



The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington

Building bridges of understanding

Annual Report 2015





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Welcome

A Message from AGSIW Board Chair Ambassador Frank G. Wisner



It gives me great pleasure to introduce the annual report of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington for calendar year 2015.

Even for someone like myself, who follows carefully the activities of the institute throughout the year, this summary of the programs, publications, media engagement, and other outreach assembled in one document offers a unique opportunity to appreciate just how much the top-notch team assembled at AGSIW under our president, Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba, has accomplished in a remarkably short span of time.

In fact, it was less than a year ago, on April 21, 2015, that AGSIW opened its doors to the public for the first time, holding a conference that I was pleased to join on volatility in global oil markets and its implications for the Arab Gulf states. Since that time, the institute has examined the issue from a number of different

angles, including labor markets, social welfare programs, monetary and fiscal policy, as well as prospects for economic reform and diversification. Planning is already underway for a follow-up event that will provide a fresh look at global energy markets and assess the political, economic, and social shocks caused by the fall in oil prices.

At the same time, the institute has continued to shine a light on the most salient geo-political and security issues in the region, including the role of external players in the Syria and Yemen conflicts, the Iran nuclear agreement, and U.S.-GCC security cooperation.

It is this commitment to sustained analysis of key trends shaping the Arab Gulf states that separates AGSIW from the many institutions in Washington, DC that operate with a broader regional, or even global, mandate. Everything AGSIW does begins with the Arab Gulf countries: from internal dynamics to external relations, and whatever lies between.

More than just an annual report, this document chronicles the emergence of a unique institution and the contribution it is making to informed debate on issues relevant to everyone who cares about a region that continues to exercise enormous influence in our collective search for global stability. If this report provides your first look at AGSIW, welcome. If you are already a member of the institute's extended family, I think you'll be as pleased as I am to read of the impact it has made.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank G. Wisner". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

A Message from AGSIW President Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba



We are often asked why we felt the need to establish another think tank in Washington, DC and, in particular, one that focuses on a single region in the Middle East. The events of the past year, and the very positive reception our efforts to provide thoughtful, informed analysis of these events have received, reassures us that we made the right decision.

Three things make AGSIW unique in the Washington think tank landscape. First, we are the first organization to focus solely and in depth on the Arab Gulf states. Second, we provide an objective intellectual platform where thought leaders from the GCC states can meet with U.S. counterparts and audiences to jointly define challenges and identify policy solutions. Third, we promote academic exchanges between Gulf and U.S. organizations, and mentor young scholars to increase the pool of regional expertise.

The dynamic societies of the GCC countries are changing in profound ways, and we believe the creative and energetic team of professionals at AGSIW is making an important contribution to efforts to understand these changes and enrich the conversation between the United States and its Gulf partners. Our goal is to become nothing less than Washington's primary source of credible and expert analysis on the Arab Gulf countries and the complex issues that impact the region and U.S. interests.

What you will see in these pages is the record of our activities in 2015. This record of success was made possible with the support of our donors, our very accomplished board of directors, and an informed and enthusiastic community of friends and colleagues. All of us are bound by a common vision: to build bridges of understanding between the United States and the Arab Gulf countries. We invite you to join us on our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marcelle Wahba". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light-colored background.

About

The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), established in 2014, is an independent, non-profit institution dedicated to increasing the understanding and appreciation of the social, economic, and political diversity of the Arab Gulf states. Through expert research, analysis, exchanges, and public discussion, the institute seeks to encourage thoughtful debate and inform decision makers shaping U.S. policy regarding this critical geo-strategic region.

Goals

- To build bridges of understanding between the United States and the Arab Gulf states on issues ranging from politics and security to economics, trade, and business; from social dynamics to civil society and culture.
- To be recognized as Washington's primary source of credible and expert analysis about the Arab Gulf states and the complex issues that impact the region and U.S. interests.
- To provide a Washington platform for opinion leaders from the Gulf states to promote interaction with U.S. policymakers and the broader American public.

Strategies

- Build long-term, cross-regional relationships that facilitate vigorous discussion of policies, issues, and trends by: sponsoring guest scholars from the Gulf, promoting academic exchanges between Gulf and American organizations, and mentoring American scholars to increase the pool of regional expertise.
- Provide credible expert analysis and timely policy recommendations by: hosting discussions and briefings with policymakers and experts from the United States and the Gulf region, producing policy analysis by resident and non-resident scholars, commissioning policy papers and op-eds by scholars from the region, and using traditional and social media tools to comment on current policy issues.
- Promote interaction between Gulf officials, opinion leaders, and the Washington policy community by: providing a platform from which these individuals can articulate for members of Congress, the administration, and the media a regional perspective on the issues most relevant to U.S.-Gulf relations. 

Program Highlights

Panel Discussions

Defense and Security

The U.S.-GCC Summit in May propelled the organization to the forefront of the Washington policy community. AGSIW hosted “The Camp David Summit: Redefining the U.S.-GCC Relationship?” The panel spoke to a full house, including several media representatives.

The Saudi-led intervention in Yemen forced AGSIW to respond quickly to the increased interest for analysis. AGSIW hosted a conference call as well as the panel discussion “The Conflict in Yemen: Searching for the Endgame” with Saudi and Yemeni speakers.

Over the summer, as Western powers and Iran agreed on a deal over Tehran’s nuclear program, the institute hosted “Negotiating the Gulf: How a Nuclear Agreement Would Redefine GCC-Iran Relations,” which drew strong interest.

With Russia’s intensified involvement in Syria, AGSIW was the first to examine the implications on Russian-GCC relations, hosting “War or Peace? The Gulf States and Russia’s Intervention in Syria.”

In December, as the world watched Saudi women take part in municipal elections for the first time, AGSIW was a go-to source for expert analysis. The institute hosted “Women and Elections in Saudi Arabia,” featuring one of the elected women candidates as well as campaigners and activists.

Economy

The slump in oil prices has generated lively debate over how the decline will affect the economies of the GCC states. AGSIW hosted “The GCC Economies: Weathering the Oil Slump?” to address the challenges and opportunities presented by lower oil prices.

At a time when economics has become a more central feature of international relations, the Arab Gulf states have raised their game in foreign economic policy to enhance and sustain their regional and global leadership. To address how the GCC states are targeting financial aid and military assistance, AGSIW held “GCC Economic Statecraft: Interactions in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia.”

Culture and Society

Recent events worldwide, from the Occupy movements to the 2011 Arab uprisings, have brought the role of cities in political life to the forefront. To look at the public’s role, especially youth, in remaking Gulf cities, AGSIW hosted “Gulf Youth and the City.”

With the Middle East Institute, AGSIW hosted “The Arts of the Emirates: A Presentation on the UAE Visual Arts Sector,” to explore the diversity of the country’s dynamic visual arts sector, profile some of its pioneers, and look at how it has contributed to the strategic vision of the UAE.

Conferences

On April 27, 2015, the institute hosted its inaugural conference, "Petro Diplomacy: The Political Economy of Volatile Oil Prices." The event brought together scholars, analysts, policymakers, and the private sector to examine the implications and prospects for energy producers and consumers in light of the volatility in oil prices, focusing specifically on the Arab Gulf states. The institute produced a conference report highlighting the major recommendations from the day's session. The closed conference was followed by a public panel and a reception.

Ambassadors Forum

To fulfill its mission to provide a platform in Washington for Gulf political and opinion leaders, AGSIW hosted GCC Assistant Secretary-General Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg for a news conference following the U.S.-GCC Camp David Summit. Aluwaisheg addressed over a dozen journalists and his remarks were referenced by Bloomberg and Al Monitor.



"GCC Economic Statecraft: Interactions in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia" panel discussion with Karen E. Young, Afshin Molavi, Hessah Al-Ojayan, William Bartlett, and Jamal Abdullah



Audience for the panel discussion "War or Peace? The Gulf States and Russia's Intervention in Syria"



"The Conflict in Yemen: Searching for the Endgame" panel discussion with Ambassador Stephen A. Seche, Abdul-Ghani Al-Iryani, and Fahad Nazer

Cultural Events

AGSIW is making a name for itself as a center for cultural and intellectual events focused on the Gulf region. In July, AGSIW hosted its first Iftar, welcoming guests from Gulf and other Arab embassies, the U.S. government, organizations working on U.S.-Arab relations, and students. In November, the institute held its first exhibit, featuring the latest collection of Saudi photographer Najla Al-Khalifa, "1001 Lights." The institute additionally lent its support to two film festivals. At Filmfest DC, AGSIW sponsored the film "Theeb," and the institute sponsored the Emirati film "From A to B" as well as a panel discussion on "The New Arab Cinema" at the Arabian Sights Film Festival.



Audience for the panel discussion following the conference "Petro Diplomacy: The Political Economy of Volatile Oil Prices"



Aziza Youssef, Kristin Smith Diwan, Hatoon Al-Fassi, Nailah Attar, and Hala Aldosari following the panel discussion "Women and Elections in Saudi Arabia"

On the Hill

Demonstrating AGSIW's integral role as a source in Washington of credible and expert analysis about the Arab Gulf states, AGSIW Executive Vice President Ambassador Stephen A. Seche testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Seche's remarks during the hearing, "The U.S. Role and Strategy in the Middle East: Yemen and the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council," were referenced by media outlets including The Huffington Post and VOA.

Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba, AGSIW president, spoke to a bipartisan group of 30 Capitol Hill staffers at a policy seminar organized by the Partnership for a Secure America (PSA). PSA's program is for Hill staff interested in generating dialogue and developing the skills and relationships to advance bipartisanship on national security and foreign policy issues. Wahba's remarks focused on Syria, ISIL, Yemen, Iran-GCC relations, and the refugee issue.

AGSIW Non-Resident Fellow Celina B. Realuyo was invited to testify before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Financial Services, Task Force to Investigate Terrorist Financing. Realuyo testified at the hearing "A Dangerous Nexus: Terrorism, Crime and Corruption" following the publication of her policy paper "Combating Terrorist Financing in the Gulf: Significant Progress but Risks Remain."

Publications

Papers

Over the course of 2015, AGSIW published 19 papers, including a report from the institute's inaugural conference "Petro Diplomacy: The Political Economy of Volatile Oil Prices." Issue papers such as "Anxious Allies: The Iran Nuclear Framework in its Regional Context" and "Narrowing the Gulf: U.S. and GCC Revamp Relations at Camp David Summit" by AGSIW Senior Resident Scholar Hussein Ibish, as well as "Confrontation or Conciliation: How the Nuclear Agreement is Reshaping GCC-Iran Relations" edited by Ibish, were particularly timely, looking at the GCC concerns and evolving relations between the GCC states, Iran, and the United States in light of the nuclear agreement with Tehran. As the relationship is perceived to have shifted between the United States and the GCC states, Mark N. Katz shows how Moscow is looking to take advantage of dissatisfaction

among the Arab Gulf states to bring them closer to Russia in "Convergent Hopes, Divergent Realities: Russia and the Gulf in a Time of Troubles."

Worsening conflicts throughout the region are increasingly affecting the Arab Gulf states. Senior Resident Scholar Karen E. Young looks at migration to the Gulf as well as the financial and military interventions of Gulf states in regional conflicts in "Refugee Crisis and Economic



Migration: Regional Economic Interdependence and the Arab Gulf States.” Additionally, with the advance of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, violent extremism has become a greater concern for the United States and Gulf states alike. Following the publication of her policy paper “Combating Terrorist Financing in the Gulf: Significant Progress but Risks Remain” AGSIW Non-Resident Fellow Celina B. Realuyo was invited to testify before the U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Financial Services, Task Force to Investigate Terrorist Financing.

The participation and election of women for the first time in Saudi Arabia’s December 2015 municipal elections drew international attention. Senior Resident Scholar Kristin Smith Diwan explores the history and political significance of municipal councils in the Gulf in “Between Popular Representation and the States: The Politics of Municipal Council Elections in the GCC.”



Blogs

In addition to long format papers, AGSIW launched two blogs in 2015, providing an online outlet for Gulf analysis. The Bridge, launched in April, is a blog that seeks to encourage thoughtful debate about the politics, economy, and culture of the Arab Gulf states and policy toward them, with pieces written by expert and emerging voices from the region and beyond. Market Watch, launched in August, is a weekly blog by Senior Resident Scholar Karen E. Young, seeking to provide insights from the crossroads of Gulf politics and finance.

Prominent Bridge posts include “Rushin’ to Syria: Riyadh Pledges to Counter Moscow’s Sudden Escalation” and “Saudi Arabia and ISIL: A False Equation but Troubling Echoes” by Hussein Ibish;



*“Market Watch”
By Karen E. Young*



*“Rushin’ to Syria: Riyadh Pledges to Counter Moscow’s Sudden Escalation”
By Hussein Ibish*



*“Saudi Arabia: A War on All Fronts?”
By Neil Partrick*



*“The (Limited) Rehabilitation of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf”
By Kristin Smith Diwan*

“Soldiers and the Nation” and “The (Limited) Rehabilitation of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf” by Kristin Smith Diwan; “Saudi Air Strikes in Yemen: When the Medium Is Not the Message” by Stephen A. Seche; “The Saudi State Versus the ‘Islamic State’” by Fahad Nazer; and “Saudi Arabia: A War on All Fronts?” by Neil Partrick.

Prominent Market Watch posts include “Volatile Global Markets and the Arab Gulf States,” “It’s all in the Financing – Renewable Energy Potential in the GCC and Iran,” “Counting the Cost – Military Expenditure in the GCC,” and “Small Victories for GCC Women: More Educated, More Unemployed.”



*“Soldiers and the Nation”
By Kristin Smith Diwan*



*“The Saudi State Versus the ‘Islamic State’”
By Fahad Nazer*



*“Saudi Air Strikes in Yemen: When the Medium Is Not the Message”
By Stephen A. Seche*



*“Saudi Arabia and ISIL: A False Equation but Troubling Echoes”
By Hussein Ibish*

Media

AGSIW has developed sustained strategies of engagement with the media through print, broadcast, and social media. The institute has built a wide network of contacts and as a result has become a go-to source for prominent media outlets looking for cutting edge analysis.

Influential Media Mentions

Huffington Post
Financial Times
The Washington Post
NBC CNN Reuters
New York Times Doha News
Gulf News Al Jazeera BBC
Bloomberg Turkish News
The National UAE

The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington

2015

A Global Audience for www.agsiw.org



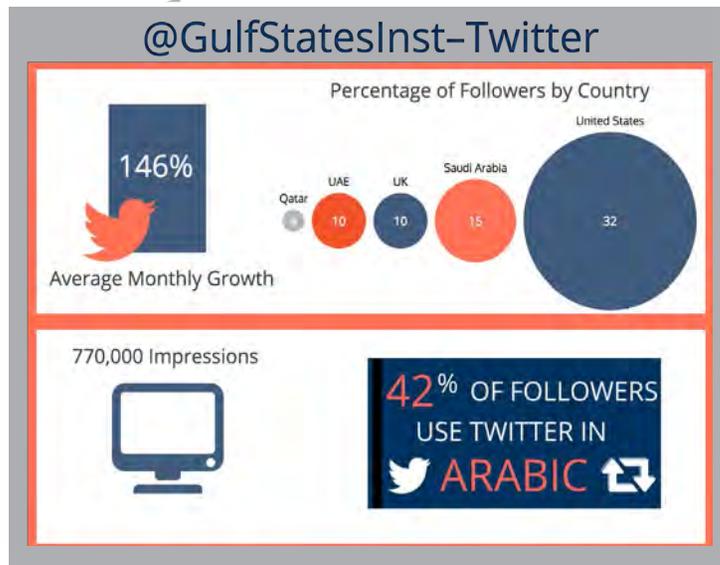
Did You Know?

In 2015, our website AGSIW.org was selected to be archived by the Library of Congress as part of its collection on public policy.



Social Media

Social media is a powerful tool in the institute's efforts to build bridges of understanding. Our audience actively engages with our content via Twitter, Facebook, and by reading our weekly online newsletter, the Dhow. The Dhow hits the inboxes of over 2,000 subscribers worldwide every Monday, allowing our audience to read and share AGSIW content with their social networks. In 2015 alone, our Twitter following increased at an average monthly rate of 146 percent and it continues to exponentially grow. Quality is key as well – we have followers from several prominent international media networks including The New York Times, The Washington Post, Reuters, Al Jazeera, Bloomberg, The National, and many more. Social media will continue to play an integral role in expanding the institute's outreach.

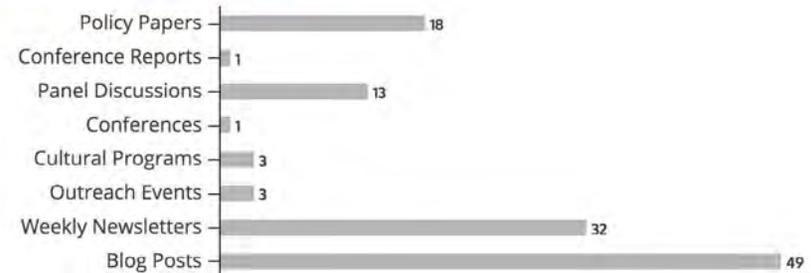


2015 YEAR IN REVIEW

Programs and Publications



By the Numbers



Audited Financial Information

The following financial information was derived from AGSIW's 2014 and 2015 audited financial statement.

Revenue

Grants and Contributions.....	\$1,163,234
Interest Income.....	367
Total Revenue.....	1,163,601 *

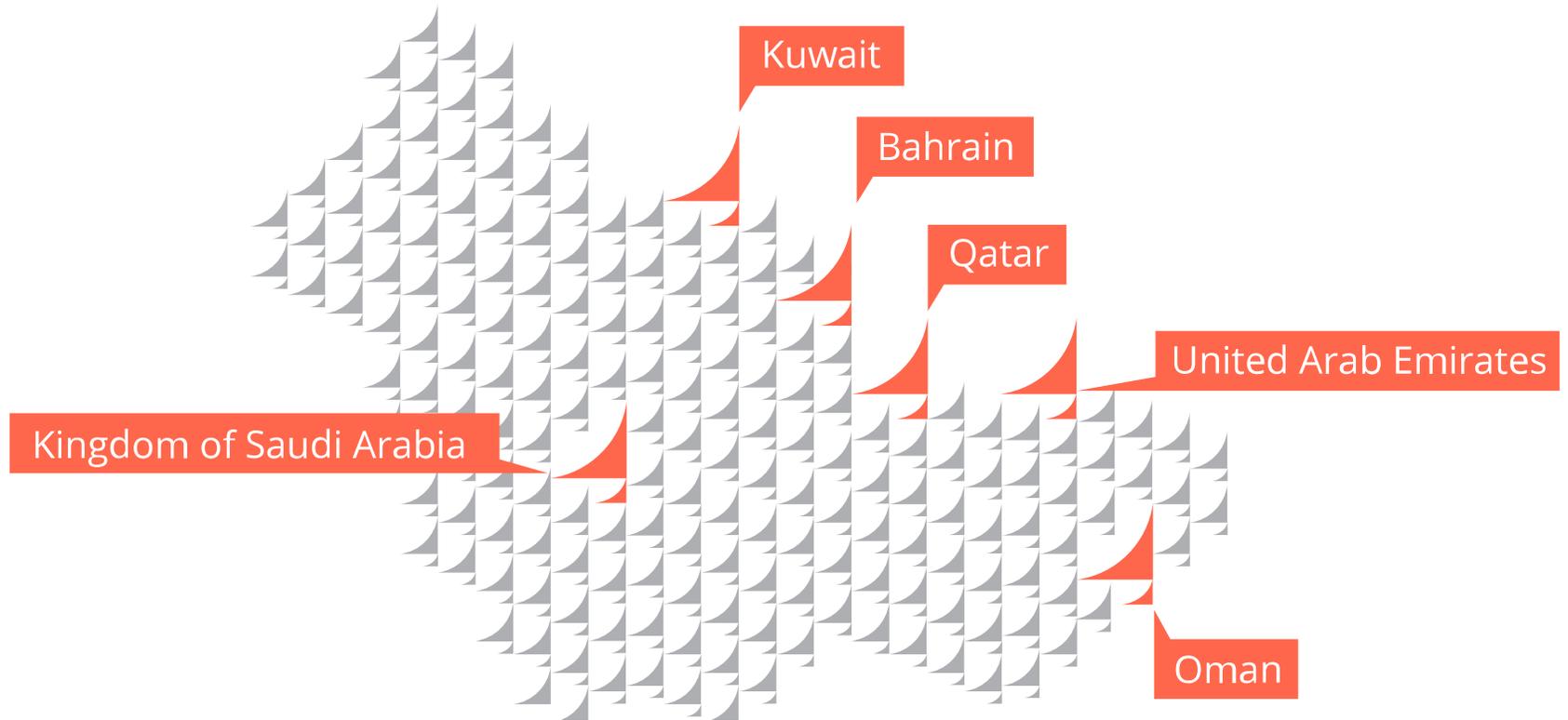
Expenses

Program Services.....	1,650,485
General and Administrative	629,908
Total Operating Expenses.....	2,280,393

Net Assets

Change in Net Assets.....	(1,116,792)
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	4,747,397
Net Assets at Year End	\$3,630,605

* This revenue figure does not reflect grant funds received in 2015 that were credited in 2014, per FASB regulations.



Staff

The institute is keen on making the Gulf region's diverse voices heard and understood more widely in Washington, and vice versa. It seeks, ultimately, to promote an open and frank dialogue on key security issues between the people and governments of the United States and those of the Arab Gulf states.

Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba, President

Ambassador Stephen A. Seche, Executive Vice President

Kristin Smith Diwan, PhD, Senior Resident Scholar

Hussein Ibish, PhD, Senior Resident Scholar

Karen E. Young, PhD, Senior Resident Scholar

Michael W. Wanyama, Chief Financial Officer

Raymond E. Karam, Director, Programs and Communication

Mary Casey-Baker, Deputy Director, Programs and Communication

Tamara Kamel, Digital Coordinator, Programs and Communication

Kevin Fagan, Senior Office Administrator

Bouchra Lawrence, Program Coordinator

Board of Directors

The institute's board of directors is made up of 16 highly distinguished individuals from the United States and the Arab Gulf states. The board provides overall direction and supervision of the institute through its president, who reports to the board. The board plans to continue to expand and diversify its membership.

Abdel Monem Said Aly, PhD, Founding Director and Honorary Chair; Chairman/CEO, Regional Center for Strategic Studies in Cairo

Ambassador Frank G. Wisner, Chair of the Board; Foreign Affairs Advisor, Squire Patton Boggs

Fatima Al-Shamsi, PhD, Vice Chair of the Board; Deputy Vice Chancellor of Administrative Affairs of Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi

Maroun Semaan, Treasurer of the Board; Chairman, Alcazar Capital Limited, Dubai

Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba, President, Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington

H.E. Yousef Al-Ebraheem, PhD, Advisor, Diwan of the Emir of Kuwait

H.E. Fatima Al Jaber, Board Member and Chair of the Project Committee, Al Jaber Group, Abu Dhabi

F. Gregory Gause, III, PhD, Professor of Political Science, Texas A&M University

Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm, Jr., Kuwait Professor of Gulf Affairs, George Washington University

Nabil Habayeb, CEO, GE in the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey

Bernard Haykel, PhD, Professor of Near Eastern Affairs, Princeton University

General (Ret.) John P. Jumper, Former Chief of Staff, United States Air Force

H.E. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Former Secretary General, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, Vice Chairman, Hills & Company

George R. Salem, Strategic Advisor, DLA Piper

Khaled Sifri, CEO, Emirates Investment Bank

The Year in Pictures



(Top, Left to Right) GCC Assistant Secretary-General Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg addresses journalists at a news conference; Panel discussion “Petro Diplomacy: The Political Economy of Volatile Oil Prices” **(Bottom, Left to Right)** AGSIW Senior Resident Scholar Hussein Ibish speaks with BBC Arabic; AGSIW Executive Vice President Ambassador Stephen A. Seche testifies at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing “The U.S. Role and Strategy in the Middle East: Yemen and the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council”; Saudi Arabia’s Ambassador to the United States Prince Abdullah bin Faisal bin Turki bin Abdullah Al Saud speaks at an exhibition with Saudi photographer Najla AlKhalifa



(Top, Left to Right) AGSIW President Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba and Executive Vice President Ambassador Stephen A. Seche speak with guests during a reception following the conference “Petro Diplomacy: The Political Economy of Volatile Oil Prices”; AGSIW Executive Vice President Ambassador Stephen A. Seche discusses the crisis in Yemen with BBC World News
(Bottom, Left to Right) AGSIW Senior Resident Scholar Kristin Smith Diwan speaks with guests as AGSIW celebrates Ramadan, hosting its inaugural iftar; AGSIW’s board of directors meets in September 2015; Panel discussion “War or Peace? The Gulf States and Russia’s Intervention in Syria”

Looking Ahead

Strategic Plan

AGSIW has identified six key trends concerning the Arab Gulf states to follow for research and programming in 2016:

- Iran-GCC relations
- Political Islam and non-state actors
- Changing economic dynamics
- Gulf rising
- Generational change
- Political identity and citizenship

Conferences

AGSIW spent the last months of 2015 planning for its inaugural UAE Security Forum, sponsored by Raytheon, to be held in Abu Dhabi. The forum will bring together leaders from the government, academia, and the private sector to focus on cybersecurity and the gap that exists in talent needed to maintain sensitive information and critical infrastructure secure.

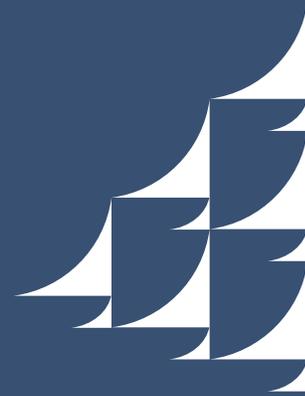
Additionally, capitalizing on the success of the “Petro Diplomacy” conference, AGSIW plans to host its second annual energy conference in fall 2016, bringing together experts from the Gulf, Europe, and United States.

AGSIW.org

In efforts to promote interaction between Arab Gulf officials, opinion leaders, and the Washington policy community, in 2016 AGSIW will launch an Arabic language website. The Arabic website will complement the English website, but will broaden outreach and engagement with an Arabic speaking audience, specifically in the Gulf states.

Additionally, AGSIW plans to launch a new blog in 2016 – Millennial Gulf. The blog will serve as an outlet for reporting on youth-led initiatives in the realms of culture, politics, technology, and entrepreneurship in the GCC states. The goal of Millennial Gulf will be to elevate the voices of youth in the GCC and to deepen understanding of their concerns and aspirations.





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