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In This Issue ...

- ❑ Iraq in Transition:
A View from Kurdistan
See pages one through five.
- ❑ Witnessing Cultural Change:
A Visit to Saudi Arabia
See pages six and seven.
- ❑ Converse Again Takes
Top Spot at National Model
Arab League
See page eight.
- ❑ Same Schools Again
Dominate SERMAL
See page nine.
- ❑ Converse Hosts
Jordanian Students
See page ten.
- ❑ Book Review:
Mark L. Haas and
David W. Lesch, eds.,
*The Arab Spring:
Change and Resistance
in the Middle East*
See page eleven.
- ❑ Arab Spring/Arab Winter:
A Symposium
See page twelve.



Joe & Jenny Dunn at a destroyed Saddam Palace in northern Kurdistan

Iraq in Transition: A View from Kurdistan

by Joe P. Dunn

Travel is broadening, often both of the mind and the body. Last fall I had another of those experiences that enhanced the girth and the intellect, indeed one of the best learning opportunities in all our travels. One of my former students who worked in the development of Kurdistan Regional Government in 2007-2008 has insisted

for years that I must travel there. I was pleased finally to have the opportunity. In November, my wife and I were among nineteen American Presbyterians who traveled to Iraq, under the auspices of the Presbyterian Outreach Foundation, to participate in a Consultative Assembly on the Presbyterian Church

(continued on page 2)

NEWS AND ARTICLES

in Iraq. The approximately fifty attendees included Arab clergy from the Presbyterian Synod of Syria and Lebanon and representatives from the four remaining Presbyterian churches in Iraq—in Baghdad, Basrah, Kirkuk, and the tiny remnant in Mosul.

Half the American group spent five days previous to the Assembly at the church in Basrah, which most of them had visited the previous year. The other half of the group, including my wife and me, traveled instead to Kurdistan, the semiautonomous region of northern Iraq. Jenny and I particularly were interested in spending time with a couple who are our friends and whose work with the Kurds is partially sponsored by our church in Spartanburg. Although they are enthusiastically welcomed and officially recognized as Christian workers by the Kurdistan Regional Government, for security reasons, we do not mention their names or specifics about their activities.

First, a brief word about the four churches which constitute the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Iraq. The Baghdad Presbyterian Church (Arabic speaking) and the Assyrian Presbyterian Church in Baghdad (Assyrian language) have recently joined together with a combined total of about 250 families, but this is less than half the membership that the two churches together enjoyed only a few years ago. The Basrah Church in the Shia South has about 25 families and without the services of an ordained pastor is led by a prominent surgeon at the Basrah Hospital. The church has a strong relationship with the Shia community and its kindergarten serves almost exclusively Shia children. The Kirkuk Evangelical Church in the disputed territory is a Kurdish congregation of approximately 150 families that is thriving in a relatively secure sector of the city. The Mosul Church, the

oldest Presbyterian congregation in the country, faces particular challenges. The historic church building is in the central area of this war-torn city, where violence and Al Qaeda are still prevalent. The elder in charge of the congregation was killed by terrorists in 2007, and his four sisters have kept a remnant of the congregation alive by meeting in private homes.

In response to violence from fundamentalists and terrorists, Christians are fleeing from Iraq, Syria, and other countries in the region. That Christians, who trace their history back to the first centuries, and Jews, with even longer history, are disappearing is a great loss to the cultural and religious diversity of the entire region. Iraqi Christians point out that Saddam Hussein, for his own political purposes, protected Christian areas, but that security no longer exists. Syrian Christians fear the fall of the Assad regime, which historically has protected the Christian minority, as they foresee the same fundamentalist targeting of Christians as in Iraq. For those who can, the great ongoing migration of Christians from Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine to Europe, the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and other places is accelerating. For those who lack the means or desire to leave, the situation is precarious and fearful.

One counter to this trend is in Kurdistan. The political dynamics of this semiautonomous region of about 4 million Kurds in northeastern Iraq is a long and fascinating saga which I will not undertake here. The future of the region and the allied question of the disputed territories of Kirkuk and Mosul will be a decisive issue for the entire Iraqi nation in the next years and decades. Kurdistan has become somewhat of a beacon for Christians. Iraqi Christians, both Arabs and other minorities, are migrating to this relatively safe region for many

reasons, including freedom to practice their faith. The level of tolerance and the diversity and growth of Christian expressions in Kurdistan is distinctive throughout the Middle East region.

No formal Presbyterian churches exist in Kurdistan at the moment. A couple of efforts at house churches for different ethnic communities are in process, but the Presbyterian requirement for seminary-educated ordained pastors makes it almost impossible to form actual Presbyterian churches. On a wider dimension though, other mainline Protestants are appearing and the growth of evangelicals is significant. All Protestants in the region tend to be called Evangelical, but a true distinction exists between those who define their manifestation of the faith as evangelicals and other Protestants. Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist, and unaffiliated community churches are emerging quickly, often supported with large amounts of outside money at their disposal. Many of the conversion-driven evangelicals are not sensitive to the fact that proselytizing among Muslim populations is not acceptable culturally or legally.

As the indigenous Chaldean Christians, people of the land whose roots in the region go back to the first centuries, explain, the very mantra of the new evangelists of “bringing Christianity to save souls” is offensive both to Muslims and long-standing Christian communities. Christians in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere point out that they live in a precarious existence in the midst of passionate upheaval and their very lives and existence are jeopardized by irresponsible actions by zealous newcomers to the environment as well as the hate-filled anti-Muslim pontificating by certain small-minded religious voices in America.

These themes were articulated eloquently by many of the Syrian and Lebanese pastors with whom

we interacted at the Consultative Assembly, and both Iraqis and Syrians explained their conception of the responsibilities of practicing Christianity within the environments in which they live. But nowhere was this message better demonstrated than by two Chaldean bishops whom we met.

At the magnificent cathedral in Kirkuk, Archbishop Louis Sako [in the last months since our trip named Patriarch of the Chaldean Church] described the roots of the violence in the city and showed the memorial to the 37 Christians from Kirkuk who had been murdered (among the over 1000 priests and believers throughout Iraq). Although about 500,000 Iraqi Christians have fled in recent years, he emphasized why it was necessary for a strong contingent of faithful Christians to stay the course. To quote from a statement on a German television interview, “We have no future unless we are negotiating with the religious and political leaders. We have to make it clear that we are Iraqis. This is our land. Long ago we were here. We want to stay and be a part of it and to offer what we can to society.” As with the other church leaders that we met, a primary means of practicing their faith was through providing education at the kindergarten and early years for children—Muslim and Christian—as a force for tolerance, reconciliation, and progress.

This perspective was even more vivid, albeit with a specific Kurdish focus, when we met the dynamic Chaldean Bishop Rabban Al Qas, the founder and director of the International School in Dohuk, a man whose passion for education across sectarian and ethnic lines is overwhelming. At the Kurdish Dohuk school, students whether Kurds, Arabs, or Assyrians and Christians, Muslim, or Yezidis interacted openly and peacefully with little concern for the

NEWS AND ARTICLES

distinctions that are the basis for so much violence throughout the region. Although the language of instruction is English, students study four other languages—French, Arabic, Kurdish, and Aramaic. No religious instruction exists at the school as the Bishop believes that religious instruction should be reserved to within the various faith communities. As the charismatic Father bounced from one classroom to

another hugging students, encouraging them to speak to the visiting strangers, and showing off their use of the various languages, his love for all the students and his vibrant personality were manifest. He was indeed a father in all senses of the word. For Bishop Rabban the students are the future. We talked with three young high school girls who stressed that religious differences were not decisive. As the girls explained,

Lunch at Kirkuk Church





Monument in Tribute to Victims of Saddam's Anfal Genocide, Dohuk, Kurdistan

they were a Muslim, a Christian, and a Yezidi, but they loved each other and shared everything. We noted the difference in Archbishop Sako's focus on Iraqi citizenship and the theme at Dohuk that "we are the future of Kurdistan."

Obviously, Kurdistan and Iraq provide material for serious scholarly analysis about the issues of cultural identity, conflict, and convergence. Drawing on this trip, I gave a paper on this topic at a conference in March and I will not repeat that

lengthy discourse here. The impact and ramifications of the Syrian Civil War, with which we dealt constantly during the trip, is another major topic worthy of treatment. However, since my audience here is more generalist, I will devote the rest of my limited space to the less challenging subject of a travelogue in Kurdistan. Our hosts made sure that we experienced the region to its fullest, and thus the trip was a great educational experience for me on many grounds.

After a long trip from Chicago,

the entire delegation landed in the new Istanbul Airport, one of the finest in the world, and we split into the Basrah and Kurdistan factions. After a ten-hour layover in Istanbul, we continued on and landed at 3:45 a.m. at the Erbil, Kurdistan Airport, which is also one of the finest in the region. We got a few hours sleep before the two-and-a-half-hour drive to Dohuk, in the north near the Turkey border. In Dohuk the next day, Sunday, we visited the School of the Medes (the Kurds trace their ancestry back to these ancient people), the International School noted above, the house of Presbyterian missionary Roger Cumberland who was murdered in 1938 after fifteen years' service in Mosul and Dohuk, a cave and recreational area at the dam on the Tigris River outside the city, and the local *souk*. In the evening, we attended a worship service in Arabic at a new Nazarene church, one of the examples of the diversity of house churches emerging in the area.

On Monday, we traveled to the ancient mountain peak city of Amaydia, whose history can be traced to the Assyrian era; the city has 34 archaeological sites of the Assyrians, Medes, and Kurds who each occupied it during its long history. From there we traveled into the beautiful northern mountains to Sulav Waterfalls, Anishka Cave, and a mountaintop palace of Saddam Hussein that had been thoroughly destroyed by the Kurds after his downfall. It was a huge structure, reportedly as lavish as were all his palaces, of which there were 26 in Kurdistan alone. We could see another former palace across the valley on another mountaintop. At dinner that evening we were the guests of Mr. Faiz, the director of the Kurdistan Reconstruction Organization, who was responsible for significant building in Kurdistan after the war. The lavish spread at the stunning Restaurant Mevandari was one of the several

memorable feasts during our trip.

Tuesday we visited the sprawling Duhok University, located in the fast-developing new area of the city, a campus with 11,000 students (and the numbers exploding annually), very nice new buildings, and construction projects everywhere. The problem for the university, as we witnessed in other places during our travels, is that environmental esthetics has not penetrated very deeply yet in Kurdistan. Trash is piled up everywhere one looks and cleaning up doesn't appear to resonate. Of course, this is typical for developing countries undergoing rapid growth, and as our host, Dr. Layla Raswol, head of the school of architecture and planning, emphasized, this next step will come in time. We also visited the Institute of Art, an impressive secondary school located on the university campus.

In the afternoon, we journeyed to the Domiz Refugee Camp just outside the city. This is a settlement for Syrian Kurds fleeing the war in their country. On the day that we visited, the camp had some 44,000 inhabitants and the numbers were swelling daily. With tents as far as the eye could see, refugee camps are a depressing sight. But I have visited refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and elsewhere in the world. By all standards this one was at the high end, an obvious case of Kurds taking care of Kurds. This camp likely will double as the war progresses. [At the time of publication of this piece, the number in the camp exceeds 100,000 and problems of drugs, crime, prostitution, and violence now are prominent]. In the evening the group split as we had dinner at the homes of two local church leaders.

On Wednesday, we left Dohuk for a lengthy day of sightseeing on the way to Erbil. We ascended to the striking edifice of the Rabban Hormized Chaldean Monastery high

on a mountain. In the nearby town of Al Qosh, we toured the tomb of the Jewish Prophet Nahum, who prophesied to King Josiah about the fall of the Assyrian Empire in the 7th Century BCE. The dilapidated tomb and synagogue are cared for by a Chaldean family who promised the last rabbi who left the city in 1948 that they would care for the tomb as best they could. The son has now followed his deceased father in continuing to fulfill this commitment. The local Chaldeans provided an exceptional lunch feast before we moved on to Lalish, northeast of Mosul in Ninevah Province, where we explored the holy site of the Yezidi faith, a syncretic religion with elements of Zoroastrianism, Sufism, and local Kurdish beliefs. The estimates of the number of Yezidi in Kurdistan, or indeed in the world, very dramatically with one authority judging that they do not exceed 250-300,000 worldwide. From Lalish we continued to Jerwan, site of an ancient Assyrian aqueduct and artifacts, where the Assyrians have accused the Kurds of "cultural genocide" against their archeological treasures.

In the evening we arrived in Erbil at the Hotel Karlovy Vary in Ankawa, the Christian sector of the city, to begin the three-day Consultative Assembly the next day. At the conclusion of the Assembly on the last day of our trip, we left the Kurdish Region to go to Kirkuk in the disputed territory in Iraq proper. The contrast was stark. The three major cities of the Kurdish Region--Erbil, Dohuk, and Sulaymaniyah--are thriving explosive economic miracles, not quite the Gulf States, but clearly aspirant. Development as exhibited in sky rise apartments, shopping malls, recreational centers, and buildings of all kinds is proceeding at record pace. The impact of oil revenues is obvious. The stability and prosperity of the region attracts foreign investment. Turkey and China are omnipresent.

Kirkuk, a city divided among its contending factions of Kurds, Turkman, Circassian, Sunni and Shia Arabs, and terrorists such as Al Qaeda, is quite a different place. The flares from the huge oil fields distinctly display the economic importance of this city for all contenders, but the lack of stability and safety prevent the prosperity enjoyed within the Kurdish Region. The Evangelical Church of Kirkuk, constructed in 1958, though is lovely and Pastor Haitham Jezrawi is a leader of serious stature. Following a tour of the church's kindergarten that serves primarily local Muslim children, the congregation served another feast. During the afternoon, the pastors from Syria and Lebanon held a Synod meeting at the church, and the evening worship service was impressive.

We returned that evening, and as we approached the demarcation boundary back into the Kurdish Region, we traversed the several checkpoints that the Kurdish Peshmerga (militia) maintain to maximize security in the Kurdish Region. When the guards learned that we were Americans, they welcomed us enthusiastically. A guard expressed thanks for the American support of the No-Fly zone in 1991 that was the beginning of Kurdish autonomy and for the elimination of the Saddam Regime.

The next morning, we began the long trek home from a most rewarding experience. I hasten to emphasize that no snapshot portrait of a country and political environment can be any more than an introduction, a glimpse, a perception. Our travels to Kurdistan were just that. But certainly it was an enlightening perspective that helps me much better to understand the dynamics, crises, and prospects for the country and the region. We hope to return to Iraq in the near future.

Witnessing Cultural Change: A Visit to Saudi Arabia

by Kaylee Boalt

Last December I had the opportunity to travel to Saudi Arabia for ten days. The trip was sponsored by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the United States, and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education. Saudi Arabia is a beautiful and gracious country with enormous potential. Its hospitality is unrivaled, its educational system is impressive, and it is experiencing unprecedented political and cultural change. Unfortunately, many Americans perceive the country primarily in stereotypes as a terrorism hub, a center of anti-Americanism, and a religious

breeding ground for misogyny. I use the word Islamophobia to describe this simplistic view, and as a political scientist major with an interest in the Middle East, it is part of my mission to address this perspective.

While in the country, my group and I visited eight universities, and I gained a lot of insight. Education in Saudi Arabia is paid for by the government with students receiving stipends rather than student loans. Traditionally, universities have been segregated, but today efforts are proceeding toward various experiments with limited forms of gender integration albeit different than what we know

in the West. Al-Faisal University in Riyadh recently built classrooms in which males and females are in the same classroom, with males on the ground floor and women in balconies behind fronted panels. The world-class King Abdullah University of Science and Technology is fully-integrated. Consistent with worldwide patterns today, women comprise more than 60% of university students in the Kingdom, and indeed Saudi Arabia's problem is that young males are not pursuing education a significant levels to fill the nation's needs. The country must find ways of more effectively employing its educated population, which means its females.

In addition to touring universities, my group visited businesses, non-profits, and governmental agencies. At every single institution, we were welcomed with Arabic coffee, dates, handshakes, and smiles. Saudi Arabian hospitality exceeds the famed American Southern hospitality. Gift-giving is a sign of respect, and we came home with many beautiful presents. Saudis are also extremely social. I cannot begin to recount how many offers we received for dinners and social gatherings. Unfortunately we did not have the time to enjoy most of these offers, but I felt more welcome in the Kingdom than any place I have visited in America. The United States has a lot to learn from this unique aspect of Saudi culture. One particularly noteworthy social event was a dinner with the American ambassador and his wife, a truly delightful evening.

As Saudi Arabia undergoes incredible political and cultural changes, women are in the forefront of this potential transformation. Dress is just one indication. Traditionally, women are covered and veiled by items



Kaylee Boalt, a senior at Converse College, is the Secretary General of the 2014 National Model Arab League conference.

of clothing known as the *abaya* and the *hijab*. The *abaya* is a full black cloak that covers the body and the *hijab* is a headscarf that can be worn in a variety of ways. The capital city of Riyadh is still very conservative, but in the more relaxed cities of Dammam and Jeddah, I saw many women who chose to forego the *hijab*. Although I knew about the *mutawain*, the religious police, and expected to see them, our group never encountered them, probably because they are restricted from bothering Western women.

In Jeddah, we visited many women's activist groups. One in particular, the Al-Sayeda Khadija Bint Khowailid Businesswomen Center, was created in 2004 as a lobbying center for the removal of obstacles to businesswomen. The Center has undertaken important efforts to educate both women and men on the balance of motherhood and work. It has also pursued the development of sexual harassment laws in the

workplace and provided lectures and workshops to increase awareness about this issue. Although attitudes toward women in the workplace have changed dramatically in the last decade, it will take considerably longer than we in the West may wish for women to gain their just rights. Dr. Mody Al-Khalaf, the assistant attaché for cultural and social affairs at the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the United States, met with our group before our departure from the United States and again at her personal home in Riyadh on our last night in the Kingdom. She emphasized that change in Saudi Arabia has to come from within the country if it is to last. Dr. Mody cautioned "to go with overexpectations" and to be "open without resentment." Her wise advice was integral not only to my time in Saudi Arabia but to other aspects of life as well.

Do terrorist attitudes, anti-Americanism, and misogyny exist in



Saudi Arabia? Yes, but the important thing to remember is that these deeply ingrained attitudes are *changing*. Just after our return, on January 11, 2013, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia announced that women would now occupy thirty seats in the Royal Consultative Assembly. Saudi conservatives may consider this revolutionary; in fact it is largely mere tokenism, but such gestures are part of very important gradual progress. Cultures are complicated; changing norms is challenging. Rather than ignorance and condemnation of that which is quite foreign to our perceptions, our role as educated global citizens is to attempt to understand the basis of that with which we may not agree. Through better insight and appreciation of the difficulties in cultural evolution, we help to be part of solutions rather than ineffective obstacles. In Dr. Mody's words, we need to strive "to be open without resentment."

Converse Again Takes Top Spot at National Model Arab League

With awards in six of the seven councils for the second year, the Converse delegation, representing Oman, displayed another dominant performance and was cited as the #1 delegation at the National Model Arab League conference, held April 12-14, 2013 at Georgetown University. Converse was named as Exceptional Delegation. Perennial rival Northeastern University (Qatar) finished #2 and was also designated as an Exceptional

Delegation. Georgia State (Libya) and the University of Utah (Kuwait) were cited as Outstanding Delegations.

HE Ambassador Mohammed Al-husseini Alsharif, head of the League of Arab States Mission to the United States, provided welcome remarks and earlier met with delegates at a drop-in breakfast roundtable. Ambassador Richard Schmierer, the deputy assistant secretary for public

diplomacy at the U.S. State Department Bureau of Near East Affairs, provided the keynote address. As he does annually, HRH Prince Abdul Aziz bin Talal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud attended the summit session and graciously posed for pictures with the various delegations following the awards ceremony.

As always the National Model demonstrated spirited sessions, many intensified by the Syrian delegation representing the Assad regime. At the previous regional models, the Syrian delegations represented the new regime now supported by the Arab League. Several crisis simulations also challenged delegates' creativity as they strived to find solutions to complex problems; and the two dockets of the Arab Court of Justice demanded lengthy deliberations.

Catia Sharp (Northeastern) presided as the secretary-general with Kat Teebagy (Northeastern) and J.J. Manser (Grand Valley State University) as assistant secretary-generals. Converse provided the chief justice of the Arab Court of Justice, chaired four of the councils, and contributed three vice chairs as well. The faculty selected Ashley Blount (Converse), who headed the joint defense council, as the outstanding chair; and Kaylee Boalt (Converse), a last-minute replacement to head the economics council, received the honorable mention outstanding chair distinction. Ms. Boalt also was selected to be the secretary-general for the 2014 Model. Three other Converse students will serve on the upper secretariat with Victoria Ball as assistant secretary-general and Rebecca Edwards and Molly Glibbery as chairs respectively of the economics and environmental councils.

Converse visits the Sultanate of Oman Embassy



Converse Oman Delegation with Awards



Same Schools Again Dominate SERMAL

Although several long-time participant schools were not able to attend the 2013 Model, new schools included Georgia College, Guilford Technical Community College, and Southside Christian School, a Greenville high school. Wilson Hall, a private academy in Sumter, South Carolina, also attended for a second year as an observer country. Other participating schools included Converse (2 delegations), Spartanburg Community College (2 delegations), University of North Carolina—Charlotte, Georgia Perimeter College, Jacksonville State University (2 delegations), Georgia State University, Virginia Tech, Northeastern University, The Citadel, Mercer University, Kennesaw State University, and a Clemson/Greenville Tech joint delegation.

Three delegations decisively dominated the conference. In virtually

every council the outstanding delegations were Converse (Oman), Georgia State (Libya), and Northeastern (Qatar). With a perfect record in all seven councils, Converse emerged as the top delegation followed by Georgia State and Northeastern. The University of North Carolina—Charlotte (Egypt), Citadel (Saudi Arabia), and Virginia Tech (Palestine) gained honorable mention status.

Ashley Blount (Converse) presided as secretary-general and Neil Mangrum (Spartanburg Community College) was the assistant secretary-general. Kaylee Boalt (Converse) was selected as outstanding chair and Sagen Blackwell (Converse) and Lara Cole (Northeastern) were cited as honorable mention chairs. One of the conference highlights was a large multiple-part crisis that engaged every council and almost every country.



Secretary-General Ashley Blount Presides at Summit

The 25th Southeast Model Arab League met at Converse, March 15-17, 2013. For the second consecutive year, Nora Nassri, a 2008 Converse College graduate who is now writing her Ph.D. dissertation in political science at the University of South Carolina, was the keynote speaker. Ms. Nassri spoke about the Syrian Civil War from both an academic and personal perspective.



Converse Hosts Jordanian Students



During late January Converse College hosted a delegation of six girls and six boys, primarily high school freshmen and sophomore students, from the Modern Montessori School in Amman, Jordan. The delegation was organized by Beyond Discovery, an Amman-based organization that specializes in a variety of educational programs and extra-curriculum activities that address and discuss the issues facing today's youth. The program director for Beyond Discovery, Megan Madison, a 2009 Converse graduate, who was a Fulbright Scholar in Jordan and has

lived there for four years, coordinated the program and led the delegation.

Although the visit included many activities, the central event was the Converse Model Arab League delegation providing training for the Jordanian students to participate in the Mubadara Model Arab League planned in April in Amman. The last two years, Converse has sent students to Jordan, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi to assist in training and administering the Mubadara Model.

In the intensive four-hour training session, a Converse student was paired with a Jordanian student to teach them about research, parliamentary procedure, debating techniques, networking, and drafting resolutions as part of an actual model simulation. The Converse mentors noted how bright, motivated, and eager the Jordanian students were, and each Converse mentor expressed pride in the progress that her partner made during the training sessions.

Other activities for the Jordanian students included attending a college class and a leadership workshop, observing a Model Arab League demonstration provided for the

Converse Academic Scholarship Weekend, participating in a service project in honor of Martin Luther King Day, and sharing meals with Converse students. The students also attended dinner at the Islamic Center of Spartanburg, spent an afternoon at a fun park, visited the Biltmore Estates in Asheville, and shopped at a local outlet mall. After leaving Converse, the group spent two days in New York City before returning to Jordan.

Dr. Joe P. Dunn, chair of history and politics department at Converse and sponsor of the Converse Model Arab League delegation, remarked, "This is a wonderful cross-cultural partnership opportunity. The students were delightful, intelligent, and spirited. We hope to have made a real connection and someday see some of the young woman as students at Converse." Sally Hammond, Converse vice president for enrollment management, the primary Converse project officer for the visit, stated, "This was one of the most enjoyable activities that the Converse community has engaged in, and we hope that it becomes an annual event." Megan Madison explained, "It was a distinct honor to bring these students to my home campus, and we began planning immediately for the next group."

The Jordanian students also enjoyed the experience. Several of the young women commented that they wished to attend Converse when they selected a college. A couple of the boys were disappointed that they were not eligible at the women's college, but one young man insisted that this was definitely the place for his older sister and upon return he intended to talk with her about his impressions. Indeed his sister has applied to be a freshman at Converse in Fall 2014.

By virtually every standard this first Jordanian visitation was a great success and both parties hope that it is a continuing tradition.



The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East



Book Review

Dr. Joe P. Dunn
Charles A. Dana Professor of History and Politics, Converse College

Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch, eds., *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East* (Westview Press, 2013).

The so-called "Arab Spring, Arab Winter" has given rise to a cottage industry of articles and books on the subject. Stating with James L. Gelvin's *The Arab Uprising: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2012), several collections of essays are now in print. Two interesting examples are Cesare Merlini and Olivier Roy, eds., *Arab Society in Revolt: The West's Mediterranean Challenge* (2012) and Nicholas Burns and Jonathon Price, eds., *The Arab Revolutions and American Policy* (2013). Books on individual countries are now pouring off the presses such as Dan Tschirgi, Walid Kazziha, and Sean F. McMahon, eds., *Egypt's Tahrir Revolution* (2013) and Carsten Wieland's *Syria—A Decade of Lost Chances: Repression and Revolution from Damascus Spring to Arab Spring* (2012), as examples of what will be many others. But I focus here on a most useful broad selection of brief essays by two Middle East scholars, political scien-

tist Mark Haas and historian David Lesch. Part 1, "Spring in the Arab World" consists of short, readable, and profound overviews by leading scholars on affected Arab countries—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia (which thus far has avoided direct impact). Part 2, "The Regional and International Context of the Arab Spring" treats the impact on Iran, Turkey, Israel, and Russia with essays on the Obama administration response and James Gelvin's perceptive overall analysis.

Gelvin explains why the Arab Spring metaphor is misleading: (1) the uprising did not start in the Spring, (2) the term Spring connotes joy and renewal but so far much of the change has, in his terms, "turned pretty sour," and (3) the term has already been claimed in 2005 by the events in Arab world following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and George W. Bush's "freedom agenda." More important, he outlines the four transnational factors that made the Arab world vulnerable to the uprisings, whatever they are called: (1) the neo-liberal revolution in the region that brought a new relationship between citizens and atavistic governments no longer able to supply the wants and needs of the population, (2) demography that includes 60% of Arab population under age 30 and the very high rates of unemployment for this age sector, (3) skyrocketing food prices, and (4) unresponsive political systems not subject to the electoral will of the populace. Gelvin notes that only five of the 22 members of the Arab League did not experience protest and he divides responses into four clusters according to the nature of the protest and the regime response.

All the articles are rich in insights

and analysis and worthy of full discussion. I will select only one, however, for comment. Probably because I was teaching Russian Politics when I read the book, the essay by Robert O. Freedman on Russia and Arab Spring stands out. Like all countries, Russia was caught by surprise by events in the Arab world. After significant detachment in the Yeltsin years, Vladimir Putin had worked assiduously to restore Russia's presence and influence in the region. The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, which might strengthen similar pro-democracy stirrings in Russia, worried Putin; but ultimately the fall of the pro-American regimes in these two countries had as many positives as negatives for Moscow. Libya and Syria were another matter. Moscow had significant economic stake in both of these countries as arms supplier and through commercial and industrial agreements. In Syria, Russia enjoyed the use of a naval facility and Russia also maintained close ties with Assad allies Hezbollah and Hamas.

Russia vacillated on what to do but ultimately sacrificed Qaddafi while remaining committed to the Assad regime. As Freedman reports, Arab Spring may have been costly to the U.S. as it had to abandon long-time ally Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, but Russia could end up paying a much greater price for continuing to undergird the increasingly unsupportable Assad regime.

In sum, this is a valuable collection. For novice students *The Arab Uprisings* may be the better choice, but for serious students who are not authorities on the region, Haas and Lesch is an excellent book that I will employ in my own class.

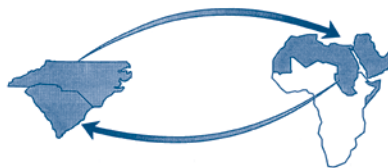
NEWS AND ARTICLES

Arab Spring/Arab Winter: A Symposium

On May 7, 2013, Converse College sponsored a symposium entitled, “Arab Spring/Arab Winter: Causes and Consequences of Recent Uprisings in North Africa: A Program in Honor of Dr. Nabiha Jerad.” Converse associate professor of French and woman’s studies Dr. Cathy Jones organized the event in tribute to her long-term friend Nabiha, who died as a result a hit-and-run automobile accident in October 2011. Dr. Jerad, a professor at the University of Tunis and a committed activist for democracy and women’s rights, made several trips to Converse and she hosted many travel-study trips of Converse students to Tunisia. Nabiha devoted her life to the issues raised in the revolution that was sparked in Tunis in December 2010. She died at a time when the nation was struggling with both the positive and negative outcomes of the uprising.

The Converse program included tributes by Nabiha’s sister Monia Chehata; Dr. Bruce Lawrence, retired professor of religion at Duke University and world-renown student of Islam; Dr. Mariam Cooke, head of the Middle East Studies Center at Duke, where Professor Jerad held an adjunct appointment; Dr. Jones; and Converse students and alumnae who had met Nabiha at Converse and in Tunisia. The latter included Morgan Roach, who sang; Converse alumnae Capucine Philson, a poet and singer, who offered original readings and music tributes; and Converse alumnae Natasha Senanayake, now pursuing a masters degree in composition at King College, London, who played three recent piano compositions. Cherif Amir Ali Bourekha, a democracy-activist who spent 18 years in the infamous Tazmamart Prison in Morocco as a political prisoner under King Hassan II in the 1970s and 1980s, gave the keynote address. Clips from the movie *On the Dignity of the Human Soul*, a film by Ingela Romare, and a press interview with Mr. Bourekha on the beginning of Arab Spring were shown. Mr. Bourekha now lives in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

The evening concluded with a sumptuous Maghreb Arab meal, much of which was prepared by Mr. Bourekha. Paintings by Tunisian artist Hamadi Ben Saad and various pieces of Magreb jewelry and other artifacts graced the venue, and the Tunisian online journal *Kapalitis* published a review of the symposium. Dr. Jones hopes to repeat the event next year.



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