

رحلة ריחלה

# RIHLA

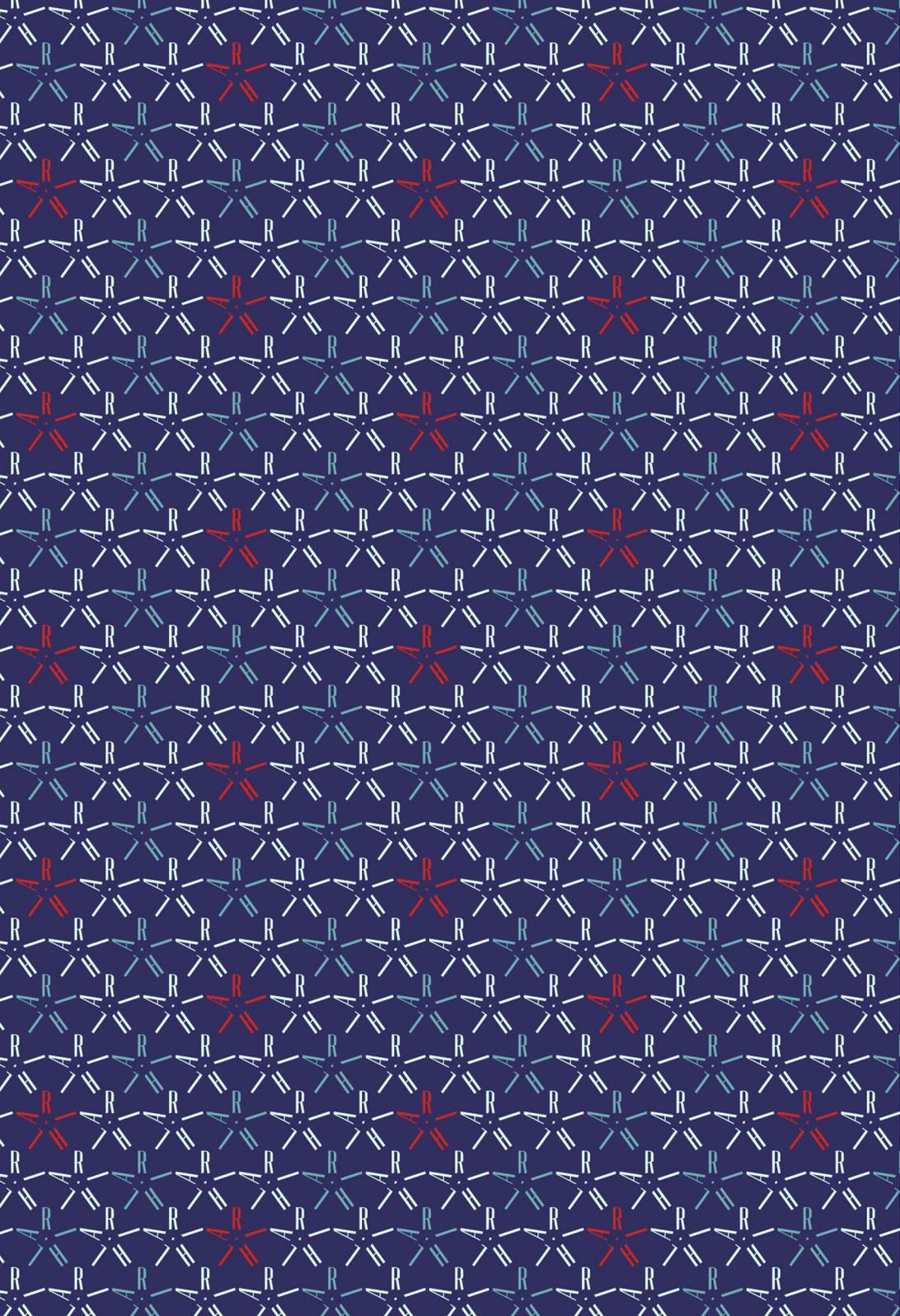
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# 2



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ESSAYS & PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRADUATE STUDENTS OF MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES



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*On the cover*

UN Peacekeepers watching Syria on Har Bental, Israeli Golan Heights.

Photograph by SAMANTHA SEMENTILLI



International MA in  
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The onset of the Arab Spring in 2011 signaled the beginning of continuing dramatic social, political, and cultural change in the Middle East. The exit of coalition forces from Iraq, the rise of non-state actors across the region, and the influence of technology have paved the way for new geo-political realities. The entire global community remains riveted on the uncertainty and unpredictability of the region's future, and struggles to adjust to the new situations on the ground.

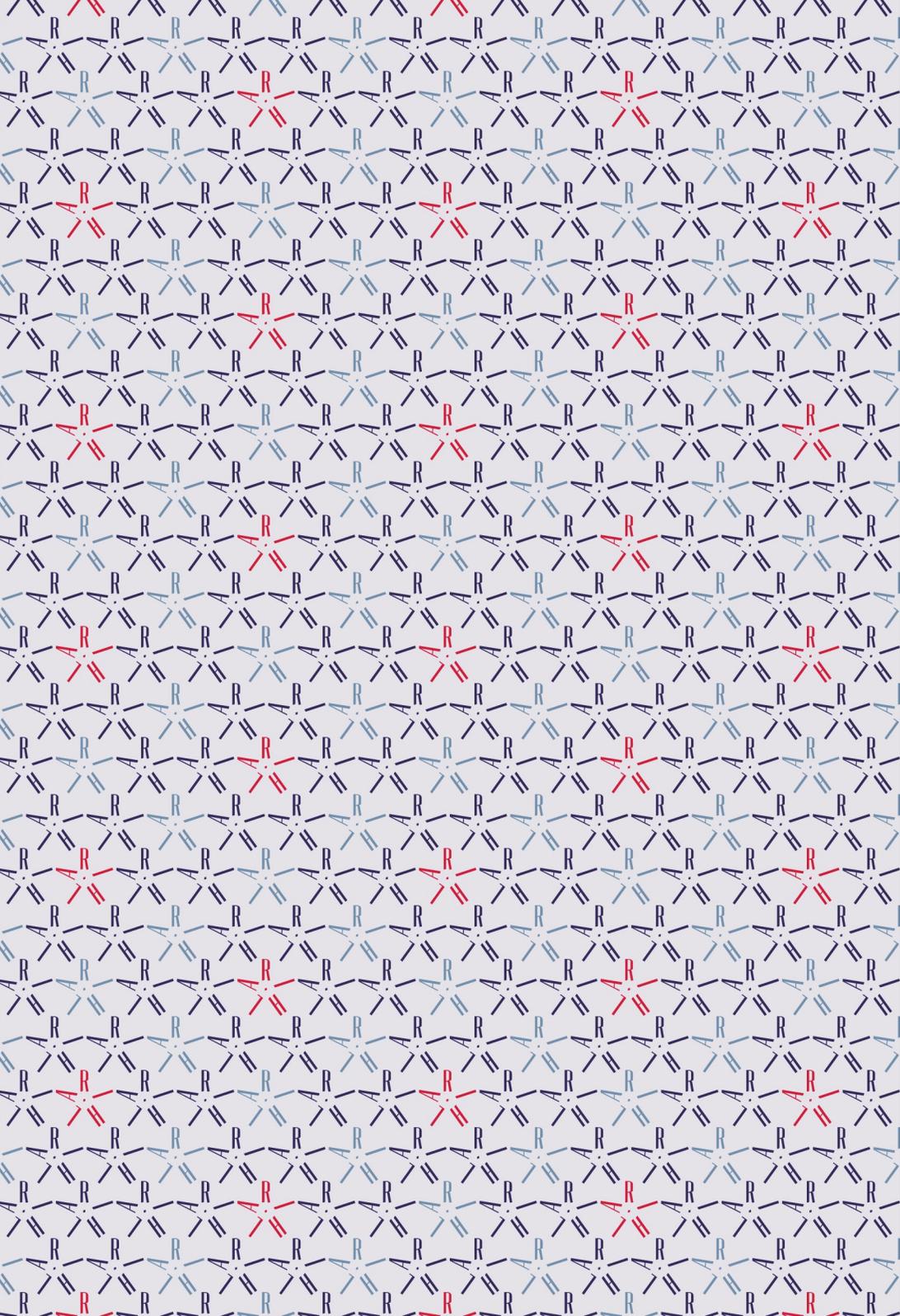
An inevitable part of studying in the International MA Program in Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University is experiencing the day-to-day consequences of these phenomena as they unfold. *Rihla*, which means travelogue or journey in Arabic, provides graduate students with a platform to share their reflections as they live and study in Tel Aviv, and travel throughout the larger region.

In the following collection of personal and academic essays our graduate students report and reflect on their eyewitness experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Through their words we become privy to fresh ways of understanding and interpreting new regional realities from individuals immersed in studies of the region's past, who are also living its present.

*Rihla* also includes a variety of provocative and inspiring photographs taken by our students. These images expressively capture the rich cultural and diverse settings in which they live and study every day. In a world that increasingly draws "East" and "West" closer together, the contents of this second volume of *Rihla* invite readers to ponder new realities, and the place of the international student in the Middle East.

PROFESSOR UZI RABI

Director, International MA in Middle Eastern Studies Program,  
Tel Aviv University



PART

# 1

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## REFLECTIONS ON ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

***Rihla* is the classical Arabic word for journey and travelogue.**

Seeing the Middle East for oneself, experiencing its vastly diverse cultures, and meeting with the people whose daily lives are shaped by regional affairs, are invaluable to gaining an understanding of this region. The articles that follow inform us and transport us to a women's advocacy event in Palestine; to the border town of Umm El Fahem, where the local art gallery defies and redefines national identities; and to Washington, D.C., where one student's future with the U.S. State Department begins to unfold.

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# Terrorism for Beginners

By JENNIFER MYERS

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A terrorist attack occurred ten minutes' walking distance from my house. And it didn't matter at all.

I was in the middle of a spirited game of Bananagrams with my seven-year-old babysitting charge when a ringing cell phone interrupted my stunning and fully-orchestrated defeat. I left my opponent in the middle of R-O-L-L-E-R-S-K-A-T-E-S to take the call.

"Hello?"

"Hey, where are you?" Since moving to Tel Aviv in the thick, humid summer of 2012, I had developed the kind of relationship with colleagues in my master's program that quickly and frequently transcended the need for telephone pleasantries.

"Babysitting. Why?"

The caller, my good friend, former housemate, and Miami-bartender-turned-intelligence-analyst, Natalie, stated plainly: "Something happened. There was a bus bombing. In Bat Yam."

\* \* \* \* \*

Whenever "something" happens in Israel, there is always a very similar progression of actions that follow. A hasty, breathless phone call from a friend is followed by a mental scan of people you know in the area, is followed by a flurry of texts, Whatsapp inquiries, phone calls, and Facebook messages, is followed by scrolling through pictures of shattered bus windows on *Ynet* that evening. Sometimes, if the "something" is particularly bad, or lethal, the international news will catch wind of it and you will sit up at one in the morning explaining to your grandparents in Wisconsin in practiced, patient tones that "it wasn't even a bus route I use normally," which means exactly nothing to them.

As commonplace as Israel's culture of volatility has become to me, I often neglect to consider how jarring it is for my family to hear these reports that I sometimes forget to even mention. Listening to my mom's tongue trip over Hebrew city names

on the map, I never thought I would use Google Earth to show her that incoming rocket strikes from Gaza are still "far away" from my Tel Aviv home. It is difficult to explain to them that the "somethings" I've seen in my 17 months in Israel are small potatoes; the months I've lived here are some of the most peaceful months in this nation's recent history. Where I live now, "peace" is measured in relative terms.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Yeah, no, I'm at work. I'm fine."

"Okay, I've gotta run. Call you later."

My anxious fingers have confused the touch display of my cellphone, and now the screen is frozen. I don't live in Bat Yam. After finally conceding that I was too broke to be spending my thesis year renting in the absurdly expensive neighborhoods of the Old North of Tel Aviv, I had recently relocated to the city's southern suburbs. Consequently, I ride a minimum of four buses each day to reach my English tutoring and babysitting commitments around the greater Tel Aviv area. I don't live in Bat Yam. But the family of my Israeli boyfriend does. The apartment where he slept for 16 years – where his mother and sister still reside – including the room where he keeps his old army gear, his stacks of high school report cards, and a fading poster of Angelina Jolie are a two-minute drive from where a bus just exploded. My phone is still frozen and Shira is crowing victoriously from the kitchen table. R-O-L-L-E-R-S-K-A-T-E-S. Twelve points.

\* \* \* \* \*

My boyfriend, Yaniv, works in technical support in Petach Tikvah. Last summer, after a year of fitful adventures in online dating, I had dwindling expectations that I would ever meet someone for whom it would be worth staying in Israel. I was half-heartedly entertaining job prospects on three different continents the night he first asked me to dinner. After a futile, 30-minute search for parking in his mother's screechy white Suzuki, I was ready to suggest an alternative date, but he stubbornly persisted until we squeezed into the last remaining space in the Jaffa Port's parking lot. I was unsure, but his wide smile, generous laughter, and warm, perfectly-toasted-marshmallow skin eventually

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8 thawed my cynicism. Nowadays, he makes my eggs every morning and playfully chases me around the apartment we share.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Whatsapp icon finally submits to my nervous pecking, and I fire off a quick message:

“Honey, there was a bomb or something on a bus in Bat Yam. Bus 142. They are shutting down all entrances to Bat Yam.”

“Yeah I read something about it.”

“☹”

Just as I set down my phone, Shira’s mother Rachel comes bustling through the door, arms full of party hats, bags of Bamba, and party decorations for her four-year-old daughter’s birthday celebration at preschool next week. As she flutters around the kitchen putting things away, she and Shira speak together in rapid-fire Hebrew, a language that I still only speak with shy, stumbling inadequacy. After cooing over her daughter’s crookedly scrawled English homework, she turns to me.

“How are you, Jennifer?” She pronounces the “r” in my name with a typical Israeli purr.

“Something happened in Bat Yam.”

Rachel recognizes the tone in my voice. She is a dusty blonde, soft-spoken, and perpetually distracted psychotherapist with two jobs and two children, but she, like nearly every Israeli over the age of 18, knows how to fire an M-16. She has served in the Israeli military, just as her daughters will when they graduate high school. In her lifetime, Israel has seen roughly ten recognized wars and operations. She knows what “something” means. She glances at me.

“B-O-M-B,” I mouth soundlessly over her seven-year-old’s head.

She nods.

“Was anybody...?”

“No.” Not this time.

She turns to the sink full of dishes as Shira erupts into a fit of giggles watching Michael Jackson’s *Beat It* video for the thousandth time. We don’t say any more about it as Rachel

9 hastily packs her daughters’ sack lunches, because it doesn’t matter. Whoever placed a duffel bag containing a crockpot of explosives on the bus has not been found, and nobody has claimed responsibility. Nobody was hurt this time, so it is unlikely to make the international news. We may never know who did it. We probably won’t even remember this particular attack in a week, or a month, or a year. It’s just another thin layer of anxiety, another small trauma, and another day in Israel.

\*\* Author’s Note: Personal names have been changed to protect anonymity.

# Navigating Nablus

By MOLLY LOWER

I hate feeling directionless.

Crammed in the back of a hotbox cab, trundling along a winding dirt road somewhere in the West Bank, I had no clue where we were going. And I didn't much like it.

I had come to Israel in search of a purpose, to rescue myself from the monotony of my former life, and to put my skills and passion to good use: to study Middle Eastern history and work for women's rights in the region. Yet, with almost a year of coursework under my belt, by June 2013 I felt no closer to that goal – not that I hadn't learned an incredible amount since I arrived in the country – a hot, sweaty, and homeless mess, in October 2012.

No, I was the girl who knew too much or, rather, the girl who knew just enough to feel completely ineffective. Having dived into the work of women's empowerment headfirst, I resurfaced to discover I was in the deep end. The combination of culture, religion, precedent, and complicity that contributes to the oppression of women worldwide is an imposing and formidable structure to dismantle. Headway made in one area is often countered by regression in another and, at times, it seems the work to realize women's rights is a battle against a hydra, with one severed head yielding two more in its stead.

The more I read about the efforts of activists; became involved with Women's Voices Now, a nongovernmental organization working to empower women in Muslim-majority societies; and tried to navigate Israel as a half-committed expat, the more I felt my own impotence. How could I possibly hope to empower women in the Middle East when I was just one person who couldn't even reliably order her own dinner in Hebrew?

Directionless and powerless.

And then I was on my way to Nablus. Tomorrow's Youth Organization (TYO), another NGO, accepted Women's Voices Now's offer to screen four of our films for an audience of

approximately 18 Palestinian women. A group discussion in Arabic would follow each film, moderated by Suhad Jabi, TYO's psychosocial program manager.

Looking out the back window of the cab at the labyrinthine roads of the West Bank, I was keenly aware of two things: how grateful I was for my coworkers because I would never have gotten here on my own, and how I had no idea how this day was going to go. We had a plan, of course. But eight months in Israel taught me that adaptability is a more useful skill than planning. Had I *planned* to spend a week running toward bomb shelters at the sound of an air raid siren a mere month after I had arrived in Israel? No. Did I have to do it anyway? Oh yes. Did I learn from the experience? Yes, I could be a much faster runner. And to expect the unexpected.

The winding road to Nablus seemed a fitting metaphor for my time in Israel up to that moment: a meandering journey with an unclear finish line – a journey that vexed the type A woman in me greatly – but a journey that I wanted and needed to take.

As soon as we arrived, thanks to the guidance of a local man, it was apparent that our plans could not anticipate the organic dynamism that unfolded before us. We came with an order to the films and a set of questions to ask the audience, but what good was an itinerary tailored to an audience we didn't know? Familiar with these women and their perspectives, Suhad took the reins to organize the screening schedule and to ask challenging questions, to push the women beyond their comfort zones, while Program Assistant Inas Badawi frantically took notes and translated significant chunks of the discussion into English for us. I sat back and watched.

I was content to do so until we watched the final film, a Gazan woman's first-person retelling of her rape and destroyed life thereafter. This woman wished she were dead. I had seen this film several times before, but I still felt sick – until Inas translated that approximately twelve (a majority) of the women present felt that it was the woman's fault for being raped because she chose to get into the car with the man who raped her. Then I was angry.

Directionless, powerless, angry.

A Kurdish woman wearing the purple headscarf particular to the Urfa region of Turkey. She and her daughter sit in a courtyard formed by the traditional beehive houses of Harran.

*Photograph by* DUYGU ATLAS



I vented my anger later that night to a friend of mine over strong drinks at the local bar. How could women blame each other for such a heinous violation as rape? I refused to understand. Moreover, I absurdly felt that the 12 women who blamed the rape victim failed to fully appreciate my tortuous journey to get to Nablus, as if their conservative mindset had put all my efforts back at square one.

Defeated.

Then my friend reminded me of something I will never forget. He said that there was no way I could ever measure the effect our presence had on those women in Nablus that day. Yes, it was entirely possible that they would continue living and thinking as they always had, and it was equally possible that we introduced to them new ideas of self-empowerment that would take hold with time. It was impossible to know in a day what effect we had, but that should never mean we get discouraged and stop trying to make the world better for women.

It occurred to me afterward that my fears of being only one person were quite well founded. Of course I couldn't expect to change the world alone – I couldn't even orchestrate a day in Nablus alone! From the time we left Jerusalem, we in turn relied on the help of: the cab driver, the local man who directed us to the center once in Nablus, Suhad to speak with the Palestinian women, Inas to translate, the bus that transported the Palestinian women to and from the center, and all the members of both Women's Voices Now and Tomorrow's Youth Organization who previously coordinated to make that day possible. Later, I relied on my friend to help me get up again when I felt beaten down.

Not knowing where the road leads does not make you directionless, and not being able to do everything yourself does not make you powerless. Even Hercules needed help to slay the hydra.

## A Culture Comes Home

By LARISSA SHULMAN

**C**ulture requires its own sanctuary, and that sanctuary is the museum. The museum speaks to and for its people, creating a sacred space that enables a people to make sense of its heritage.

No less is true for the Umm al-Fahem Gallery which, in only 20 years, provides a space where Palestinian culture can build and progress, turn inward and outward, look to the future, and reflect on the past. "We are pushing for official museum status," says Said Abu Shakra, the founder and director of the gallery, whose charisma and candor bring a radiant energy to the space. In pursuit of his vision, Said and his team of donors, curators, researchers, and gallery staff created a singular hub of contemporary Palestinian-Israeli culture.



Work by Farid Abu Shakra, from *Abdullah: The Poem, the Flesh*

“There was no place for Palestinian artists [before the gallery],” shares Said, who comes from a family of artists and is one himself.

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The idea for the gallery emerged after the death of Said’s cousin, Asim Abu Shakra, a prodigious artist who succumbed to leukemia before his thirtieth birthday. After leaving a commemorative retrospective of his late cousin’s work held at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Said was confounded by the reality that Palestinians lacked their own artistic ecosystem. He did not want subsequent Palestinian artists to be confined by Jewish-Israeli curators and institutions alone. Starting from scratch, Said set out to make a home for Palestinian art. Through the evolution of the gallery, to which he devotes tireless efforts, Said puts Palestinian culture into the hands of its people.

I had the pleasure of spending the day at the gallery during the installation of *Manifestations of Letter*. Through its presentation of a diverse body of work that portrays Arabic language as a means to bond a people to its past, the exhibition explored the ways in which written and lingual traditions buttress Palestinian-Israeli identity.

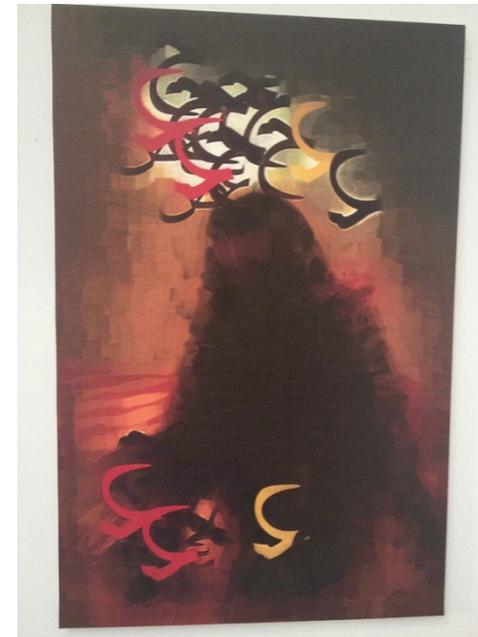


Work by Khader Oshah

Farid Abu Shakra, Said’s younger brother, showed several of his works in *Manifestations of Letter*, and happened to drop by during my visit to the gallery. He spoke with me about the “new, Palestinian every man” depicted in his work, *Abdullah: The Poem, the Flesh*. The piece depicts the confused and disorientated state of the archetypical contemporary Palestinian young man, replete with a jarring yet appropriate message in English: “No Signal.”

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The exhibited works of *Manifestations of Letter* run the gamut of traditional, emotional, political, and unnerving; the mark of a well-curated show that seeks to delve, question, enlighten, and move, like the gallery itself.



Gallery artist

Perhaps the gallery’s greatest treasure is the extensive photography and film archives. What began in 2008 as an idea for an exhibition, expanded into a project which now accounts for hundreds of testimonials from the elders of Umm al-Fahem, Wadi ‘Ara, and Lajjunn (now Kibbutz Megiddo). The archives are

part of an ongoing permanent exhibition, which allows people to learn about the communities that surround the Umm al-Fahem Gallery. The gallery also features a subset of photographs by the Jewish-Israeli photographer, Shai Aloni, documenting the elders of the neighboring Wadi 'Ara.



Photographic tapestry by Shai Aloni from *Shadows of Time: Photographic Documentation of the Elders of Wadi 'Ara, 2007–2012*

Aloni is one of many Jewish-Israeli artists involved with the Umm al-Fahem Gallery. Said himself says that, “we would be no where without Jewish-Israeli help.” In fact, the El-Saber Association, a cultural benefactor that receives funding from the Israeli Ministry of Education, is one of the gallery’s major sources of support. The museum exhibits works of Jewish-Israeli artists, and involves Jewish curators in the making of its exhibitions. Rina Peleg, a Jewish-Israeli artist, runs pottery workshops for the women of the Umm al-Fahem region. Collaboration has been a critical component in the creation and success of the gallery from the start.



From *Shadows of Time: Photographic Documentation of the Elders of Wadi 'Ara, 2007–2012*



Pottery created in workshops led by Rina Peleg  
*Photograph by ADAM MOSS*

In my view the gallery disseminates two narratives that run in tandem. One narrative is of resistance and regaining, and voices a refusal to forget history. The other narrative makes peace with the present, carving out the space for a Palestinian identity that is inextricably Israeli. The institution itself is a catalyst for rebranding Umm al-Fahem. Once considered a *locus non grata* in Israel because of its radical political bent, the gallery changed perceptions of the city.

For Said, developing the gallery is deeply personal work and rooted in a desire to link one generation to the next. "This is for my mother," says Said of the gallery, "and it is for my children." Still, Said fears that his offspring are uninterested in the past and won't understand their cultural legacy after those who can remember it are gone. "I carry my family on my back," he says. "This museum is my gift to the next generation."

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## Practical Application: U.S. State Department

By VAL JENSEN

It's a big day for me. I'm standing in a suit and tie looking out over my audience, notes in hand, but I won't look at them much. I know this stuff. I scoured the Internet for information, read articles, double checked facts, played the role of pesky inquisitor while rehearsing in the bathroom mirror, and covered all foreseeable angles. Wait! Numbers! Do I know all the numbers? Calm down that's why you've got your notes, I remind myself. Okay then, let's do this.

"Good afternoon class, today I will be briefing you on the current struggles facing President Hadi's government in Yemen..."

Once I conclude, my classmates graciously applaud. I think to myself: I nailed it. When Prof. Tanchum interrupted and asked questions, I provided informed answers to them. Well, to most of them. Sure, Prof. Tanchum had his criticisms but they were well placed. If this was a video game, this experience leveled me up.

Fast forward ten months and it's a big day for me. I'm in a room full of State Department officials standing in a suit and tie, notes in hand, but I won't look at them much. I know this stuff.

My acceptance to the internship program with the State Department came to me as somewhat of a surprise. I forgot that I applied to the program before I left to study at Tel Aviv University. It was a surprise and somewhat redemptive. I took the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) right before I left. Just a couple of days before my flight to Israel, I learned that I passed. I completed the next steps in the process, personal narrative essay questions, and a review of all my answers and current scores at the Qualification Evaluation Panel (QEP). While in Tel Aviv, I finished the essays in the allotted time and submitted them. I received an email not much later saying I wasn't selected to advance to the Oral Assessment. I was quite disappointed.

Two weeks after that rejection, I received another email stating I had been chosen as the primary candidate for an internship with the Bureau for Diplomatic Security. Nevertheless, it was still a long and hard process before I secured my spot there. I needed to pass a background investigation; gain a security clearance; figure out the logistics of how to get to Washington, D.C., and how to live for ten weeks on an unpaid internship. Somehow, it all came together. In September 2013, I found myself saying goodbye to Israel and on my way to D.C.

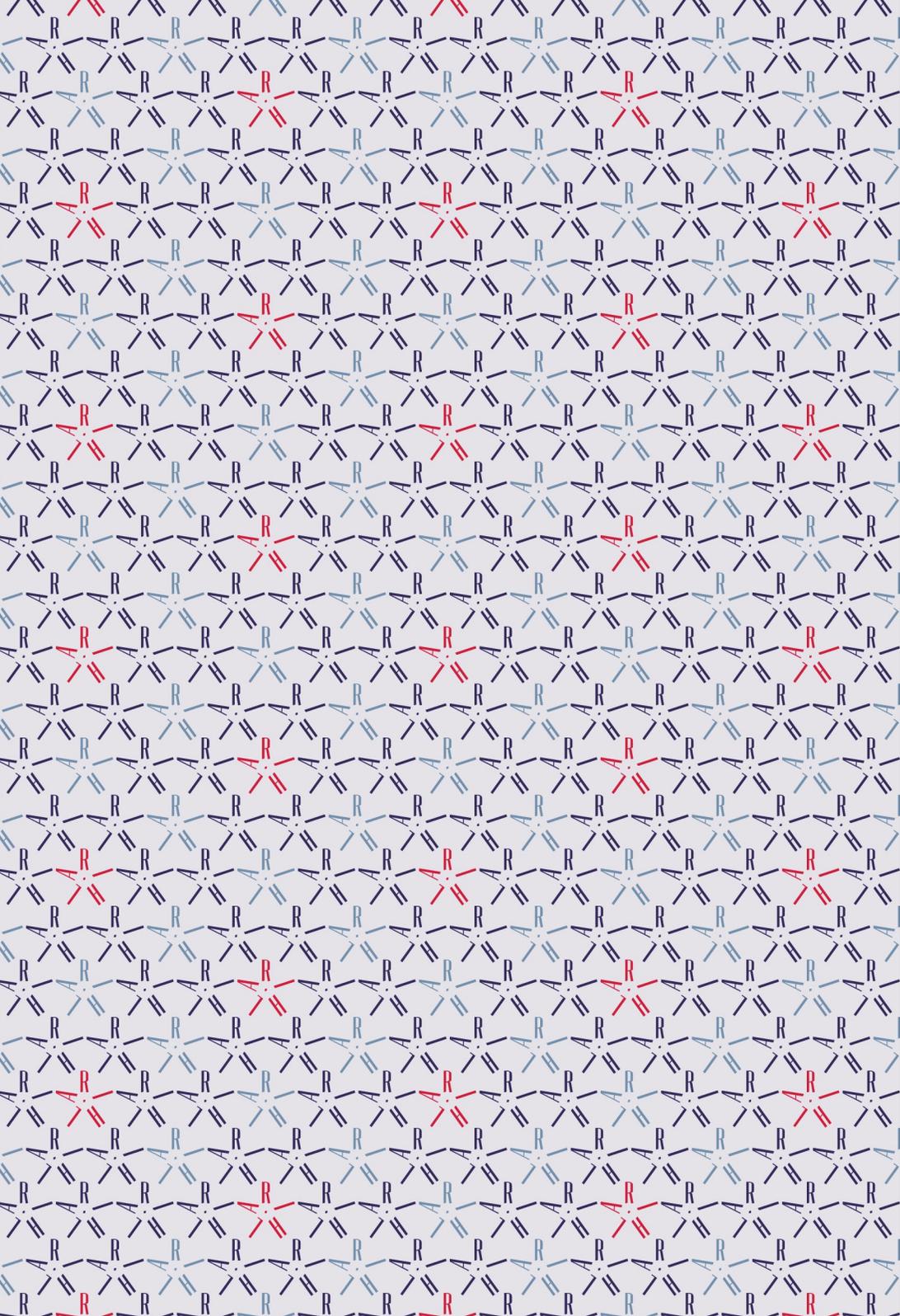
The Bureau for Diplomatic Security (DS...everything is an acronym in government) is like the law enforcement arm for the State Department. I marked it on the application because I thought it sounded cool. I wanted to be placed in the Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs, my first choice, but once I started the internship I found that DS was unique. I became the intern for the Kabul Embassy Security Force (KESF). Our team was in charge of a multi-million dollar contract to protect the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. I became involved with, and sometimes in charge of everything, from market research for Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAP), to Z Backscatter® Vans (ZBV), bio reviews for new guards, working with Excel on data sheets dealing with billing and contract oversight, writing concise information memos for superiors, and more.

In my first week I conducted market research on the ZBV, a mobile x-ray van disguised as a utility vehicle that scans for explosives in cars. After researching and contacting multiple people about the “scan van,” I presented my findings. At the end of my presentation, I received a flurry of praises. My supervisor said that I really helped the team and developed a great skill along the way. I credit my time at Tel Aviv University for that.

Şanlıurfa, Turkey. An elderly man performs ablutions at the Pool of Abraham (Balıklı Göl), where it is believed that the Prophet Abraham was thrown into the fire by King Nimrod.

*Photograph by DUYGU ATLAS*





PART

# 2

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## IDENTITY POLITICS AND EVOLVING PERCEPTIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Teaching students to synthesize and analyze the unfolding phenomena in the MENA region is the principle goal of the MAMES program. In the following essays, MAMES students discuss the issues of the day: from the rift between technological progress and progress for human rights in Qatar; to the abandoned hopes of Egypt's revolutionary youth; to the precarious position of Turkey's Kurdish population, offering cogent perspectives on a region in the throes of change.

# Interest, Ignorance, and Irresponsibility:

## The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and the World of German Soccer

By VALERIE STRASSMANN

“The World Cup is not just a great global sporting event; it is also inscribed with much deeper cultural and political importance.”

— Martin Jacques, British journalist and academic

Every four years, 32 men’s national soccer teams compete in the international soccer competition hosted by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). Also known as the World Cup, with the exception of 1942 and 1946 (due to the Second World War and its aftermath), the world anticipates the games that began in 1930 and took place in Uruguay. Throughout FIFA’s history and to the present day, controversy, criticism, and contention accompany the deliberations over which country will host the World Cup. For example, in protest of the decision to hold the global competition in Europe twice in a row, Argentina and Uruguay boycotted the tournament in 1938.

Indeed, the fact that no Asian or African country hosted the World Cup until 2002 demonstrates FIFA’s Eurocentrism. This is not surprising when one considers the potential benefits of hosting the World Cup: ample financial gain for the international sport federations and their corporate partners, opportunities for real-estate investments, prestige for the hosts, and the sense of national unity and pride. Contrary to this understanding, though, hosting the World Cup does not guarantee a significant economic or political boost for the host nation. Professor Andrew Zimbalist, an authority on sports economics, argues that countries which have not planned properly beforehand and want to accommodate

these events “at any cost” end up “spending billions of dollars that are completely wasted.”<sup>1</sup>

In the case of Qatar, the location secured for the 2022 World Cup, “money is not an object,”<sup>2</sup> mused Franz Beckenbauer, the highly-esteemed and, arguably, the all-time greatest German footballer and manager who served on the FIFA executive committee from 2007 to June 2011. Yet, shortly after Qatar won the bid to host the 2022 World Cup, concerns were raised about the extremely hot temperatures that average 40 degrees Celsius and higher. Beckenbauer suggested holding the World Cup in the winter despite major implications for the national leagues’ game schedules. Yet, Beckenbauer also proudly shared that “the Emir of Qatar proposed to cool down the entire country in case it is necessary.”<sup>3</sup>

Criticism of an entirely different sort erupted in September 2013 when *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, revealed that thousands of Nepalese workers, who constitute the single largest group of foreign laborers in Qatar, were held under conditions that the International Labor Organization defines as “modern-day slavery.” Following the prospect of work and higher salaries, they often found themselves trapped in the country as their passports were confiscated, and forced to live in labor camps with unsanitary and dilapidated conditions. Between June 4, 2013, and August 8, 2013, at least 44 workers reportedly died of heart attacks, heart failure, or workplace accidents. These accusations triggered several interesting reactions within the world of German

1. Guerra, Ricardo, (2014). “Special Interview: Cost-benefit analysis of hosting the World Cup, Olympics”. *Al-Arabiya News [English Version]*, July 03, 2014. Online <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/economy/2014/06/25/Special-Interview-The-surprising-truth-about-hosting-the-Olympics-and-the-World-Cup.html> (accessed 10/08/2014).
2. Juergens, Tim, (2014). “Beeeckenbauer ist homosexuell: Franz Beckenbauer über schwule Fußballer und die WM 2014” [Beeeckenbauer is homosexual: Franz Beckenbauer about homosexual footballer and the WM 2014]. *11 Freunde [German]*, February 22, 2014. Online <http://www.11freunde.de/interview/franz-beckenbauer-ueber-schwule-fussballer-und-die-wm-2014?page=2> (accessed 10/08/2014).
3. Ibid.

soccer, revealing some of the controversy's potential ramifications and the extent of German-Qatari connections.<sup>4</sup> Theo Zwanziger, the former president of the German Soccer Association (DFB – Deutscher Fussball-Bund), admonished FIFA for awarding the World Cup to Qatar and condemned the first league clubs FC Bayern Munich and Schalke 04 for ignoring Qatar's human rights violations. On February 13, 2014, in Germany's *Die Welt* newspaper, Zwanziger stated, "These clubs cannot simply turn a blind eye on such incidents. Those who look away are complicit."<sup>5</sup> Neither club commented on the situation, although both of them train at Qatar's ASPIRE (Academy for Sports Excellence) during the winter.

On the contrary, Karl Heinz-Rumenigge, a German soccer authority and the current CEO of the FC Bayern Munich AG supervisory board, praised the "fantastic training conditions" and the "supportive hosts" in Qatar.<sup>6</sup> Only FC Bayern Munich player, Anthony Ujah, openly expressed his opinion by supporting a petition against the World Cup in Qatar on Facebook: "I come from a country [Nigeria], where people have to leave in order to find work and earn money to survive. That's why I received the reports from Qatar with dismay and sadness. [...] We all thought slavery was abolished but that's not the case. [...] It is unacceptable."<sup>7</sup>

4. Patisson, Pete, (2013). "Revealed: Qatar's World Cup 'slaves'". *The Guardian*, September 25, 2013. Online <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/25/revealed-qatars-world-cup-slaves> (accessed 15/08/2014).

5. Roehn, Tim, (2014). "Zwanziger attackiert FC Bayern und Michel Platini" [Zwanziger attacks FC Bayern and Michel Platini]. *Die Welt [German]*, February 13, 2014. Online <http://www.welt.de/sport/fussball/article124815553/Zwanziger-attackiert-FC-Bayern-und-Michel-Platini.html> (accessed 10/08/2014).

6. FC Bayern Munich, (2014). "Viel Training und zwei Spiele am Persischen Golf" [Extensive training and two matches at the Persian Gulf]. *FC Bayern Munich News [German]*, January 1, 2014. Online <http://www.fcbayern.de/de/news/news/2014/volkswagen-camp-qatar-fcb-mit-zweitestspielen-am-persischen-golf.php> (accessed 10/08/2014).

7. Haubrichs, Alexander, (2013). "Ujah: 'Nichts anderes als Sklaverei!'" [Ujah: Nothing else than slavery]. *Express.de [German]*, October 8, 2013. Online

At the same time, Franz Beckenbauer, an honorary president of FC Bayern Munich, made a contradicting statement about the abusive work conditions. Asked about laborers' situation in the light of *The Guardian's* reportage, Beckenbauer answered, "I have never seen one single slave in Qatar. They all walk around freely – not tied to chains, or in a state of atonement. I have never seen such a thing [as a slave]."<sup>8</sup> Recently though, Beckenbauer's integrity came into question when he was banned by FIFA for 90 days from any football-related activity due to his refusal to cooperate with an inquiry into allegations of corruption in allocating the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar, respectively. While the ban was eventually lifted, FIFA continues to investigate the matter.

Of course, human rights issues and scandals linked to mega-events like the World Cup are not limited to the case of Qatar. Outrage accompanied the lead up to the 2014 World Cup held in Brazil, for example, when news broke about the forced eviction of residents; and the harsh crack down on the protest movement demonstrating against prevailing corruption, social grievances, and the economic burden of the World Cup. In response, FIFA officials, including President Josef Blatter and Franz Beckenbauer, voiced their surprise and displeasure about the demonstrations and slammed the Brazilian government, saying that "Brazil applied for this World Cup. We did not force the World Cup on Brazil!"<sup>9</sup>

Qatar is, however, the first Middle Eastern and Muslim country to host the World Cup. Interestingly, this milestone in FIFA's

<http://www.express.de/fc-koeln/fc-star-ueber-wm-in-katar-ujah-nichts-anderes-als-sklaverei-3192,24568532.html> (accessed 15/08/2014).

8. Runde, Joerg, (2014). "Blatter, Beckenbauer und Co: Peinlicher geht es nicht" [Blatter, Beckenbauer & Co.: It could not be more embarrassing]. *T-Online.de*, June 14, 2014. Online [http://www.t-online.de/sport/fussball/wm/id\\_69838698/blatter-beckenbauer-und-co-peinlicher-geht-es-nicht.html](http://www.t-online.de/sport/fussball/wm/id_69838698/blatter-beckenbauer-und-co-peinlicher-geht-es-nicht.html) (accessed 10/08/2014).

9. "Beckenbauer überrascht von Protesten in Brasilien" [Beckenbauer surprised by protests in Brazil]. *Bild [German]*, June 20, 2013. Online <http://www.bild.de/news/aktuell/beckenbauer-ueberrascht-von-protesten-in-30917054.bild.html> (accessed 08/12/2014).

history did not surface in any of the statements made by either German soccer officials, or in any of the commentary published in major German newspapers. Even the center-right tabloid *Bild*, known for its sensational and populist journalism – as displayed in one of its reports on the German-Algeria match during the recent World Cup in Brazil with the headline “Ramadan-Alarm: How hungry for goals are the Algerians during the month of fasting”<sup>10</sup> – did not comment on Qatar being an Arab or Muslim country. In contrast, the official FIFA homepage praises Qatar for its commitment to ecology-friendly technologies and architectural advancement, while emphasizing its Middle Eastern and Arab background: “A World Cup in Qatar would be the first global sporting event ever to be hosted in the Middle East [...] fans from around the world would experience the magic of *traditional Arab hospitality* and leave Qatar with a new *understanding of the Middle East*.”<sup>11</sup>

So what about Muslims in Germany? Have there been any reactions to the scandals in Qatar? The only article that appeared was published on June 20, 2014, by the *Islamic Newspaper (Islamische Zeitung)*. In the article, the author, Benjamin Idriz, the imam of the Sunni Muslim Islamic Community in Penzberg (Bavaria), and chairman of the multi-ethnic Sunni Muslim association, Munich Forum of Islam (MFI – Muenchner Forum fuer Islam e.V.), decried the international criticism of Qatar as pure “envy” of the “rapid and successful advance” of the Emirate. “It seems like that this small country, an Arab country, is deliberately challenged for hosting the soccer World Cup...”<sup>12</sup>

10. *Bild Zeitung*, (2014). “Ramadan-Alarm: Wie torhungrig macht der Fastenmonat die Algerier?” [Ramadan-Alarm: How hungry for goals are the Algerians during the month of fasting]. *Bild [German]*, June 28, 2014. Online <http://www.bild.de/sport/fussball/nationalmannschaft-algerien/macht-sie-ramadan-torhungriger-36576946.bild.html> (accessed 10/08/2014).

11. FIFA, (2013). Bidders for the 2022 FIFA World Cup – Qatar. Online <http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/qatar2022/bidders/qatar.html> (accessed 10/08/2014).

12. Idriz, Benjamin, (2014). “Für ein konstruktives Miteinander” [For a fruitful cooperation]. *Islamische Zeitung [German]*, June 24, 2014. Online <http://www.islamische-zeitung.de/?id=18034> (accessed 15/08/2014).

While Imam Idriz admitted that the status of laborers in Qatar is indeed important, he doubted whether European states can voice any justified criticism of Qatar, considering the many refugees that have perished at the expense of Europe’s advancement. However, Idriz’s vocal support of Qatar is not surprising as Qatar is one of the main sponsors of the Munich Forum of Islam.

Similar to Imam Idriz, German newspapers have widely reported on international criticism regarding Qatar hosting the World Cup, but have largely dismissed such negative commentary as envy, and countered this sentiment by emphasizing the advantages of a World Cup in Qatar and praised its efforts in hosting the competition. Moreover, the criticism seems generally focused on Qatar’s abuse of human rights and an ongoing corruption scandal, while avoiding placing Qatar into a Muslim, Islamic, or Middle Eastern context. Does this indicate that there have not been any statements about Qatar being an Arabic or Muslim state? Not quite.

In his reaction to the events, Imam Idriz emphasized that Qatar is an “Arabic country.” Hence, it can be assumed that this fact, at least in his opinion, does to some extent play a role. Another example – albeit an extreme one – involves statements issued by (far) right-wing populist representatives, such as Michael Stuerzenberger, regional chairman of the ring-wing populist party “The Freedom Party Bavaria” (Die Freiheit Bayern), who calls Qatar an “Islamic rogue and sharia state” that “keeps its guest workers from Nepal, India and Sri Lanka like animals in typical Islamic inhumanity.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, those are actors that also call for the expulsion of Muslims who are unwilling to renounce their faith.<sup>14</sup>

[www.islamische-zeitung.de/?id=18034](http://www.islamische-zeitung.de/?id=18034) (accessed 15/08/2014).

13. Stuerzenberger, Michael, (2013): “Video Muenchen: Boykottiert die WM in Katar!”. *PI-Politically Incorrect*. Online <http://www.pi-news.net/2013/10/video-muenchen-boykottiert-die-wm-in-katar/> (accessed 22/08/2014).

14. Lang, Juergen, (2014). “Radikal gegen den Islam” [Radical against Islam]. *br.de [German]*, March 19, 2014. Online <http://www.br.de/nachrichten/rechtsextremismus/die-freiheit-106.html> (accessed 22/08/2014).

Criticism directed at Qatar and its successful bid for the World Cup competition of 2022 will indubitably continue, as will scrutiny over the suitability of the location, reports about human rights abuses, and corruption scandals. In the meanwhile, the majority of the world of German soccer remains silent, or conveniently ignorant, toward the accusations and affairs; few officials have voiced an opinion and, predominantly, in favor of Qatar. Only the suggestion of holding the World Cup during the winter incited some argument as it would greatly influence the national leagues' schedules. No evidence could be found that more Muslims in Germany reacted publicly to Qatar's nomination and the criticism directed against it. The fact that Qatar is the first Muslim and Middle Eastern country to host such a major soccer event has hardly played any role in public discussion. In this respect, only the far right seized the chance to use the situation for their own racist and nationalist agenda.



Al Azhar Mosque, Cairo, Egypt, by night.

*Photograph by* ABBY BERGREN

# The *Thawra* Generation: A Conversation with Egyptian Revolutionaries

By LUCY OLEYNIK



Youth heading to Tahrir Square on the “Day of Anger”.  
January 25th, 2011

After three tumultuous years of revolution, Egyptian society is undoubtedly altered. After multiple revolts and protests in the now infamous Tahrir Square and other city centers of the country, what will remain embedded in many people’s minds is that very first *thawra* (revolution), when youth first voiced their dissent. Taking to the streets spontaneously, these young people ushered in an era of change. At the same time, this unprecedented, popular mass movement lifted the hopes of millions worldwide.

Today, however, we continue to witness ongoing stagnation. Youth in Egypt are still largely unemployed, disgruntled, and uninvolved in the political process. Prominent activists, such as dissident blogger Alaa Abd el-Fattah, are behind bars and

thousands of other activists sit in prisons on dubious charges. Ahmed Maher’s story (leader of the April 6 Movement) is rather telling in this regard. He is now serving a three-year sentence for attending an illegal protest. Following the November 2013 ban of demonstrations, some 16,000 people have been jailed as well.

Mohammed Emara and Tariq Yusuf were at the forefront of the protests in 2011. They joined the April 6 Movement in 2010 from their respective bases in Cairo and Alexandria, where they actively engaged in promoting the revolution. Three years after the first protests in 2011, they reflect on a time when spirits were high, and ponder the current situation faced by their homeland:

*Q: How would you describe the first revolution from today’s perspective?*



Protesters gathering in Zamalek neighborhood, Cairo.  
January 26th, 2011

**Mohammed:** I realize now that as protesters we were hasty, disorganized, and somewhat romantic. We all came from completely different backgrounds. The only thing we had in common was striving for liberties. We naively believed overcoming corruption and bribery was possible. Was there any strategy behind this idea? Not really. We were so exhilarated about the revolution we didn’t give much thought to its consequences. It’s perfectly understandable that such unexpected success blinded

us completely. One day there was just a group on Facebook – “Kullīna Khaled Sa’id” (“We are all Khaled Sa’id”) – and the next day actual protests began. Soon enough, these demonstrations would bring tangible results. Night curfews were perceived as a considerable achievement. For the first time our voices mattered. We might have failed in the long run, but we most certainly embraced freedom at its best.

**Tariq:** I must agree. What united us was the fight against the regime’s preposterous favoritism and unlimited bribery. We didn’t set specific goals. The young people of Egypt just had enough. Today I clearly understand we lacked a leader and a consistent program. Back then I saw everything through rose-colored spectacles.

**Q:** *Would you say the main aspiration back then was to topple the regime?*

**Mohammed:** As I said, it all started with sporadic demonstrations against the regime. It felt as if the society exploded from internal grievances. We were hoping for a change, but no one thought we would come that far.

**Tariq:** It was an outcry of Egyptians in search of a better life. Ousting Mubarak was out of the question when we first went out to protest. Only after the military crackdown did we come up with an open slogan “asqaṭ ya Mubarak” (“bring down Mubarak”). After his resignation, it took us a while to process this news. As Mohammad mentioned, we never thought we would come that far.

**Q:** *How was Morsi perceived when he came to power?*

**Mohammed:** Some revolutionaries hated him and didn’t vote for him. Others hated him, but still voted for him, hoping he would supervise a collective constitution. I personally voted for Morsi. To me he seemed like a better alternative. After all, the anger towards the old regime was overwhelming and no one wanted

to see members of Mubarak’s cabinet back in charge. Besides, the Brothers have always appealed to the religious Muslim majority.

**Tariq:** I am Christian and I voted for Morsi nonetheless. The Brotherhood’s program seemed promising. However, what really mattered to the revolutionaries was the fact that the democratic elections were taking place in Egypt. The turnout was impressive and for the first time there was no fraud. Yet again, we were too preoccupied with the present to think a few steps ahead.



Public gathering near Al-Azhar Mosque.  
January 27th, 2011

**Q:** *What is the mood in Egyptian society today?*

**Mohammed:** There is certainly a sense of desperation. The media is growing more conservative by the day, calling jailed activists foreign-paid spies.

**Tariq:** I should correct Mohammed. The youth feel reckless, whereas the older generation openly supports Sisi. The Homey Egyptians, Hizb al-Kanaba (The Sofa Party) as we call them, are his main proponents. These people prefer sitting on their sofas, watching TV, and blabbering instead of taking action. Sisi’s agenda of security and stability sounds compelling to them. The revolutionaries in turn feel betrayed and know Sisi’s regime is another trap where social rights won’t be welcome.

**Q: What awaits Egypt in the near future?**

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**Mohammed:** It hurts me to say so, but Egypt will most probably deteriorate to a state of backwardness. With Sisi in power, the crackdowns on revolutionaries are likely to intensify. It's an embarrassing feeling when you are incapable of helping your country. The "Thawra" generation is in a deadlock.

**Tariq:** I am not that pessimistic. Maybe the youth are going through a hard time, but we will not give up on our hopes so easily. *Wallahī* (I swear to God) Egypt is slowly moving towards another revolution. This time we will be prepared and the old guard won't stand a chance. As one Egyptian proverb teaches: "*illī maktūb 'al-jibīn lāzim tshūfu al-'ayn*" ("One will inevitably meet one's destiny").

*Photography by* MOHAMMAD EMARA.

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## Turkey's Kurdish Dilemma

By Z. ASLI ELITSOY

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From the early-sixteenth century through the early-twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire ruled over the Kurds of today's Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. In the aftermath of the Empire's demise, on July 24, 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed at the end of the Lausanne Conference between Turkey and the victorious Allies of World War I, confirmed the de facto division of Kurdistan among the three newly established countries of Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. The only outstanding territorial issue that the Lausanne Conference failed to resolve was the final status of the Ottoman *vilayet* (province) of Mosul, which falls inside of today's Iraqi Kurdistan, leaving the solution to be worked out between Britain and Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

The northern Iraqi cities of Mosul and Kirkuk, roughly comprising southern Kurdistan, have been and are major oil-producing centers. Largely motivated by the presence of oil fields, after World War I the British were unwilling to abandon their control over the territory.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, from 1926-1932 Mosul was incorporated into the Iraqi state and ruled by the British Mandate.<sup>3</sup> Not until the first U.S. invasion of Iraq in the early 1990s were the Iraqi Kurds provided a promising opportunity to create a state in northern Iraq. Following the collapse of Saddam Hussein's control over the Kurdish region, in 1992 the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was established.

Presently, Turkey's Kurdish question is one of the most problematic and protracted intra-state conflicts in the Middle East. As Kurds are divided among four Middle Eastern states:

1. Kirişçi, K. & Winrow, G.M., *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 78.
2. Van Bruinessen, M., *Agha, Shaikh and State* (London & New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), p. 273.
3. Bengio, O., *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2012), p. 10.

Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, the Turkish-Kurdish relationship holds many implications for current regional politics. In order to better understand the significance of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, vis-à-vis Middle Eastern politics and current affairs, it is necessary to grasp the dimensions of the Turkish state's relations with both its own Kurdish population and the Kurds of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Initially, Turkey considered the emergence of the KRG in northern Iraq a serious threat to its national unity, as it feared KRG influence would stoke Kurdish aspirations for autonomy in the region. The KRG's establishment physically occurred in the security vacuum of the border area between Turkey and Iraq, providing the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK; the main Kurdish resistance group in Turkey) with a safe haven, a source of cheap weapons, and a launching pad for attacks on Turkish soil.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Turkish-Kurdish relations in the twentieth century, within Turkey, were problematic.



Mardin, Turkey. A Kurdish girl waves a flower crown she has made to passersby in the village of Dara, once the largest city of the Roman Empire in the region.

Photograph by DUYGU ATLAS

4. International Crisis Group, *Turkey and Iraqi Kurds: Conflict or Cooperation?*, Middle East Report No. 81, November 2008.

According to Barkey and Fuller, Turkey's key internal conflict centers on the role of its Kurdish minority in a state that constitutionally consists only of "citizens of Turkey" – Turks – with no ethnic distinctions drawn.<sup>5</sup> At present, the largest population of Kurds resides in Turkey (between 13 and 14 million by various counts), and constitutes the largest ethnic minority in the country.<sup>6</sup> Alienated by the imposition of Turkishness, between 1920 and 1938 alone, the Turkish state faced 17 Kurdish rebellions; and between 1984 and 2013, Turkey was the scene of protracted, armed conflict between the PKK and government forces.<sup>7</sup>

The PKK, founded by a group of university students led by Abdullah Ocalan, as a secular Marxist-Leninist organization in November 1978,<sup>8</sup> touted a radical nationalist agenda and declared an armed struggle against the two paradigms of feudalism and colonialism.<sup>9</sup> For example, one of the PKK's grievances against the established order featured in the 1978 PKK Manifesto, accused feudal and religious leaders, particularly Sufi sheikhs, of leading the spread of colonialism in Kurdistan by collaborating with the Turkish state.<sup>10</sup> Notably, the PKK is an unusual phenomenon among Kurdish nationalist movements, particularly in its left-wing origins.

Most other Kurdish parties, particularly in Iraq, emerged from more traditional Kurdish circles with a specific regional and tribal

5. Barkey, H. J. & Fuller, G. E., *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Lanham & Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), p. 1.

6. World Population Review, "Turkey Population 2014", <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/turkey-population/> — accessed on 18 July 2014; Erdem, T., "How many Kurds live in Turkey?", *Hürriyet Daily News*, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/how-many-kurds-live-in-turkey-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=45644&NewsCatID=396> — accessed on 18 July 2014.

7. Heper, M., *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1.

8. Tejel, J., *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 76.

9. Aras, R., *The Formation of Kurdishness in Turkey: Political Violence, Fear and Pain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 71.

10. The Founding Manifesto of PKK, 1978.

orientation.<sup>11</sup> For example, the KDP is, in essence, a nationalist and traditionalist party dominated by the Barzani tribe,<sup>12</sup> whereas the PKK is a secular movement that built its foundation on the undermining of Kurdish society's tribal organization. The founder of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Mullah Mustafa Barzani, descended from Naqshbandi Sufi sheikhs who became tribal leaders and were frequently in conflict with the authorities or with neighboring tribes.<sup>13</sup> Presently, the PKK, the KDP, and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)<sup>14</sup> are the three mainstream Kurdish factions that dominate the current Kurdish political landscape. Acting as *primus inter pares* since the mid-1990s, the three groups have been competing and even conflicting with each other to monopolize Kurdish politics.

In 1994, Barzani's KDP and Talabani's PUK fought each other over scraps of revenue entering Iraqi Kurdistan through smuggling.<sup>15</sup> During periods of unrest between the two factions, the PUK often cooperated with the PKK (two parties considered to be modern parties fighting against feudalism), while the KDP forged an alliance with Turkey. Taking advantage of the hostile environment that ultimately served to weaken both the KDP and PUK, Turkey took up the opportunity to diminish the PKK as well.<sup>16</sup>

Despite ongoing conflict with its own Kurdish population, Turkey developed positive relations with the KDP. Throughout

11. Barkey, H. J. & Fuller, G. E., p. 21.

12. Gunter, M., *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds* (Lanham & Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2004), p. 106.

13. Bidwell, R., *Dictionary of Modern Arab History* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 71.

14. Following the collapse of Barzani's revolt in 1975, the Iraqi Kurdish movement had headed splintered and fell into disarray. In June 1975, Jalal Talabani announced the creation of the PUK.

15. Romano, D., "Deterring Kurdish Insurgent Attacks" in Wenger, A. & Wilner, A. (eds.), *Deterring Terrorism: Theory and Practice* (California: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 234.

16. Gunter, M., "The Kurdish Nationalist Movement" in Olson, R. W. (ed.), *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), p. 56.

the 1990s, Turkish troops – in cooperation with the KDP forces – conducted cross-border operations to limit the PKK's reach into KRG-controlled territory. Barzani's willingness to cooperate with Turkey and his readiness to be pragmatic with respect to Kurdish aspirations in northern Iraq appeared to earn, to some extent, the trust of many Turkish decision-makers.<sup>17</sup> Although the KDP knew that animosity against the PKK served Turkish interests as opposed to Kurdish aspirations for autonomy, KDP leaders feared that any threat to relations with the Turks would give Turkey the excuse they sought to close the border between Turkey and KDP-controlled territory. The KDP feared a closure because it benefited from being included in Turkey's economic sphere. Economic opportunities in Turkey strengthened the KDP vis-à-vis its main rival, the PUK, whose economic and political ties were with Iran.<sup>18</sup> This status quo lasted from 1995 to the 2000s.

However, the coming to power of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 caused a paradigmatic shift in Ankara's Kurdish policies. With elections held during the ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish security forces, in the lead up to election-day the AKP promised democratic reforms that would help to resolve Turkey's Kurdish problem. Convinced of the AKP's sincerity, Kurdish voters played an important role in the AKP victory. In reality, though, the AKP initiative did not include opportunities for consultation or more imaginative solutions to the conflict than the reforms already required by Turkey's ongoing attempt to accede to the European Union.<sup>19</sup> Instead of finding permanent resolution to its own Kurdish problem as promised in the AKP's agenda, the government repeated its predecessor's political maneuverings by advocating stronger diplomatic, political, and economic ties with the KRG. In doing so, from 2007 onwards, the AKP pleased

17. Kirişçi, K. & Winrow, G. M., p. 165.

18. Laizer, S., *Martyrs, Traitors, and Patriots: Kurdistan after the Gulf War* (London: Zed Books, 1996), p. 66.

19. Yıldız, K. & Breaux, S., *The Kurdish Conflict: International Humanitarian Law and Post-Conflict Mechanism* (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 234.

powerful Turkish businessmen who started to conduct economic activities in the KRG. Furthermore, following the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1999, the PKK abandoned its initial aim to achieve full independence in favor of limited autonomy in Southeast Turkey. The effect of the latter development in the PKK's history has led Turkey to no longer fear that an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq will inspire Turkey's Kurds to demand something similar.

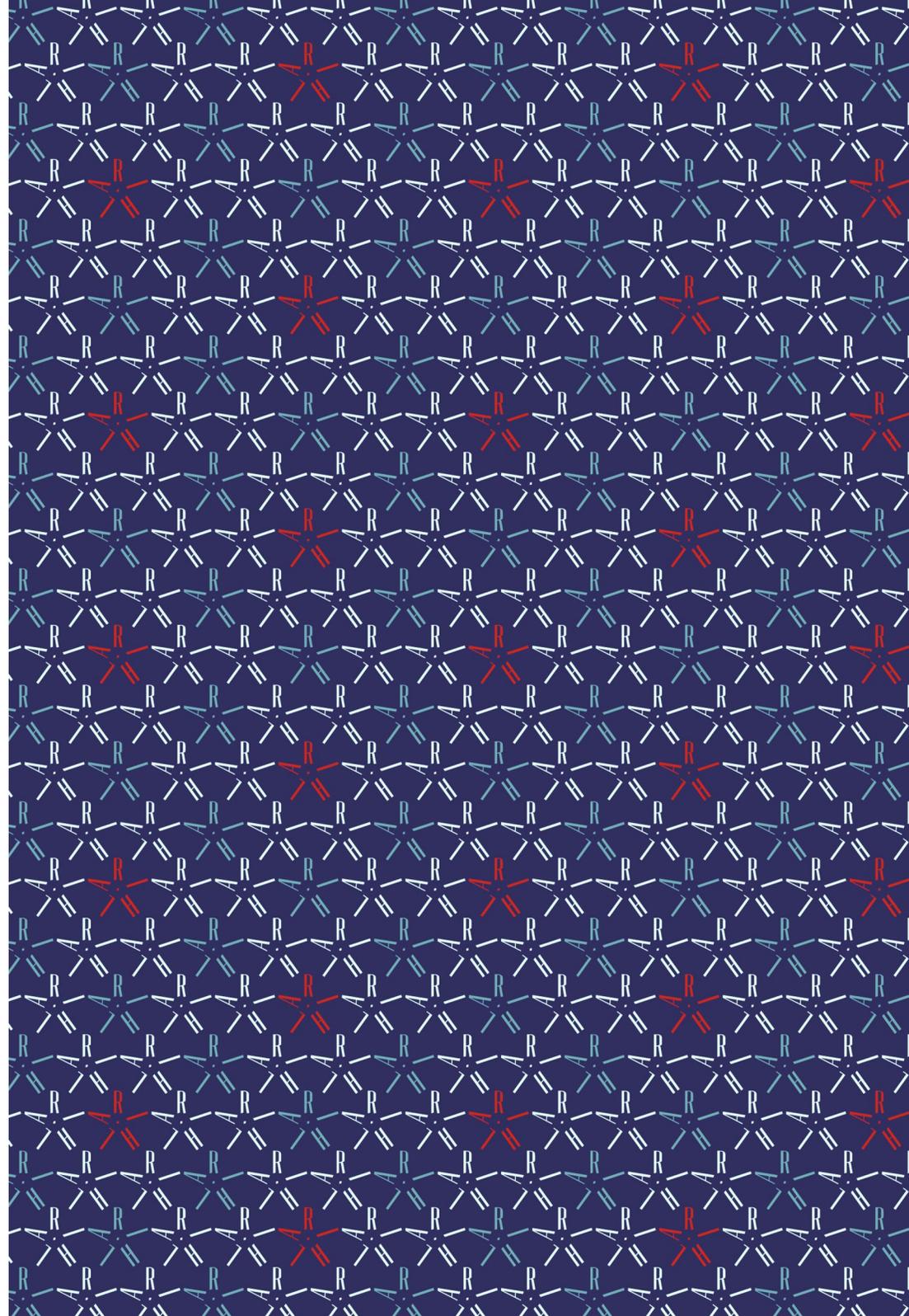
Recently, Turkey and the KRG agreed to build pipelines for exporting KRG oil and gas through Turkey, thereby bypassing the Iraqi government.<sup>20</sup> As a matter of fact, Turkey needs KRG oil to meet its energy needs, but the economic interests are not the only aspect of this pragmatic relationship. In deepening economic ties and strengthening political solidarity with the KRG, Turkey successfully created a buffer zone between its borders and the rest of Iraq, which descended into civil war shortly after U.S. withdrawal of its troops. Considering the rise of sectarianism in the Middle East, it seems that future alliances will continue to be framed by the Sunni-Shi'i discourse.<sup>21</sup> In this context, alignment with Sunni Kurds is a better option than any cooperation with a Shi'i-led government.

Today, Iraqi Kurds are Turkey's most important ally in the region. Given the current chaotic situation in the Middle East, Turkey's relationship with the KRG offers a useful model of future regional engagement.<sup>22</sup> However, Turkey must solve its Kurdish problem at home if it seeks to implement an overall, effective foreign policy in the Middle East. A new Turkish-Kurdish alliance could inspire other countries to follow Turkey's example and, quite possibly, improve stability in the region.

20. Rousseau, R., "Who is allowed to sell oil in Iraq — Baghdad or Erbil?", *Eurasia Review*, 30 April 2014, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/30042014-allowed-sell-oil-iraq-baghdad-erbil-analysis/> — accessed on 22 July 2014.

21. Charountaki, M., *Turkish Foreign Policy and the Kurdistan Regional Government*, Perceptions, Winter 2012, Volume XVII, No. 4, p. 185–208.

22. Sugarman, E. & Walker, J., *Iraqi Kurdistan & Turkey: America's Middle Eastern Silver Lining*, Center for National Policy, November 2013, p. 3.



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