



BROWN UNIVERSITY
**CENTER FOR
MIDDLE EAST
STUDIES**

Dear Friends,

I hope this message finds you healthy and prosperous. Under current circumstances, saying this is more than a formality. Even as we confront great challenges triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, we can wish that, when a new normalcy is established, we will find the world a more just, compassionate, and environmentally responsible place.

As with Brown as a whole during the academic year 2019-20, the work of the Center for Middle East Studies was curtailed significantly starting in the middle of March, when most students were sent home and on-campus presence became limited to essential staff. The Center was a place of vigorous programming prior to the shutdown, with a number of important events remaining to be held during the Spring semester that will, circumstances permitting, now take place in Fall 2020.

The work of a diverse group of students and faculty is key to the Center's mission. We are delighted to announce the establishment of the **Mahmoud Darwish Chair in Palestinian Studies**, the appointment of **Beshara Doumani** as the first holder of this chair, and the appointment of **Faiz Ahmed** as the **Joukowsky Family Distinguished Associate Professor in Modern Middle East History**. Over the past year, we covered topics ranging from North Africa to Xinjiang, and from the medieval period to contemporary societies of the Middle East. We paid attention to the Center's long-term initiatives in **Palestinian Studies** and **Islam and the Humanities**. We also welcomed new programs driven by faculty interests in **Kurdish Studies** and **Israel and Palestine: Lands and Peoples**. The news cycle generated the need for events pertaining to Iran, Syria, Turkey, and China. Our aim in addressing topics emerging and longstanding, about the past or the present and the future, remained to provide academic treatments geared toward a better and ever more compassionate understanding of the lives of people in the Middle East and elsewhere.

We are unable to say goodbye to our **graduating concentrators** in the usual style because Commencement was an online event. With the rest of Brown, we hope to welcome students and their families back for an on-campus celebration in the future. The lack of ceremony does not, of course, take anything away from our pride in the students' phenomenal work and their current and future achievements.

This letter marks the end of my term as the director of the Center for Middle East Studies at Brown. It has been a pleasure and an honor to occupy this role and I especially want to thank my colleagues Barbara Oberkoetter and Saraya McPherson for making CMES an extremely pleasant and efficient concern. The "magic" would not happen save for their tireless effort that always goes well beyond the call of duty. My thanks also to all students, faculty, and advocates inside and outside the University without whose support the director's job would be meaningless. We are exceedingly fortunate that **Professor Nadje Al-Ali** has agreed to take over the directorship. She is an inspiring choice to lead the Center. I wish her all possible success as she charts an ever brighter future for the study of the Middle East at Brown.

Shahzad Bashir

Director, The Center for Middle East Studies
Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Humanities