

Dietrich Jung

Essays

# Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies

## A Multi-Disciplinary Approach

In May 2007, the board of University of Southern Denmark (SDU) made a strategic decision in declaring the field of modern Middle East studies a priority research area of the Faculty of Humanities at SDU. The board underpinned this decision with the allocation of substantial additional means to the Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies at SDU (hereafter “the Centre”). The research staff of the Centre was augmented by two regular professorships, one guest professorship (one-year term) and two PhD positions. In this way, the board aimed at strengthening the research component of the Centre and its international profile. The first new faculty member was guest professor Francesco Cavatorta (today teaching at Université Laval in Canada), who was employed from August 2008 to July 2009. Since then, nine scholars have served as guest professors at the Centre, representing countries as diverse as Germany, India, Ireland, Jordan, Turkey, and the United States.<sup>1</sup> In January 2009, the Faculty of Humanities appointed Dietrich Jung as the first regular professor. Jung previously worked as a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). He also took over the directorship of the Centre from Associate Professor Peter Seeberg who had served in this position since

1. More information about the Centre’s previous guest professors you will find on its homepage.

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January 2003. In August 2012, Martin Beck then joined the Centre as the second regular professor. Coming from a position as the Resident Representative of the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Amman, Jordan, Beck had previously worked as a senior researcher at the German Institute of Global Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg. In addition, four PhD researchers have thus far been employed at the Centre thanks to the above-mentioned allocation of extra resources.

With its decision to make modern Middle East studies a priority research area in the humanities, the SDU board facilitated a remarkable transformation of the Centre. Established at the time as an “Information Centre on the Arab World” mainly catering for the Danish public, today the Centre represents an internationally recognized academic research institution on the Middle East and the Muslim world. Over the year 2016, the staff of the Centre comprised 11 full-time faculty members, two part-time lecturers, six PhD researchers, one project manager and a secretary. Currently it is organized within four units: First, there is a research group working on the modern political history of the Middle East; second, there are researchers focusing on studies in immigration, religion and cultural transformation; third, there is the section for Arab language acquisition; and finally, there is the Danish Resource Centre on the Modern Middle East and the Muslim World. The unit for Arab language acquisition holds an autonomous position within the Centre, whereas the three other units are characterized by crosscutting activities of the various researchers involved.

The research and teaching agenda of the Centre is complementary to the departments for Arab and Islamic studies at Copenhagen (KU) and Aarhus Universities (AU). While not giving up on being an important source of information for the Danish public, the multi-disciplinary research output of its staff is predominantly directed to an international scholarly audience. Its researchers publish in international peer-reviewed journals and with global publishing houses that also address audiences beyond a Middle East area interest. Moreover, the Centre offers a MA program in English language that attracts a relatively high number of international students. This article will first briefly describe the transformation of the Centre from an information unit for the Danish public to an internationally oriented institution of graduate teaching and research. The main

part of the article, then, presents the multi-disciplinary research agenda of the Centre, its institutional cooperation, and its scholarly output. The focus will be on the two integrated units studying the Middle East and immigration/religion/cultural transformation, as well as the Resource Centre. The conclusions will take a look into the future and end with a critical remark on recent decisions in Danish university policies.

## The Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies: A Historical Sketch

The Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies at SDU was founded in August 1983. The establishment of the Centre goes back to an application to SDU's rector, Aage Trommer, in which Morten Nøjgaard, then professor of Roman languages and literature in Odense, asked for the establishment of "Arab Area Studies" within the Faculty of Humanities. The aim of the Centre was to provide information about the contemporary culture and society of Arab peoples. In this way, the profile of the Centre should clearly distinguish itself from the traditional university discipline of Oriental studies and its focus on philological methods. In contrast to the classical approach of Oriental studies, the faculty of the Centre should teach courses on the culture, economy and politics of the modern Arab world. They should transmit knowledge about current Middle Eastern affairs to the staff of Danish business and to state employees. Consequently, teaching and research at the Centre was initially aiming at the provision of general information about the region with practical relevance.

The dissemination of this information about the modern Middle East took place largely through two journals that were published at the Centre: *Mellemøstinformation* (Information about the Middle East) and *Information om Indvandrere* (Information about Immigrants). The journal *Mellemøstinformation* appeared from 1983 to 2008 and comprised short articles on Middle Eastern affairs related to then topical public debates. These articles were predominantly written by the staff of the Centre, but the journal was also an open forum for contributions from journalists, diplomats and business people. *Information om Indvandrere* was launched in 1996 and published until

the year 2008. The journal took up current debates about immigration and discussed more general issues regarding migration, cultural encounters, nationalism, and xenophobia. Like in the journal *Mellemøstudier*, researchers at the Centre wrote the articles for *Information om Indvandrere*, with the journal in this case also open for contributions from other authors. In addition to these two journals, the Centre published a series of books, many of them directed to the interested general reader. Furthermore, the Centre's staff produced four editions of the *Mellemøsthåndbogen* (Handbook of the Middle East) with "facts about countries in the Middle East and North Africa". The last edition of the *Mellemøsthåndbogen* appeared in 2005.

In terms of teaching, in the first two decades the focus of the Centre was clearly on "further education" through so-called open university programs. The staff taught weekend-courses in the fields of Middle East studies, immigration studies, Arabic, and Mediterranean Studies. These courses were mainly directed toward students who already had a professional career. Through the Centre's weekend-courses they were able to acquire a supplementary university degree in order to broaden their professional profiles. This kind of focus on further education was gradually transformed into regular university teaching in the field of Arab language acquisition and the broader area of Middle East and Islamic studies. A decisive change in the Centre's teaching profile took place with the establishment of a graduate program in Middle East studies in September 2005. This new MA program has increasingly attracted graduate students from various Danish universities and from universities abroad. Currently about 30 students enroll each year in the program, and it represents the core of the Centre's teaching activities. The course addresses students from the social sciences and the humanities without demanding specific regional language skills. Its curriculum builds on the multi-disciplinary character of the Centre. The courses combine the modern history of the Middle East with the fields of culture, politics, political economy, research history, and religion. In these fields, teaching deals with Middle Eastern affairs and their relationship to social developments in the broader Muslim world, including ongoing debates about Islam and the West. Moreover, the program includes an internship period through which students are able to acquire practical skills and regional expertise.

When winding down the publication of *Mellemøstinformation* and *Information om Indvandrere* the Danish Resource Centre on the Middle East and the Muslim World was established in 2008. Since then, the Resource Centre has been developed toward concentrating the various tasks of dissemination to the Danish public within one organizational unit. Through this information unit, the staff publishes short articles directed to the broader public, documents the Centre's engagement with Danish media, supplies links to important news media in the Middle East, and conducts public lectures, workshops, and conferences. These dissemination activities are complemented by the publication of the Centre's newsletter and Facebook-page; at the moment, the newsletter has 1,347 subscriptions. Moreover, we keep in touch with our previous students through the Centre's alumni association, organizing events between them and our MA students twice a year. The alumni association also keeps track of the employment of our graduates who make their way into a broad variety of careers in the public and private sectors.

In light of this brief historical sketch, the decision of the SDU board in 2007 supported and accelerated a process that already had been tentatively under way. From this perspective, continuity and change have characterized the historical development of the Centre. The Centre was established on a multi-disciplinary platform and has been following this particular design. The profile of its staff has never represented classical area experts and its research agenda comprised issues beyond the geographical demarcations of the Middle East. Since 2009, however, changes in the profile of the Centre have become more visible in both its teaching and its research. The open university courses came to an end, due to both the enhanced research orientation of the Centre and a sharp decrease of interest in further education courses in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007/2008. The staff's teaching is meanwhile clearly directed toward regular university students and has its core in the Centre's flagship graduate course in Middle East studies. This does not exclude future engagement in the field of further education. Yet this engagement has to be demand-driven and will only represent additional forms of teaching with regard to the focus on research-based graduate studies in Middle East and Islamic studies. Visible changes have also characterized the Centre's research activities, in particular when it comes to content and audiences. Today, the

researchers at the Centre predominantly address international scholarly audiences with research-based journal articles and books. They engage in current academic debates and disseminate their knowledge at international conferences, workshops, and symposia. This does not exclude the catering of information to the broader Danish public, as the activities concentrated in the Resource Centre show, but these activities represent nonetheless only an additional task for the staff and in this way the heritage of the rationale on which the Centre was originally founded continues. The following section will move to the current research agenda of the Centre. It will describe the scholarly profiles of its core faculty and some of their more recent research projects. Moreover, the section presents the Centre's most important institutional cooperation with national and international partners.<sup>2</sup>

### **Researching the Middle East: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach**

The research agenda of the Centre has its focus on the modern Middle East in a global perspective. Historically, the individual research projects cover the period from the early nineteenth century to the present, with a particular focus on developments in the 20th and 21st centuries. In geographical terms, the Middle East is conventionally defined as a regional state system demarcated by Morocco in the west, Iran in the east, Turkey in the north and Sudan in the south. However, many of our current research projects transcend these geographical boundaries of the Middle East. On the one hand, we consider the Middle East to be an integral part of international and global relations. Therefore, we conduct Middle Eastern studies from a global studies perspective, rather than in the form of a distinct field of area studies. On the other hand, we approach the region from a multi-disciplinary angle documented in the different educational backgrounds of the Centre's staff. The academic staff of the Centre represents very different disciplines, such as Geography, History, Islamic Studies, Linguistics, Political Science, and Sociology. These different disciplinary backgrounds are mirrored by the thematic fields which the research agenda of the Centre addresses. Broadly speaking, these thematic fields deal with

2. For each of the Centre's core researchers, three important publications are listed under references at the end of the article.

three distinct areas: First, Middle Eastern affairs and regional developments in their global contexts; second, issues of migration and cultural transformation with their implications for Denmark and Europe; third, linguistics and studies on methods and didactics of the teaching of communicative Arabic. Again, this framework of research reflects to a certain extent the historical legacy of the rationale on which the foundation of the Centre originally took place. In the following I will briefly describe ongoing research in the first two areas.

### Middle Eastern Affairs and Regional Developments

The first area, Middle Eastern affairs and regional developments in their global contexts, combines the individual research projects of Martin Beck, Peter Seeberg, Martin Hvidt and Dietrich Jung. In this area, the researchers apply theories, themes and methods from political science, IR, geography, development studies, and political sociology in a historical perspective. The research interests of Martin Beck comprise the Arab uprisings and their repercussions, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, international and regional oil politics, and the international relations of the Middle East in general. He has based his research on the international relations of the Middle East on the concept of regional power, rent theory, and the application of schools of thought of International Relations, particularly rationalist theories and constructivist Institutionalism. The Arab uprisings, for instance, Beck addresses from two vantage points. First of all, he discerns a region-wide crisis behind them, which applies to the Arab world as a whole. Secondly, Beck examines the various different ways in which the Arab political systems have responded to the uprisings. In this way, he analyzes contemporary Arab politics as undergoing a complex transformation process of diversification. In this context, Martin Beck has recently received funding for his projects: “The Impact of the ‘Arab Spring’ on Socio-Political Developments in Lebanon: Preconditions, Process, and Consequences” and “State Crisis Management of the Current Syrian Refugee Waves to Lebanon and Jordan”. In his research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, finally, Beck attempts to challenge the conventional wisdom that Israel and the PLO are adversaries in a basically symmetric conflict that—supported by the international community—envision “peace” in

the form of a two-state solution. Instead, he emphasizes the structural asymmetry of the conflict and the incapability and limited willingness of all actors involved to solve the fundamental issue of human rights deprivation of the Palestinians.

Peter Seeberg's research agenda addresses mainly the historical development and political implications of European-Middle Eastern relations. In the broader framework of "the EU and the Mediterranean 1980-2017", Seeberg analyzes the relationship between the EU and Middle Eastern states since the Venice Declaration of the EU in 1980. In this research he focuses on both the cooperation between Europe and the Mediterranean and the role of the EU as an actor in foreign and security policies. Seeberg applies a historical perspective in order to describe the gradual changes in the EU's political and institutional practices between 1980 and 2017 and the ways in which these changes have affected relations between the EU and Middle Eastern states. In particular, he investigates three landmark agreements: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), and the so-called Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Seeberg considers these three agreements core elements in a new foreign policy and security regime on behalf of the EU. Seeberg's research perspective takes its point of departure in attempts at discussing the EU as a foreign policy actor. This discussion has been characterized by a number of different perceptions – from François Duchêne and his understanding of European civilian power domesticating the European surroundings to, for instance, Federica Bicchì's concept of ideational intergovernmentalism and her understanding that the EU still needs to offer a less Europe-centered contribution to Mediterranean politics. In his work, Seeberg discusses the regionalist ambitions of EU policies, demonstrating that they actually never have been realized. He argues that recent EU policies can be termed as pragmatic multilateralism. This label indicates a continuation of the pragmatic dimensions of the ENP. Furthermore, it claims that the EU through the UfM pursues a policy which neglects former ambitions of promoting democracy and human rights.

The current work of Martin Hvidt is in the field of the political economy and social development of the Gulf countries. He has been working on economic diversification in the Gulf states

and on the “Dubai Model” of development. His most recent research project addresses the transformation of Gulf economies into so-called knowledge economies. This research interest he was able to underpin by holding a professorship in the political economy of modern Gulf countries at Zayed University in Dubai (2013-2016). Martin Hvidt’s research agenda has revolved in particular around two major projects for which he was able to receive substantial external funding. The first project – “Gulf Rising” – examines developmental patterns in the resource rich economies of the Arab Gulf states. This research project focuses on the broader development processes that are currently undertaken in the Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE. More specifically, this research project attempts to document and analyze variations in the developmental strategies, patterns and their respective outcomes among these six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The major aim of this project is to understand the emergence of divergent outcomes of the employed strategies over time. In the second project, Martin Hvidt examines Dubai from the perspective of a Middle Eastern developmental state. In this project, Hvidt has analyzed the developmental process of Dubai in order to specify the key elements of the “Dubai model” of development. The project has looked more closely at the political and organizational set-up in Dubai and the interrelationship between the state and the private sector as it unfolds in society. The core ambition of this project is to contribute to the ongoing theoretical debate on the so-called developmental state.

Finally, Dietrich Jung has been working on wars and conflicts in the region, as well as on the modernization and EU accession process of the Republic of Turkey. In applying concepts of historical political sociology, Jung analyzed different conflict formations in the Middle East in the context of global constraints to regional state formation. In his research on modern Turkey, Jung also put emphasis on processes of state and nation building since the Tanzimat (1839-1878), the period of Ottoman reforms. Moreover, he has been working on more recent issues of Turkish domestic and foreign policies. However, since joining the Centre in 2009, Jung increasingly engaged in studies which also relate to the second research area of the Centre.

## Migration and Cultural Transformation

This second research unit addresses issues of migration and cultural transformation with their implications for Denmark and Europe from sociological perspectives. These fields are the priority areas for the research of Kirstine Sinclair and Mehmet Ümit Necef. Since her PhD thesis on Hizb ut-Tahrir in Denmark and Great Britain, Kirstine Sinclair's research interests have addressed questions of Islam in Europe with a particular focus on organized forms of political activism among Muslim minority groups. This comprises the relationship of Islamist organizations to Europe and the Middle East, as well as various forms of cultural encounters between Muslims and their European host societies. Sinclair's studies have been concerned with issues such as belonging, transnational networks, and collective and individual processes of identity building. Furthermore, her research contributes to the study of political activism in general and Islamist and Jihadi-Salafi movements in particular. With respect to this research area, Kirstine Sinclair has been working with previous activists of both jihadist organizations and extremist right-wing groups. Her core interest with regard to these groups of people has been the ways in which negative emotions contribute to individual processes of motivation and recruitment. In theoretical terms, Kirstine Sinclair's research has been inspired by the hermeneutical approaches of sociological theories, cultural studies and cultural geography.

Mehmet Ümit Necef's research agenda refers to the relationship between ethnic minorities and their host societies. Necef has, in particular, focused on Muslim immigrants to Denmark. In theoretical terms, Necef's work has engaged in an ongoing discussion about concepts such as discrimination, prejudice, racism, and multiculturalism. He has especially been interested in reflecting upon these concepts in a Danish context. One of his fields of research is a critical analysis of Danish research regarding migration. In this field, Necef examined majority opinions, media representations, labor market discrimination and criminal records, as well as the issues of the Islamic headscarf and instances of honor killings. In addition to these studies on migration research in Denmark, Necef also worked on a project about ethnic minorities in Danish film and literature. In this work, Necef analyzed the representation of ethnic minorities in

Danish movies between 1970 and 2013, reaching the conclusion that Danish movies live in a “post-racist” period. More recently, he entered the field of radicalization studies with a particular focus on the motivational backgrounds of young Danish Muslims who are joining the Islamic State (IS). In doing so, Necef investigates IS’s propaganda machine and the various ways in which its ideology resonates among young Muslims in Denmark.

Since coming to the Centre in 2009, Dietrich Jung has increasingly been working on the broader Muslim world in applying concepts associated with the sociology of knowledge. In light of the ongoing debate about differences between Islam and the West, his research agenda aims at uncovering the conceptual foundations of Islam as a modern religion in the modern transformation of European and Muslim societies from the nineteenth century onwards. In 2013, Jung was able to attract extensive funding for two individual projects, which became integrated parts of the “Modern Muslim Subjectivities Project” (MMSP). The MMSP takes its point of departure in cultural theories about the construction of modern forms of subjectivity and applies them to the history of the modern Muslim world. While the relationship between Islam and politics has been a central theme in research about Islamic modernity, the formation of modern Muslim identities has remained a comparatively marginal field of inquiry. With regard to European history, sociological research refers to three dominant types of subjectivity formation since the nineteenth century: the classical bourgeois, the peer-group-oriented subject of the salaried masses and a consumption-oriented “postmodern” form of subjectivity. It is the hypothesis of the project that all three types are of relevance in the Muslim world. However, while Christianity seems to play a relatively peripheral role in modern European subjectivity formation, modern forms of subjectivities in the Muslim world have been constructed in close reference to Islamic traditions. The project will investigate the various ways in which Islamic traditions have been related to these cultural processes and why religion tends to play a more significant role in the Muslim world than in modern Europe.

The MMSP involves a number of researchers at the Centre and beyond. At the Centre, four researchers, one associate professor and three PhD candidates are directly involved in MMSP.

In her project “The Role of Islamic Universities in Modern Muslim Subjectivity Formation in Europe and the USA”, Kirstine Sinclair examines the ways in which Islamic universities in the West facilitate the construction of meaningful selfhoods among their students. In her PhD project, Gry Hvass Pedersen takes up a similar question, her empirical site, however, being Islamic universities in Asia. In her study “Visions of Higher Education and Modern Muslim Selfhoods at Islamic Universities in Asia”, she explores the interlacement of global models and local interpretations of higher education at Islamic universities in India and Malaysia. Line Mex-Jørgensen, in her thesis “Young Egyptians’ Imaginaries of the Good Life”, analyzes the various ways young Egyptians imagine the good life in the post-Arab Spring period. Finally, there is a third PhD project directly funded by the MMSP grants. In “Being a ‘Good Muslim’ in Denmark”, Sofie Pedersen analyzes the impact of the prescriptive ideals and norms of the Danish welfare state on the subjectivity formation of young Danish Muslims. In addition to these four researchers at the Centre, Prof. Mervat Hatem (Howard University, Washington DC) and Mark Sedgwick (Aarhus University) are integral parts of MMSP. Mervat Hatem is working on the project “The 1952 and 2011 Egyptian Revolutions and Comparative Perspectives on Gender Subjectivities: Work, the Family and the Body”, while Mark Sedgwick examines “Postmodern Sufism” as forms of spirituality and the good life in late modernity.

In addition to the abovementioned research projects, three additional PhD researchers have been active at the Centre throughout 2016. In January 2016, Martin Ledstrup successfully defended his thesis “Oscillations of Nationhood: A Socio-logy of In-betweenness in the United Arab Emirates”, and Maja Gildin Zuckerman submitted her thesis “Broadening Home: The Emergence of Danish Zionism and its Topological Expansion of Danish Jewishness, 1897-1914” in September 2016. Finally, Claudia Læssø Pedersen embarked upon her project “The Political and Military Challenges of Urban Warfare in the Israeli-Arab Wars, 1982-2014” in September 2016. She is a Danish Air Force officer at the Royal Danish Defense College and her project is supervised by Dietrich Jung and Dr. Niels Bo Poulsen, the head of the Defense College’s Institute of Military History and War Studies.

## Institutional Cooperation Projects

The Centre is part of extended research networks through both individual and institutional cooperation. It would go well beyond the scope of this article to describe all these collaborations among the Centre, its researchers, and external partners. Therefore, I only present briefly the most important institutional cooperation. *The Danish Jordanian University Cooperation* (DJUCO) was certainly the most significant of these cooperation projects in the past years.<sup>3</sup> DJUCO was established in 2009, based on a grant from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the context of the Danish Arab Partnership Program (DAPP) it has received funding totaling 11.6 million DKK between 2009-2016. The project has been directed by Peter Seeberg and was until November 2016 managed by Bo Vestergaard Thiesen. DJUCO aims at enhancing academic cooperation between Denmark and Jordan through conferences, research cooperation and student exchange programs. The project aims to build a bridge between different educational cultures and to establish scholarly networks between Danish and Jordanian academia. Thematically, the focus is on European-Middle Eastern relations which represents one of the core fields of teaching and research at the Centre.

In institutional terms, cooperation has primarily taken place with the Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II School of International Studies and the Center for Strategic Studies at University of Jordan, whereas the academic network also includes regional scholars and researchers from Europe and the United States. Educational cooperation has been a central part of the project. Since 2009 more than 70 Jordanian students have attended the MA-Course “Mediterranean Perspectives” at SDU. The course has been taught in both Jordan and Denmark and facilitated an intensive exchange among European and Arab students. In this context, about 67 Danish students took part in events in Jordan and 34 Danish students worked for DJUCO as interns in Amman. Together with its Jordanian partners, DJUCO arranged two Young Scholars Conferences at which students presented their papers in different panels. In 2015 and 2016, DJUCO arranged an Academic Student Conference, where Danish and Jordanian students worked together on specific topics. Finally, DJUCO organized Innovation Camps,

3. For more detailed information, see: [sdu.dk/en/om\\_sdu/institutter\\_centre/c\\_mellemoest/pro\\_amman](http://sdu.dk/en/om_sdu/institutter_centre/c_mellemoest/pro_amman)

bringing students and graduates together in working on specific business cases provided by a Jordanian private company.

In addition to DJUCO, the Centre is involved in three international cooperation partnerships. In the so-called *Stella Polaris* cooperation, the Centre works together with the Middle East and Islamic studies departments of Hamburg University, Kiel University and the University of Aarhus. This co-operation was originally initiated as part of a broader partnership by the vice-chancellors of the universities involved. Over time the cooperation between the three university departments and the Centre became self-reliant, based on fundraising by the individual partners. The cooperation covers both research and teaching and has established an annual Danish-German research meeting to which promising MA and PhD candidates are invited. More recently, SDU signed a cooperation agreement with Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. In the context of this university cooperation, the Centre is engaged in building a platform for joint research and teaching activities with the Islamic studies department of the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science of Griffith University. Last but not least, the Centre cooperates with the international publishing house Palgrave MacMillan in New York in the book series “The Modern Muslim World”. In transcending the confines of area studies, the series publishes scholarly work on political, economic, and cultural issues in modern Muslim history, taking a global perspective. At the Centre, “The Modern Muslim World” is edited by Dietrich Jung and 12 volumes have appeared since its inception in 2012.<sup>4</sup>

On the national level, the Centre has been a partner of the *Centre for Resolution of International Conflicts* (CRIC) since August 2013. CRIC received funding from the Danish Council of Strategic Research and is a research centre organized as a cooperation between researchers from different disciplines at the University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen Business School, Aarhus University, Aalborg University, the University of Southern Denmark and Danish Institute for Human Rights. The core aim of CRIC is to strengthen the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts through developing analytical tools and practical techniques in collaboration with practitioners. Finally, there is the *Research Cluster – International Security, Middle Eastern Conflicts, and U.S. Policy*. This Research Cluster brings together three distinct centres in the humanities and social sci-

4. See: Palgrave homepage: [palgrave.com/fr/series/14429](http://palgrave.com/fr/series/14429)

ences of SDU: the Center for American Studies, the Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies and the Center for War Studies. All three centres conduct research at a high international level and offer graduate teaching for Danish and international students. The Research Cluster aims at integrating related research themes of the three centers and developing a platform for synergy in inter-faculty collaboration with regard to both teaching and research. The collaboration will further develop the research and teaching profile of SDU in the broader field of international studies. In the fall semester of 2015, for instance, the Cluster organized four lectures with Dr. Laurent Bonnefoy (SciencePo, Paris), Prof. Steven Hurst (Manchester Metropolitan University), Dr. Matthew Hill (Liverpool John Moores University), and Prof. Pinar Bilgin (Bilkent University) that together attracted more than 300 people.

## Conclusions

This article has described the current research and teaching agenda of the Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies at SDU and its transformation from a national information center into an internationally oriented scholarly institution. The article argued that this transformation was mainly facilitated by the decision of the SDU board to declare Middle East studies one of the priority research areas of the humanities and to provide the Centre additional funding. Since the implementation of this decision in 2009, the staff of the Centre was able to attract substantial amounts of additional external funding for its research projects. These external grants of about 30 million DKK have come from a broad range of funding institutions such as Carlsberg Foundation, Danish Institute in Damascus, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Danish Research Council for the Humanities, Danish Research Council for the Social Sciences, and VELUX Foundation. In this way, university funding and external funding have been complementary in developing and enhancing the Centre's research activities toward a clearly visible international standard.

This international standard is documented in the staff's representation in international professional associations, in conducting a broad variety of academic consultancies, and in serv-

ing as peers for over 40 international journals and publishing houses. With regard to the research output, the Centre's staff has published research-based articles in about 50 different peer-reviewed journals representing a broad range of thematic and disciplinary fields. This comprises, on the one hand, articles in leading area studies journals, such as *British Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Der Islam*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, *Middle East Critique*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, *The Middle East Journal* and *The Muslim World*. On the other hand, the Centre has been represented by articles in important disciplinary journals, such as *Dansk Sociologi*, *Democracy and Security*, *Democratization*, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *International Journal*, *Journal for the Study of Religion in Europe*, *Mediterranean Politics*, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, *Religious Research Review*, *Security Dialogue*, *TEMP*, *TEMENOS*, *Thesis Eleven*, and *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*.

This positive development of the Centre, however, does not only depend on the efforts of its staff. On the contrary, the future of its vibrant research and teaching environment will largely be determined by political decisions. In this sense, the most recent decisions of Danish governments have impacted negatively on the Centre. In the course of *dimensioning*, the political demand to substantially reduce the number of students at Danish universities, SDU decided to fade out the university's Arab language teaching programs. Moreover, it limited the number of enrolled students in the Centre's MA program to 25 students beginning in 2018. This number of students, however, is only a tiny margin above the economic break-even point of MA courses in the humanities. Consequently, a number of drop-outs or students who prolong their studies for various reasons, often beyond their control, could undermine the economic viability of the Centre's teaching component. This restriction with respect to enrolled MA students is particularly problematic because the Danish government has already imposed economic sanction regimes on the universities in order to guarantee graduation within regular time. Given the fact that the Danish university funding system to a large extent relies on mere numbers of successfully graduated students, the economic governance of the educational sector may also have severe effects on research. In the end, positions at Danish universities depend on the eco-

conomic viability of the educational component. Consequently, the future for the Centre as an international research institution harbours uncertainties which seem to be almost entirely out of the control of its staff. In looking back on the achievements of the Centre since its inception in 1983, this conclusion leaves us with very ambivalent feelings regarding its future.

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