

# Carolinas Committee on U.S.–Arab Relations

## NEWSLINES

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## Qatari: National Pride, Resilience, and Reinvention

*by Kennedy Anderson*



*Al Jazeera Building*

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As I write this article in May 2020, international travel is very restricted, and my life dream to travel as much as possible is on hold. When I will be able resume my quest is uncertain. But I can think back to a rare and special opportunity that I had in February and early March just before the COVID-19 virus shutdown occurred. Some of my peers from our Model Arab League delegation previously had enjoyed the opportunity to participate in

the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations trip to Qatar. I had heard them speak about it in glowing terms, and now it was my good fortune.

The Qatar trip is not like other travel adventures. [You can read about my trip to Rabat in an article in this newsletter.] The experience in this unique Arab culture was quite remarkable. Rabat was eye opening; Qatar was dazzling. One has to start with the luxury. From our

arrival at Hamad International Airport in Doha, where we were ushered through special lines, we were treated as royalty. My private suite at the five-star "W" hotel in downtown Doha was stunning, and the multi-course meals throughout, prepared by a Michelin star chef, were beyond description. Everything that we did was first class. Our briefers knew our names and treated us like foreign diplomats. Needless to say, I have never known anything on this level.

But the trip was more than mere luxury. We had briefings with high-ranking government officials and ministers, individuals from the business sector such as at Qatar Petroleum, and cultural leaders. Our visits included the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Museum of Qatar, Museum of Islamic Art, Al Jazeera, Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, Qatar Financial Center, and more. We seemingly never stopped over the five days of visits, and they were all wonderful. I learned so much. The friendliness of everyone that we met from the high-ranking to occasional opportunities to engage with common workers was a joy.

My adviser asked me to pick one policy issue from the trip to discuss. After much reflection, I decided to speak about Qatari national identity and the impact and reaction to the recent/present blockade of the nation. This quote from the wall of the National Museum of Qatar says it succinctly: "Qatari identity is rooted in this unique ge-

*The National Museum*



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ography and history of the peninsula, true to its Arab heritage and the values of Islam while welcoming new influences and ideas... United the Qatari people are striving to open up new opportunities and promising horizons, strengthened by a shared vision for the future."

Qatar spent 55 years as a British protectorate, but unlike many other liberation struggles, the end of colonial authority happened peacefully as "a mutual decision for the British to leave Qatar." Britain played a positive role in the development of the nation, including the development of the oil industry. In 1922, to separate its oil territories, the British played a role in the Qatar Peninsula being separated as a distinct entity from the Arabia Peninsula mainland that would become later the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This action ensured Qatar's independent status and economic future. On September 3, 1971, with the acquiescence of Saudi Arabia, Qatar became an independent state. The strong ties between Britain and Qatar remain today. And Qatar has always remained fiercely independent.

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and other surrounding states though has not always been harmonious. Many factors contribute to conflicts. Among the more contentious in recent years has been Qatar's close relationship with Iran, with which it shares oil fields, and the political ties of various Gulf States with different political groups that others consider hostile.

In June 2017 the fray exploded



*Kennedy with friend*

as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Egypt, and the Maldives severed diplomatic ties with Qatar. Saudi Arabia closed its airspace to all Qatar Airways flights. Soon after, all the GCC countries, with the exception of Oman and Kuwait, ordered all of their own citizens to leave Qatar, and they severed financial ties and trade agreements. Kuwait and Oman remain neutral, and in 2017,

Kuwaiti mediators presented a list of Saudi demands to Qatar which included: cutting off all links with Iran, expelling resident members of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, shutting down the Al-Jazeera network to "stop interfering in foreign countries' affairs," and ceasing any funding or support for "terrorist" organizations.

The GCC blockade undoubtedly shaped the contemporary

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history of Qatar. The blockade brought devastating personal losses but produced longer-term profound national gains for the beleaguered state as well. Qatar's place at the "crossroads of the world" came into play as the nation demonstrated both its vulnerabilities and its capacity for resilience and reinvention. The challenges and heartbreaks of the blockade since

2017 define the state of the cross-cultural family, religious, and economic links throughout the Gulf. Or as it was put in words, "[P]ersonalized and deeply familial relationships among the Saudis, the Emiratis, and the Qataris inextricably combine with political questions."

Although Qatari airspace remains open, families in neighboring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab

Emirates cannot fly directly or cross by land into Doha. Qatari citizens have also been deprived of religious freedoms and practices since the holy places of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia are virtually inaccessible to Qatari citizens. Qatar currency, now banned in Saudi Arabia, has led to problems for Qatari citizens abroad. These experiences of interpersonal loss have diminished trust in and across the Gulf region. Regardless of the shock that the Qatari government felt from the blockade, the nation quickly devised a domestic framework to deal with these losses. This framework galvanized national identity and pride, motivated strategic economic self-sufficiency, and inspired internal opportunities for women. As Qataris assert, they appreciate the "blessing" of change which grew from necessity following the blockade.

Despite the initial devastation of being separated from their Gulf partners, the people of Qatar joined together in solidarity. The blockade served as a catalyst for the people of Qatar and the government to join together and create an identity for Qatar separate from the previous broader regional identity. The people celebrate their history of former British rule as it developed Qatar's capital Doha into a multicultural city. Prior to the conflict, the Qatari government had to balance the needs of the GCC and Qatar. While still actively supporting the GCC, Qatar now can concentrate more on its own affairs. From establishing a nation-

*Group at the Museum of Islamic Art*





*In the Desert*

wide diary company in under a month to securing the World Cup 2022, Qatar has developed strategic initiatives that show the nation's resilience and innovative vision for the future. The admiration for the government can be seen throughout the country as the Emir's face is on buildings, t-shirts, bumper stickers, and magnets. The country has masterfully created an identity that was designed and practiced by the Qatari people and government in tandem. This strong and vibrant national identity will show

the world that Qatar is "open [to] new opportunities and promising horizons, strengthened by a shared vision for the future."

My time in Qatar was unforgettable. I initially entered the trip thrilled to explore a new country in place of classes for a week. I could not have anticipated how inspiring and refreshing the trip would be. I returned with broader parameters both for food and society. I was enamored by the small nation's national pride and unity. I also returned home with a new gauge for

hospitality. The hospitality in Qatar makes southern practice pale in comparison. Our trip guide, Sheikh Abdulaziz Abdulla Al Thani, along with all of our spectacular briefers, made it their mission to ensure that each of us felt welcomed. I hope international travel will soon return to normal. However, if Qatar is my last international trip for a while, at least it will remain one of my most memorable life experiences.

# Modern Women in the Kingdom: Rights, Challenges, & Achievements

by Kathryn Frizzell

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has become a popular topic in the media due to its renovations following the enactment of the Vision 2030 plan and increasingly progressive laws regarding women's rights. It was very interesting to see diversity amongst Saudi women; some wore burkas, whereas others wore bright, open

abayas, and some wore makeup and did their hair in fancy ways, whereas others chose a natural look. How has this modernization affected the lives of Saudi women? Have the laws recently passed by the Kingdom regarding women's rights initiated change in the Saudi society? In other words, is the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia truly progressive in terms of women's rights?

### What are the laws that increased women's rights in the Kingdom?

The Saudi Vision 2030 plan is a strategy to diversify the Saudi economy and develop the country's infrastructure, capacities, and influence, which will allow the Kingdom to compete economically on the international stage. The Saudi Vision 2030 plan spearheaded this modernization through progressive goal setting. The plan commits to "providing opportunities for all" through various means and "unlocking the talent, potential, and dedication of our young men and women". This inclusion of all Saudis, specifically women, in the language of the 2030 Plan paved the path towards more progressive laws for Saudi women. As of 2017, laws were passed in Saudi Arabia that granted women equal treatment in the workplace, permitted them to obtain family documents from the government, and allowed them to obtain a passport and travel without permission from a wali, or a male guardian.<sup>1</sup> In addition, women can get a driver's license, can spectate sports, and no longer have to wear an abaya so long as they dress modestly.<sup>2</sup> Although these freedoms are put into law, do they actually reach the lives of Saudi women? This question, among many others, was what I aimed to answer on my trip to the Kingdom.

*Shopping in a store*



## **What is the social perception of these changes in women's rights?**

The reality is that there are mixed feelings within the Kingdom regarding the progression of women's rights. Many Saudi women have taken these opportunities to wear brighter, open abayas and not cover their hair, whereas others still wear burkas. The ability to choose what they want to wear is a big step for Saudi Arabia; however, according to an anonymous source, sometimes the way a woman dresses is up to the woman and sometimes it is up to her family. In addition, regional differences impact opinions of these changes. The west of Saudi Arabia tends to lean towards a more progressive perspective, where as much of the south and east of the Kingdom, especially in the rural areas, still practices the more traditional cultural and social norms. This means that although women can choose how they dress or whether or not to interact with men, they may be looked down on or disapproved of. However, Dr. Turki Alawad emphasizes that you have to separate the opinions and practices of the people from the government and the laws, as evident by the lack of women driving on the roads and limited number of women attending sporting events. Dr. Turki Alawad states that it is "more than just the image, the women and people [in Saudi Arabia] believe in this", which shows an increasingly changing perspective within the Saudi people.

## **What is the perspective of the Saudi government?**

Prince Turki bin Faisal noted that "women are taking over, and that is good". In addition, he hopes to see women granted more rights and opportunities in the future. Saudi women are like an untapped resource that, if nurtured, could greatly improve the Kingdom's economy. Dr. Turki Alawad explained that since Saudi women have been included more in education and the workforce, they have contributed new perspectives, greater creativity, and more engagement in their career fields. This projects a positive future for women's rights in Saudi Arabia if the Saudi government continues to increase opportunities and freedoms for its women.

## **What changes would Saudi women like to see in the future?**

The future of Saudi women's rights seems to show increased freedoms; however, Hanan Al-Ahmadi explains, "a transformation is indeed under way, but we need to be able to create this change gradually and maintain our identity". Dr. Turki Alawad explains that "it's not perfect, but it is gradually going there". There are other factors to consider when contemplating the future of women in Saudi Arabia, and it is vital to remove all Western bias during this contemplation. Not all Saudi women would want all restrictions lifted; maintaining the Saudi identity, which includes cultural norms and religious beliefs, remains a strong aspect of how Saudi women identify themselves and retain certain standards, such as privacy, order, and respect. Modernization and progression bring new complications

and factors into the mix regarding social order and norms, and they would require further discussion and policies to combat the consequences of such changes. For example, allowing women more career opportunities has placed them in the path of sexual harassment; the Saudi government does not have an effective process for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace because it did not occur in the workplace when women were not allowed to work. However, following social changes and progression in other parts of the world, people, over time, will want more involvement in decision-making and democratic processes in politics, which will naturally increase the rights of all Saudis, including women.

## **In Conclusion**

The Saudi Vision 2030 plan and social changes in Saudi Arabia have greatly impacted the lives of Saudi women, and it seems as though there will be further improvements in the future. With every step the Kingdom takes to progress, there will need to be measures to prevent negative consequence and efforts to address the mentality and perspective of women's rights in the people. In order to maintain the Saudi identity and ensure a smooth transition throughout the Kingdom, it is vital that this process unfolds at its own pace, especially without Western influence. One anonymous source informed me that Saudi women hope that the increasingly progressive laws met by the continued use of abayas and social norms will solidify the importance of the Saudi identity globally.

**Note: I would like to thank all of the Saudi women, officials, and educators who contributed to my understanding of Saudi Arabia and its people.**

## Lessons from Travel in Morocco

*Kennedy Anderson*

When our adviser ventured the idea of going to Morocco to participate in the Rabat Model Arab League conference in the November 2019, I made it clear that I would be on the trip. I have always been an avid traveler eager to see more of the world. However, I did not anticipate how much this trip

would expand my parameters as a young adult. Some moments may have been less than ideal; however, as I reflect on the adventure and write this essay, I am overwhelmed with the memories of the positive events. When I talk about the trip with family, my stories are often filled with laughter, descriptions of

the unworldly beauty, and a bit of boasting about my own personal growth.

Prior to this excursion, I had some basic knowledge about Morocco largely stemming from research for our Model Arab League competition preparation. But in reality, I was venturing into the unknown. Growing up in a diverse household, I was never a stranger to new cultures and experiences. My entire family's reaction was full support and some envy. They created a group chat entitled "Keeping Up With Kennedy" so that everyone could follow my adventure. We were all ready to embrace the Moroccan experience. Our primary purpose was to participate in The Université Internationale de Rabat (UIR) Model Arab League; however the lessons from this trip overshadowed the conference. To ensure that they reap maximum rewards from the opportunity, I propose two key lessons for students who travel outside of the country.

The first lesson that I implore readers to adopt in travel and study abroad is not to be a tourist. This is not an encouragement for people to avoid exploring new locations with zeal, but a recommendation for a new approach to travel. While standing out is often a positive trait, I found that the best way to travel is to blend in. Learn from the locals, embrace the local language, and learn the culture. There is a difference between cultural appropriation and embracing and learning new cultures. Learn

*Evening ride into the dunes*





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and respect the culture of new locations.

Beyond my limited knowledge from Model Arab League, I knew little that would aid me in Morocco. In regard to languages, I knew introductory French and “black panther” Arabic; but, I was willing to learn. Starting with our flight to Paris, I tried to limit my use of English outside of competition. During our time at UIR, I tried to envision myself as a student there. I made friends with UIR students and asked for tips for navigating the country. By the end of my time I was invited to sit in on classes. Connecting with UIR students provided me the unique experience to sit in a class session on Moroccan literature and gender and peacebuilding. If I would not have embraced the Moroccan lifestyle and worked to incorporate and learn French and Arabic, I do not think I would have gained as much from this trip. Stepping out of my comfort zone and learning and embracing Moroccan life resulted in me being treated as a Moroccan rather than a foreigner.

My other lesson is simple but often the hardest to put in practice. The singer Sonny Curtis said it best “love is all around, no need to waste it.” While I am sure Sonny in no way was talking about the beauty of Morocco in this 1980s hit, this lyric resonates with the most important lesson that I learned in Morocco: embrace the beauty around you. Although the experience had challenges, it was beautiful. Once travelers realize that the world is not your hometown, the experience of travel is richer. Food, drinks, bathrooms, weather, lifestyle is different when you leave



*Evening on the URI campus*

home whether it is down the street or 10,000 miles away. When you travel, understand that things will be different. Do not spend time comparing a place to back home because it is not a competition. It is easy to spend time focusing on what a country doesn't have in comparison to your home; but you will be missing what a place does have.

I know that the members of our group, myself included, were shocked when they first experienced the so-called Third World toilet of a hole in the floor. However, I do not look back and lament the absence of the porcelain throne. Instead I laugh as I think back to the first explanation of how to properly execute the use of the hole. When traveling one must be adaptable. My life has been full of moving and adapting so adopting this lesson was not difficult. During our trip, we encountered many dif-

ferences that I know many of my teammates continue to think of through various lenses.

While I admit that eight-plus hours trekking over the Atlas Mountains through the night on a hot bus seems less than appealing, it allowed us the unique opportunity to see most of a country in a few brief days. The experience provided views into some of the most breathtaking sights: the Atlas Mountains, the Merzouga Desert, the Gorges du Todgha, the Kasbah of Ait Ben Haddou, and the colorful and lively old medina in Marrakech. Thinking back to the trip, I can see why so many movies are shot in Morocco. I emphasize that this trip was full of beauty beyond anything seen in the more developed West. We must stop and take in the beauty around us. Leave at home preconceived expectations that inhibit your full ability to appreciate what is before you, and you may

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*At the airport*



not have the opportunity to pass this way again.

Competing in Model Programs leads to interactions with students from around the world, and since my trip to Morocco, my international friend group has increased. As I am writing this I reflect on my most recent experience at International Model NATO. I was speaking with a delegate that attended the University of Laval in Canada. During our conversation I learned that the delegate was from Tangier. We immediately bonded when I revealed that I had recently traveled to Morocco. The ability to talk about a delegate's home with an appreciative and open mindset gave me a chance to understand and connect at a deeper level

with delegates from the MENA and other regions of the world.

Traveling to Morocco touched the core of my being. When describing my experience to others, I am often taken back to an incident in a small shop. I was looking for small gifts to take home for my family. As I was shopping, one of the shop workers, an Amazigh (Berber) man began to help me look for gifts. As I was negotiating prices, he stopped me and offered me the price I wanted and a free item. He premised the deal with saying, "because you look like us." Growing up in the United States as a woman of color, I often am very aware of my race. While I grew up with a mixed-race family background filled with support, I still

felt like a minority in my own home. As a child, I became aware that in certain places when my family sat down to eat we received stares from our white counterparts. Morocco was a unique experience for me because I was able to blend somewhat with the populous and not feel like a minority. I felt welcomed and respected as I walked around and entered shops. I felt accepted in Morocco and that feeling has extended past the trip. This experience has permanently affected me in the most positive way. I look forward to my next trip to the region and the new lessons I will learn. I hope that my lessons outlined in this article can allow other students to get the most out of their travels.

# COVID-19 Wipes Out Model Arab League Season

Joe P. Dunn

We historians always wish to document events and activities as part of the record for the future. In this newsletter, which I have edited since 1998, I have tried to maintain an annual record of both the Southeast (SERMAL) and National (NUMAL) Model Arab League conferences. This article is for the purposes of that record.

This year was one of the most promising delegations that I have had in my 34 years in our Model Programs activities. In November we participated in the Rabat (Morocco) Model Arab League and enjoyed great success. The trip is discussed in another article.

Our International Model NATO team swept the awards in that competition in Washington, DC, in February. Against 26 delegations from a large number of European and Canadian universities as well as top U.S. institutions, our two teams took two of the three Outstanding Delegations awards. It was one of the best performances that we have had. We looked forward to equal success in MAL competitions.

We had a full Southeast Regional Model (SERMAL) planned for mid-March with some new schools joining us for the first time. Then COVID-19 hit. With great sadness, we had to pull the plug on SERMAL two days before we began. It was a tough but necessary decision. Cancellation of the National Model soon followed.

As with most institutions, the college closed down, all students were sent home, and we pivoted immediately to online instruction.



At this moment, we do not know when and how colleges will reopen and how instruction will be conducted in the fall. Students and their families continue to be impacted financially, socially, and emotionally. Whatever the future holds, it will be a major effort for the models to return to full flower. Social distancing is not conducive to the close interaction of a model. Travel could remain problematic, and college budgets definitely will be severely restricted. I fear that getting our program back to normative function is going to be

one of the greater challenges that I have faced.

As I have said many times in various forums, the Model experience is one of the greatest educational tools that I have been able to offer my students for more than three decades. Whatever it takes, we need to get back to the central role that our Model Programs have played in the lives of generations of students. There will be a day when I am no longer involved with the Model, but the program must continue for the benefit of future students.

## Where Are They Now? A Look at Exceptional Model Arab League Alumni

Holly Jordan, New Business Development Manager – Anera



### **How did you come to participate in Model Arab League?**

Honestly, it wasn't intentional. Many women come to Converse College wanting to participate in MAL, which is an incredibly competitive process to join at Converse. An email went out my freshman year (2003) about some sort of debate club (I now know it was in fact not a debate club) about the Middle East (I had never heard of the Arab League at the time). It sounded fun, and I had done Debate League in high school, so I figured why not? I did the research - the topic was the West Bank Wall, and we were assigned either Israel or Palestine - and came prepared. I biffed the tryout at the very end and was not chosen for the team. I then took an International Relations class with Converse's MAL advisor, Joe Dunn, as an elective. I guess I did well enough in class debating the topics of the course, as Dr. Dunn asked me to join the team roughly three weeks before SERMAL 2004. Converse represented both Jordan and Libya that year, so Dr. Dunn of course assigned me to Jordan. Yes, I was Holly Jordan the Delegate representing Jordan. And yes, I still have that placard.

Because I had joined so late, there was not a spot for me to attend

Nationals that year. One of my teammates, Josie Shaheen (née Fingerhut), serving as Assistant Secretary-General that year, convinced Dr. Dunn to let me serve as Chief of Staff that year, a position she made up that we now use at every major conference. When I got there, the entire delegation of Eritrea had no-showed. There were topics on Eritrea in both Political Affairs (then Ministers of the Interior) and Economic Affairs that year, as well as a case in the Arab Court of Justice, and I ended up representing Eritrea in all three committees. I had been in MAL all of about six weeks at this point. Josie introduced me to Philip D'Agati, the previous year's Secretary-General with whom 12 years later I would co-author *The Model Arab League Manual*. My knowledge of the region was still so new that when Josie told me I was representing Eritrea, I asked Phil what an Eritrea was. Needless to say, he laughed at me, corrected my interrogative to where, and gave me a binder of research and a briefing on the three topics I would be debating and presenting. That first semester in the program ended with my study-travel visit to Jordan, bringing to an end a whirlwind six months that I never expected to experience. Those first experiences caused me to change my major and set me on a path of 15 years' service to the program.

### **Could you start with a quick run-down of the path you took after college and how you got to where you are today?**

After leaving Converse College in 2006, I began a Master of Arts in Religion at the University of Georgia, which I completed in August of

2009. That degree was far different than what I had studied at Converse, namely political theory and MENA politics. My Master's focused on Biblical and Hellenistic Judaism. I had always been interested in the unique position of modern Israel in the Middle East, and I suppose I entered that degree with a "how did we get here?" mentality. During this time, both during my degree and in the gap before my PhD, I served as an adjunct professor of religion at UGA, teaching world religions. After a brief stint as a Communications Director at a large Presbyterian Church, I matriculated into Virginia Tech's interdisciplinary Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Social Thought (ASPECT) PhD program in 2011, earning my degree in 2016. In this degree, I combined my undergraduate studies in politics with my comparative religion background from UGA to study the Arab-Israeli Conflict, focusing on the political and security issues revolving around the evolution of personal status laws under the State of Israel. I was able during this time to teach in the Departments of Religion and Culture, Political Science, and History and gained an appreciation for my areas of interest from a multidisciplinary perspective. I also began a Model Arab League program at Tech in 2012, for which I was awarded the Model Arab League Lifetime Achievement Award. I, along with my students at Virginia Tech, founded the Appalachian Regional Model Arab League (AR-MAL), which has continued to be a successful hybrid Model since 2014. At the time, I was the first alum of the program to start a new delegation, and I am now one of five program alumni (myself, Philip D'Agati, Joseph W. Roberts, David Takitaki,

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and Rob Willingham) to advise college teams.

These experiences led to a three-year appointment as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion at Roanoke College beginning in 2014, where I was able to teach in a wonderful, liberal arts environment very similar to my Converse days. In addition to the core, comparative religions courses, I was able to design my own course on the politics and religion of the modern MENA region. I also started a Model Arab League program at Roanoke College in 2016, and Roanoke has continued to be a high-performing college at ARMAL, the Southeast Regional Model Arab League (SERMAL), and the National University Model Arab League (NUMAL). In 2017, my Visiting position ended, and I moved to Washington, DC, with the goal of working in something relating to the Levant Region, where I could use my studies to do development work. At a brief stint writing proposals for a federal contractor focusing in cybersecurity, I found my current career, writing grant applications and managing the New Business Development department within Anera (American Near East Refugee Aid), an international governmental organization serving refugees in the Levant since 1968. Everything in my studies and career has led me to this dream job, where I get to use my research background, subject matter expertise, and love of the Middle East to help secure lasting improvements to the lives of refugees in Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan.

### **What are some habits that led to your successful education and career?**

Create family wherever you go. I was a navy brat growing up, and my life reset every two to three years until I graduated high school. The same was true in college - 3

years at Converse, 5 years at UGA, 6 years at Virginia Tech and Roanoke College, and now 2 years in DC. All that transience has made me realize that it is the bonds you form with your peers and your community that give you a sense of grounding through life. Find a group of people that bring out the best of you, that you can rely on in times of need, and with whom you can grow in your career and studies. My closest friends are the ones I made through college and graduate school, with whom I would workshop papers, debate my studies, and celebrate with when I achieved even the smallest of victories. Surround yourself with supportive people, and be a good friend to them, and everything else falls into place.

Also, remember that you won't be able to give 100% every day. Sometimes giving it your all means only being able to do 10% of what you know you're able to do--and that is okay! Do your best, but be forgiving of yourself. And apply the lessons you learn to being better the next day.

### **Graduating college can be disorientating for many students, how did you find direction after leaving college life?**

I went to more college! I knew I wanted to be a professor, but I wasn't exactly sure where I wanted to land. My varied degrees show this, because I pretty much just studied what I thought was interesting. Without having a rigid plan in place, I believe I was more open to considering other learning paths and career goals. I had no intention of returning back to my interest in the Arab-Israeli Conflict when I entered my master's. But one elective with the late Dr. Randy Sturman on the anthropology of the Conflict reignited my interest in that area. The term paper for that course eventually became one of the

core chapters of my dissertation seven years later. I don't know that this is the best way to go about life post-college. In fact, I'm sure most parents would be horrified to read this. But, as I always advised my students, spend your time in college figuring out what you're passionate about. I changed my major three times during college and ended up far away from where I started (biochemistry!). If you end up choosing to go to graduate school, do it because it is the thing that will make you happy in that moment. If anything else will make you happy, pursue it. School will always be there for you to return to if you choose. But find something that makes you excited to wake up in the morning and pursue that. For some, it will be a career. For others, it will be your life outside of your career. But use your talents for good.

### **With such varied experiences, why did you decide to work for Anera?**

I became aware of Anera through the National Council! On a study-travel visit to Lebanon in 2012, I met Bill Corcoran, then the President and CEO of Anera. He described Anera's work in Lebanon and Palestine, and I was immediately struck by how unique Anera was as a development INGO. All but one of Anera's country staff, who make up the majority of our staff, are from the communities in which they serve. It is truly a bottom-up focused organization that responds to the needs on the ground instead of imposing "solutions" from America without local context. As my career shifted out of academia, I found myself visiting Anera's website to see what they had been doing since I met Bill, and I found a job listing that felt like reading my own CV back to me. I immediately applied for the position and was fortunate enough to be hired by Anera in January 2019. Anera allows me to put my study of political and cul-

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tural theory into practice, using everything I've studied since I was 17 to work in a region I've been fascinated by since I was a child. I get to work with amazing people from all of the countries in which we work, and I find myself fulfilled in ways that I never thought I would outside academia.

***You attended numerous Model Arab League Conferences since 2004 and won awards on the regional and national level. How many models did you attend and what are some of the memories you have from those conferences? What was your favorite model to attend?***

I actually had to pull up my CV and tally this. I believe I have attended 27 models, including NERMAL, SERMAL, NUMAL, CARMAL, NHSMAL, ARMAL, and AHSMAL. I have served as delegate, justice, advocate, assistant chief justice, chief justice, chief of staff, chair, faculty advisor (for three difference colleges including once as a surrogate advisor for Converse College), judge, conference coordinator, and plenary keynote speaker over the last 15 years (and intend to judge at NUMAL again in 2020). In fact, the only positions in MAL I have not held are bailiff, secretary-general, or assistant secretary-general! I won surprisingly few awards during this time as a student - the only award I won during undergraduate was Best Crisis Chair at the 2006 NUMAL and as far as I know am still the only Chief Justice to have won a chairing award. I earned my only debating award during graduate school in the Heads of State committee in 2012. Most of my MAL career as a student was spent in the Arab Court of Justice, which gives me a more unique pedigree than most students. Some of the most fun parts of that experience included researching the docket for court cases each year and re-

searching legal precedent to write into topic guides. Some of the Word templates I designed for the ACJ as National Chief Justice in 2005-2006 are still used to this day!

SERMAL will always be my favorite conference to attend. It is held at my alma mater (Converse) and is always a mini-reunion of Converse MAL alumnae. Getting to go back to Spartanburg nearly every year since I graduated to do something I love as much as I loved my time there has been a blessing. Each model has its own personality, and NUMAL and NERMAL were some of the most fun experiences I've ever had. I could write an entire book on stories from during committee and after-hours shenanigans, so to list some memories here would take up too many pages. But I can say that because of the close bonds with students and peers from schools such as Georgia State, Kennesaw State, Northeastern, Hollins, Berry, and, of course, Converse College, my entire MAL experience has shaped who I am today.

Along with the conferences, I was fortunate enough through the Council to participate in two study-travel visits. The first was to Jordan in 2004 to study Arabic and Levantine politics at Ahl al-Bayt University in Mafraq. I had never before been out of the country, my entire world changed. I landed in Jordan not even knowing the Arabic alphabet and was absolutely a fish out of water. One of my dearest MAL friends and 2004 Secretary-General, Daniel Quintal, was on that trip with me, and we still talk about the adventures we had traveling through Jordan for six weeks. I also was chosen for the Lebanon Summer Fellowship in 2012 and traveled through Lebanon for 10 days, meeting with political, social, religious, and youth leaders and learning about Lebanese-American relations. Neither of these opportunities would have

been possible without being an alumna of MAL.

***You wrote the book on Model Arab League. What made you decide to do this? Do you have any tips for students who want to be better delegates?***

So the book... the book just fell out of the sky. Matthew Kopel, from Bloomsbury, contacted Philip D'Agati, my colleague, close friend, program alum, and faculty advisor of MAL with a CV in the program even longer than mine, about the possibility of writing a textbook on the subject. Matthew was an alum of the program as well and believed this would be a valuable resource for both current students and schools looking to start a program. Phil reached out to me about co-authoring the textbook, and we made a plan to tackle the project. In a multi-day writing storm at Phil's house over winter break 2014-2015, Phil and I, along with frantic phone calls to several of our students and delegates from our own years (some of whom actually showed up at Phil's house), storyboarded the book, created the outline, and pulled together our (at that time) decade-plus resources on the program. I dragged binders I hadn't opened since college out of bookcases to use as source material, and Phil and I relived so many moments together over those few days. The book came together more quickly than either of us could have imagined, and Manchester University Press (who picked up the contract from Bloomsbury) published it in March 2016. The book is the only textbook for the program to date, and I am so incredibly proud of what Phil and I were able to put together. (Though, as a side note to anyone in graduate school: if you are given the opportunity to write a book that is not your dissertation, realize that 1) you will get behind on your dis-

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*In Palestine*



sertation and 2) your advisors will not be happy about this...)

As to advice? TALK. Just talk. The first time you speak at a conference can be absolutely terrifying. Just rip off the band-aid. Get on the speaker's list. Raise your placard during moderated debate (longways, not upright so your chair can read it, and not before they're done asking for speakers). If you've done the research and know your country's position, you'll get into the flow. If you're new to parliamentary procedure, you'll pick it up through the help of your peers and chair. Just immerse yourself in it. And know you'll make mistakes and will probably be corrected. Mistakes help us learn. For whatever reason--course credit, passion for the region, your friends guilted you into it--you're there. Make the most of those 2-3 days. Oh, and also, buy our book.

**How did your experience with Model Arab League help you academically and professionally?**

I joke with the other MAL alumni in my life, of which there are still many, that my new job lets me do Model Arab League, but "for real." Through assisting with program design, coming up with fun acronyms for projects, and working with ministries and local municipalities, I am actively doing the work that MAL prepared us for. Furthermore, I believe I owe much of my academic success to the research and presentation skills I learned in the program. There is nothing like a crisis situation at a Model to teach you how to research quickly, react logically, and come up with solutions to an unexpected problem. Term papers, especially when you put them off like many students, become equally stressful crisis situations. And as much as no former professor wants to hear this, I was able to churn out high quality research and writing in just a few days because of those skills.

**What was an influential topic or issue that you studied and debat-**

**ed while you were in Model Arab League?**

I entered MAL, at 18 years old, during the first year of the Second Iraq War and the year both the Gaza Disengagement Plan and the expansion of the West Bank Wall was announced. These topics showed up over and over again through 2011. Through the second half of my 20s and all of my 30s, the ongoing Syrian conflict has been at the center of many committee agendas. But ongoing struggles in the region also are discussed over time, and I've been able to see the evolution of country policies on each of them. You can't go a year without a desalination topic, and every few years the status of the Hala'ib Triangle, Western Sahara, or Mayotte crops up in the ACJ. MAL has always been a program grounded in history and responsive to evolution of politics in the region, and both of these factors are what make the program strong.

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For instance, Yassir Arafat died the day before NERMAL 2004. We were just in the early days of social media, and so none of us learned of this until we saw the cover of the New York Times while waiting for our flight from Spartanburg, SC to Boston, MA. We were Lebanon that year, so this had clear implications for our policy as well as the policies of many of the attending schools. Under MAL rules, anything in the “real world” that happens before opening ceremonies is true in committee. The intelligence, poise, ability to pivot, and brilliance of my fellow delegates was on full display that weekend, and I remember that conference experience being one of the most dynamic in which I ever participated.

***Are there any friends or connections you made while in Model Arab League who you still have contact with today?***

HA! Not a day goes by where I do not talk to someone from the MAL community, either personally or professionally, and you can absolutely bet stories from the “old days” come up every time we’re together. Any time something interesting happens in the region, my phone blows up with texts to discuss what’s going on. I have friends in nearly every state on the Eastern seaboard, and across the country and the world, with whom I can crash when I travel. I am still a part of a rich network of Converse MAL alumnae that all were shaped by the program and have gone on

to be some of the most successful women I know. I would not be who I am today without the mentorship and support of my Converse advisor, Joe Dunn, with whom I keep regular contact.

I have had the pleasure of having peers and students from the program as teammates at two of my jobs since earning my PhD. Being “conference mom” at the conferences I attend means that I am able to interact with students from schools all over the country, and I am so grateful to be able to share my experiences and advice with them. I cannot imagine a time when I am not affiliated with Model Arab League, and I’m so touched that the Council keeps finding new ways in which to keep me involved!

## LEARNING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### **Kim Ghattas, *Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry That Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East* (2020)**

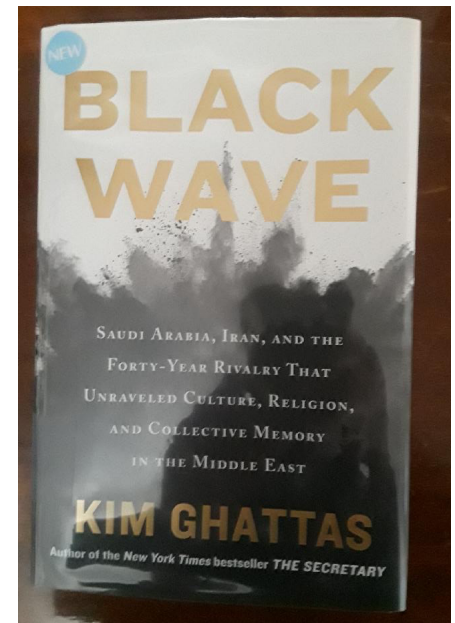
**Reviewed by Dr. Joe P. Dunn**

This large undertaking is a *tour de force* on the contemporary Middle East. Emmy Award-winning Kim Ghattas, presently a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who lives between her native Beirut and Washington, DC, has covered the region for twenty years for BBC and the Financial Times.

Ghattas is a master storyteller who weaves history, geopolitics, on the ground reporting, and deft insight into her account. The basic underlying theme is the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, but the book goes far beyond that to

discuss politics from the Maghreb, Egypt, Levant, Gulf, to Pakistan. While serving as a basic text of the interrelated happenings of the region, especially since the pivotal year of 1979, the book brims with stories about characters from dictators, to novelists, to ordinary individuals. Slain journalist Jamal Kashoggi appears repeatedly over the years in various situations.

The well-crafted book is written for intelligent, informed laymen as well as scholars, and it is totally engaging; but the volume of information is so extensive and intense that it has the power to overwhelm its readers. The listing



of all the major players discussed in the book, broken down by country, is very helpful. Books by journalists often do not hold their value over time. This will not be the case with this volume. It definitely has staying power.