



# Carolinas Committee on U.S.–Arab Relations

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## Modernization in the Gulf: The Case of Qatar

*Joe P. Dunn, Converse College*

I study political development and I have had the opportunity to spend time on the ground in many countries undergoing dramatic political change. In graduate school in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I focused on the Soviet Union, and over my teaching career I watched the evolution and devolution of that political system. I visited Russia and several communist Eastern Europe countries in the mid-1970s. In the last

couple of years, I have journeyed to several Eastern Europe countries to observe the present situation in the region twenty-five years after the fall of communism, and I have made two recent trips to Cuba, where change is clearly afoot. I have on-the-ground experience in places such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Ghana, and much of the Middle East, including most recently Iraqi Kurdistan, which have all experienced significant economic

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and political development in the last decades. The dramatic modernization in the Arab world spurred by the intense forces of globalization, and in the Gulf region, by hydrocarbon rentier economies, remains a major area of interest.

Having participated in study trips to four of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and UAE) and three of the aspirant members (Iraq, Jordan, and Morocco), I seized the offer to be a member of the week-long Qatar Malone Fellowship travel-study experience for Model Arab League faculty and students. The trip in December 2014 provided an opportunity to observe the dramatic modernization/development taking place in this small country.

A bit of background first. Qatar, a peninsular country smaller than Connecticut that juts off Saudi Arabia into the Arabian Gulf, has a population of slightly more than 2.1 million with Qataris comprising less than 20% of that total. The rest are "residents" that fall in several classes. South and Southeast Asian immigrants, the largest number from India and Pakistan, on contract labor agreements, do most of the manual work. Europeans, North Americans, Arabs, and other professionals from around the globe staff government agencies, NGOs, Qatari companies, and foreign businesses. Simply put, the small Qatari work force could not begin to handle the scope and myriad of tasks that the ambitious nation has set for itself. The country intends to expand its population two fold in the next decade; the building of the infrastructure for this quest is seen everywhere.

Qatar has oil, the twelfth largest reserves in the world, but liquid natural gas (LNG), the energy source of the future, is the primary resource of the country. Qatar

possesses the world's third largest reserves of natural gas and it is the second leading global exporter of LNG. Iran has the second largest gas reserves; however, international sanctions inhibit the country's ability to export. This situation might soon change, and both the U.S. and China may have even larger untapped reserves; however, it is safe to assume that LNG will be an invaluable source of Qatari revenue for the immediate and longer-term future. Qatar is also a world leader in gas-to-liquid (GTL), green bio-diesel, and other environmentally-friendly technologies that will become increasingly more important in coming decades.

Qatar desires regional and world attention and respect. The way that it handles the extraordinary resources at its disposal to pursue modernization and social/political development will determine its image on the world scene. The country has witnessed its peers in the region address modernization and has had the opportunity to learn from their achievements, mistakes, and social/cultural tensions. Doha is an aspirant Dubai with all the latter's glitter and international standing. Although similarities with the UAE exist, significant cultural differences are equally evident. Generalizations are dangerous, but I will risk a few.

Qatar stems from the same tribal family alliances and Wahhabi Muslim tradition as Saudi Arabia. This makes Qatar quite different from the conservative but decidedly cosmopolitan Dubai. However, Doha has much more in common with Dubai and Abu Dhabi than with the more insular and provincial Riyadh. Doha's surging 1.3 million population is only slightly smaller than Dubai (at 1.5 million, the largest Gulf city). Doha's Philharmonic Orchestra (with musicians from 30 countries),

Opera House, Film Festival, and jazz, theatre, and choral groups project Qatar's modern global image. The diverse population includes 8.5% Christians and 14% other faiths, primarily Hindus and other Indian religions. The government has provided financial support for building churches and religious centers in the country. However, traditional cultural is important to Doha, as well illustrated in the Katara Cultural Center and the fabulous facility of the Museum of Islamic Art, which contains one of the finest collections in the world.

Hosting international sporting events has become a means of garnering world attention. Dubai and Abu Dhabi have established their stature as hosts to numerous high-profile international events. Kuwait secured the world championships in team squash (2015) and men's and women's bowling (2017); Bahrain has hosted world American football competitions, golf and international formula racing championships, and it is scheduled for the Asian handball and the world sailboat championships. Qatar's aspirations surpass all of its Gulf neighbors. Doha already has hosted many international sports championships in swimming, aquatics, track and field, gymnastics, volleyball, tennis, motor racing, sailing, handball, golf, and horse racing, to name only a few. Between January 2014 and March 2015 Qatar was home to 99 sports championships, which included 43 international events and five world championships. Our group was present for the World Short Course Swimming Championships in December.

Acquiring the World Track and Field Championship in 2019 was a major feat for Qatar, but nothing can compare to the prestige of the FIFA 2022 World Cup to be held in Doha. Soccer may be secondary in America, but it is the sport of the globe, and the World

Cup surpasses the Olympics for the majority of the so-called Third World. Qatar's successful bid for the World Cup has engendered continuing international political controversy. Beyond this, the challenge to the country's social and ecological infrastructure will be significant. Nevertheless, the nation is focused on preparation. The proposed expenditures include eight to twelve stadiums that are marvels of architecture at a cost in the billions, a brand new metro system under construction to support transportation for the events, tens of thousands of world-class hotel rooms, and a total infrastructure development such as the world has seldom witnessed. All this will focus considerable attention on an event that will take place in a desert country where summer temperatures can reach 120 degrees. The Qatari response is "We plan to succeed." Already the country intends to extend another bid for the Olympics, which it has attempted twice previously. Qatar has facilities and a sports development program that reaches down to very young children to prepare athletes to win Olympic and other world competition medals. Qatar is not lacking in ambition or in the resources to achieve its goals.

However, the core element of modernization, development, and reform is the political structure. Qatar is defined as a constitutional monarchy with the 2005 constitution proclaiming the country as a democracy. That claim is quite a stretch. Elections occur, but the fact is that the emir is a hereditary ruler with both legislative and executive power. A 35-member Advisory Council, appointed by the emir, debates matters assigned to it and can pass resolutions subject to the emir's approval. The constitution was amended in 2003 to allow for direct election of the Council but the first

elections, scheduled for 2013, were postponed indefinitely when Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani abdicated to his son in June 2013.

The 38-year-old Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hammad Al-Thani has pursued a progressive agenda. Sharia law is proclaimed as the principal source of legislation and judicial matters, but it is increasingly limited to personal and family matters. The rights for women have improved; however, they are a long way from equality. As one commentator reflected, "Even if Sharia is curtailed to only a small portion of the political/judicial system, for women the issues of family, divorce, children, and women's rights are the very issues that are decisive for them." Sharia is not equal for women, and its influence constitutes a challenge within any Muslim society that does not define itself as secular.

Qatar decidedly wishes to be considered a modern global society, but culture and tradition, including conservative Islamic practices, provide challenges. Moreover, a society with only a small percentage of its population eligible for citizenship raises inherent issues. Treatment of foreign workers has drawn just international scrutiny. Qatar constantly invokes the mantra of compliance with "international norms and standards" for virtually every aspect of the economy and society. Qataris proudly proclaim their membership in and adherence to the practices of the whole range of world organizations. The large portion of the society managed by NGOs and foreign contracted agencies creates an environment with emphasis on "international norms" in labor rights, environmental issues, and best practices principles and codes. However, the deaths and injuries of foreign workers, especially in the brutal heat, which have been investigated by the

foreign press, cannot be dismissed. Qatar has acknowledged abuses, and it appeals for time to make the necessary adjustments. How fast the changes occur will be a test of the nation's progress.

Within the citizen population, pressures for more robust democratization appear to be minor. The homogeneity of Sunni Qatari with only a tiny Shia citizen population (unlike all its Gulf neighbors), the high standard of living, relatively progressive leadership, and minimal overt oppression, mitigate demands for greater public involvement in political affairs. Not everyone accepts the globalized Western trends. A strong *Salafist* strain exists in the country, and some Qatari citizens are major contributors to jihadist groups. Like its Gulf neighbors, Qatari leadership fears that fuller democracy will aid and abet the fundamentalist threat.

Qatar cannot escape the problems, including jihadist challenges and terrorist threats inherent in the region. Its relationships with its immediate neighbors over territory, policies, and alliances are often tense. All the Arab countries differ over support and opposition to the varied political movements swirling in the region. To many other Arabs, Qatar is an upstart nation attempting to assert a greater influence than its short history justifies. Its relationship with Iran is as nuanced and sometimes difficult to define as are its associations with the U.S. and the West. This tiny country attempts a delicate and tricky balancing act among many contradictory alliances, friends, partners, and adversaries. How it will all play out is uncertain. What is certain though is that Qatar is important and it promises to continue to be in the future. The country intends to be taken seriously and it must be.

## 10 Days in Qatar: A Political Scientist's Observations on a Society in Transition

Thomas Doleys, Kennesaw State University

ARRIVAL: The day is November 29, 2014. Less than an hour ago the wheels of our well-appointed Qatar Airways Boeing 777 touched down at Hamad International Airport. I just cleared customs and am currently standing in baggage claim with fourteen other Malone Fellows—ten undergraduates and four faculty colleagues. Anticipation is written on everyone's face. For many of us, it is our first time in the Middle East. For all of us, it is our first time in Qatar. A Europeanist by training and inclination, I am no expert in the region. So while I know enough to guess much of what I am about to see, I am far less certain what I will make of it. What follows is a brief chronicle and commentary on my experience.

Good form for a travelogue would be to begin the chronicle with a brief introduction to Qatar. But I could hope to do no better than Joe Dunn does in his lead article. I will spare the reader my efforts. Instead I will assume the reader has obtained a good sense for key geographic, demographic, and political features of this small Gulf state from the introductory piece.

There is one characteristic, however, that bears revisiting – the economy. Let's begin with the obvious. Qatar is a wealthy country. Nay, Qatar is a very, very wealthy country. Measured on a per capita basis, Qatar is the wealthiest country on earth. In 2012, Qatari GDP per capita topped \$100,000/year. [To put this in context, the next most wealthy country is Luxembourg with a GDP/capita of approximately \$80,000. US GDP/capita, by contrast, is roughly \$50,000.] Like other Gulf states, Qatar's wealth is found in

the hydrocarbon economy. But unlike its neighbors, whose wealth is built on the extraction and export of petroleum, Qatar is rich in – and has become rich by exploiting – natural gas. Apart from hydrocarbons and hydrocarbon-derivatives, though, Qatar has limited export. It has no other natural resources to exploit. It has no significant agricultural sector or indigenous industry.

Economists will tell you that to build an economy around the export of a single product or commodity is perilous – especially when that commodity is non-renewable. But it's not just the one-dimensional nature of the Qatari economy that creates perils the government tasked with managing it. The Qatari government must also attend to the social and political challenges associated with the rapid and massive accumulation of wealth attendant to the extraordinarily profitable export of hydrocarbons. How will the wealth be used? Who will benefit? Qataris need only look to Saudi Arabia next door to see understand that oil wealth alone does not a stable society make.

Enter the role of political leadership. Qatar is fortunate to be blessed with a forward-looking governing class. Led by Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Qatar has a plan for how to use the country's riches. The plan, known as *Qatar National Vision 2030*, looks to use the country's now plentiful resource to the benefit not only of the current generation, but for generations to come. To quote the government, *National Vision 2030* provides "a roadmap towards Qatar becoming an advanced society capable of sustainable development with the

goal of providing a high standard of living for all its citizens." This developmental blueprint is built on four pillars—economic development, social development, human development and environmental development. They provide both points of reference and policy direction to government efforts.

During our time in Qatar, we were given numerous opportunities to see government efforts to bring this national vision-to-reality. Our first such opportunity involved the *Qatar Foundation*. The Qatar Foundation is a government-funded non-profit entity dedicated to promoting education, science and research, and community development. The Qatar Foundation occupies an expansive campus on the outskirts of town. While on a tour of the grounds, our hosts gave special attention to an area of the campus known as *Education City*. Still under construction (as much is in Qatar), Education City is precisely what its name suggests. It is the institutional focal point for higher education in Qatar. What is particularly striking about the approach taken by the Qataris is that their effort is built around a core of six major American universities (Cornell, Georgetown, Northwestern, Carnegie Mellon, Texas A&M and Virginia Commonwealth). Each was invited to set up a branch campus in Education City for the specific, and narrow, goal of taking advantage of each institution's global reputation in a particular discipline. For instance, Georgetown was invited for its renown School of Foreign Service. Northwestern was brought in for its expertise in journalism and communication. Together the



amalgamation of foreign institutions constitute a new type university – one built by foreign partners but focused on the needs of the Qatari people.

The Qatari *National Vision* is not limited to quality of life measures. The Qataris have ambitions to become a regional, if not global, leader in targeted areas. One of these is transportation. The government expects Hamad International Airport to become a crossroads for intercontinental air traffic. Considerable progress has already been made toward this goal. In 2014, when it began operations, the airport had an annual carrying capacity of an impressive 23 million passengers. By 2030, the government intends to expand this capacity to 50 million – making it one, if not the, largest airport in the Middle East.

Another expression of Qatar's ambition is found in the area of

sport. Qataris are, I came to learn, sports mad. As Joe Dunn also notes in his piece, Qatar has hosted major sporting events in athletics, cycling, motor sports among others. But the goal is greater than simply to play host to major events, they are determined to compete in these events at the highest level. Emblematic of this ambition is the aptly-named *Aspire Academy*. The purpose of the academy is to scout Qatar for the very best athletic talent and provide them with world class coaching and training facilities. While I'm in no position to judge the quality of the scouting or coaching, I will say that the facilities are jaw-dropping. The *Aspire Dome*, the centerpiece of the complex, claims to be the largest indoor sports dome in the world – housing facilities for football (soccer), basketball, swimming/diving all under one roof. If Qatar athletes fail to excel, it won't be for

lack of resources or training.

One more observation about sport...and it is an observation of no small import since it goes to the intersection of sport and the much larger project of national development. In 2009, Qatar lodged a bid to host soccer's FIFA World Cup. In 2010, against all odds, it was awarded the 2022 games. Hosting the World Cup promises to be a transformational experience. On the one hand, preparations for the event will require a physical transformation. Indeed, one sees preparations everywhere. Roads are being laid. Public transport is being installed. Communication facilities are being designed. The airport is being expanded. Hotels are being built. All of this to meet the expectations associated with hosting the biggest event in sports.

But the transformation promises also to be psychological in nature. Hosting the World Cup means

inviting an estimated 1 million visitors into your home. And let's be clear, Qatar is a very conservative, tradition-bound home. How the Qataris approach the presence of "football tourists" will be revelatory. How will event planners and, more perhaps just as importantly, how will the Qatari people respond to the social, dietary, and entertainment expectations of a group that may be ill-prepared or disinclined to respect Qatari cultural sensibilities? Will they seek to cordon-off visitors? Or will visitor be invited to circulate freely? The rhetoric at present is one of inclusion. We'll see.

The eyes of the world will be on the Qatar as it gears up for the event. How well they address the challenges will go some distance in enhancing, or undermining, public perceptions. This, in turn, will impact their ability to achieve the regional and global aspire in areas far beyond sport. Interestingly, our group got a glimpse of where Qatar stands currently. It is the sense of this observer that Qataris - or at least the Qatari government - remain cautious of unconstrained engagement. Take our hotel. Opulent by any definition, it was also quite removed from the Doha city center. Further, we were urged not to leave the hotel grounds. Was this done for our own safety? Perhaps. But I wonder if it might not also have been motivated by risk aversion - better to shelter and guide visitors than to have them encounter situations that might not be easily understood or managed?

To be fair, Qatari could be forgiven for adopting a risk averse approach. For all the wonderful things we saw while in country, not all the news that emanates from Qatar is flattering. Take, for instance, the case of the imprisoned US couple that was much in the news last year. The Qatari authorities charged the couple (both of Asian decent) with the forced starvation and intent to murder one of their adopted

children (of African decent). There were suggestions, communicated in the press, that officials believed the parents were trafficking the children with the intent to harvest their organs. No evidence supporting these claims was ever presented. And yet, they were convicted and faced execution.

Fortunately, the situation was resolved when an appellate court overturned the couple's conviction. Still, the international press generated by the event - focusing as it did on issues of race and cultural stereotypes - did nothing to flatter Qatari culture or the legal system. To many, the event fed the narrative that Qatar may have attained a level of economic well-being similar to that enjoyed in the West, but the country remains either unwilling or unable to demonstrate a similar commitment to fundamental human rights.

I'm not sure such claims are either accurate or fair. But there is no doubting that the government continues to find itself the target of criticisms of this nature. The sensitivities - and tensions - over rights is nowhere more evident than in the conditions surrounding Qatar's 1.5 million foreign guest workers. Qatar has a small indigenous labor force - far too smaller to realize its developmental goals. The shortfall is covered by foreign nationals. Hailing mostly from South Asia, their presence is ubiquitous. They are landscapers. They work in shops. But the group that has received the most attention internationally are the tens of thousands who work among the forest of cranes that populate the Doha skyline. The foreign media is rife with claims that these workers are subject to exploitation and abuse.

The government is very sensitive to these claims. Officials we spoke with at the *Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy* - the body charged with overseeing World Cup preparations - made special point to

address them. They suggested the claims are wildly overblown and that the government has been vigilant in promoting the rights of workers. They further suggested that claims of exploitation and abuse amounted to a thinly veiled effort by outside elements to undermine Qatar's planning and were motivated by some combination of sour grapes, envy, and, at worst, outright anti-Arab racism.

As short term guests, we were obviously in no position to judge the veracity of claims made by either side. What was clear, though, is that it would be difficult to get to the truth. Civil society as we understand does not exist in Qatar. There are no labor unions. Non-governmental organizations, particularly foreign human rights organizations, do not operate freely. As a consequence, there is no societal check on government (in)action in the area of labor rights and human rights more generally. Does this mean that human rights abuses are rife? No. Does this mean we should dismiss government claims that it is being vigilant? Of course not. But it does lead one to wonder whether government claims can be trusted.

Skepticism noted, we did have occasion to speak with representatives of an entity that occupies some of the same policy space associated with NGOs. That entity is *The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC)*. The NHRC is quasi-independent institution whose mandate is to receive and respond to claims about human rights violations. It is not entirely clear, though, what action those who work for the body are empowered to take. The NHRC has no enforcement authority. The NHRC has no authority or mandate to initiate policy change. It has an advisory role, offering recommendation to government ministries and official who seek it counsel. But the authority to pass, implement and enforce such

legislation rests firmly in the hands of the Emir and his government.

Ongoing concerns about human rights notwithstanding, there are signs of change *qua* progress in Qatar. For instance, civil rights have been expanded in recent years. Women now have the right to vote and run for office (a rarity in the region). And measures have been taken to address the conditions that face guest workers. For instance, in 2013, the *Qatar Foundation* announced a code of conduct relating to workers' conditions. The key is to understand context. Though perhaps not as committed to liberal principles as external observers would like, Qatar compares favorably with its neighbors.

Qatar-watchers will note that the Emir has been mindful of calls for "more" rights. But one must understand that Qatar is a deeply conservative country. Despite being the ultimate authority in the land, the Emir must remain mindful of the social foundations of his power. He cannot risk alienating member of the ruling family, or, for that matter, other powerful elements of Qatari society. There is little reason to believe that he will (or can) take the country any farther, any faster than the people are willing to go.

This is why the 2022 World Cup is of such significance. The country has, in a sense, invited foreign scrutiny... and, indirectly, pressure for change. Doubtless, the government will receive many plaudits for its achievements. And those plaudits will be richly deserved. But there will also be criticisms and calls for change. Those calls can be expected to get louder as 2022 approaches. I have little sense for how the government, or the population, will handle these pressures. I leave such analyses for those more well-versed in Qatar culture and politics than I. I will say, however, that I, like much of the world, will be watching.

## Qatar Through the Lens: A Photographer's Perspective

Gabriella Chamberland, Converse College

I was filled with excitement and anticipation as our flight lifted off from Dulles International Airport in Washington, DC to begin our adventure to Qatar. Though prepared by our pre-trip orientation lectures at the National Council on US-Arab Relations, I also had lots of anxiety. I wanted to fully embrace the culture and capture everything I saw with my camera, but I also had concerns about the nature of society that I would be visiting.

At first I used my camera as a shield. Reading about the Middle East is nothing like suddenly being dropped into the quite different world of Doha, Qatar. Finding oneself surrounded by men in the white robes referred to as thobes and women clad in mysterious flowing black abayas can be utterly intoxicating and disorienting. I wanted to reach

out and touch the women and ask them about their lives and about their spiritual nature. But I didn't want to pry, look ignorant or chauvinistically American, or be interpreted as insensitive. I had to fight my natural tendency to be giddy or silly in these situations to cover my uncertainty. I was caught between a desire to know and interact but not to act disrespectful. What were my boundaries?

So I hid myself behind my lens taking pictures of my surroundings to study them later on and gain some sort of better understanding before turning myself loose to interrelate with the people of Qatar. As my culture shock subsided, my lens became a means of connection rather than a wall of safety.

As a photographer, I record most activities. I could not record our

Gabby and Friends



many meetings on film, but I could capture all that surrounded these sessions. I found several differences from shooting in America. People did not tend to exaggerate their actions in front of the camera lens for effect. Especially the women were reserved, more apt to shield their faces from moments that I wished to capture. Normally, when I present myself as a photographer, people are excited to have their images recorded with my large cameras. But in some interpretations of Islam, and Qatar with its Wahhabi background is in this tradition, depicting living forms

can be the first step to idolatry or the veneration of anything but Allah.

My study of Islam had taught me that this is why calligraphy and patterns are the staples of Islamic and Middle Eastern art. As photography become prevalent and easily accessible to the masses, Muslims have had varied ways of interpreting how being photographed should be interpreted in the framework of the Islamic way of life. For many Muslims today, photographs are as much a part of life as for those of any other culture, but for others how a picture might be interpreted, family

Lamp Shop



considerations, issues of prestige or shame are part of the dynamic of a picture. The photographer must be cautious and respectful of the context of shooting individuals, especially women.

I took hundreds and hundreds of pictures during my few days in Qatar, but my most memorable incident is also my favorite remembrance of the country. One night we visited the souq, a traditional market with many winding corridors filled with cloth, antiques, hookahs, jewelry, household goods, and more. Wandering down the cobbled alleyway awash with yellow light, I lost myself in the surroundings, my soul at home among the shop owners and the women bartering over the prices of goods. I stepped into a shop with mosaic hanging lamps that bathed the area in vibrant pools of colored light. This beauty had to be photographed. Shortly, the shop owner came up to me to ask if I desired to buy one of the magnificent mosaic lamps. Sadly I had neither the money nor the space in my suitcase for such a purchase. Nevertheless, he invited me to photograph his shop.

After 45 minutes of talking and photographing the man's shop and favorite possessions, I had to hurry away to join our group for dinner. Though it was only a moment of my life, the time was transformative. The universality of all humanity was never more prevalent than when I connected with this shopkeeper about art, writhing, photography, and finding one's place.

As I look at my photographs of the kind old man standing in the middle of his shop, a contented smile upon his face, I have hope that we all can find our place without fear of others chastising lifestyle choices or culture, his shining mosaic lamps symbolizing the varied and singular tapestry of all humanity.

*Gabby graduated from Converse in May with a major in Politics. She will teach and be the associate director of an NGO working with children in Indonesia.*

Group at Beach



## Women in Saudi Arabia: Slow and Measured Change

*Lauren Ziegler, Senior Politics and French Major, Converse College*

Through a fellowship program administered by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, I had the opportunity to travel to Saudi Arabia in December/January this past winter. Prior to my trip, I possessed, as is the case for most Americans, almost total lack of knowledge and considerable amounts of myth and prejudice about the country. The experience was enlightening. Much about life and practices in the Kingdom remains mysterious and inexplicable to my Western mind, but I do understand a bit more now. As a student at a woman's college, the condition of women in Saudi Arabia was of

particular concern.

A central component of Western prejudices focuses on the condition of women in this restrictive culture. It is widely known that women in Saudi Arabia do not have the legal right to drive a vehicle within the country, the only nation in the world that adheres to this practice. This fact is appalling to Americans because the ability to come and go whenever we wish is a central element of our basic conception of freedom. Reliance on a man to perform this function offends our sense of equality and fairness. What I learned is that whether or not

we believe that this cultural practice is absurd or oppressive, we have to understand it within the context of a culture very different than the values of our own. The solution is not as easy as saying give women the right to drive. Frankly, most Saudis, men and women, would opt for that solution. The recently deceased King Abdullah was on record in support of the change. But driving is only an external manifestation of a deeper cleavage of cultural values within the society. Things change very slowly in Saudi Arabia which is extremely cautious about all the implications of any break from tradition. Do most women

want the right to drive? I can't answer that question, but I can say that for many women it is far less important than other changes that they desire. Cultural changes can be revolutionary, and whatever Saudi Arabia is, it is not revolutionary.

In prior times, women's lack of access to education was truly oppressive. The changes in the last several decades in this realm are almost revolutionary, and in fact may well be the spark of cultural revolution. Education is the most substantial step women can take to further their personal development. King Abdullah established funds for women to pursue bachelor's degrees in Saudi Arabia and abroad. Thousands of women, who have the consent of their families, have availed themselves of this opportunity and women significantly outnumber men in universities.

We visited King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh, which maintains two separate campuses for men and women located a few blocks from one another. On our delegation, the men toured the men's campus and the women, the female institution. The women's campus had a high wall that divided the front entrance from the main lobby to allow no transparency from the front sidewalk into the building. The faculty, student, and staff members were all women, which provide a safe learning environment for women to study. KSU has a large Health Sciences Division that includes Schools of Dentistry and Pharmacology as well as general medical studies. A department of 'Translation Studies' includes Arabic, English, and French languages.

In Jeddah we also visited Effat University, a women's liberal arts college that resonated for

me as a student at a liberal arts women's college myself. Effat has recently received accreditation for undergraduate and graduate studies in fields such as psychology, engineering, and various humanities studies. Just as at KSU, education for both men and women emphasizes science and technology to serve the needs of Saudi Arabia, but it was gratifying to see that the liberal arts is increasingly granted its place as "the soul of life" in balance with job market skills. I enjoyed the opportunity to speak with these impressive, empowered women and ask questions about the role of covering in Islam and specifically in Saudi Arabia. In the United States the image of covered Muslim women often is interpreted as suppression and oppression. I found the issue to be more complicated. Saudi women take modesty seriously, and many see this as a true expression of their faith. Their interpretation of proper modesty though varies by individual, family, region of the country, and specific circumstances. For example, one young lady stated that she covers her face with the *niqab*, but her mother simply wears a *hijab* that covers her hair because of their respective differences in interpretation of women's modesty in Islam.

I learned of several accounts where women in positions of authority wear *hijabs* in public but wore *niqabs* or even *burkas* when participating in televised interviews and ceremonial processions. Female television personalities vary quite considerably from those who cover extensively to those who attire themselves on the television screen similar to Western women. No common practice exists as each woman follows her own interpretation in terms of dress

and make-up for the public arena. It was fascinating to speak candidly about this subject and I don't know if I am clearer or more confused as a result. I enjoyed the opportunity to experience covering myself and how I viewed the external world differently through this lens.

Other topics that we discussed included birth control, the size of families, and perceptions about the pace of change for women in the Kingdom. Effat provides child care for every student and faculty member to make it easier for women to pursue education. The women were quite forthright and optimistic about continuing changes, although they know it will come slowly. One student stated that "social aspects are collectivistic, not individualistic. Any progress has to be for the greater good of the Kingdom, not for a select few." She continued that this applied to both social and political adjustments, and it will take decades to modify deeply set traditions.

During my trip I learned that Saudis understand how they are depicted in the American public and they do not believe that it is an adequate representation of the reality. They believe that the positive aspects of gradual change are not given enough credit and that the media focuses on that which is most shocking and offensive to Westerners. Saudi Arabia is not monolithic but a diverse society that continues to struggle with blending modern Western culture, with which they must deal in the international economic environment, with a unique and traditional lifestyle based on long history and practices. Saudi Arabians are "many and varied" and we who view them from the outside must take this into account in our perspectives.





At Bahrain Embassy

## At NMAL Converse Completes Another Good Year

Converse College completed another very successful year with a Distinguished Delegation Award at the 35<sup>th</sup> National Model Arab League, held April 9-12 on the Georgetown University campus. Converse garnered awards in eight of the ten venues, which included the eight councils, the Arab Court of Justice, and the Joint Crisis Council.

The conference opened with a powerful and disturbing presentation on the plight of Gaza by Bill Corcoran, President and CEO of American Near East

Refugee Aid. National Council President Dr. John Duke Anthony followed with an inspirational call for students to prepare and commit themselves to becoming meaningful actors in a challenging world. Retired Congressman Paul Findley made brief remarks that evening at the conference banquet. The faculty enjoyed a Friday lunch presentation on the situation in the region by HE Lukman Faily, Iraqi Ambassador to the United States, and a Saturday breakfast speech and question and answer on Syria

and Lebanon by Dr. Imad Harb, Distinguished International Affairs Fellow with the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. HE Mohammed Alhussaini Alsharif, Ambassador of the League of Arab States, spoke about the challenges of ISIS and jihadist ideology at the closing ceremony.

Beyond the work of the eight councils and the slate of cases in the Arab Court of Justice, the Joint Crisis Council, in its second year, provided an exciting venue. For the entire weekend, the members of the this council,

divided into Kurdistan Regional Government and Republic of Iraq delegations struggled with the issues of cooperation and conflict between the two entities, including oil exporting, distribution of revenues, local vs. national priorities, and common ISIS security issues. A simulated major crisis ensued with the announcement of popular uprisings in Dohuk and the declaration of a Yezhidi-Christian enclave. Faculty members appeared as expert witnesses or political figures in newscasts, interviews, question and answer sessions throughout the weekend. The lively council

is always a favorite for those who participate in it.

In the final awards, Northeastern University (Jordan), Converse (Bahrain), Georgia State University (Tunisia), and the American University of Cairo (Lebanon) took top honors. Sidney Jones (Converse) in the Joint Defense Council and Stephanie Leahy (Northeastern) in the Political Council were judged the Outstanding Chairs and April Sanders-Aboulila (Palestinian Council) was cited as a Distinguished Chair.

Other participating universities included Mercer,

Shawnee State, Texas State at San Marcos, Grand Valley State, George Mason, Northwestern, Adrian College, Roger Williams, Arkansas--Little Rock, the U.S. Military Academy, Kennesaw State, University of Houston-Clear Lake, University of Houston-Honors College, Miami University of Ohio, Brigham Young, George Washington, Utah, York College of Glendon University (Canada), and John Carroll University.

Stephanie Leahy will serve as the Secretary General for the 2016 National Model and Converse was proud to receive six chair positions for next year.

Converse Bahrain Delegation



## NEWS AND ARTICLES



### Another Successful Southeast Regional Model Arab League

The Southeast Model Arab League convened at Converse College, March 13-15, 2015, with seventeen delegations representing seven states. New first time participants were Hollins University, Western Kentucky University, Georgia Southern University, and Seneca High School. Three high schools participated this year, including returners Spartanburg Day School and Southside Christian Academy (Greenville) along with Seneca High. The high school students were well prepared and a student from each school

garnered a council award. At the Opening Event, a panel of three students and two faculty members who had participated on the Model League Fellowship Travel-Study trips to Saudi Arabia and to Qatar spoke about their experiences. Secretary General Brandy Blanton with the assistance of Assistant Secretary General Melanie Waddell then opened the Plenary Session.

Although all eight regular councils were engaging, the Joint Crisis Council, in its second year of operation, was a favorite. Participants on JCC devoted the

entire weekend to the problems and interplay between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan in a non-stop series of overlapping crises which touched on the whole region and indeed the globe. Guest appearances in JCC to provide information, insights, and conflicting perspectives on matters before the body included Secretary of State John Kerry, "an academic expert" on ISIS, and various international diplomats from Saudi Arabia, China, and Russia. Beyond the JCC, various other committees also dealt with other simulated crises, including

## NEWS AND ARTICLES

Iranian involvement in Yemen, a disastrous environmental oil spill, and rumors of CBW usage in Syria.

Through the judges' votes and peer assessment, the Outstanding Delegate Awards went to Bahrain (Converse), Iraq (Converse), and Tunisia (Georgia State). Honorable Mention citations were given to Kuwait (Georgia Perimeter), Egypt (Georgia Southern), and Lebanon (Jacksonville State). Lauren Ziegler (Joint Defense Council) and Sidney Jones (Palestinian Affairs Council) from Converse shared the Outstanding Chair Award with Meghan Oakes (Environmental) from Virginia Tech as Honorable Mention.



The evening banquet was replaced this year with a Sunday luncheon which worked nicely with the pace of the conference.

In sum the Southeast Model continues to evolve and it remains a very successful conference.

*Brandy Blanton, SERMAL Secretary-General, presents the Outstanding Chair Award*



## Southside Christian School Wins Again at National High School Model Arab League

For the second year in a row, Southside Christian School, Greenville, SC, garnered top awards at the National High School Model Arab League conference, held April 25 in Washington, DC. With only seven delegates, Southside Christian was able to fill only three of the six councils, but the team of Carson Polk and Kathleen Sowder took the outstanding delegate award in the Social Affairs Councils and Susan Survance and Jake Day were recognized with honorable mention in the Political Affairs Council. Other members of the delegation were Katie Wray, George Davis, and Lauren Martin. Wray and Martin had received honorable mention at the Southeast Regional College Model (SERMAL), held in March at Converse College. Overall at the National High School Model, Southside Christian, which represented the UAE, received Honorable Mention behind the winning school, which entered 27 delegates.

While in Washington, the Southeast students were guests at the UAE Embassy and attended church services at the National Cathedral.

Idell Koury, the faculty sponsor of the delegation, thanked the young women from Converse College who assisted in preparing and training the team. She also noted that Southside Christian's participation at the SERMAL conference provided valuable experience for success at the model in Washington, DC.



At UAE Embassy

## Inaugural ARMAL

The Appalachian Regional Model Arab League (ARMAL) held its inaugural conference at Virginia Tech, on an unusually seasonal bitterly cold weekend, November 14-16, 2014. The new model was the creation of Holly Jordan, a Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech and two-year appointment faculty member at nearby Roanoke College. Ms. Jordan, a 2007 graduate of Converse College, was a four-year member of Converse's Model Arab League and International Model NATO delegations, and she served as Secretary-General of Model NATO. Kayle Boalt, 2014 Converse graduate, four-year member of Model Programs, and now a program assistant with the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, was the Council staff member administering the model.

The model was small with eight participating colleges. In a commitment to get the model off the ground, Converse entered four delegations and provided three of the four chairs. With a young team that included nine freshmen, who were experiencing MAL for the first time, Converse nevertheless swept the competition. All four delegations won awards with the Bahrain delegation named as the Best Overall Delegation, and 20 of the 22 Converse debaters won awards. Kandice Miles won the best chair citation.

The other competing schools were the U.S. Military Academy, Emory University, Washington and Lee (2 delegations), Washington and Jefferson, East Tennessee State, Jacksonville State University, and Virginia Tech.

With a commitment that several other universities will participate next year, it is hoped that ARMAL will grow into a strong and valuable fall conference in the MAL schedule.



## Converse Hosts Tunisian Professor

Through a National Endowment for the Humanities Visiting Humanist grant, Dr. Hedia Khadhar of the University of Tunis spoke at Converse on Wednesday, April 29. The author of many publications on women of North Africa, Dr. Khadhar has taught as well at both the Sorbonne in Paris and as a visiting professor at Yale. At Converse she spoke to the Introduction to Women's Studies course about the roles of women in Tunisia during and since "Arab Spring," and in the Survey of French Literature course, she addressed contemporary North African women writers. She also met with students and faculty during an informal lunch in the Converse dining hall. Dr. Khadhar's visit was sponsored by the department of foreign languages, cultures, and literature, and by the history and politics department.



# LEARNING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES



## Three Books on ISIS

Reviewed by Joe P. Dunn

**Charles A. Dana Professor and Chair  
of the Department of History & Politics**

Just as books on Al-Qaeda were in vogue a few years ago, volumes on ISIS are now pouring off the presses. Several are simplistic, sensationalized, or polemical, but the three books featured here are strong contributions. Although all three cover much the same territory, they differ in orientation and emphasis. Each deserves its own lengthy treatment, but space does not allow this. My brief exposition will focus on the books as sources for undergraduate students.

Patrick Cockburn, veteran Middle East correspondent for London's *Independent* and recipient of many journalist accolades, including the 2014 Foreign Affairs Journalist of the Year Award, was one of the first to recognize the rise of this new Sunni jihadist movement. Indeed his volume, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*, was first published under the title of *The Jihadis Return* (2014). Cockburn places heavy blame on Saudi Arabia, whose worldwide sponsorship of Wahabbi militancy provides the ideological foundation for the jihadism that Al-Qaeda and ISIS manifest. Because Saudi Arabia and the other responsible nation, Pakistan, are important to the U.S. for strategic reasons, the U.S. diminishes or ignores the support and funding of the terrorist networks by these two allies. Cockburn also emphasizes the role of the news media in misinterpreting the situations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria where Western involvement "acerbated existing differences and pushed hostile

parties toward civil war." In each case politicians underplayed the role of jihadists and sold American intervention as humanitarian "in support of popular forces against dictators and police states."

This short primer is very good for younger students as it presents the issues clearly, concisely, and candidly without overpowering the novice with the myriad of names, groups, and machinations that are part of a complete rendering of the story. Cockburn is outspoken and his biases are clear, but his views deserve attention.

Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan's *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* is the most developed of the three books. The two journalists readily confess that they are not neutral observers. Hassan is a native Syrian from Albu Kamal, a border town that has been a portal for the movement of jihadist in and out of Iraq, and Weiss reported for years from the suburbs of Aleppo. Their mutual passion is evident. The book is the product of numerous interviews over the years in both Iraq and Syria. The main focus of their book is the source of ISIS appeal and how the group recruits its legions for their "managed savagery." Iraqi prime minister Nouri Kamal al-Maliki's ineptitude and the unspeakable brutality of Syria's President Bashar Assad's bear primary responsibility, but ISIS has its own independent attraction to the disaffected misanthropes that swell its ranks. The authors make clear that fundamentalist jihadist Islam may be the core philosophy of the movement, but the individuals who constitute the ranks are generally not religious zealots. The leadership and much of the constituency are old Saddamist and Syrian Baathists, secularists of the highest order. ISIS is composed of a criminal element of opportunists, corrupt mafia, and first-class thugs who attract the naïve, dispossessed, and psychotic. These hoodlums could just as easily be Nazis or cultists of all kinds of other religions or ideologies.

The personalization provided by the interviews makes fascinating reading, and the chapter of profiles of various ISIS enlistees is revealing. Despite the lively writing, the book is so comprehensive with names, organizations, internal divisions, internecine warfare, and shifting alliances that it is overwhelming for many casual readers. The differences and warfare between the parent organization Al-Qaeda and its ISIS

offspring in Iraq and Jabhat al-Nursi, the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, which has its own on-and-off relationship with ISIS is interesting. The discussion of the personal war of control between Al-Qaeda's Ayman Al-Zawahiri and ISIS upstart Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi is quite instructive. Even if challenging for those with minimal background on the Middle East, the book is a marvelous addition to the literature.

Finally, Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger's *ISIS: The State of Terror* is the broadest of the volumes. Harvard's Stern is one of the country's leading authorities on terrorism and her collaborator also possesses established credentials in the field. The authors focus on ISIS as part of the larger global terrorist network and they make extensive comparisons to Al-Qaeda. The latter pursued a more intellectual vision of a global movement with long-term goals. As the authors explain, Al-Qaeda at its height saw itself as an elite management organization, "a corporation, with a payroll and benefits department, and operatives who traveled around the world inserting themselves into local conflicts."

ISIS on the other hand demanded an immediate caliphate with defined territory under its control in preparatory for the grand Armageddon which would wipe away all apostates in the end-times scenario. Stern and Berger explain the central ideology of ISIS and other apocalyptic jihadist groups who welcome and attempt to provoke Western military intervention. Like the authors of the previous book, Stern and Berger describe the recruitment tactics and apocalyptic appeal of ISIS to dispossessed, disaffected, misguided youth through the adroit employment of publicity, social network technology, and the attraction of "divinely authorized" savagery against those outside their ranks. The authors caution against playing into ISIS's hands by being drawn into a military confrontation on the ground. ISIS is merely the latest iteration of terror and a multitude of others will metastasize from its ashes. The authors emphasize that the contest is long term, and they provide a list of proscriptions for the sustained confrontation against perverse ideologies and barbarism.

Quite accessible, the book is a good source for students at all levels and the one that I have opted to use in my fall course. The inventory of books on ISIS and other jihadist movements will multiply in the next years, but these three volumes are very worthy early contributions.