VOLUME 60 · ISSUE 3 · SEPTEMBER 2009

MEI Bulletin

INSIDE

MEI Focuses on New Media in the Middle East

The reaction to the recent Iranian elections was witnessed here in the West almost exclusively through the Twitter feeds, Facebook profiles, YouTube videos, and Flickr photographs of Iranian protestors. This has focused attention on the role of new media in the region's public discourse, the theme of this fall's *Bulletin*. Despite an Iranian government crackdown on media and the internet, protestors circumvented censors using social networking tools such as those mentioned above to coordinate their meetings and communicate with the outside world. The new media phenomenon is not unique to Iran, but has spread across the Arab world as well. Drs. Bruce Ettling and James Palfrey of Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society explore this topic in their recent study on the Arabic blogosphere, which they discuss in this issue of the *Bulletin*.

A scene from Tehran's social media-fueled protests following Iran's June 12 election (L), and satellite dishes perch atop the majority of homes in Sana'a, Yemen (R). Photos by Flickr users Milad Avazbeigi (L) and localsurfer (R).

Included in every *Bulletin* is a profile of one of our Adjunct Scholars. In this issue, Dr. Mehrzad Boroujerdi discusses his Iranian roots and his recent research into the field of Middle East media. Given our theme, he was a natural choice for this issue.

The Middle East Institute itself has responded to the new media trend in a variety of ways. In July we launched a Twitter feed (www.twitter.com/mei_edu), through which MEI previews new publications, highlights our Scholars' appearances in the media, and publicizes key quotes from our guest speakers. One such speaker was Ammar Abdulhamid, a prominent advocate for democratic reform in Syria. He spoke at MEI on July 21 about the differences and similarities between the democracy movement in Iran and reform efforts in the Arab world. The Center for Pakistan Studies also has embraced new media by launching an online discussion forum, where members can discuss reform and development proposals put forth by the Center.

Also included in this issue is an interview with Asher Kaufman, the author of an upcoming *Middle East Journal* article investigating the boundaries between Israel, Lebanon, and Syria. His research focuses on the village of Ghajar, currently divided between Lebanon and Israel. Using pre-1967 maps and archival documents, Kaufman demonstrates that the village might actually belong to Syria. These findings and their possible impact on border negotiations were previewed on National Public Radio August 4.

MEI's scholars have appeared frequently over the last three months both in public and in the media to discuss the situation in Iran, the possibility of engaging Hamas in peace process negotiations, and many other topics. Their opinion pieces were published in

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The New York Times, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and Lebanon's *Daily Star*. I myself had the honor of testifying before the Near East and South and Central Asia subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 29 about the need for greater American public diplomacy in Pakistan.

Our energies are now devoted to the development of our 63rd Annual Conference, "Rewriting the Middle East Agenda." The full-day event will be held November 10 at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. Speakers are still being lined up, but already include former IAEA Director General Hans Blix, former US Ambassador to Israel and Egypt Daniel Kurtzer, and James Woolsey, former Director of the CIA. New speakers are being added, so visit our website regularly for updates and registration. We hope to see you there!

—Wendy Chamberlin

The Middle East Institute's 63rd Annual Conference
Rewriting the Middle East Agenda
November 9-10, 2009

William Burns
Undersecretary of Political Affairs, Department of State (invited)

Hans Blix
Former IAEA Director General

Kevin Cosgriff
Former Commander of US Naval Forces Central Command

Daniel Kurtzer
Former US Ambassador to Egypt and Israel

Speakers include:

James Dobbins
RAND Corporation

Rend al-Rahim Francke
US Institute of Peace

Murhaf Jouejati
National Defense University

Raad Al-Kadiri
Senior Director, PFC Energy

Daniel Levy
New America Foundation

Karim Sadjadpour
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Khalil Shikaki
Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research

James Woolsey
Former Director, CIA

Monday, November 9
Banquet Dinner

Tuesday, November 10
Annual Conference

The National Press Club
529 14th Street NW, 13th Floor
Washington, DC 20045

Please visit www.mei.edu for information about sponsorship and registration, as well as a complete list of speakers.

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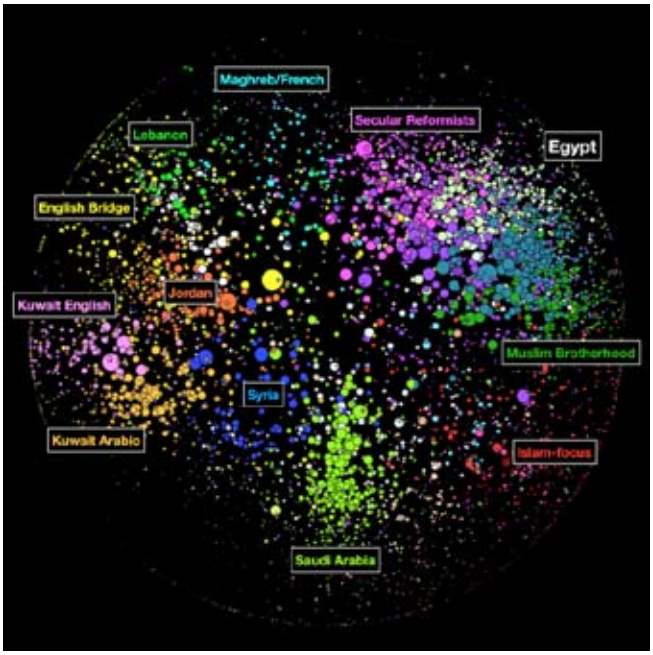
MEI Bulletin is published four times a year from Washington, DC.

Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere

On January 17, 2009, a popular Saudi TV sports program covers the day's disappointing loss by the national soccer team to Oman in the Gulf Cup. The show's host and his guests, including a professional soccer player and a former coach, are critiquing the team and its management when a call comes from Saudi Prince Sultan bin Fahd, a key patron of the team. He is not happy with their analysis. On air, the Prince dresses them down in turn, and goes so far as to tell one of them he is poorly raised, a serious insult in Saudi culture. The Prince's tone is disrespectful, and his words are not those of a leader to citizens, but of a ruler to his subjects. A clip of the tirade quickly appears on YouTube, and blogs and online forums post the link, spawning long chains of comments. These are overwhelmingly critical of the Prince, who was seen as speaking to the commentators as though they were his slaves. This story (and there are many others like it) illustrates the collision of old realities and new technologies taking place in the Arab world, and a surprising number of elements intertwine in them: abuse of power, legitimacy of authority, the power of television, feedback between blogs and the press, traditional versus modern sensibilities, freedom of expression, and the power of online voices.

Around the world, in open and repressive nations alike, Internet-based communications provide new channels for citizen voices, minority viewpoints, and political mobilization, while also challenging traditional regimes of mass media control. In our paper, "Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture, and Dissent," we look at this still small component of the Arabic Internet, but one that in many places has emerged as arguably the most consequential in remaking public sphere communications. The goal of this research effort is to produce a baseline assessment of the networked public sphere in the Middle East and its relationship to a range of emergent issues, including politics, media, religion, culture, and international affairs.



Our study explored the structure and content of the Arabic blogosphere using link analysis, term frequency analysis, and human coding of individual blogs. We identified a base network of approximately 35,000 active Arabic language blogs (about half as many as we found in a previous study of the Persian blogosphere), discovered several thousand Arabic blogs with mixed use of Arabic, English, and French, created a network map of the 6,000 most connected blogs, and hand coded over 4,000 blogs with a team of Arabic speakers.

We found that the Arabic blogosphere is a network that organizes itself primarily around specific countries in the region. By far the largest cluster is Egypt, which includes several distinct sub-clusters. These sub-clusters range in political preferences from secular reformist bloggers to members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood are technically illegal in Egypt, the Mubarak regime appears to tolerate their large online presence. "Brother bloggers," like other political bloggers in Egypt, talk often about human rights and defend those who have been arrested by the government. They are also engaged in a public debate about the future of the organization and its priorities.

Other large network formations include Saudi Arabia, whose bloggers appear to focus more on personal diary-type reflections rather than overt political discussion, Syria, which is notable for its frequent criticism of domestic leaders, and Kuwait, which has two distinct sub-clusters based on bloggers' preference for writing in English or Arabic. Both groups of Kuwaiti bloggers focus heavily on domestic news and politics, but the Anglophone bloggers are more likely to advocate reform and discuss economic and women's rights issues. Bloggers from Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan frequently write in English and form a bridge to the English language blogosphere. Bloggers from Morocco, Tunis, and Algeria similarly write in both Arabic and French and link to sources in those languages. Finally, a loosely connected cluster from various countries is focused

Arabic and New Media

While the Arab world has seen massive growth in the use of new media, in some cases the Arabic language has presented its own unique challenges. Many keyboards and fonts are not necessarily conducive to rendering text in the Arabic alphabet, thus Arab bloggers and new-media users have developed a system whereby Arabic can be rendered in Latin letters. Those letters which do not have an English equivalent are modified to numbers, e.g. the number 3 actually signifies the Arabic letter "ع" and the number 7 means the Arabic letter "ح". While, Arabic fonts are increasingly used, the use of Arabic rendered in Latin letters and Arabic numerals has been used frequently in such areas as social networking and texting; this is particularly the case in countries where meeting in person between young people of the opposite gender is not "the norm." The usage of this syncretic language ranges from using Facebook to organize events that may go against social mores in some countries, such as comedy shows or concerts, to illicit text messaging between young people of the opposite gender.

mainly on Islam, mixing personal, theological, and political topics.

What we did not find is also interesting. While much has been made of Iraqi bloggers during ongoing debates about the Iraq war, this group does not figure prominently in the Arabic blogosphere. Rather, they are deeply integrated into the English Bridge group. This may be because many Iraqi bloggers write in English and have many inbound links from US think tanks, journalists, and partisan political bloggers ("Iraq the Model" on the right, "Riverbend" on the left, for example), rather than mainly writing for a domestic public. We also did not find any cluster of bloggers dedicated to violent extremism.

Coding data revealed that bloggers are primarily young and male. Overall, women make up just 34% of bloggers. The clusters with the highest proportion of female bloggers are the Egyptian Youth sub-cluster and Saudi Arabia, while the Maghreb/French Bridge and Syria have the highest proportion of male bloggers. Arabic bloggers are more likely than not to use their name as opposed to writing anonymously or under an obvious pseudonym. However, women are more likely than men to blog anonymously.

What do bloggers write about? Most tend to write personal, diary-style observations about their day-to-day lives. However, those that write about politics tend to focus on issues within their own country and are more often than not critical of domestic political leaders. Foreign political leaders are discussed less often and usually in more negative terms. Domestic news is more popular than international news among general politics and public life topics, especially within large national clusters writing entirely in Arabic. The one political issue that commands the most attention of bloggers across the Arab world is Palestine, and in particular the situation in Gaza (Israel's December 2008-January 2009 military action occurred during the study). The United States is not a dominant political topic in Arabic blogs, and neither are the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. When the United States is discussed, it is usually in critical terms. Religion is also a major topic of conversation for bloggers in the region, including a small online community of Baha'i bloggers.


Photo: flickr user uak_rock

Blogs are an integral part of the Arabic media ecosystem. We found that bloggers link to Web 2.0 sites such as YouTube and Wikipedia (both the English and Arabic versions) more than other sources of information and news available on the Internet. Al Jazeera is the top mainstream media source, followed by the BBC and Al Arabiya, while US government-funded media outlets like Radio Sawa and Al Hurra are linked to relatively infrequently. Most national media outlets do not have much reach outside of their respective national clusters. Returning to YouTube, we found that Arabic bloggers tend to prefer politically oriented videos to cultural ones. Videos related to the conflict in Gaza and the throwing of shoes at George W. Bush in Iraq are popular across the entire blogosphere, while clips related to domestic political issues are linked to more heavily by the various national clusters, such as Kuwaiti parliamentary campaign videos.

YouTube at War

For a case study of the importance of New Media and Web 2.0 in the Arab political sphere, see Assaf David and Oren Barak's MEI *Policy Brief* "How the New Arab Media Challenges the Arab Militaries: The Case of the War between Israel and Hizbullah in 2006."

This study comes at an interesting juncture in US relations with the Arab world following President Barack Obama's call for a "new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world." At the heart of this new beginning is a plea for understanding between cultures, to "listen to each other; learn from each other," to dismantle gross stereotypes, and to prevent extremist views from setting the tone of cross-cultural relationships. There is ground for optimism towards making progress on these accounts in the Arabic blogosphere. Our research indicates that extremist views occupy a very small proportion of the ideas and opinions found there. Instead it is a space populated with a broad diversity of views, many of which promote common international values such as free speech and human rights.

— Bruce Etling and John Palfrey

The study is available at http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications/2009/Mapping_the_Arabic_Blogosphere.

MEJ Author Asher Kaufman on Ghajar, Sheb'a Farms, and Border Disputes

Asher Kaufman is an Assistant Professor in the History Department of Notre Dame University. His areas of specialization are the modern history of Lebanon and Syria and the Arab-Israeli conflict. He is the author of *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) and of articles on Lebanese and Syrian nationalisms. The Autumn issue of *The Middle East Journal* will feature his article, "Let Sleeping Dogs Lie: Ghajar and Other Anomalies in the Syria, Lebanon, Israel Tri-Border Region."

You emphasize the roots of the Ghajar problem, as well as Sheb'a Farms, in the boundaries drawn by the European Mandatory powers. Are there other border issues lurking in the region based on similar issues? In some contexts one would assume self-determination through a referendum would be a logical solution to such problems, but it is rarely suggested here. Why do you think this is?


MEJ Author Asher Kaufman

There are many border anomalies in the Middle East as a result of the clumsy manner in which European powers delineated the boundaries of the modern states in the region. But most of them have remained dormant because the political elites have had no interest in awakening them. Interest could arise for a variety of reasons. For example, in the case of the recent demarcation of the Saudi-Yemeni boundary, the prospects of finding oil motivated Saudi Arabia to embark on one of the most expensive projects of boundary demarcation in the world so as to determine its exact sovereign territory. In the case of Syria and Lebanon, the two states had no interest in seriously dealing with their porous and imprecise shared boundary line until the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. Only then did it become an issue for some in Lebanese political circles who demanded the demarcation of the boundary between their country and Syria to resolve about 36 contested spots along the boundary line.

The Sheb'a Farms and Ghajar fall within this category as two border anomalies that remained dormant until 2000. It was only with the Israeli occupation of these areas and Hizbullah's political use of the Sheb'a Farms as a tool for maintaining its armed struggle against Israel that these dormant border anomalies were awakened. In general, inter-Arab border dynamics always have been different from Arab-Israeli border dynamics. While a disagreement over the location of the boundary could arise between Arab states, it never carries the same political weight and emotional baggage that political interaction — in war or in peace — with Israel holds in the Arab world. Ghajar and the Sheb'a Farms are a perfect example of this reality. Had it not been for Israel's involvement, most likely these two interconnected border anomalies would have stayed dormant within the context of Syrian-Lebanese political dynamics.

The second part of your question about referenda, where a borderland population could vote to belong to one state or the other, deals with the bigger issue of redrawing the political boundaries of states in the Middle East. Throughout the world, post-colonial states have had a tendency to adopt and even to sanctify the political boundaries that were imposed on them by their colonial powers. This holds true also in the Middle East, where political elites sanctioned the boundaries they inherited from Britain and France. In one exemplary case where a state challenged these boundaries, the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990, Arab leaders deemed the agressor's actions unacceptable. Additionally, in the political climate of the contemporary Middle East, no referendum could take place, for it would take power from the political center and transfer it to the periphery. I cannot think of a scenario where any Middle Eastern political elite would freely allow a referendum about any issue, let alone about the redrawing of their state's boundaries.

You mention the proximity of Ghajar and other border anomalies to the headwaters of the Jordan. How important is the water issue in this dispute?

Without a doubt, water always has been one of the prime reasons for conflict in this region. However, it is also important to note that oftentimes Arabs and Israelis alike have exaggerated the importance of water in disputes in this region. I will give you two examples. After the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, Lebanon constructed a pumping station at the Wazzani Springs. Israel responded that this could constitute a *casus belli*, despite the fact that the quantities of water pumped were relatively small and for local consumption. Israel's reaction was exaggerated and was primarily done in the context of its struggle against Hizbullah and not so much out of concern that this pumping station might drain the Jordan River. The second example comes from the Sheb'a Farms. It has become an established fact in Lebanon that Israel refuses to withdraw from the area of the Sheb'a Farms, the southwestern slopes of Mount Hermon, because of the abundant

sources of water in this region. In fact, any beginning geologist would be able to tell you that because Mount Hermon is made out of karstic rock systems, all the snow and rain that fall on the mountain quickly seep into the bottom of the mountain and resurface in the springs of the Dan, Banias, Wazzani, and a few other smaller springs. On the mountain itself, including the Sheb'a Farms, there are very few water sources with the exception of some seasonal water-gathering pools. There are many reasons why Israel refuses to withdraw from the Sheb'a Farms, but water is not one of them. Mount Hermon itself is dry. One who wants to control the rainfall and snow-melt that falls in abundance on the Hermon needs to control the plains below.

There has been much talk of Israel withdrawing from the northern part of the village (the "Lebanese" part). Would this impede normal communications within the two parts of the village? Would resolution of one issue create another problem by making everyday life for the villagers more difficult?


The town of Ghajar. (Photo: Flickr user keithwillis)

As I demonstrate in the article, the partition of the village was based on a cartographic and historical mistake. However, in my view, the most important argument against the partition of the village is the human dimension of the Ghajar ordeal. Dividing a village like Ghajar is tantamount to killing it. Ghajar is a traditional community and its partition would tear it apart. The village cannot survive divided into two sections that are physically separated from each other. With no other 'Alawi village in its vicinity, the survival of Ghajar solely depends on its ability to function as one undivided community. Any proposed solution needs to take this fact of life in the village into account. As I argue in the article, all parties involved would benefit from leaving Ghajar united under Israeli control until a peace deal is reached between Israel and Syria when theoretically, the village together with the Golan Heights would return to the latter. Lebanon has never claimed that Ghajar is a Lebanese village; Syria also recognizes that the village is Syrian. Israel does not want the village to be divided because it poses a security threat by being the only open section in an otherwise tightly sealed Israeli-Lebanese boundary.

How optimistic or pessimistic are you about progress being made on the Ghajar and Sheb'a Farms issues in the short-term, either as part of an Israeli-Syrian deal or as a confidence-building measure? And what about the longer term question between Syria and Lebanon after a (hypothetical) Israeli withdrawal?

The border disputes in the Sheb'a Farms and Ghajar are symptoms of the greater malady of the Arab-Israeli conflict. If and when a peace deal is struck between Israel and Syria, they would disappear into the abyss of oblivion. While the current American administration is trying to initiate the resumption of peace talks between Israel and Syria, and between Israel and Lebanon, in the current regional political climate, unfortunately, I think it would be challenging to reach a comprehensive peace deal that would terminate either conflict.

An Israeli withdrawal from the Sheb'a Farms as a confidence-building measure is also challenging. First, there is no agreement over the exact definition of the Farms and of the area demanded by Lebanon. Therefore, even if Israel decided to withdraw from this region, there is no consensus about the territory from which it should withdraw. Since only Syria and Lebanon can determine where their boundaries lie and since Syria will not agree with Lebanon about the location of this line so long as Israel occupies the Golan Heights, we find ourselves in a catch-22 situation.

Finally, it has been suggested that an Israeli withdrawal from the Sheb'a Farms would pull the rug out from under Hizbullah's pretext to remain armed. However, I do not believe that this disarmament would be achieved through an Israeli withdrawal from the Sheb'a Farms. Hizbullah already has stated several times that staying armed is not connected to an Israeli withdrawal from the Sheb'a Farms. I also doubt that an Israeli withdrawal from the Farms would necessarily empower the anti-Hizbullah forces in Lebanon. This brings us back to the initial question. I am pessimistic about the short-term chances to untangle the border disputes in the Sheb'a Farms and Ghajar. But I am optimistic about the long-term chances of a regional peace deal. I also believe that this is the only way to deal with disarming Hizbullah.

— Interview by Michael Collins Dunn

Meet the Scholars: Mehrzad Boroujerdi

Dr. Mehrzad Boroujerdi has led a long career in academia, focusing on the international relations and politics of the Middle East, and particularly those of his native country, Iran. He is Associate Professor of Political Science at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, where he also serves as the Founding Director of the Middle Eastern Studies Program. Dr. Boroujerdi recently served as Co-Director of the Religion, Media and International Relations Program at Syracuse. He is the author of *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, which explored the ideological roots of the Iranian Revolution. A former Scholar-in-Residence at the Middle East Institute, he currently serves as an MEI Adjunct Scholar.

Was a career in academia something you always wanted, or was there something specific that pushed you toward it?

Dr. Mehrzad Boroujerdi. Photos: Center for International and Regional Studies at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar

The latter, really. I came to the United States in 1978, and shortly after my arrival, the Iranian Revolution began to unfold. These events captured my attention and convinced me to go against my original plan of becoming a petroleum engineer. I decided to try to make sense of the revolution and its effects, which led to study of political science and sociology. From that point forward I knew that I wanted to go into academia.

I've learned that making sense of Iranian politics is next to impossible — a sort of occupational hazard. But I try, and once you become a serious student of the country and the subject matter, there is some sense in how the events of the revolution came together and in why Iranian politics have been so ferocious for the last 30 years.

You've been banned from Iran and deemed a counterrevolutionary figure. How do you feel about not being able to return to your homeland? Do you foresee a time when that might change?

To put it simply, I feel awful. However, I try to look at the bright side of things, because exile enables you to do away with some of the restrictions that may exist for others, in terms of how freely they can speak their minds. I'm trying to turn this into something positive and fulfill my responsibilities toward what's happening in Iran.

Not being able to return is a big problem, both in terms of my personal life and my professional life. This is especially true with everything currently happening in Iran — one wants to be there in the middle of this social upheaval. I do long for a time when I can go back. Hopefully my return will be under a better political system, or even a modified version of the existing system, where political amnesty can be issued to those who do not see eye-to-eye with the government.

What in particular led to your condemnation as a counterrevolutionary figure?

It was sort of a combination of factors. Back in 2001, I was involved as an intermediary and translator in a public opinion poll that Zogby International conducted in Iran. This was when Muhammad Khatami was running for a second term, and there really wasn't anything controversial about this poll. But then Gallup contacted my interlocutors in Iran about a second poll in which participants were asked whether the Iranian public was in favor of reestablishing ties with the United States. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents said "yes." This was hard for the government to accept — it ran counter to their propaganda line — and the government accused the pollsters of being American spies. The pollsters were jailed for two to three years, and people (like myself) who had been in contact with them were listed as counterrevolutionaries, I assume because of our email exchanges and the contact we had prior to the second poll. On top of that, the present regime was not necessarily happy with some of my writings and other types of activities. That's why they branded me as a "leading counterrevolutionary," which I think perhaps may be a badge of honor.

We've seen what some have called a "Twitter Revolution" after the recent Iranian elections. Do you see this as a lasting method of communication and dissent in Iran?

There are two dimensions I see in this. Considering the young demographics of Iranian society, one should not be surprised that Iranians have turned to new media — it's a way of getting unfiltered news, sharing political information, presenting counterintuitive opinions, and engaging in political activism. The other dimension is that Iran is a country with an extensive censorship mechanism, and is almost at the very bottom of the World Press Freedom Index. Despite this, Iran has a very vibrant blogosphere of some 60,000 regularly updated blogs.

So the fact that the younger population, which is technologically savvy and wants to find its way around censorship, is turning to new media like Twitter is a sign of the type of political participation that we will see in the future. The recent election uprising drove home the point that people are trying to utilize these mediums to create a new type of public space for themselves and move around the censorship mechanisms.

How do you see the media landscape evolving in the Middle East on the whole?

Dr. Mehrzad Boroujerdi with faculty at the Center for International and Regional Studies at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar.

One should be very optimistic about what's going on, especially as the younger population and women are entering this domain to find new venues to express themselves. I think we should bear in mind that the trend is an impact of globalization; people's identities are becoming more complex and eclectic. What you see right now in the Middle East is that the old and new media are enabling people to undermine the authoritative rule of political figures and religious leaders by questioning and challenging their assertions in public.

We also should acknowledge the fact that there is still a large gap between the media of the Arab and Muslim world and the rest of the world. Yet, while access to information is still an issue, overall we see positive trends in the emergence of media organizations such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Al Manar. It's a positive omen for what's going on in the region; the media is making it possible for people to have more arguments among themselves, thus creating a counter-discourse. I think these are all very positive trends and we are only in the early phases of this communication revolution.

One of your recent initiatives was serving as Co-Director of the Religion, Media and International Relations Project, a three-year initiative funded through a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. How do you see the interaction among these three areas playing out in international politics today?

If you look into the tripartite subject of religion, media, and international relations, there is a lot that captures our attention. The purpose of the project, which we approached through the lens of the media, was based on the sense that we are training the next generation of graduate students in international relations, but we are not serving them well unless we make them cognizant of the important role of religion in global politics. Because international relations is such a secular discipline of study, religion's role has been ignored for many years. World events are forcing us to rethink this issue, and we sought to study how media impacts the way religious institutions and organizations manipulate or react to international events.

We have concluded that policymaking, decision-making, leadership, and problem-solving are impacted by the intersection of religion, the news media, and international relations. In the future, the dynamics of this interaction should be looked at in a more systematic fashion.

Your current research project ties nicely to your early dedication to examining and explaining Iranian politics. What does the project entail?

It's a major research project on the political elites of post-revolutionary Iran. The project gathers information on around 2,000 individuals who have held important positions since 1979. When it's finished, the project will identify macro-level explanations and trends, so that the analysis of Iranian politics does not get reduced to personality profiles.

I think the book I published on Iranian intellectuals and the West, which was more of a theoretical work, was my attempt to explain some of the ideological underpinnings of the 1979 revolution. This work will take the story from 1979 to the present and examine the political profile of the people who have come to power.

— Interview by Nichole Allem

The George Camp Keiser Library

The George Camp Keiser Library is grateful for a donation of papers, political cartoons, and maps of the Middle East from Ilse Stauffer, wife of the late Dr. Thomas R. Stauffer. Dr. Stauffer, who received his PhD at Harvard University and taught at Harvard, the Vienna Diplomatic Academy, and at Georgetown University, and was a longtime member of the Middle East Institute and a frequent lecturer.

The Library would like to remind readers of our numerous online features including:

Our online catalog enables MEI members to create accounts to accommodate their research: http://www.mei.edu/Library/CatalogSearch/tabid/93/Default.aspx

Our virtual showcase of new books: http://www.mei.edu/Library/NewBooksShowcase/tabid/98/Default.aspx

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The following is a sample of recent acquisitions to the George Camp Keiser Library:

Books marked by an asterisk (*) have been reviewed or annotated in the Summer 2009 edition of *The Middle East Journal*.

The Alevis of Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition / David Shankland (2003)

Arafat and the Dream of Palestine: An Insider's Account / Bassam Abu Sharif (2009) *

A Call for Heresy: Why Dissent is Vital to Islam and America / Anouar Majid (2007)

Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan / Hamid Khan (2005)

Cotton, Climate, and Camels in Early Islamic Iran: A Moment in World History / Richard Bulliet (2009)

Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland / Sana Haroon (2007)

The Gulistan (rose Garden) of Sa'di: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary / Sa'di; Wheeler M. Thackston, trans. (2008)

A History of Pashtun Migration 1775-2006 / Robert Nichols (2008)

"I Have a Very Good Trust in My God" construction de la religiousite des jeunes gens Sunnites a Beyrouth / Eva-Maria Zeis (2009)

iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam / Gary Bunt (2009)

Islamism: A Documentary Reference Guide / John Calvert, ed. (2008) *

The Jews of Lebanon: Between Coexistence and Conflict, 2nd ed. / Kirsten E. Schuzle (2009)

Al-Midhanah al-hamra': sirah dhatiyah / Ibrahim Ghushah (2008)

Muslims in Modern Turkey: Kemalism, Modernism and the Revolt of the Islamic Intellectuals / Sena Karasipahi (2009)

The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition / Itzchack Weismann (2007)

Notes from the Fortune Telling Parrot: Islam and the Struggle for Religious Pluralism in Pakistan / David Pinault (2008)

Poetry and Politics in Contemporary Bedouin Society / Clive Holes and Said Salman Abu Athera (2009)

Resistance: The Essence of the Islamist Revolution / Alistair Crooke (2009)

Revolutionary Ideology and Islamic Militancy: The Iranian Revolution and Interpretations of the Quran / Najibullah Lafraie (2009)

SIPRI Yearbook 2009: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security / (2009)

Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation / John Renard, ed. (2009)

Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City through Text and Image / Frances Terpak (2009) *

Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law / Judith Tucker (2008) *

— Simon Braune

Books in Brief: *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*
Gary Bunt (2009)

The post-9/11 reader has witnessed a surge in literature attempting to explain the complexities of the Islamic tradition. This ever-increasing myriad of books contains numerous duplications, perhaps encouraging authors to explore unaddressed aspects of the world's fastest-growing religion. Gary Bunt, Director of Islamic Studies and Senior Lecturer at the University of Wales, achieves a groundbreaking study in his latest book *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. Bunt applies the subject of e-learning in theology to the contemporary Muslim community. While modern scholars have addressed the subject to some extent, Bunt presents a comprehensive report of the Internet's profound impact on modern Muslims' discourse, identity, and community.

Bunt introduces the reader to the "cyber-Islamic environment," defining the umbrella term as acknowledging diversity among and within different zones in cyberspace that represent varied Muslim worldviews. This explanation contains the book's most technical jargon. While iMuslims does require a basic understanding of the Internet, it is readily accessible and appealing to readers interested in both modern Islam and computer science alike.

Throughout the book, Bunt remains steadfast in his phenomenological approach to online Islam and addresses the inherent complexities of Muslim networks online. For example, when noting that online *fatwas* are instantly accessible to a global audience, the author acknowledges the difficulty in gathering empirical evidence to measure the real impact of online Islamic legal opinion. This same complication is applied in the chapter on "Digital Jihad" — how can we measure the social impact of jihadist groups online? Thus, what Bunt essentially achieves is a comprehensive acknowledgement of the growth of cyber-Islamic environments by virtue of their online presence, raising important questions surrounding their real-life impact along the way.

Bunt's survey of Islam's online presence ultimately focuses on the Internet as a transformative medium for global religious communities. While Bunt is careful to acknowledge that not all aspects of the Islamic tradition are fully represented online, he concludes that the Internet has reshaped the "boundaries of Muslim networks, created new dialogues, and presented new transaction routes within the Islamic knowledge economy." This book provides a refreshing report on the world's contemporary Muslim community, and raises stimulating questions that will contribute to the ongoing discussion on the adaptability of religion in the computer age.

— Clifton Martin

Books in Brief: *The Internet in the Middle East: Global Expectations and Local Imaginations in Kuwait*
Deborah L. Wheeler (2006)

In *The Internet in the Middle East*, Deborah Wheeler challenges the claim that the Internet necessarily enhances democracy, freedom, and economic privatization by examining the Internet's role in Kuwaiti society. Wheeler argues that instead of the Internet shaping Kuwaiti culture by promoting Westernized ideals, Kuwaiti culture determines Internet usage.

Wheeler examines how culture determines Internet usage by examining how women, Islamists, and young people utilize the Internet. Kuwaiti culture discourages female Internet use from an early age, as little girls are often instructed to go straight home after school while boys' families allow them to stay and play on the Internet. The daily life of a woman in Kuwait, dictated by societal norms and values, is not conducive to using the Internet. According to Wheeler, this is not an isolated example: Indeed, only 6% of Middle Eastern Internet users in 2002 were women.

Although many aspects of Kuwaiti society have remained unchanged, Wheeler explains that the proliferation of the Internet has provided increased opportunities to both men and women. Whereas arranged marriages were once standard in Kuwait, now many couples meet on the Internet. Women now have a better platform to express their opinions, as the Internet provides anonymity. Now Muslims have the opportunity to educate

the sizable Internet community about their religion. Though these small steps in daily life are important, they have yet to be institutionalized through concrete governmental actions. Daily life may be changing slightly, but Wheeler argues that cultural norms have deferred any drastic changes.

Wheeler uses personal stories, surveys, and statistics to illustrate the Internet's place in Kuwaiti society. Through the author's descriptions of Internet usage, the reader learns the history, culture, and political system of Kuwait. Wheeler's use of first-person accounts and the uniqueness of the topic make *The Internet in the Middle East* an engaging and thought-provoking read.

— Jennifer Bourgoin

The Middle East Journal

The Autumn 2009 issue of *The Middle East Journal* offers a major contribution to the boundary dispute over the town of Ghajar, a look at Syria's Muslim Brotherhood, and three articles on various themes related to Turkey and Turkish-Americans. The issue, due out in October, will contain the following articles:

- Asher Kaufman, "Let Sleeping Dogs Lie: Ghajar and Other Anomalies in the Syria, Lebanon, Israel Tri-Border Region." Kaufman provides new insight in a careful study of the divided town of Ghajar, currently split between Lebanon and Israel. A sticking point in any future negotiations for Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, Ghajar, like Sheb'a Farms, has often been considered Syrian territory. The article contains a very detailed account of the issue.
- Yvette Telhamy, "The Muslim Brothers of Syria and the Syrian-Iranian Relationship." An overview of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's relationship with the 'Alawite-led state.
- Ersel Aydinli, "A Paradigmatic Shift by the Turkish Generals." A study concentrating on the shift in attitudes of the Turkish military in its relations with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its Islamic orientation.
- Ilhan Kaya, "Identity Across Generations: A Turkish-American Case Study." The study of Middle Eastern diasporas is drawing increased attention, and this case study of identity among Turkish Americans contributes to the growing field.
- Mesut Yegen, "'Prospective Turks' or 'Pseudo-Citizens:' Kurds in Turkey." A look at the background and evolution of identity politics in Turkey's Kurdish community.

The Book Review Article, by W. Andrew Terrill of the US Army War College, will discuss four books on the Iraq War.

— Michael Collins Dunn

Beyond the Beltway

Several major developments in the region kept MEI's Scholars very busy during the past three months, including President Obama's speech at Cairo University, stable elections in Lebanon and a violent electoral aftermath in Iran, and the withdrawal of US troops from Iraqi cities. The Iranian elections alone put our Scholars in the media more than 450 times. The Scholars also wrote prolifically, producing multiple independent reports for organizations like the US Institute of Peace and Jane's Islamic Affairs, as well as publishing eight op-eds in papers including *The Daily Star*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Washington Times*, and World Politics Review.

Wendy Chamberlin with Thomas Friedman and Al-Jazeera's Riz Khan discussing the Arab Human Development Report. (Photo: Stephanie Swierczek)

Paul Scham and Wayne White discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict at the United States Institute of Peace. (Photo: Kacy Barton)

MEI in the News

MEI Scholars discussed President Obama's speech 22 times in the media, and offered analysis of his Middle East policy more than 90 times over the past three months. **Abdallah Schleifer** published two articles on the websites of Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera English about the speech's implications. As new settlement activity in Israel threw the President's policy into question, Ambassador **Phil Wilcox** discussed the history of US policy toward Israeli settlements on "Viewpoint with James Zogby," **Graeme Bannerman** spoke to Al Jazeera about Benjamin Netanyahu's announcement of a new settlement in East Jerusalem, and Ambassador **Edward Walker** addressed the same topic for *The Jewish Week*. Additionally, Walker, Wilcox, Bannerman, and **Wayne White** were quoted in *The National* discussing Washington's reaction to the issue of new settlements. Ambassador **David Mack** made several appearances on Arabic language television, including Al Jazeera and BBC, to discuss the current situation between Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The Iranian presidential elections were addressed by **Alex Vatanka**, **Mehrzad Boroujerdi**, and **Trita Parsi** on CNN, CNBC, Voice of America, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, "The News Hour with Jim Lehrer," and NPR. Wayne White was interviewed on KCRW Los Angeles' "Warren Olney Show," and **Louay Bahry** was quoted by Al Jazeera English when the United States withdrew troops from Iraqi cities on June 30. MEI Scholar-in-Residence **Marvin Weinbaum** discussed US operations in Afghanistan during a feature segment on *World Focus*.

Around Town


Alex Vatanka and AEI's Ali Alfoneh speak at an event in the Boardman Room. (Photo: Nichole Allem)

MEI President Ambassador **Wendy Chamberlin** brought her expertise on Pakistan to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where she testified before their Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs about the status of Pakistan's internally displaced persons. In addition, Ambassador Chamberlin participated in a panel discussion on the United Nations Development Programme's Arab Human Development Report at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where she was joined by Thomas Friedman, Robin Wright, and Bahgat Korany of the American University in Cairo. Wayne White and **Paul Scham** discussed the Arab-Israeli conflict and the need to engage Hamas while participating in a panel at the US Institute of Peace. Graeme Bannerman spoke at MEI and again at USIP about the June 7 parliamentary elections in Lebanon, for which he served as an election monitor. **Peter Bechtold** addressed the Rumi Forum on "The Significance of Obama's Speeches in Ankara and Cairo," and Ambassador **David Newton** also addressed the Forum in an event titled "Iraq: A Personal Perspective." **Zubair Iqbal** participated in a roundtable discussion on June 30 hosted by the Atlantic Council about "Building Consensus in Pakistan," which was covered by the Associated Press of Pakistan. **Molly Williamson** addressed Syracuse University graduate students studying energy policy development during a class held in Washington, DC. Williamson also spoke at the Osgood Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where she discussed the politics of petroleum. **Stan Riveles** participated in a lunchtime discussion at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars about "Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement."

Beyond the Beltway

Louay Bahry traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where he presented his paper, "Foreign Labor in the Persian Gulf and the Crisis of National Identity" at the ISA-ABRI Joint International Meeting. **Andrea Rugh** participated in a summer talk series hosted by the Massachusetts-based Ad Hoc Committee for Peace and Justice in the Middle East, discussing "Political Challenges in the Middle East." Ambassador David Mack discussed

"Communication and Miscommunication across Cultures" during a videoconference with Montana State University-Bozeman students, representing countries across the Middle East. Mehrzad Boroujerdi was hosted by the Center for International and Regional Studies of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar for a discussion about the June 14 Iranian presidential elections. Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin traveled to San Francisco for the 32nd Annual Banquet of the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America, where she delivered the keynote address on July 4. **Herman Franssen** traveled to Colorado, Iran, Switzerland, London, and Singapore to speak about energy issues and their impact on the Middle East and beyond. Paul Scham traveled to Beersheva, Israel to deliver a speech on breakthroughs in Arab-Israeli negotiations at the Annual Conference of the Association for Israel Studies.

— Kacy Barton and Nichole Allem

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