

January 18, 2021

Dear colleagues, students, and friends of CMES,

I am writing to you all to send my best wishes for the New Year in the midst of extremely tumultuous and difficult times. Wherever we are currently based, all of us are worried about the health and well-being of ourselves and our loved ones, battling not only with physical risks but the growing mental and emotional pressures and challenges confronting us. We might be weighed down in different ways by the ongoing pandemic and also those hardships and inequalities we were facing before and that have become more pronounced over the past year. But I very much hope that all of us will find relief and better conditions at some point during 2021. Until then, I wish that we can collectively support each other in ways fit to each of our individual and institutional abilities. From my side, I hope that CMES will offer insights, inspiration, and a sense of community.

Meanwhile, the debates and violence in the U.S. in relation to the November election results have illustrated maybe more clearly than ever before that we need to radically rethink old categories of dividing the world into stable and fragile democracies. Many of us working on the Middle East have tried for a while to de-exceptionalize the region, while paying attention to its specificities, historically and in contemporary context. Over the next semester and beyond, I hope that our programming will contribute to this attempt at rethinking old categories, boundaries, and divisions, and to a perspective that de-exceptionalizes not only the Middle East but also the U.S.

In terms of specific programming, we will be pursuing the strands and initiatives I referred to in my [last statement](#), particularly in relation to the politics of gender. [Our first event this semester](#) will explore feminist mobilizations in the context of COVID-19 with reference to the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Please check out our programming for the coming semester [here](#). And if you would like to catch up on any events from last year, please use [this link](#).

At this moment in time, we are also marking 10 years since the wave of protests and uprisings in the Middle East. I am excited that CMES is joining a year-long initiative “10 Years On: Mass Protests and Uprisings in the Arab World,” organized jointly by my colleagues Professor Amaney Jamal at the Arab Studies Institute, Princeton’s Arab Barometer, and Professor Bassam Haddad at George Mason’s Middle East and Islamic Studies Project. The initiative presents the attempt to reflect on and talk about the protests and uprisings in the Middle East in new and original ways, with historical depth and comparative perspective. Crucially, the initiative is also very much about collaboration, working collectively instead of competitively. Given the current situation

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and the challenges we are facing, I personally believe that it is high time that we try to do much more collaborative work, across institutions, within US academia, and outside, as well as with the communities we are connected to. The partner institutions for this initiative include: Georgetown University (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies), American University of Beirut (Asfari Institute), ACSS, UC Santa Barbara (Center for Middle East Studies), Harvard University (Center for Middle East Studies), University of Exeter (Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies), Birzeit University (Department of Political Science), Stanford University (Center for Democracy, Development, and Rule of Law), AUC Affiliates, and Georgetown University (Qatar).

Below find a link to the short launch event. We will soon advertise the first big event reflecting on ways to think about the protests on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January (details to follow).

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ca4Dvk7Ld4&ab\\_channel=Jadaliyya](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ca4Dvk7Ld4&ab_channel=Jadaliyya)

Online events allow us to link with speakers and audiences across the globe and facilitate access and connection, so we are planning to make some of our events available in Arabic through simultaneous translation (and wherever relevant also in Turkish, Persian, and Kurdish).

I am hoping that many of you will join us over the next few months.

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