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“The Peace-Puzzle: America’s Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace, 1989-2011”

The World Affairs Council of the Mid-Hudson Valley and SUNY New Paltz’s Center for International Programs, School of Letters and Sciences, the Department of Political Science & International Relations along with The Gillespie Forum hosted Shibley Telhami on September 23rd for an event entitled, “The Peace Puzzle: America’s Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace, 1989-2011”. Shibley Telhami is the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, College Park, and non-resident senior fellow at the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution . Besides having taught at several universities, Dr. Telhami also served as Advisor to the US Mission to the United Nations and was an advisor to former Congressman Lee Hamilton. Dr. Telhami has written several books on the Arab-Israeli conflict. His latest book “The World Through Arab Eyes” focuses on public opinion surveys he has conducted in the Middle East.

Professor Telhami spoke about the unprecedented changes in the region of the Middle East in recent months. In Egypt and Tunisia, grassroots social mobilization on such a grand scale overthrew authoritarian governments and led to new civic organizations and political coalitions. Prof. Telhami anchored his talk around the question of the Obama administration’s commitment to solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. While the Arab-Israeli conflict did not necessarily cause the uprisings in neighboring countries, he explained why it is important for the US government to make an effort to solve this problem.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is central, he argued, because of how it shapes opinions of the United States and the West in the Arab world. Though opinions vary from country to country, one general tendency can be seen all over the Arab world: The conflict is the prism evaluation, or “prism of pain”, through which Arabs view virtually every political and economic issue in the region. How the Arab world sees America is strongly prejudiced by this ongoing unrest as well. America is viewed as the dominating power that has supported Israel for decades. Arabs think that the United States has intervened too often in the region; therefore, there is a general mistrust of intentions. Moreover, it is not clear whether or not these intentions are driven by values or policies.

Telhami continued by giving some examples of the questions asked in his polls. Through this it becomes very clear that, for Arabs, the conflict with Israel is still very much on their minds. When passing judgments about various political issues, this conflict is at the core of how they view the world. Consider, for example, Israeli and Arab opinions about the two-state solution. According to public opinion polls, a majority of Israelis and Arabs still supports a two-state approach. However, when asked if they think the two-state solution would actually happen, a majority of Arabs as well as



World Affairs Councils of America
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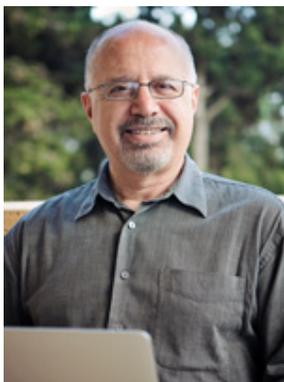
Israelis answered: “never”. Responses to a question about the likely outcome of a two-state solution were even more revealing. An Arab majority said it would result in indefinite conflict for years to come. Though this pessimistic view is rather understandable, Telhami argues that this attitude is a major problem that has made it difficult to negotiate a resolution to the conflict. If the public thinks that even the preferred solution would fail, why and how would it get resolved? Consequently, it is essential to focus on transforming the public’s expectations in order to achieve progress.

“We are almost at the end of a two-state solution. If it fails it will be a disaster and the future will be uncertain”

The Arab street’s distrust of the United States deepened after the failure of the 1993 Oslo Agreement in 2000 when negotiations between President Bill Clinton, Palestinian leader Jassir Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak ended without results. One major problem, according to Telhami, is the asymmetry of power between Israel and Arabs which makes it more difficult to mediate. In addition, the U.S. is Israel’s biggest ally. This essential fact makes it difficult for Americans to view the problem objectively while reinforcing Arab skepticism of the U.S.’s claims to be an honest broker. All of this makes peace negotiations a rather challenging task.

When President Barack Obama first came into office he appointed a Special Envoy to deal with this issue, thus signaling his understanding of the importance of the Palestinian question. However, according to Telhami, it is still not clear whether the president has internalized this realization. Telhami was not certain whether Obama understood how inextricably the Palestinian question was tied to U.S. interests and national security. Currently, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is taking another shot at a solution. While Telhami thinks that the Obama Administration is still capable of resolving the conflict with a two-state solution, he argued that it would only happen if the President made it was a priority and personally involved himself in the negotiations. In the end, sending a proxy will not do.

Shibley Telhami concluded by stating that the process for a solution is very clear: “We are almost at the end of a two-state solution. If it fails it will be a disaster and the future will be uncertain.” After the talk, Prof. Telhami participated in an active Q&A session with students and faculty from SUNY New Paltz and the surrounding universities as well as Hudson-Valley residents who attended the event.



Professor Shibley Telhami

“Land Grabs and Large-Scale Agricultural Investments: Explaining the Race for the World’s Farmlands”

The World Affairs Council of the Mid-Hudson Valley hosted Michael Kugelman on October 17th at Marist College for an event entitled “Land Grabs and Large-Scale Agricultural Investments: Explaining the Race for the World’s Farmlands”. Michael Kugelman is the senior program associate for South and Southeast Asia at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC.

The topic of “land grabs” has gotten relatively little attention in the United States or in the mainstream media. When it does come up, though, the subject is very controversial. Foreign investors are buying off land in countries, mostly food scarce nations, leading to serious problems for local populations. Since the 2008 Global Food Crisis when food prices spiked, food riots occurred, and food exports were banned in several nations, foreign land investment has contributed to the worsening of conditions in developing countries. Large-scale agricultural investments are not a new phenomenon, added Kugelman, as colonialism was an early form of this practice.

Michael Kugelman complemented his talk with a slide show illustrating the enormous scale of land investments in the last five years. In 2009, 15-20 million hectares of agricultural investments were subject to negotiations or transactions. In 2012, eight times the size of the UK got sold or leased globally within the last ten years. In 2011, for example, Mozambique offered concession to Brazil to farm 6 million hectares (14.8 million acres) of land.

The key targets for these investments are Africa (mostly sub-Saharan Africa) where six out of ten of the largest deals worldwide can be found, along with Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe or former Soviet Union, Australia and New Zealand. Investors tend to be from capital rich and food-importing countries such as Gulf nations, China, Japan, India or South Korea. Kugelman noted that land grabs are not strictly a “North-South affair”. Major land investment often occur within a geographic region. For example, North African companies are buying land in sub-Saharan Africa. The main motivators for these foreign land investments are food security, energy security, and profit. The speaker stated that \$14 billion in private capital were committed to farmland in 2012. This number is expected to rise to \$30 billion by 2015. Not only investors are profit driven, but also the governments of host countries see benefits in such deals. Potential for agricultural growth and new infrastructure are appealing incentives. While many of these countries’ governments are undemocratic and are driven by corruption, money plays a major role when deciding whether or not to let foreign investors buy off land. Unfortunately, the consequences and effects on the local population and their needs to survive are often times not considered.

Why should we worry? As mentioned, foreign investors generally buy land in developing and food-scarce nations. According to Kugelman, promises made by companies to local communities are often times not kept. Further complicating the picture are the wide power asymmetries between host countries and investors. Ill-conceived land deals can displace local communities and cut them off from access to water, food, and medicine. While land grabs are done by powerful international players working with host governments to acquire land, local communities tend to be too poor and marginalized to be protected. In addition, envi-

ronmental destruction such as deforestation and endangerment of local animal species are major problems. Foreign land investments have another serious effect on host nations: conflict. Often times, deals happen in countries wracked by internal conflicts. Protests against the governments and that make these deals are also not uncommon. In Cambodia, for instance, 55% of arable land was taken over by out-of state companies, leading to protests from local populations. This helped to bring down the government and the new one cancelled the land deals with foreign investors. In the case of Cambodia, protests worked out well for the locals; however, in many other cases escalation of violence and civil wars can occur destabilizing the country even more.

The speaker ended his talk with future projections concerning foreign land investments. According to him, the issue can be seen as a part of an evolving quest for resources starting with the Gold rush followed by the oil rush and now the "land rush". Some projections for 2020: land deals for acquiring biofuels are on the ascent. Major investors will be the Chinese and Indian governments as both need to meet the needs of their increasing populations. Major target areas will be Latin America as land is still plentiful there. Africa will remain a key target region. Destabilizing risks are likely to continue in Latin America; war-torn could areas in Africa will remain a main concern but risks will most likely intensify everywhere.

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session with students and faculty as well as members of the World Affairs Council and interested Hudson-Valley residents.



Michael Kugelman with
World Affairs Council Member Marc VanderHeyden

What stands in the way of a form of Global Governance?

Continuous global integration and interdependence between nations through "Globalization" has created debates about global governance. But is a form of global governance even possible? Though it seems to be a good idea to ease problem solving on a global scale, it comes with various problems. Before reflecting on these problems, I will first look at some "sub-forms" of global governance that already exist. As mentioned, nations have become more interdependent and integrated over the past decades. This has led to the creation of some early forms of global governance, such as

regional blocs, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and private-sector associations. Though there has been quite an increase in policy initiatives at the provincial level within states, the international level needs attention in this debate.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, for example, former Soviet states have been working on fulfilling the criteria to join the European Union (EU). Several states have already successfully joined the EU in recent years, such as the Czech Republic or Poland. Common norms and interests mostly determine goals of nations and they are the reasons why joining organizations across borders has become appealing. Furthermore, since the EU is a very powerful organization, formerly communist states aim to join it for economic and political reasons that would eventually benefit their own state. Every member state of the EU has to give up some of its state sovereignty and adhere to the rules and regulations of the European Union. However, most countries are willing to do so in order to enjoy the overall benefits of being part of a larger international/regional organization. Nevertheless, one can argue that main motivators for adhering to certain rules are based on the nations' self-interest.

On a global level, several institutions have been established and are currently the closest forms to global governance. The United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or even the World Trade Organization (WTO) are international organizations that are very powerful in our globalized world. Though these organizations make it increasingly difficult for nation-states to maintain their independence – politically and economically – these IOs have not managed to establish a strong global political authority because the state is still the main actor in the international arena and cultural and ideological differences still play an important role.

The UN, as an example, has 193 member states and addresses issues of international peace and security alongside other pressing global issues. Even within the United Nations, representatives of national governments make decisions and the self-interest of these governments generally comes before the common interest of all. The Security Council of the United Nations is comprised of 15 member states of which five states are permanently represented. These five countries (China, France, Russia, Great Britain and United States) have veto power, which means that if one of these states vetoes a resolution it will not get passed. This can be a problem as self-interest plays a major role in decision making. For instance, when the United Nations Security Council was voting on resolutions on solving the problem of Syria, Russia and China repeatedly vetoed resolutions against the Syrian government which prevented the United Nations to act on this matter. The problem here is that the UN cannot just unilaterally decide to send troops or aid to the region as the organization relies on the support of member states. We can see here that even though the UN comes very close to a form of global governance, its hands are tied in a way, if member states are not willing to support the organizations' efforts.

Though we are moving towards a more integrated world and there could be an eventual "need" for global governance, it will be difficult to create a global institution that will have authority over all nations as long as nation-states are the main actors in the political realm. There are several researchers that believe that our world is moving towards a "democratic global governance based on Western cosmopolitan ideals, international legal arrangements, and a web of expanding linkages between various governmental and non-governmental organizations." However, critics argue that this

idea does not take into account the “cultural feasibility of global democracy”. Though nations have started to put their political and economic interests before ideological interests making international alliances and organizations possible, cultural aspects have still not disappeared completely. As long as nations’ self-interest as well as cultural and ideological differences are present in our global society between countries and regions, a strong form of global governance will be very difficult to achieve.

Sources:
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“Through the Eyes of Women: Working for a Better Congo”

The World Affairs Council of the Mid-Hudson Valley together with the Vassar College Africana Studies Department and Integrated Enterprise Solutions, Inc. hosted Dr. Diana Putman on October 21st, 2013 for an event entitled “Through the Eyes of Women: Working for a Better Congo”. Dr. Putman is the USAID Mission Director of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Her talk focused on the role of Congolese women and their status in society. While they are generally disadvantaged by traditional and religious gender stereotypes, Dr. Putman described how Congolese women strive to play important roles in society and to create a better future for their country. Despite their deprived status, the enthusiasm of Congolese women in all areas of life is astounding. Education and career for girls and women have started to become major goals. In her talk, Mrs Putman presented examples of rural and urban, illiterate and well-educated women in the Congo.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is located in Central Africa. It is one of the poorest nations in the world, according to the World Bank and the United Nations Human Development Index. The nation is listed last on the socio-economic index and has one of the highest child mortality rates in the world. While there is sufficient land to feed all of Africa, the DRC is a net importer of food. According to Mrs. Putman, there has been slow but steady progress. The population growth rate has declined in recent years and the number of girls attending primary school has increased.

While the Congo is supposedly a Democracy, the national government is not able to maintain authority and stability in this huge, conflict ridden country. A number of rebel groups control different areas of the nation. One of the most widely known armed groups led by Joseph Koni, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), has moved from Uganda across the border into the Congo. U.S. Africa Command, where Putman served for five years, is working on training the Rwandan and Congolese military to go after this rebel group. To strengthen democracy, one of USAID’s efforts is to train local communities and to show how a government works. Educating people about democracy through civic education workshops is a main part of the program.

Diana Putman was raised in the DRC and has witnessed the situation of Congolese women first hand. According to her, the sit-

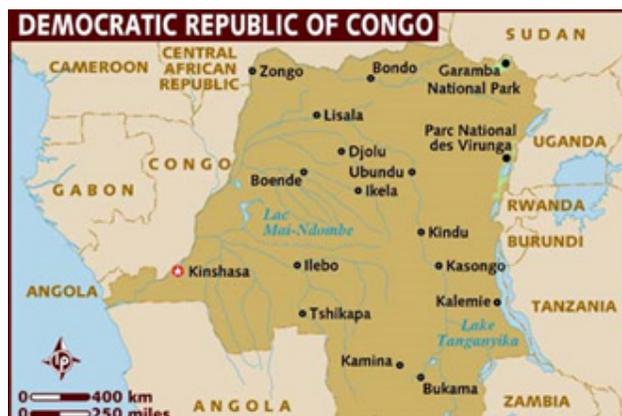
uation of women in the DRC is the toughest in the world: “It is the worst place to be a mother”. The numbers of pregnancies of young women between 15 and 19 years are extremely high. In addition, 65% of 15- 20 year-olds have experienced violence. Married women are not allowed to travel without their husbands. According to Putman, rape is used as a weapon of war. Many young girls and women have been victims of sexual violence and efforts have been taken to help them to become a functioning member of society again. Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) helps these girls and women to cope with the memories of the traumatic events which has been very successful. In addition, individual support is offered to victims as well.

Mrs. Putman presented several programs to improve the situation of women and girls in the Congo. Programs such as *Empowering Adolescent Girls* aim to create a safe learning environment for girls. Teaching that sexual harassment is not acceptable is another main goal of the program. Another program sponsored by USAID is the *Ambassadors Girls Scholarship Program* which provides scholarships to young girls along with life skills mentoring and community mobilization. The speaker presented the 16-year-old Kawanga Kasela who had received this award in the past. Through this scholarship she is now able to continue her education and is currently in 9th grade.

Other projects for adults encouraging to create positive definitions of masculinity for men, non-violent definitions, are very successful. About 70 % of men who had stated that violence was acceptable before they took part in the program said that it was not afterwards. Furthermore, the programs aim to educate both, men and women, that there are no specific tasks for boys and girls. This outlook loosens the stereotypical gender roles and gives women more opportunities in their society while their husbands start to support them in achieving their goals.

While their situation is tough, there are many women that strive to create a better future for themselves and their country. To invest in empowering women and their education is the main goal of USAID and other organizations working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Many of the programs mentioned by the speaker have been very successful in making a change in society but there is still a long way to go to reach gender equality.

Mrs. Putman’s talk was followed by an active Q&A session with Vassar College students and faculty as well as Members of the World Affairs Council.



(Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/africa/>)

World Affairs Council Trivia

1. In which African country did the mall shooting take place last September?
 - a) Namibia
 - b) Kenya
 - c) Ethiopia
 - d) Somalia
2. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry recently traveled to Geneva to take part in a negotiation about Iran. What was the primary purpose of this negotiation?
 - a) peaceful relations with Israel
 - b) strengthening U.S. - Iran relations
 - c) lifting economic sanctions in exchange for capping some of Iran's nuclear programs
 - d) hardening sanctions due to continuous nuclear weapons development
3. According to Michael Kugelman, the number one region for foreign land investment is
 - a) Latin America
 - b) Asia
 - c) Africa
 - d) Sub-Saharan Africa

Join Us at our Upcoming Event:

Wed., Dec. 4, 6:00 p.m., – Members' only dinner
Catherine Hill, President of Vassar College
"Cuba"

American Bounty Rest., Culinary Institute of America
The talk will be held in the Eco-Lab Theater



For more, visit: www.hvworldaffairsCouncil.org

Membership Options

Join Us! Meet and exchange ideas and questions with people in the region who share an interest in international issues. The World Affairs Council of the Mid-Hudson Valley is an all volunteer organization. Membership directly supports the educational programs and activities which bring nonpartisan, lively information about critical issues facing our nation and the world.

Student	\$5	Not for Profit	\$100
Educator	\$35	Displomat	\$250
Single	\$50	Envoy	\$500
Dual	\$70	Consul	\$1,000
Sponsor	\$100	Ambassador	\$2,500
Leader	\$250		
Patron	\$500		
Benefactor	\$1,000		

Benefits of Membership:

- Deepen your understanding of international issues that touch our lives as professionals, citizens, and students
- Connect and network with experts and like-minded individuals in the Hudson Valley who are seeking to expand their knowledge and understanding of global affairs
- Invitations of public lectures, youth activities programs, and other events
- Invitations at reduced cost for Members-Only Dinners at the Culinary Institute of America
- Receive advance notice of all WACMHV activities through email
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- Invitation to special pre-event receptions for Patrons, Benefactors, and Organization Members
- Through WACA, special rates on publications from Foreign Affairs, World Policy Journal, and books from Brookings and other publishers