

SISMEC BOARD REPORT SPRING 2012

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

SISMEC began in 2010 as an initiative for the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies (at the time the Department of Near Eastern Studies) with a mandate to recruit and train MA students in the culturally and historically grounded study of Middle Eastern conflicts. By our upcoming two year anniversary, our people, projects and development plans bespeak the energy and excitement that this project has attracted.

Our first three MA students from the original research team will have graduated from the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies and will be going on to either government service or PhD programs in the US and UK. Matt Flannes' MA thesis on the ideology and practice of 'creative destruction' and the Iraqi economy during the war was commended by SISMEC board member and veteran US diplomat Ambassador David Dunford as "providing an explanation for what seemed inexplicable policy" even as Ambassador Dunford was serving as the State Department mentor to the Iraqi foreign ministry during the Bremer interregnum. Colin Owens' MA thesis on insurgency and counterinsurgency in Iraq will provide a former US serviceman and security contractor's critical view of how Iraqi resistance and US military strategy co-evolved or influenced each other in the years from 2003-2011. And Johann Chacko's work on the mutual influence of

Deobandi Islam and Pakistani nationalism sheds historical light on one of the least understood dynamics of the background to the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict. These projects sought to analyze the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and analyzes complex ways in which the various parties to a conflict or ideology shape and reinforce one another.

The contours of the second generation of SISMEC are already clear. Having attracted PhD as well as MA students inside and outside of the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies, the initiative has expanded its scope to include, alongside the US wars and the dynamics of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, the vast new realm of the "Arab Spring" uprisings. These conflicts, some non-violent and some armed, provide a real-time laboratory for studying the clash of authoritarian structures with democratizing forces in countries across the region. Our doctoral students are working on countries from Mauritania to Turkey to the Persian Gulf and on topics that include the formation of armed groups (Dylan Baun), the political economy of conflict and security alliances (David Callen), relations between militaries and civilian humanitarian NGOs (Lyndall Herman), post-conflict power sharing (Christina Sciarra), contemporary political Islam (Ahmed Meiloud) and minority politics

(Gulsum Gurbuz). Our framework for analyzing the various waves of Arab Spring uprisings comparatively will incorporate a variety of methodologies from anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and political science. And our new MA students are working on dual degrees with professional schools, Sam McNeil and Britain Eakin in journalism and Nicole Zaleski in public health.

The intellectual momentum and potential of the project has far exceeded the modest expectations I had when I first envisioned what would become SISMEC. Our challenges for the next year include development and sustainability. We will be pursuing grants and community outreach to fund our programs and research projects and to help support more graduate student work through the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies

Dr. Leila Hudson,
Director, SISMEC



FALL 2011 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Organizational development

SISMEC took an important step in developing a firmer institutional footing for the long term with expansion of our Board of Advisors. The board will eventually consist of nine members selected for their civic engagement with various constituencies we hope to learn from and contribute to.

In October 2011 Dr. Turki Faisal Al Rasheed agreed to join our Board of Advisors, and to take his place as its acting chairman. Dr. Al Rasheed is a University of Arizona alumnus, agricultural entrepreneur, agricultural policy advocate, and democracy activist. He has published on the inter-related problems of food security, political stability, democratization and a number of other issues in the Arab press. With his executive experience as chairman and founder of Golden Grass Inc., a board member of the National Agricultural Development Company, the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce, and founder and chairman of

the Saudi Voters Center, Dr. Al Rasheed is a valuable addition to the SISMEC family.

Ambassador David Dunford (Retired) is another addition to the SISMEC Advisory Board, having previously served on our Academic Advisory Board. Ambassador Dunford retired from the Foreign Service in 1995 following completion of his assignment as Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. He served from 1988-92 in Saudi Arabia as Deputy Ambassador, including 15 months as Acting Ambassador. He is adjunct faculty at the University of Arizona, and had previously served as adjunct faculty at the Thunderbird School of Management.

Events

23 September 2011: SISMEC co-sponsored the "Anatomy of a Tipping Point" panel discussion chaired with the American Institute for Maghreb Studies (AIMS) to examine the different course of the Arab Spring in Libya

and Syria. Chaired by Dr. Leila Hudson, SISMEC researchers presented on the role of domestic armed forces, political Islam and foreign intervention in the escalation from civil protest to armed conflict.

27 October 2011: SISMEC co-sponsored a talk entitled "Turkey and the Arab Spring" by Kerim Balci. Mr. Balci is a senior Turkish journalist associated with the Zaman Media Group, the country's leading private newspaper publisher.

9 November 2011: SISMEC co-sponsored the "Symposium on US-Israeli relations" with the Judaic Studies department of the University of Arizona. Topics included the changing relationship of American Jews with Israel and the state of the US-Israeli strategic relationship.

*See reverse page for continuation of
Fall 2011 Accomplishments.*

FALL 2011 ACCOMPLISHMENTS (CONTINUED)

Publications

Articles: Dr. Hudson, Colin Owens and Matthew Flannes article "Drone Warfare: Blowback from the New American Way of Warfare" was published in the Fall issue of *Middle East Policy*. Dr. Hudson and Matthew also published "The Arab Spring: Anatomy of a Tipping Point" in *Al Jazeera English* on the role of foreign intervention.

SISMEC Bi-Weekly Bulletin: The Bulletin has continued to cover crises and current affairs while readership and the number of contributors

have continued to grow. Article subjects have spanned from armed forces reform in Turkey to the nuclear standoff with Iran to the struggles of the Arab Spring.

Academic:

Course Development: Two new SISMEC developed courses have been accepted by the University of Arizona for Spring 2012. Matthew Flannes is teaching "NES 380: Introduction to the Arab Spring" while Johann Chacko is teaching "NES 385: Introduction to Political Islam."

Middle East Studies Association: SISMEC presented the "Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Middle East Conflict" panel at the 2012 Annual Middle East Studies Association Conference in Washington DC on December 3rd. Topics included applying Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to Lebanon's civil conflicts, covert financing, the US approach to counter-insurgency in Iraq, and the influence of Neoliberal ideology on the American occupation of Iraq.

DEVELOPMENT

At the beginning of 2012 SISMEC continues to look to enhance our external funding opportunities. As such the organization has taken a view to pursue two quite divergent funding paths: applying to the extraordinarily prestigious and competitive Carnegie Corporation grant program, while at the same time focusing on our Southwestern roots and seeking broader community involvement and support in our ongoing research projects.

Our application to the Carnegie Corporation grant program will detail SISMEC's ability to

pursue a large-scale, interdisciplinary research project, highlighting the diverse interests and academic disciplines of our researchers and faculty affiliates. As such, SISMEC is seeking funding from the States in Transition program for a project addressing the causal conditions involved in the various types of conflict witnessed in the Arab Uprisings.

In a nod to our public interest and involvement component, SISMEC is also pursuing a more vigorous agenda of community

involvement. As well as our continuing involvement with the Jewish Community Center and their "Current Events" lecture series, SISMEC is working to build a relationship with the local Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions and other service organizations. Through this enhanced community involvement, we hope to expand our base of private donors, while pursuing more institutionalized relationships and funding through formalized grant applications.

SPRING 2012

The Spring semester is starting off to be a busy one. Two of our research assistants are teaching undergraduate courses, one on the Arab Spring and one on political Islam. In addition to these exciting new courses we have a busy community outreach/guest lecture schedule. We have already delivered three guest lectures at the Tucson Jewish Community Center on the Arab Spring and have lined up three additional community engagements for early March, covering the same subject. Following our article "Drone Warfare: Blowback from the American Way of War" we have decided to co-host a panel on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, with two law student groups. The panel covers a variety of topics from the use of drones to the political, legal, and ethical implications.

Looking forward to the future, we have written a pedagogical article on the use of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to understand Middle Eastern conflict, particularly the Arab Spring. This article is currently in its final stages and will be sent off to an academic journal for review shortly. Following this article we will start collecting data on the Arab Spring which will serve as a data base for a follow-up article, applying the QCA methodology to the events in the Arab Spring. With this new research we hope to identify the combinations of conditions that lead to specific outcomes, with more accuracy and nuance than other methods.

We have also initiated a sister-organization,



the SISMEC Student Reading & Research Group (SISMEC SRG) to provide an opportunity for interested undergraduate and graduate students to contribute to SISMEC events and news bulletins and discuss the latest scholarship on peace and security issues in the region. We hope to see SISMEC SRG take on its own character and initiate projects reflecting the members' diverse interests and experiences.



School of Middle Eastern
and North African Studies

For More information, visit
www.sismec.org

Or e-mail us at
sismec1@gmail.com