are not based on shared political, security, and economic objections alone. The Egyptian and American societies share many of the same pressing concerns, such as systems of oppression which marginalize minority voices. Both societies share a passion for art, be it literature, sculpture, or film. Most importantly, Egypt and the U.S. are aware that shared understanding and cooperation is in their best interest in this increasingly globalized world. CASAR hosted over 15 scholars, authors, activists, and artists to examine the historical and modern societal challenges, approaches to activism, and art which link America and Egypt.

CASAR's discussion on societal challenges attempted to identify the systemic power structures created within Egyptian and American society in order to understand manifestations of oppression. The United States' legacy as a settler-colonial nation built on indigenous land by African slave labor impacts its present. Mass incarceration decimates minority communities at a time when income inequality continues to grow. Washington's interference in other nations' affairs has prolonged conflicts and displaced millions, and the refugees resettled in the U.S. face issues of conflicting identity. Women, particularly women of color, are marginalized economically and politically and sexual assault is rampant. Since the dawn of the 21st century, the ill-conceived War on Terror spawned an 'us versus them' narrative, which marginalizes Muslim-Americans, and this divide is only gaining strength. The understanding of how Donald Trump secured his unexpected 2016 victory is rooted in a deeper exploration of the structure of American society and its inherent flaws. In Egypt, there is growing recognition that improving women's status

will produce tangible economic and security gains. There was hope that the role of women in the 2011 revolution would compel change, but the 2012 and 2014 constitutions disappointed activists. The need to change society's perception of women is not unique to Egypt but is endemic in the Arab World and the greater international community. Similarly, transnational jihadist movements, such as the Islamic State, have turned their attention to minority religious communities across the region, sewing seeds of sectarian and religious conflict in their wake. One needs to look no farther than the Islamic State's genocidal campaigns against the Yazidis and Shia minority populations in Syria and Iraq, and the group's popularity among youth. The challenges facing both Egyptian and American society are manifest.

Despite these very real concerns, CASAR's outreach programs also sought to highlight successful resistance to the dangerous status quo. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement has reinvigorated the discussion on police brutality and state-sanctioned violence against Black American bodies and continues the tradition of Black resistance. The blossoming relationship between this movement and Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement exemplifies transnational activism against global apartheid and colonization. It reminded participants at CASAR events of the overlap between anti-racism and decolonization movements in the late 20th century and reflects the knowledge that all systems of oppression intertwine. Activists imprisoned in Israeli and American jails have engaged in hunger strikes, and there is increasing coordination via social media. The 2016 election of Donald Trump countered traditional American narratives of meritocracy and progress, forcing citizens to engage in tough discussions. Across the Arab World, IS, like Al Qaeda before it, is losing popularity due to its savage targeting of minorities. Internationally, there is growing belief among youths that unfettered capitalism is destroying the environment and compounding inequality and an understanding that all will benefit from a more just society. CASAR provided a platform to share the anti-oppression movement's successes, learn from its setbacks, and envision modalities for transnational solidarity and activism.

By analyzing trends within various disciplines of art, CASAR underscored the historic cooperation between artists in Egypt and the United States. The American sculpture tradition is rooted in an understanding of Ancient Egyptian monuments as a statement of power, and key pieces like the Statue of Liberty and Mount Rushmore exemplify this tradition. America's noted Chicago School of architecture was also partially inspired by Ancient Egyptian design. Through its documentary film series, 'The American Experience,' CASAR used cinema to present varied perspectives on American society and draw parallels between life in America and the Egyptian experience. Both Egypt and America boast of a storied literary tradition, and CASAR displayed the work of high-achieving authors. Participants discussed translation and travel writing as modalities for increasing literary cooperation between Arab and American authors. At the 2017 'Rumpus: America in the Age of Trump' conference, participants demonstrated an understanding of Trump's presidency through literature and satire. The conference featured an anthropoetic poetic performance on the history of American imperialism in the Arab World,<sup>14</sup> and a poetry reading by Dr. Marilyn Hacker, the former Chancellor of the American Academy of Poets. CASAR understands the legacy of artistic collaboration between Egypt and the U.S. as crucial to enhancing cultural understanding and as useful tool of critique.

Finally, CASAR engaged with the larger Transnational American Studies, particularly Americanists based outside of the U.S. Exploring the societal and cultural context is an important aspect of the American Studies field, CASAR's outreach programs also focused in how the U.S. is studied. Washington's influence on international events is regularly discussed, but often spurred the intense academic critique other countries experience. Speakers at CASAR events highlighted

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<sup>14</sup> The term "anthropoetic" was created by the performers to explain their work. It combined dramatic readings of an autobiography, anthropological explanation of the work's context, poetry, and photographic archival displays to narrate their mother's story.

the work of noted academics in this field and used the late Edward Said's conceptual framework to analyze contemporary developments in the Arab-U.S. relationship. It also touched on orientalism in literature and media portrayal, colonial reproduction of knowledge, and Occidentalism, all issues which impact how the Arab World studies and conceptualizes the U.S. By focusing on how the academic community approaches American Studies, CASAR outreach program made concrete recommendations for new or revamped modalities for analysis.

### *Societal Challenges in the United States and Egypt*

CASAR hosted internationally renowned scholars and policy-makers as participants in the ongoing discussions on Egyptian and American society. The events focused on the questions of racial, gender-based, and religious discrimination which plague both societies. Participants examined the history of various forms of oppression, their current manifestations, and modalities of resistance with an emphasis on transnational cooperation. In other events, discussants highlighted the strides taken and successes achieved in creating a more just society, whether the result was monumental or incremental. Over the course of nine lectures and an international conference, CASAR grappled with the complex challenges facing Egyptian and American society and recent causes for optimism. These events allowed AUC students, faculty, and staff and members of the public an opportunity to learn and discuss the challenges Egyptian and American society face as they move through the 21st century.

CASAR's outreach programs evaluated the state of American racial relations and the challenges currently facing minority communities. This issue has gained increased attention and importance since the 2016 presidential elections, due to racially inflammatory rhetoric. Dr. Ruthie Gilmore, professor of Earth & Environmental Studies and American Studies at the Graduate Center of City University of New York, discussed the similarities between 18th and

19th century slavery and 21st century mass incarceration in America. She explained that the U.S. currently handles the breakdown of its social welfare system by jailing its most vulnerable populations. It particularly targets at low-educated persons of color and amounts to a form of human sacrifice. Rather than address the systemic factors which cause economic recessions to disproportionately impact the poor while the gains of economic growth fall into the hands of the elite, the system criminalizes the poor. Once jailed, Dr. Gilmore showed, this population sickens and dies at a quicker rate than the rest of the population. Even when released, the formerly jailed suffer a host of physical and mental illnesses and are barred from accessing many social welfare, housing, and educational assistance programs. She used the experience of California, which built 23 prisons between 1984 and 2007, as an example of the growth of the prison industrial complex. The U.S. currently hosts 25% of the world's incarcerated population, and 75% of those jailed are members of a racial minority. Racial justice cannot be achieved in a system which criminalizes Brown bodies instead of addressing systemic inequality.

In addition to imprisonment, the experience of emigration also affects minority communities in the U.S. Mr. Andrew Lam, renowned author and journalist, discussed the Vietnamese diaspora community in America 40 years after the fall of Saigon. This topic was of particular interest to CASAR, due to the large Egyptian diaspora community in the U.S. Mr. Lam explained that while the Vietnamese immigrants may have worked on assembly lines, their children are at the forefront of technological innovation. Few Vietnamese left their homeland prior to 1960, but these success stories served as a catalyst for subsequent emigration, which is a now common ambition among Vietnamese youth. Despite their professional successes, the children of Vietnamese immigrants often express a sense of divided identity: conversations within the community occurred in traditional language and focused on the past, while among classmates they spoke English and looked towards the future. Despite the passage of time, the Vietnamese-American community continues to financially support relatives in Vietnam and invest in the country's economy. This is also true of the Egyptian diaspora community, who are still a

powerful political actor. CASAR's outreach activities engaged with the challenges facing minority communities in America in terms of emigration, incarceration, and identity.

Both Egyptian and American societies need to further improve the situation of women to achieve their full potential. Dr. Magda Shahin and Ms. Yasmeen El Ghazaly emphasized that the subjugation of Egyptian women was perpetuated by national laws that viewed women as secondary to men. In the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, many activists hoped the new Constitution would improve women's legal status by decreasing the role of Sharia law. However, the drafting of the 2012 Constitution took place after then-president Morsi had seized control of the government, and women's voices were largely ignored. Women comprised only 6% of the drafting committee, thus men wrote the majority of personal status provisions. The 2014 Constitution, while less overtly religious, did little to address the status of women. It placed female representation within the 'minority' quota shared with Copts and youth representatives. In a 2015 lecture, Ms. Sarah Sewall, former American Under-Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, underscored women's importance in addressing Egypt's economic and security challenges. The Egyptian economy cannot perform adequately when half the population, in many cases the most educated half, suffer from unequal access to the labor market. This is also true in the United States where women, particularly women of color, earn considerably less than their male counterparts. Dr. Gilmore explained that until the 1990s, women were incarcerated at a higher rate than men, particularly for drug offenses. While this has changed due to national pressure, there is a stark divide between the government's treatments of mothers versus non-mothers. Privileging the experience of mothers to the detriment of other women will not enhance societal equality. CASAR firmly believes enhancing the worldwide role of women is necessary to achieve economic and political stability.

The plight of religious minorities across the Arab World and the United States was another topic discussed at CASAR's outreach programs. In the Arab World, religious minorities face both state-

sanctioned discrimination and persecution by non-state actors. Dr. Fawaz Gerges discussed the rise of Islamic ideologies which targeted religious minorities. Violent attacks against Egypt's Coptic minority were a trademark of radical Egyptian Islamist groups, particularly after they allied with Saudi ultra-Salafists in the 1980s. However, these groups' goal was to overthrow the governments of secular nation states in the Muslim world and to compel America's retreat from this region. Dr. Gerges explained it was only after the U.S. invasion of Iraq that Al Qaeda in Iraq, followed by the Islamic State, turned its attention towards Shi'a Muslims. The modern face of Sunni jihad has genocidal intentions towards the Shia, a population they view as a '5th column' of infidels disguised as believers. While this approach has resulted in significant bloodshed, it has also caused Sunni-jihadist movements to lose the local population's support. The United States also suffers from religious bigotry, particularly in regards to its relationship with Islam. According to Dr. Hisham Aidi, professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, Washington initially debated whether to support Sufi or Sunni political Islamist movements at the start of the Cold War. Though they considered the former a better partner for spreading democracy across South Asia, Iran, and North Africa, the latter had the requisite institutional capacity and ability for social control needed to protect against Soviet influence. This is a decision, he explained, that the U.S. would come to regret at the dawn of the 21st century, when Al Qaeda attacked New York and Washington. The fear this attack inspired permeated the American psyche, and Dr. Mostafa Bayoumi discussed the subsequent oppression of Muslim-Americans. In the 2016 elections, President Trump openly advocated for state-sanctioned discrimination against Muslim-Americans, and social media facilitates the spread of Islamophobia. CASAR firmly holds that designing programs to addressing religious discrimination in the Arab World and the U.S. is imperative.

CASAR, in collaboration with AUC's Department of English and Comparative and Literature and the American University in Beirut, hosted an international conference entitled 'Rumpus: America and the Age of Trump.' This conference arose out of CASAR's desire

to examine the social, economic, and cultural factors which gave rise to the Trump presidency and to situate these factors within the larger historic narrative. Panelists from the American University in Cairo, American University in Beirut, University of California –Davis, Rice University, Cairo University, Rutgers University, and Ain Shams University presented papers on domestic and global intersectionality, metaphors and representatives of American politics, and battling belligerences through art. The speakers' diverse backgrounds, including undergraduate and graduate students in addition to academics, and areas of expertise ensured a fruitful discussion on the systemic and historical factors prompting Trump's presidency and potential steps forward from this moment. The papers presented shared common call for international cooperation and resistance to the Trump era, as well as a need to situate the event in larger narratives of oppression.

During the conference, Dr. Khaled Mattawa, assistant professor of Creative Writing at the University of Michigan and visiting professor at AUC, discussed the issues surrounding Trump's election and his coalition through the intersection of race, class, and gender and addressed issues pertinent to cultural studies, anthropology, history and historical perspective, ethnography, and literature. The election, he stated, signaled to many that pervasive fear of liberal democracy and resistance to the positive gains of social movements, particularly in terms of integrating immigrants, was more prevalent in America than most wish to think. Participants engaged with the role systemic racism, settler-colonialism, and capitalism played in facilitating Trump's success and the need to critically analyze these root causes. Dr. Steven Salaita, professor at the American University in Beirut, stressed the importance of seeing Trump's election as the inevitable result of a capitalist system which encourages an obsession with financial wealth. He called upon the American Studies field to situate Trump's election within the system, because erasing the process by which he came to power would preclude actually change. As Ms. Alice Kezhaya, a graduate student at the American Studies Center at AUB, succinctly explained, Trump's election was not un-American; it was the epitome of Americanism. She reminded the audience that while many overt forms of racial oppression have been removed from

the U.S. political system, a system built on white supremacy will remain implicitly racist. Participants at CASAR's Rumpus conference focused on situating the 2016 election within larger frameworks of systemic oppression in order to formulate concrete recommendations for change.

Despite the number of racial, religious, and gender-based challenges facing Egyptian and American society and the historical socioeconomic factors which gave rise to the current situation, participants at CASAR events focused on a number of positive developments. At CASAR's 'Rumpus' conference, participants acknowledged and lauded the development of transnational resistance movements to combat both the phenomenon that is 'Trumpism' and America's hegemonic influence throughout the world. Mr. Ismet Alhalaby, a Ph.D candidate at Rice University, discussed early European-educated Palestinian activists' decision to use the colonizers rhetoric to speak truth to power's throughout the 20th century. It not only impacted the Palestinian movement but was also embraced by the Black Panthers. The relationship between Palestinian liberation movements and the American movement against white supremacy remains important today, particularly when discussing transnational modalities for resistance. Ms. Tala Makhoul, a graduate student at AUB's Center for American Studies, examined the structural and ideological intersections of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movements. Ideologically, both stand against the military industrial complex, Israel and America's cooperation to train soldiers to enact violence on brown bodies, and the systemic racism and classism in both countries which creates apartheid. The Black Lives Matter movement's charter explicitly pronounces its support for the BDS movement; however, this partnership underscores some of the challenges associated with transnational solidarity movements. For example, Ms. Makhoul discussed the role of BLM supporters based in Tel Aviv. While police brutality disproportionately affects black bodies in Israel, many question whether Israeli BLM advocates fully support the decolonization and Palestine liberation aspects of the BLM platform. By examining modern transnational resistance movements, conference participants discussed modalities

for cooperation, structural and ideological intersections, and questions of inclusivity.

Additionally, CASAR hosted a number of speakers who highlighted positive social developments and other forms of transnational cooperating. Dr. Ruthie Gilmore focused on the emergence of the oft maligned Black Lives Matter movement as an important stepping-stone towards a more just society. She reminded the audience that state-sanctioned violence against Black bodies is not new and neither is Black resistance. In the 1950s, the National American Association for Colored People (NAACP) won several important court cases which helped tear down America's system of apartheid. BLM, a movement which focuses on the criminalization of Black bodies and the police's treatment of Black Americans, continues this tradition of resistance. The movement reflects a growing understanding that comprehensive systemic change is needed. Policies to limit the incarceration of mothers and the elderly will be insufficient as long as the image of the 'criminal' in American society remains Black. The BLM movement, Dr. Gilmore explained, is significant because it fights the dehumanization of Black bodies.

Mr. Andrew Lam addressed media manifestations of transnational solidarity between American immigrant communities and their countries of origin. He estimated there are up to 3,000 ethnic new sources published in over 100 languages. Domestically, these outlets are very influential in their communities and have fostered relationships between ethnic communities across America. Mr. Lam credited Chinese language media as one of the main reasons San Francisco elected its first Chinese-American mayor in 2011. The cooperation between Vietnamese-American communities in New Orleans and Houston, which significantly lessened the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the former, began after early warnings issued by ethnic media. Ethnic media also focuses on the domestic and international events, which most closely impact a given community, thus creating the ability for individuals to engage politically in America and the country of origin. Articles often address immigration reform, political and social changes in the country of origin, and regional/international politics

from the country of origin's perspective. Dr. Hisham Aidi discussed transnational solidarity through music, particularly the relationship between rap and Islam. Black Muslim Americans played an important role in the jazz and hip-hop movements, and Arabic language and Islamic motifs are common in hip-hop. It exposed Black Americans to Islam and non-Muslims to Black culture and has facilitated cross-cultural, international dialogue since the 1970s. Similarly, Dr. Aidi noted the American government's interest in Sufi music as a means to spread a more liberal form of Islam. Though the West supported Salafi leaders during the Cold War, after 9/11 leaders sought to mobilize the Sufi population against the Salafi movement. Much as rap and hip-hop created linkages between Black Americans and the international Muslim community, Sufi worship movement could facilitate liberal discourse. Participants at CASAR's events expressed optimism about these developments and the potential for media and music to enhance solidarity.

Egyptian and American societies face a number of pervasive malaises which harm individuals and the country's ability to maximize its potential. In Egypt, women and religious minorities face discrimination at the hands of state and private actors. This is reflective of these populations' experiences across the Arab World, and the challenges are magnified in countries where transnational extremist groups have established a strong presence. In America, systematic racism, rampant capitalism, sexism, and mass incarceration plague the society. In many ways, these systems of oppression have received little attention outside of the populations they marginalize, but the 2016 election of Donald Trump brought to the surface the historic factors which led to that result. CASAR supported events which allowed participants to situate the challenges Egypt and the U.S. face within historic and global contexts in an effort to look for the way forward. While overcoming these challenges is not easy, there are reasons for optimism, including transnational solidarity through media and music, transnational activism, and a growing awareness that the status quo is unsustainable. CASAR uses its position as an American studies center in the Arab World to foster these bonds of cooperation, support, and activism.

In addition to discussing Egyptian-American society, CASAR's events focused on examining the arts. Importantly, this allowed international students and guests to learn more about Egyptian arts and gave Egyptian students and other participants the opportunity to learn more about American culture. Notably, CASAR, in partnership with the English & Comparative Literature department, hosted a monthly film series entitled 'The American Experience.' The chosen documentary films presented different perspectives on the American lived experience and provided timely sociopolitical commentary. Other events included presentations on American architecture, Egyptian pottery, translation, and travel experiences. Over the course of six lectures and a monthly film series, CASAR exposed the AUC community to the beauty of the Egyptian and American art and cultural scenes.

Mr. Eric Blom, an American sculptor and 2012 Fulbright scholar, addressed Egyptian influence on modern American sculpting. He began by reminding the audience that the most famous American sculpture, the Statue of Liberty, was first conceived as a statue for the entrance of the Suez Canal and originally featured a fully veiled Egyptian agricultural worker holding aloft her torch. Though Bartholdi reworked his final product into a more Greek ideal, its Egyptian roots remained visible. The giant stone monuments of Ancient Egypt, particularly Ramses II's Abu Simbel temple, inspired Gutzon Borglum, the creator of Mount Rushmore. Traditionally, European leaders preferred iron or bronze busts, but Borglum turned to Egypt's historical stone sculptures to portray the power and might of the American presidency. Mr. Blom explained to participants that Egypt is also the birthplace of imaginative figure art. This movement dates back to the late 1880's, when Khedive Ismael Pasha embraced realistic bronze sculptures and supported art education across the country. Despite its influential artistic history, Mr. Blom indicated two challenges which impeded modern Egyptian sculpture. First, bronze foundries are expensive, and artists in the developing world struggle

to source their work. Second, most Egyptian art schools no longer teach figure drawing or sculpting, which limits students' exposure to the very field Egypt once pioneered. CASAR believes the historic relationship between Egyptian and American sculpting serves as an illustrative example of the states' storied partnership extended beyond shared political goals.

Egyptian influence on modern American art is also visible in the field of architecture, particularly the Chicago School of Architecture. In a 2012 lecture, Mr. Richard Findley, architect and art lecturer at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, examined the emergence of the Chicago School movement at the beginning of the 20th century. He explained that Chicago School architects embraced the narrative of 'America as a country of immigrants' and sought to meld different cultural traditions into a distinctly American look. These architects were trained in the contemporary design philosophies of French and English schools of thoughts. More importantly, they had access to illustrative pattern books which provided detailed images of historic buildings and ornament design from ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman times. Mr. Findley demonstrated how the blend of ancient and modern understandings of architecture, combined with early 20th century manufacturing advancements, is visible on Chicago's contemporary skyline. The Chicago School's approach inspired international architects, including those in Egypt, thereby influencing modern construction across the world. This process reflects the importance of Ancient Egyptian art and architecture as an inspiration for modern urban development.

Film is another medium in which cross cultural cooperation between Egypt and the U.S. has flourished, and CASAR focused on this during its year-long 'American Experience' documentary film series. The events, which were hosted in cooperation with AUC's English & Comparative Literature Department, allowed AUC students to learn and discuss social issues facing Egypt and the U.S. through films. CASAR chose films which depict how life is experienced by ordinary Americans and some of the topics covered were race, the role of religion in politics, economic development, and the legacy

of armed conflict. CASAR's director, Dr. Magda Shahin, explained that documentary films are a powerful learning tool which provide great immediacy to the learning processes. CASAR held movie screenings during the school day to ensure students had easy access to the events. A student participant explained that she found the topics more interesting because they were introduced through film and commented that *God in America (A Nation Reborn and A New Light)* showed America faced similar challenges to Egypt in regards to the role of religion in politics. The 'American Experience' film series used cinema to present multiple perspectives on American society and helped students from all disciplines understand the common issues facing Egyptians and Americans.

CASAR also hosted events which addressed literature, particularly translation and travel writing. Dr. Dalia Bassiouny, adjunct associate professor of Drama and Criticism at 6th of October University discussed her efforts to translate the work of Iraqi-American playwright, Heather Raffo. Raffo's work, entitled *Nine Parts of Desire*, centers on Iraqi women's experience during Saddam Hussein's regime and the subsequent U.S. invasion. Dr. Bassiouny expressed her commitment to translate Arab-Americans' literary works into Arabic so they can be widely read in the Arab World. CASAR's event also included a staged reading of portions of Dr. Bassiouny's translation, allowing AUC and 6th of October University students an opportunity to showcase their theatric skills. The importance of translation was also discussed by Dr. John Carlos Rowe, professor of English & American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. He introduced CASAR's audience to translation as a form of orientalism, discussing the impact word choice and the selection of works translated impact perception of the Arab World. Dr. Rowe also highlighted the late Edward Said's contribution to the field of literature, particularly his critique of mainstream American authors. American scholars Joshua Maricich and Will Reynolds explained their experience sailing the length of the Egyptian Nile immediately following the 2011 revolution. They joined a short list of other Americans who embarked on this journey, and their narrative centered on conversations with Egyptians along the way. Their travel

writing reflected conversations with rural Egyptian farmers, tourism workers in Aswan and Luxor, and grain importers around Cairo. Mr. Maricich and Reynold's work shed light on rural Egyptian's differing perceptions of the revolution, the impact of American grain imports on the local environment, and the impact of post-revolution anti-corruption initiatives. Most importantly, their work, and the work of other participants at CASAR events, reflected the importance of literature as a means of cultural exposure and communication between the Arab World and the United States.

Throughout the two day 'Rumpus' conference, speakers analyzed the role of literature and the arts as a means of understanding and resisting hegemonic narratives, including those which gave rise to Donald Trump's election. Dr. Noura Al Abbady, assistant lecturer at Cairo University's English Department, juxtaposed the rise of Donald Trump with the main character in a *Death of a Salesman*. Her paper, 'The Vote for Willy Loman: Donald Trump, America's Salesman,' discussed the fundamentally capitalist nature of the American Dream, which has historically been built on the exclusion of Black bodies. Trump offers Americans a re-conceptualized dream, one without 'political correctness' and run by the 'common man.' She claimed that in reality, Trump like Loman before him acts as salesman, selling American a specific narrative about the accessibility of economic success. Conference participants also discussed identity as reflected in American literary works. Ms. Hala Darwish's paper, entitled 'Pan-ethnic Coalition as a Means of Empowerment: A Reading in Arab-American Poetry,' drew links between the interpersonal relations and experiences of minority writers in the United States, particularly Japanese-American, African-American, and Native American authors. Two common themes which emerged was a conflicting loyalty to the United States and the country of origin and a sense of responsibility, whether internalized or forced by external actors, to speak on behalf of 'their' ethnic group. Dr. Heba Sharobeem, assistant professor of American Literature at Alexandria University focused on questions of cosmopolitanism and identity in the '1.5 generation' (those between the first and second generation of immigrants) through Chang Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*. Lee explored the Korean-American

identity and themes of cultural alienation and betrayal, interracial and intergenerational conflict, the ‘bamboo ceiling,’<sup>15</sup> and the alien inside all of us. Discussions about the American literary tradition allow CASAR to examine perceptions of historic narratives and conflicting identities in American society.

In addition, participants grappled with questions of imperialism, social justice, and identity through artistic representation. In the final conference session, Dr. Marilyn Hacker and Dr. Khaled Mattawa performed original poetry for participants. Drs. Munira (assistant professor of Anthropology at AUC), Yasmine (assistant professor of Comparative Literature at Rutgers University), and Rola (instructor at the Columbia University School of Art) Khayyat addressed the legacy of imperialism through an anthro-poetic performance. Their piece, entitled “Pieces of U.S.: The Intimate as Imperial Archives,” drew on their grandfather’s photographic archives and their mother’s autobiography. The book discusses their mother’s experience growing up on an ARAMCO compound in Saudi Arabia and living in Beirut during the civil war. Through their disciplines of anthropology, literature, and photography, the Khayyat sisters grapple with questions of identity, violence, and family after growing up between two empires. These performances offer participants an opportunity to witness the role of performing arts as a form of social commentary.

Egypt and America’s shared artistic tradition provides numerous avenues for cooperation and cultural exchange. Ancient Egyptian culture provided the inspiration for American sculpture and architecture, which continue to impact these fields today. The field of translation has traditionally connected the two cultures; the West’s initial interest in the Arab World was heavily influenced by translation of Arab literary masterpieces. However, there is a substantial risk in perpetuating Orientalist tropes in translation which must be considered. CASAR supports the effort to translate Arab-American literature into Arabic, thereby increasing exposure to these important

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<sup>15</sup> This term figuratively describes the institutional and cultural barriers to Asian-American professional success, specifically their ability to hold leadership positions.

diasporic voices. Travel writing, a genre marginalized by the advent of the travel blog, presents opportunity to amplify regional voices and enhance cross-cultural understanding. Literary and cinematic works also provide a platform for critiquing culture and drawing attention to societal challenges. As shown by the success of the AUC-AUB Rumpus conference, literature can be a useful medium for resistance and a theoretical framework for analyzing political and economic development. It is a channel many employ to address questions of identity and empire, which is more accessible to the average citizen. CASAR's outreach work emphasized the importance of shedding light on cross-cultural artistic cooperation between Egypt and the United States and enhancing this current partnership.

### *Conclusion*

Despite the international attention given to the political and economic aspect of Arab-American relations, it is perhaps cultural cooperation which best creates enduring bonds between nationals. In this regard, CASAR considers its cultural programs events a key element of its outreach and an integral part of its mission. The shared societal challenges and tradition of cultural collaboration offer promising avenues for cooperation between the Arab World and the United States. To preserve and strengthen these bonds, it is important to honestly critique harmful societal norms and systems of oppression which enable injustice to flourish. This includes reframing historic narratives that ignore actors' roles in perpetuating oppression or discusses contemporary events without acknowledging contextual influences. It also involves celebrating societal progress, artistic achievement, and international solidarity. Finally, CASAR examined the ways in which the Arab World and the U.S. are discussed in academic settings and assessed their ability to adequately present the current situation. It is CASAR's hope that embracing the importance of Transnational American Studies is a modality for fostering mutual understanding at the academic and community levels.

While the societal experience in Egypt and the U.S. is quite different, they face similar challenges. The growing economic inequality worldwide is indicative of over-glorification of capitalism and wealth accumulation. In both societies, institutionalized racism and sexism impact how racial minorities and women access resources and relate to society. In the U.S., the prison industrial complex and police brutality were two of the main issues participants at CASAR events identified. For Egypt, participants advocated for a more comprehensive approach to improve the status of women, beginning with their legal status. Growing religious intolerance is also a challenge that impacts both the Arab World and the U.S. Countering this trend is paramount to improving domestic and international relations. In addition to these shared challenges, CASAR's work highlighted transnational activism and solidarity. The example of BDS and BLM underscores the challenges and benefits to approaching resistance in coordination. CASAR is committed to furthering societal critique and supporting transnational movements of resistance.

In addition to shared societal critique, CASAR emphasized the influential roles of film, literature, and art in Egypt and the U.S. Its documentary film program used cinema as a medium for depicting everyday life in America and drawing parallels in Egypt. In literature, outreach events covered the influence of ethnic newspapers on American audiences and the impact of narratives surrounding immigration. It also drew attention to Arab-American literary work and translation: CASAR believes ensuring Arab audiences access the work of diaspora communities is paramount to its mission. Translation is another important field the center discussed and the decisions made by translators impact worldwide perceptions of the Arab World. Finally, CASAR's programs linked developments in American architecture, sculpture, and drawing to Ancient Egyptian influences. Focusing on the relationship between American and Egyptian artists creates an apolitical channel for cooperation between the Arab World and the U.S.

*Included below is a list of CASAR events pertaining to Art, Society & Culture. For complete coverage and comprehensive reports on each event, please refer to CASAR's official website.*

1. American Experience Film Series with English & Comparative Literature Department (2016-2017).
2. "American Studies, Egyptian Scholarship" conference, (April 3, 2014).
3. Andrew Lam, "The Changing Face of American Media," (December 1, 2013).
4. Andrew Lam, "War and Peace: Vietnamese Diaspora at 40 Years Old," (December 2, 2013).
5. Dalia Bassiouny, "Nine Parts of Desire: Translating Arab-American Theater into Arabic," (May 13, 2014).
6. Erik Blome, "Public Art in America: Public Monuments and Public Sculpture" (April 23, 2012).
7. Fawaz Gerges, "ISIS and the Jihadist Movement: Change and Continuity," (March 29, 2015).
8. Hisham Al-Aidi, "Empire State of Mind: Race, Music and Democracy Promotion," (May 4, 2014).
9. John Carlos Rowe, "American Orientalism after Said," (October 31, 2011).
10. John Carlos Rowe, "Arabia Fantasia: U.S. Literary Culture and the Middle East," (November 1, 2011).
11. Joshua Maricich and Will Reynolds, "The Winds of Change: Sailing the Nile in 100 Days" (October 17, 2012).
12. Mostafa Bayoumi, "Ranters, Racists, and Revolutionaries: Muslim Minority Politics and How Technology Facilitates Both Hate and Healing," (November 26, 2012).

13. Richard Findley, “The Scarritt Arcade and Office Tower: Influences of the American Chicago School,” (March 13, 2012).
14. “Rumpus: America and the Age of Trump” conference, (May 13-14, 2017).
15. Ruthie Gilmore, “Prisons, Criminalization and Fragmented Space: Contextualizing Black Lives Matter,” (February 16, 2015).
16. Ruthie Gilmore, “The Black Radical Tradition: Continuities and Breaks in Liberation Culture,” (February 18, 2015).
17. Sarah Sewall, “The Role of Women in Overcoming Egypt’s Economic and Security Challenges in the 21st Century;” (February 10, 2016).
18. SareeMakdisi “Occidentalism: Making England Western,” (October 29, 2013).
19. “The Politics and Practice of American Studies in the Middle East: A conference on Transnational American Studies,” (Spring 2013).
20. Vijay Prashad, “Why Are You Interested in the United States?” (February 24, 2014).

## CLOSURE

Over the last few years, the Arab World and the United States' experiences can only be characterized as tumultuous, and the future presents questions. While Egypt enters 2018 more politically and economically stable than in years prior, the region as a whole is far from calm. Conflicts continue to rage across the Arab World, the Gulf States are attempting radically to diversify their economies, and misgivings persist about the role of non-Arab actors in the greater Middle East. The United States is still mired in controversy after the 2016 elections, and the social divides will take time to heal. President Trump suffers from record-low approval rates, but this could change with the president acquiring diplomatic skills and clearer vision over the years. His approach to foreign policy lacks clarity, which further clouds predictions for the future. However, one thing is clear: the relationship between the Arab World and the United States will be of the utmost importance.

In the early days of his presidency, Donald Trump has rolled out the red carpet for Arab leaders and reaffirmed the traditional U.S. privileging of alliances over human rights narratives, two decisions which radically differed from the Obama administration. Despite these developments, which regional leaders welcomed, his decision to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem was internationally condemned. If we can define Trump's initial foreign policy doctrine, it is by his commitment to unilateral interventionism and his willingness to change his mind about fundamental political issues. It is still too early to tell whether the protean nature of Trump will be the foundation of his foreign policy strategy and future doctrine, or whether it will prove that he has no doctrine. At this point, there is no confirmation that President Trump has a clear vision about the prevailing crises in the Middle East region or their dimensions, implications, or methods of termination. How the Arab World handles Trump's novel approach will go a long way in determining the short-term trajectory of this relationship, as will developments in the regional conflicts.

However, the nature of the Arab-American partnership transcends the personal relationship between heads of state. Most importantly, Washington needs to focus on regaining the Arab Street's trust after decades of unwarranted meddling in internal affairs and the Islamophobic rhetoric employed during the 2016 election cycle. There is a storied history of Arab-American cooperation, which can serve as a building block for the future. Understanding this relationship as one of equals is the first step Washington must take to enhance cooperation with the Arab World. With this in mind, CASAR's work as an American Studies institute in the Arab World is of the utmost importance. It must continue to disseminate knowledge to AUC students and the wider community, while providing a platform for discussion and debate about the nature of this relationship.

With this goal in mind, CASAR's outreach program is designed to touch upon the most important political, economic, and cultural developments in the U.S. and the Arab World. Since the Center is housed in AUC's School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, the political and diplomatic relationships are central to students' academic growth. This was particularly true after the Arab Spring, as states needed to reconsider and recalibrate their policies in light of governance changes. However, the cultural wealth of the Arab World and the U.S. provided ample opportunity for discussion. As leaders come and go, CASAR is committed to ensuring the traditional relationship between the Egyptian and American people endures. In the face of growing mistrust, xenophobia, and nativism, this approach is of the utmost importance.

CASAR attempted to shed light on America's political intentions towards the Arab World through robust dialogue. In this regard, CASAR supplemented its academic course offerings with student-tailored extracurricular activities. Event participants, particularly students, had the opportunity to ask experts tough questions about Washington's support for Israeli occupation of Palestine and armed interventions in Libya and Iraq. American experts were able to present their perspectives to Arab youth with an interest in policy and governance. Its regional and international conferences became a

hub for knowledge exchange and intellectual growth while serving as an incubator for permanent partnerships. Above all, the analysis and reports CASAR disseminated kept a pulse on the rapid changes in the Arab World in a neutral and fact-based manner.

Over the last years, it was equally important that CASAR remained on the forefront of Transnational American Studies. The U.S.' worldwide influence is undeniable, but too often the discussions focus on the outcome of Washington's actions as opposed to the rationale behind them. Similarly, the U.S. often escapes harsh critique over its domestic human rights abuses, institutionalized discrimination, and legacy of genocide and mass atrocity. As an American Studies center in the Arab World, CASAR presented students a narrative of the U.S. which frankly portrayed the good, as well as the bad. Participants at its events drew parallels between the challenges the U.S. faced moving forward and those plaguing the region. By situating the Trump presidency within the larger historical context of settler colonialism, white supremacy, institutionalized misogyny, and unsustainable capitalism, CASAR reframed the popular sentiments of surprise and confusion which accompanied the 2016 election results. This also provided space to discuss modalities for international solidarity and activism against overlapping systems of oppression. A more just international system cannot be achieved in isolation fostering these relationships is a small step towards this ultimate goal.

The richness of our Website is proof to the immense work CASAR has achieved throughout the last few years, of which I take pride. The records of our events are part of the public domain, offering researchers, policy-makers, and the general public insight into how the Arab World perceived local and international events. This narrative is important; these eight years reflect a determined and documented movement towards incremental changes. In addition to specific program reports, this narrative provides a comprehensive overview of the conversations which occurred in Cairo. It is my sincere hope that this program narrative, which thematically presents CASAR's outreach program, will assist those with an interest in the Arab World in their endeavors and enhance mutual understanding.

I have ensured CASAR covered a vast spectrum of issues, ranging from foreign policy to the fine arts during my eight years as director. I have given CASAR a name and exposed it at the national and regional levels with a reputation of which AUC can be proud. I have tried to make use of the expertise of national, regional and international experts who were invited by CASAR, as well as hold a number of seminars and workshops to benefit the AUC community and beyond. It was particularly important that events were geared towards AUC students and youth communities, as they will be the key to the future of Arab-U.S. relations. There is still plenty of work to be done to achieve CASAR's goal of furthering mutual understanding between the MENA region and the United States. In this regard, the Center remains a work in progress. As director, I earnestly hope that the narrative contained in this book will serve as a solid basis to build on as AUC thrives to elevate CASAR to a state of the art research center producing high-caliber work on Egypt and in the Arab World. With my modest achievements, I hope that I have brought CASAR a little closer to realizing these aspirations.

Last but not least I would like to extend my gratitude and deepest thanks to all who helped in making CASAR what it is today. In particular, I would like to acknowledge GAPP's dean, Ambassador Nabil Fahmy, a career-long colleague who was always there to give us a push in the right direction. I would also like to recognize the support of my assistant and associate, Yasmin El Ghazaly, who has served with me throughout my stay at AUC and has spared no effort to ensure the success of CASAR. I am especially grateful to her for always keeping the website up to date. Last but not least my thanks go to Claire McNally, without her generous assistance, this book might have never come to fruition.

**GALLERY**  
**CASAR (2012-2018)**



Welcome to CASAR!



Welcome to CASAR!



Ambassador Dr. Magda Shahin, CASAR Director



Yasmeeen El-Ghazaly – CASAR  
Assistant Director



CASAR Meeting room



Convening with CASAR donor HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal at the Prince Alwaleed Director's meeting at the University of Cambridge – May 2016



Arab – US Relations Conference, Marriot Zamalek, 29-30 January, 2017



Arab American Institute in Washington Delegation event  
-Jan 17, 2016



Daniel Kurtzer lecture – February 4, 2015



FawazGergis lecture – March 30, 2015



Egypt – US Relations Conference, Marriot Zamalek – May 2014



Walter Mead lecture – Dec. 4, 2014



Celebrating CASAR's 10 year anniversary with the Arch Stanton Quartet Jazz Band – March 2013



Egypt- U.S. Relations symposium – June 2013