



THE GABR FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTER



Chairman Mr. M. Shafik Gabr, Gabr Fellow Pascal Rathle, NGIC Young Leaders: Assen Plevneliev, Kanishky Kanddia, Kevin Bassney, Evangelia Savvidou, Savannah Lane, Celia Chartres-Aris, Eiqan Shams, William Wang, Milind Taneja, and Mayor George. At the Global Baku Forum | Baku, Azerbaijan

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NGIC Global Leaders**

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DO WE LEARN OR ARE WE STILL ILLITERATE?

M. SHAFIK GABR

April 2025

On Saturday, 14th December the front page of the *Financial Times* featured a photograph titled “Syrians mark fall of Assad”. The image reminded me of memories of similar events in the past, but I had little time to reflect. I was running late for a meeting with Frank Maury and Susan Seamount at the Belvedere Café in central London.

Embarking onto the cold, and windy streets of London, a light drizzle greeted me. Dressed in an overcoat, scarf and cap, I paced myself for the city’s increasingly frustrating traffic. What should have been a quick 15-minute drive turned into half an hour due to road closures and congestion – a daily problem in London.

I arrived at the door of the café which was warm and welcoming. I was greeted by a hostess with a bright smile who took my overcoat, scarf and cap. She then ushered me to my friends’ table. Frank, a former American ambassador, and a present author, writer and board member of a consulting firm welcomed me warmly, as did Susan who was wearing attractive gold jewelry, blonde hair in a Roman bun and a sharp black Ralph Lauren suit. Susan was a global traveling professor of practice, with a background in business and geopolitics.

After some pleasantries and ordering a cappuccino with a warm croissant, Frank turned the conversation to the British economy, which he described as spiralling downward, under the current Labour government. He was critical of Chancellor Rachel Reeves, warning that her policies could cripple the economy. From farmers protesting to tax hikes to renewed inheritance policies, to the death of the non-dom status and foreign trusts, Frank painted a bleak picture of investor and business frustration, with many already bailing from the UK.

As my coffee and croissant arrived, Frank shifted the discussions to today’s front page *Financial Times* photo. “Doesn’t that Syrian image remind you of Tahrir Square in Cairo or Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis?” he asked. Susan and I both nodded, and this opened the door to a broader conversation.

For the next hour, we discussed how the so-called Arab Spring, once celebrated as a step towards democracy by the West, ultimately gave rise to chaos, extremism, and terrorism disguised in religious rhetoric. Frank admitted that the West, along with Israel, had supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, while both the U.S. and France backed similar groups in Tunisia.

Susan expanded on how these groups thrived with Western support and funding. The consequences, Susan noted, have been devastating. The events of 2011 left the Middle East economically weakened and socially fragmented, with scars still visible today. Frank highlighted how the demonstrations in Damascus' Ummayyad Square mirrored the failures of Tahrir Square. "The only difference," he noted dryly, "is the flag."

Susan, with a knowing smile, called it tragic that the West continues to back radicals. She pointed out that the West not only supported the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates, including Hamas, but even removed Mohammed Al-Jolani from a global terrorist list just a day after he assumed control in Syria. "Was there some sort of deal?" Frank asked. "Who financed the American military equipment that entered Hama under both U.S. and Syrian flags?" A heavy silence followed.

The discussion turned into eerie parallels: so-called locals destroying and defacing statues in Damascus in a similar fashion as was done in Baghdad. In Baghdad, they decapitated Saddam, in Syria they brought down Bashar, removing large billboard images that filled the streets of Damascus. Frank described the similarities, and how a government in Syria was fabricated by the terror alliance known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, who appointed Mohammed Al-Bashir as Prime Minister. Al-Bashir, a known terrorist, was in charge of a sliver of territory in northwest Syria.

For hours we debated the complexities of the Middle East, discussing the roles of America, Russia and Israel. Two key conclusions emerged. First, the world has undergone a major geopolitical shift, with technology and a relentless news cycle eroding human empathy and morality. Tragedies – bombed hospitals, devastated cities and the killing of innocent is now met with indifference unless they directly affect the powerful.

"We only care when the bomb falls near us," Susan observed. "And if it does, that's when the scent of the atomic war will be smelled." Second, we agreed that 2025 is a pivotal year, with a 50/50 chance of descending into global instability. Frank remained optimistic that humanity would wake up before it sleepwalked over the edge. Susan and I, however, were less hopeful, pointing in a frame of realism to a leaderless world with one very powerful country that has made repeated foreign policy misjudgments.

Finally, we looked at our watches. To our surprise, 3 hours had already passed, and the rain had finally stopped, we all wished each other best wishes and agreed to meet in New York. Walking out into the now-dry streets, I reflected on my Bloomberg interview with Margaret Brennan at the time that Cairo erupted under the Muslim Brotherhood in 2011. Back then, I had warned of the dangers of the consequences of supporting the Brotherhood and how the loss of stability, security and a proper path to change, could lead to a very chaotic, catastrophic and caustic path, one I hoped would be completely avoided in 2025 worldwide even though my concerns remained high.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



M. Shafik Gabr is a renowned leader in international business, innovation, and investment; and is one of the world's premier collectors of Orientalist art and an accomplished philanthropist. During his career, Gabr established over 25 companies, plus three investment holding companies, including ARTOC Group for Investment and Development which is a multidiscipline investment holding company with businesses in infrastructure, automotive, engineering, construction, and real estate. Over the past three years, he has focused on investment in technology and artificial intelligence. Gabr is the Chairman and founding member of Egypt's International Economic Forum (EIEF), a member of the International Business Council of the World Economic Forum, a Board Member of Stanhope Capital, International Chairman of the Sadat Congressional Gold Medal Committee, and a Member of the Parliamentary Intelligence Security Forum. Mr. Gabr is also a Member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's International Council and serves on the Advisory

Board of the Center for Financial Stability, the Advisory Board of The Middle East Institute, and the Global Advisory Council of the Mayo Clinic. In his capacity as Chairman of EIEF, Gabr has hosted global leaders from the worlds of politics, economics, business, media, technology, and culture. These include President Vaclav Klaus; Secretaries James Mattis, John Kelly, and Rex Tillerson; H.E. Amr Moussa; members of Congress; business leaders in technology; academics; and media figures from CNN, Fox and CNBC. Gabr has also hosted six CNBC programs on 'World Business' Moreover, as Chairman of the Shafik Gabr Foundation, Mr. Gabr regularly hosts his interactive 'Expecting The Unexpected' working dinners in Cairo, Davos, London, Munich and Washington, DC. The dinners are off the record and engage leaders across the board in timely predictions of geopolitical and geoeconomic issues. The most recent dinners were held in Davos these dinners were held during the World Economic Forum on January 16th and February 16th at the Munich Security Conference. The guests included former Presidents, Ministers, Ambassadors, U.S. Congress members, international organization chairs, heads of think tanks, business leaders, and distinguished scholars from Europe, the Middle East, the United States, and Asia. Gabr was previously the Chairman of the COMESA (Common Market for East and South

Africa) Business Council and a member of the Executive Board of the International Chamber of Commerce (Paris). He also served on the advisory boards of Zurich Financial Services and The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). Furthermore, Mr. Gabr was a founder of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt in 1982, serving as its first Egyptian President from 1995 to 1997, and was a founding member of the Wilson Global Advisory Council. Mr. Gabr has been recognised among the “Most Influential Arabs” and “Top 50 Arabs”.

In 2009, Mr. Gabr was presented with the Foreign Policy Association's (FPA) award for Corporate Responsibility. In June 2014, Mr. Gabr was awarded the Meridian Global Citizen Award, and in November 2014, the Middle East Institute's Visionary Award. In March 2015, Mr. Gabr received the American University in Cairo's Global Impact Award in New York. In May 2016, Mr. Gabr was awarded the College of Mount Saint Vincent's Saint Vincent de Paul Award and Drew University's Peacebuilder Award. In September 2017, Mr. Gabr received the Policy Direction and Leadership Award from the London Center for Policy Research. Most recently, in November 2024, Mr. Gabr was awarded the highest honor conferred upon foreign nationals by the President of Italy: the 'Grande Ufficiale' (Grand Officer) of the 'Ordine della Stella d'Italia (Order of the Star of Italy) for his extraordinary achievements and merit. Since 2016, Mr. Gabr has focused his attention on innovation and investment in technology as well as his Foundations. Mr. Gabr has invested in a wide spectrum of technology companies, ranging from startups to fully mature companies, and in many sectors in between. Mr. Gabr's focus is multidimensional in a world of technology, which is reflected in his personal approach to the sector through its multifaceted applications, including AI, machine learning, data mining, mobility and business.

M. Shafik Gabr's contributions and insights have been featured in numerous articles, including some published in Egypt Independent. Additionally, his perspectives on international business, investment trends, and cultural diplomacy have been featured in interviews with global media outlets such as Bloomberg, CNBC, BBC, Al-Horra and many more. Through these platforms, Mr. Gabr has highlighted his extensive work on cross-cultural dialogue and offered perspective on world markets and geopolitics. Through the Shafik Gabr Social Development Foundation, Mr. Gabr is helping to improve elementary-school education in Egypt, introducing students to arts and culture, and promising sports and physical fitness for youth. In the area of higher education, Mr. Gabr is a major supporter of the American University in Cairo.

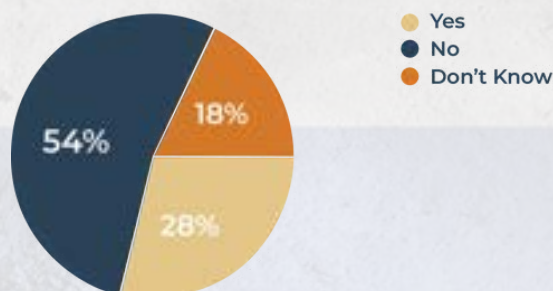
The Foundation also developed a free medical-care system by providing “Medical Caravans” for residents of underprivileged areas of Greater Cairo. The Foundation established its first Medical and Social Development Center in Mokattam, Cairo, offering free medical and health services. In 2012, Mr. Gabr established the Shafik Gabr Foundation in the U.S., which supports educational and medical initiatives and, in November 2012, launched the ‘East-West: The Art of Dialogue’ initiative (see www.eastwestdialogue.org), promoting exchanges between young emerging leaders from the U.S. and Egypt with the purpose of cultural dialogue and bridge-building.

At present, the Foundation's Fellowship program has 141 Fellows. Mr. Gabr is recognized as one of the world's largest collectors of Orientalist art, amassing a unique and extensive collection that captures the beauty, culture, and history of the Middle East and North Africa. His collection showcases masterpieces from the 19th and early 20th centuries, reflecting the works of prominent Orientalist painters who were captivated by the region's vibrant landscapes, traditions, and people. Through his dedication and passion for preserving and sharing these historical artworks, Mr. Gabr has significantly contributed to fostering cultural appreciation and understanding of the Orientalist movement on a global scale. Mr. Gabr holds a BA in Economics and Management from the American University in Cairo and an MA in Economics from the University of London.

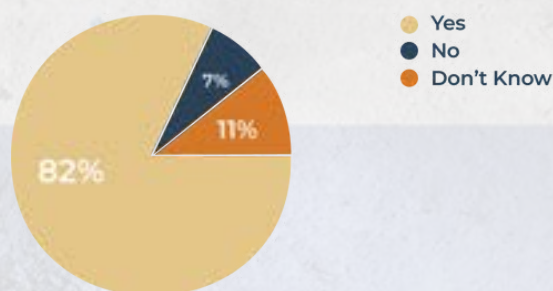
MONTHLY WORLD PREDICTIONS

As the Gabr Fellows enter into leadership roles—in business, diplomacy, government, finance, and more—they will continue to grapple with significant challenges, magnified by an increased pace in technological advancement, the potential for increased global inequalities, and changes in governance and economic structures. To better understand the pulse of the Gabr Fellowship community and to begin to articulate substantive dialogue, the Foundation polls the Fellows each month on the key issues facing their respective countries and the global community at large.

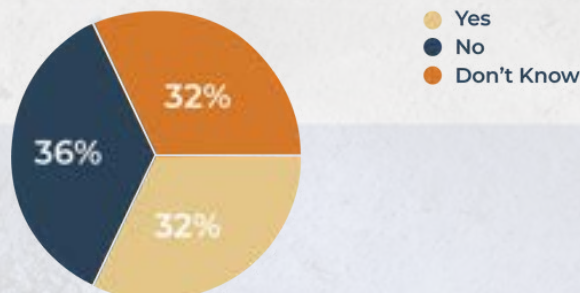
Will Saudi Arabia join the Abraham Accords in 2025?



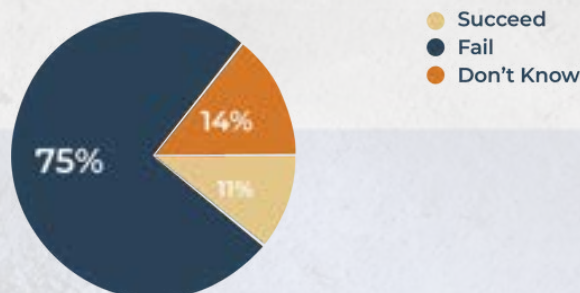
Is the deportation of American citizens or legal residents in America a human rights violation?



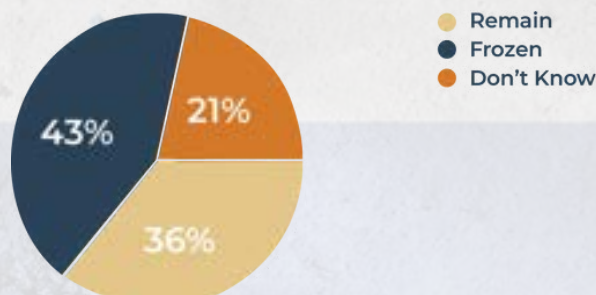
Will global stock markets recover from their mid-March dip by end of September 2025?



Will the planned deportation of Palestinians living in Gaza fail or succeed in 2025?



Israel is bombing Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza with mounting death and destruction. Will the Abraham Accords remain active or be frozen during 2025?





FELLOWS UPDATES



David Guhl, 2022 Fellow

David Guhl, 2022 Fellow, is helping host this year's annual UNESCO International Jazz Day, celebrating jazz as a global force for peace, unity, and cultural dialogue. This year's edition will take place on April 30th in Abu Dhabi, recognized as a UNESCO Creative City of Music since 2021. Established by UNESCO in 2011, International Jazz Day highlights jazz's unique role in promoting intercultural understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect worldwide.

Bhargav Srinivasan, 2025 Fellow

Bhargav Srinivasan, 2025 Fellow, joined the board of directors of Starfire Council, a nonprofit focused on supporting community and inclusion for people with disabilities and joined the Economic Club of New York National Fellowship Class of 2025.



Basma Fahim, 2022 Fellow

Basma Fahim, 2022 Fellow, had the honor of attending a special Iftar gathering hosted by Her Excellency Ayşen Balçık Şen, wife of the Turkish Ambassador to Egypt, H.E. Salih Mutlu Şen. The evening celebrated the enduring legacy of remarkable women in Turkish history, with tributes to figures such as Zeynep Kamil Hanım, a philanthropist and daughter of Mohamed Ali Pasha; Princess Kadriye Hussein, a literary voice and women's rights advocate; and Emina Fuat Tugay, a renowned artist and writer.



FELLOWS UPDATES



Crystal Rüya Staebell, 2025 Fellow

Congratulations to Crystal Rüya Staebell on her acceptance into the Chatham House Common Futures Conversations Program! Her continued dedication to global dialogue and policy engagement is truly inspiring.

Jeremy Pesner, 2022 Fellow

Jeremy Pesner, 2022 Fellow, has taken on a new role as Director of Communications at onAir Networks, a cutting-edge startup pioneering an open-source information commons to transform public access to knowledge.



Michael Goff, 2014 Fellow

Michael Goff, 2014 Fellow, was awarded a prestigious grant from OpenPhilanthropy to explore the dynamics of Scaling in Human Civilization—a bold, forward-looking project you can explore. [Explore more here](#)



FELLOWS UPDATES



Lydia Kamiel, 2025 Fellow

Lydia Kamiel, 2025 Fellow, recently completed the Retail Academy program at CIB, marking a key step forward in her professional growth in the banking sector.

Mahmoud M. El Makkawe, 2025 Fellow

Mahmoud El Mekawi, 2025 Fellow, has resumed learning Italian and begun developing a PhD research proposal, continuing his pursuit of academic and diplomatic excellence.



Mohamed Sobhy, 2025 Fellow

Mohamed Sobhy, 2025 Fellow, marked a major milestone by participating in a high-level ministers meeting in his mid-20s—an achievement reflecting his early impact in international law and policy.



FELLOWS UPDATES



Nayra Gadallah, 2016 Fellow,

Nayra Gadallah, 2016 Fellow, has an upcoming article on the Administrative Prosecution Authority's role in protecting refugees and asylum seekers under Egypt's new refugee law, soon to be published in a leading Egyptian legal journal.

Yasser El Zahhar, 2016 Fellow

In March, to celebrate International Women's Day and embrace the spirit of Ramadan, Yasser and his team at Abjjad launched a groundbreaking reading challenge. Through the Abjjad app, they pledged to donate the cost of one medical surgery to Bahiya Hospital -a foundation dedicated to supporting women battling breast cancer- for every 10,000 hours of collective readership on the app. Their ambitious goal is to reach 100,000 hours, enabling them to fund 10 surgeries. The initiative garnered significant attention from writers, readers, and publishing houses alike. Yasser was also featured in a 20-minute interview on Madrasatna, an educational channel, where he discussed the reading challenge and its impact.



[CLICK ON IMAGE TO WATCH INTERVIEW](#)

ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP



2022 Gabr Fellows at the National Defense University with the NDU's President, Lt Gen Michel Plehn

Launched in 2012, the Gabr Fellowship program helps connect and build constructive relationships between future leaders aged 24 and 35. Each year, the Fellowship consists of 20-24 Fellows, half of whom are men and the other half women, with an equal distribution between participants from the United States and Egypt. The Fellowship also accepts applicants from Jordan, Lebanon, France and the United Kingdom. Fellows represent a variety of sectors, including the arts, law, finance, tech, non-profits, and entrepreneurship – both business and social.

The mission of the Fellowship is to promote greater mutual understanding by building bridges between the two cultures by instigating dialogue and the exchange of ideas between emerging leaders from the United States and Egypt. Together, they explore one another's cultures, political realities, business trends and their goals for the future.

In addition to engaging in deep discussions with key stakeholders from both countries in business, government, academia, religion, science, tech and finance, all Fellows are invited to form multinational teams to complete an action project. These projects empower the Fellows as intercultural ambassadors, amplifying the Fellowship's reach and impact.

Ultimately, through hands-on activities, rigorous discussions, cultural site visits, and the collaborative action projects, the Fellows have a greater understanding of both countries and become part of an international cohort dedicated to building a more equitable and peaceful world.



Gabr Fellows with Major General Mohamed El Keshky, Egypt's Former Assistant Minister of Defense

The Gabr Fellows have acquired a greater understanding of both Egypt and the United States and the challenges faced by both communities. Having served as cultural as well as linguistic ambassadors to one another, they then return home to play the role of diplomat, introducing Egyptians and Americans to a people, a culture and a future never before explored in this way.

Together, they are creating the legacy of 'The Gabr Fellowship: an international cohort dedicated to pursuing cooperative, collective solutions to their region's most pressing issues.



Gabr Fellows at the Pyramids



FELLOWS' EXPERIENCES

Fabrice Guerrier, 2018 Fellow

Fabrice Guerrier, 2018 Fellow, and a Haitian-American writer and poet, authored the Substack article titled "A Vision In Egypt Changed My Life Forever." In this piece, he reflects on his transformative experience with **'The Art of Dialogue' program in Egypt**, emphasizing the importance of genuine dialogue in bridging cultural divides.



A Vision In Egypt Changed My Life Forever

Notes On Imagining The Future #23 by Fabrice Guerrier



FABRICE

MAR 27, 2025



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THE DECLINE OF SOFT POWER IN A HARD POWER WORLD: IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL SECURITY

GEORGE D. WILLIAMS II - 2025 FELLOW

Introduction

Recently, I came across some remarks by Shafik Gabr, the Egyptian business leader, philanthropist, and Chairman of the ARTOC Group, that resonated deeply with my own observations. Mr. Gabr noted that as soft power diminishes globally, we are witnessing a corresponding rise in nations expressing their ambitions through hard power. This shift has profound implications for global security, economic prosperity, and international stability.

As someone working at the intersection of diplomatic engagement, economic development, and cross-cultural exchange, I've observed this troubling trend firsthand. The deterioration of soft power is creating dangerous voids that hard power rushes to fill.

The Diminishing Role of Soft Power

I remember my Uncle Johnny B in Columbus, Ohio telling me, "In this life, you gotta give people a reason to want to work with you. Strong-arming only works until someone stronger comes along." This wisdom encapsulates soft power—the ability to achieve objectives through attraction rather than coercion.

Across the globe, it would appear that we are forgetting this lesson. Several factors contribute to this retreat from soft power:

Declining Faith in Multilateralism

Our post-World War II institutions designed to promote cooperation are increasingly viewed as ineffective or obsolete. The UN Security Council struggles with veto-power paralysis, the WTO fails to mediate complex trade disputes, and NATO faces internal divisions about its purpose.

During my time as a Fellow at the German Marshall Fund, I saw firsthand the difficulty of sustaining these institutions. They're like grand old cathedrals—impressive in vision, but showing structural damage. The question isn't whether to maintain them, but how to renovate them for modern challenges.



FELLOWS' EXPERIENCES

The Rise of Transactional Diplomacy

International relations increasingly operate as discrete transactions rather than partnerships built on shared values. This mirrors the classic “prisoner's dilemma”—when nations lack trust and mechanisms for enforcing cooperation, they pursue short-term self-interest even though mutual cooperation would yield better results for everyone.

Technological Disruption and Information Warfare

The digital revolution has created new vectors for influence operations and disinformation. As AI accelerates the capability to generate convincing false narratives, the information environment is increasingly weaponized, undermining the transparent exchange of ideas that soft power requires.

The Hard Power Surge

As soft power recedes, we are witnessing a corresponding surge in hard power approaches:

- Conventional Military Confrontations: From Ukraine to the South China Sea, military power is being deployed with increasing frequency.
- Economic Coercion: Nations are wielding economic tools as weapons, where connectivity becomes vulnerability.
- Strategic Control of Critical Resources: Competition for resources has intensified, reflecting a zero-sum mentality at odds with cooperative management.

The most alarming aspect is how these approaches are being amplified by technological advancement—AI-enabled autonomous weapons, sophisticated cyber capabilities, and space militarization.

A Path Forward

As Mr. Gabr noted, the world currently faces approximately thirty active armed conflicts. Each reflects the consequences of failed soft power mechanisms and institutional inadequacies.

Addressing this Shift Requires:

1. Institutional Reform: Reconsidering veto-powers, strengthening regional organizations, and developing frameworks for managing technological risks.
2. Investing in Soft Power Infrastructure: Educational exchange, cultural diplomacy, and development assistance create lasting networks of understanding.
3. Developing New Technological Governance: Balancing innovation with security through ethical guidelines and verification mechanisms.
4. Revitalizing Track II Diplomacy: Unofficial dialogues like those fostered through the Gabr Fellowship create space for engagement when official channels are constrained.



FELLOWS' EXPERIENCES

The solution isn't abandoning hard power but developing a more sophisticated integration of approaches. "Smart power" combines coercion and persuasion in service of strategies that advance both values and interests.

Conclusion

Throughout my career, I've witnessed the power of intentional bridge-building across divides of culture, ideology, and experience. Whether through the Mosaic Taiwan program or the Gabr Fellowship, I've seen how authentic engagement can overcome seemingly intractable divisions. As Uncle Johnny B might have put it: "You can't win by just being the biggest guy with the biggest stick anymore. That might get you what you want today, but tomorrow you'll find yourself all alone when you really need somebody in your corner." As we navigate this pivotal moment, we would do well to remember that the most enduring forms of influence come not from coercion but from the power of example and the patient work of building understanding. Hard power may deliver tactical victories, but only soft power can secure the strategic prize of a more stable, prosperous global order.



GEORGE D. WILLIAMS II
2025 FELLOW

George D. Williams II is an inaugural U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Recovery Corps Fellow with the Fund for Our Economic Future, focusing on economic development in Northeast Ohio. He previously served at the White House in an advance and public engagement role for President Biden and Vice President Harris, and is the founder of Diversity Global Institutes, which creates self-sustaining, inclusive knowledge ecosystems worldwide. Williams is a Fellow with multiple international organizations, including the German Marshall Fund's Transatlantic Inclusion Leaders Network and the Shafik Gabr Foundation.



SUPPORT THE FOUNDATION

THE SHAFIK GABR FOUNDATION INVITES YOU TO INVEST IN THE FUTURE AND PARTNER WITH THE FOUNDATION USING ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING MEANS.

SPONSOR A FELLOW

Individuals have the opportunity to nominate a Fellow and if selected, sponsor their participation in the Gabr Fellowship. Sponsors will be recognized in all Foundation publications, marketing materials, and at all events.

CORPORATE PATRON

Corporations can nominate Fellows for participation in the Fellowship Foundation and sponsor their participation on a company-wide level. The company will be listed in all publications, the logo will be presented on the Foundation's homepage and be given visibility at all events in the United States and Egypt.

UNRESTRICTED SUPPORT

A general operating grant can empower the Foundation to continue to invest in innovative platforms to facilitate ongoing dialogue between the East and West. From new technologies to expanding the program to more countries and a greater number of participants, the Fellowship can create a broader multiregional impact.



TO SUPPORT THE FOUNDATION VISIT
<https://www.eastwestdialogue.org/fellowship/how-to-support/>

UPDATES WITH CHAIRMAN

IN EGYPT



[CLICK ON IMAGE TO VIEW POST](#)

Mr. Shafik Gabr was recently spotted at a high-level meeting with U.S. Ambassador Herro Mustafa Garg, alongside prominent Egyptian former officials and business leaders, to share insights on regional developments and ways to strengthen the U.S.-Egypt strategic partnership. [View post](#)

XII GLOBAL BAKU

[30 Trends News Agency](#)



World must end existing conflicts and pursue negotiations - ARTOC Group Director.
[CLICK ON IMAGE FOR FULL ARTICLE](#)

Mr. M. Shafik Gabr spoke at the XII Global Baku Forum, calling for urgent negotiations to end global conflicts and reform outdated international institutions. He emphasized that without action, the world risks shifting from the rule of law to the rule of force.



THE POWER OF DIRECTION: HOW ONE CONVERSATION SPARKED ACTION

BY ASSEN PLEVNELIEV
NGIC GLOBAL YOUNG LEADER 2025

During the 12th Global Baku Forum, Mr. Gabr dedicated two hours to a fireside chat with the Forum's Young Leaders - a group of young changemakers selected to attend the event.

One exchange in particular stayed with me long after the conversation ended. He asked each participant where they saw themselves in five years. When I said I wasn't sure, he challenged me: "You should always have a vision!" He emphasized that while a detailed plan isn't necessary, having clarity of direction is essential.

Since that conversation four weeks ago, I've taken his words to heart. I reflected, defined my goal, and began taking decisive steps toward it. I've been making more progress than ever, and I'm deeply grateful for the clarity that moment sparked.



Assen Plevneliev is the Chief of Staff at Sigma Squared - an invite-only community of 1,000+ entrepreneurs under 26, who have collectively raised over \$2.5 billion to tackle the world's most pressing challenges. He focuses on partnerships, community building, event organization, and investor relations.

Outside of Sigma Squared, Assen organizes curated retreats for entrepreneurs, investors, and politicians. His mission is to facilitate positive impact through tailored introductions, and his current focus is on building bridges between top-tier investors and the most promising founders in his network.

BY ASSEN PLEVNELIEV
NGIC GLOBAL YOUNG LEADER 2025



THE FAILURE OF FORCE: ADDRESSING EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES AT THEIR CORE

BY EIQAN AHMAD SHAMS

NGIC GLOBAL YOUNG LEADER 2025

At the 2025 Global Baku Forum, I was honored to be selected as a Global Young Leader, where I had the privilege of engaging in a two-hour discussion with Mr. Mohamed Shafik Gabr and my fellow young leaders. As someone from Israel and a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, my perspective is shaped by a life lived among both Arabs and Jews, my discussion with Mr. Gabr focused on the Middle East's persistent instability and the urgent need to address the core of the problem. Having lived among both Arabs and Jews, having seen friends who served in the IDF die during the war, and mourned the loss of innocent members of my community in Gaza by Israeli airstrikes, I have witnessed the human toll of conflict firsthand.

For too long, the world has been mired in discussions about history - **"who caused what, who is to blame"** - while the Middle East descends into deeper chaos. Gaza is a humanitarian catastrophe, with civilians bearing the brunt of a conflict that shows no signs of abating.

Israel, meanwhile, pursues security through measures that, while rooted in legitimate concerns, often fuel further instability. The region is a tinderbox, and the approaches of the past have failed to douse the flames. Nowhere is this failure more evident than in the foreign policies of Western powers, which have consistently misjudged the dynamics of the Middle East and exacerbated its problems.

I find myself reflecting on a critical failure of Western foreign policy in the Middle East, a failure that has perpetuated instability by ignoring the root of extremism.

"You cannot kill an extreme ideology with force and power" it didn't work. In Afghanistan, the West spent 2.7 trillion dollars, yet the Taliban is still in charge in 2025, stronger than ever. In Iraq, Gaza and other places the path to stability lies not in killing the ideology with bombs, but in offering an alternative ideology. The man who interprets his holy scripture in the most incorrect way is not afraid to die by a bomb, that is his goal.



NGIC GLOBAL LEADERS

The core of the problem is transparent: force cannot kill an ideology. The man who believes he is fulfilling a divine mission by dying in conflict isn't deterred by the threat of death - he welcomes it. Western foreign policy has failed to recognize this, focusing on military solutions while ignoring the need for an alternative narrative that can resonate with the next generation. As a new generation, we must demand a shift in approach that looks beyond the battlefield to the ideas that fuel these conflicts. The Middle East's future depends on addressing the root of the problem rationally, not with more bombs, but with a vision that offers hope and meaning to those who need it most. For a better future for all.



EIQAN AHMAD SHAMS
NGIC GLOBAL YOUNG LEADER 2025

Eiqan Ahmad Shams (22 Years old) is a dedicated legal and media professional from Israel, currently pursuing an LLB and a BA in Government, International Relations, and Strategy at Reichman University. As the Advisor to the Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the Holy Land (Israel and Palestinian Territories), he plays a key role in organizing conferences that bring together leaders from different backgrounds to the same table. These efforts are aimed at fostering trust and understanding between Arab and Jewish communities, particularly in the aftermath of the recent war. Currently, he is working at i24 News Israel, contributing to news programming. With over a decade of experience in media, he has also been an integral part of MTA International, where he started as a volunteer at age 12 and later became a presenter for live programs in Arabic and English. His expertise extends to public relations, digital media production, and legal research. In the legal field, Eiqan has worked at the Israeli State Attorney's Office, assisting in legal documentation and prosecution support. He also participated in the International Humanitarian Law Clinic at Reichman University, conducting specialized legal research on prisoners of war in the Ukraine-Russia War and China's law enforcement practices in the Indo-Pacific region, in collaboration with NATO-SHAPE legal teams. Fluent in Arabic, Hebrew, English, Hindi and Urdu, he continues to contribute through both legal and media platforms. He remains committed to learning, serving his community, and engaging in meaningful conversations that bring people together.



DAYTON ACCORDS AND PALESTINE/ISRAEL

BY KEVIN BASSNEY

NGIC GLOBAL YOUNG LEADER 2025

Introduction

The 1995 Dayton Accords (formally known as the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina) ended the Bosnian War and established a complex governmental structure for Bosnia and Herzegovina. This peace agreement, brokered primarily by the United States under the leadership of Richard Holbrooke, brought an end to the three-year conflict that had resulted in approximately 100,000 deaths and displaced over two million people.

The Dayton Accords were negotiated in November 1995 at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, with key participants including the presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Alija Izetbegović), Croatia (Franjo Tuđman), and Serbia (Slobodan Milošević). The agreement represented a compromise solution that maintained Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single sovereign state while accommodating the interests of its three main ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs.

Bottom Line Up Front

The Dayton Accords model offers promising elements that could be adapted to the Palestinian context, particularly its power-sharing mechanisms and international oversight provisions. While implementation would require significant modifications to address unique regional challenges, the core principles of maintaining territorial integrity while accommodating diverse interests could provide a valuable framework for a future peace agreement in the region.

Summary of the Outcomes of the Dayton Accords Governmental Structure

1. **Single Sovereign State:** Bosnia and Herzegovina was preserved as a single, internationally recognized state.
2. **Two-Entity Structure:**
 - Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (predominantly Bosniak and Croat) o Republika Srpska (predominantly Serb)



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3. **Tripartite Presidency:** Consisting of one Bosniak, one Croat, and one Serb member with a rotating chairmanship.
4. **Bicameral Parliamentary Assembly:**
 - House of Peoples (15 members: 5 Bosniaks, 5 Croats, 5 Serbs) o House of Representatives (42 members elected proportionally)
5. **Cantonal System in the Federation:** Ten cantons with varying ethnic majorities:
 - 5 Bosniak-majority cantons
 - 3 Croat-majority cantons
 - 2 mixed cantons with special power-sharing arrangements
6. **Division of Powers:**
 - Central government: foreign policy, trade, monetary policy, immigration, etc.
 - Entities and cantons: education, healthcare, policing, culture, etc.
7. **International Oversight:** Office of the High Representative (OHR) with powers to impose decisions and remove officials.

Key Negotiating Powers

1. **United States:** Led by Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, with support from Secretary of State Warren Christopher and military advisor General Wesley Clark.
2. **European Union:** Represented by Carl Bildt, EU Special Representative to the former Yugoslavia.
3. **Russia:** Represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.
4. **Warring Parties:**
 - Alija Izetbegović (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
 - Slobodan Milošević (Serbia, negotiating for Bosnian Serbs) o Franjo Tuđman (Croatia)
5. **Contact Group:** United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Russia. Follow-On Actions from Accords Within Bosnia.

Successful Outcomes

- **Cessation of Violence:** The Dayton Accords successfully ended the armed conflict, with no return to large-scale violence since 1995.
- **Institutional Stability:** The complex governmental institutions have continued to function, providing a framework for governance.
- **International Integration:** Bosnia and Herzegovina has made progress toward European integration, becoming a candidate country for EU membership.



Challenges and Limitations

1. **Economic Stagnation:** Bosnia and Herzegovina has experienced slow economic growth and high unemployment rates (approximately 18% as of 2023).
2. **Ethnic Divisions:** The Dayton structure has maintained rather than dissolved ethnic distinctions in governance.
3. **Governance Efficiency:** The multi-layered government structure has created administrative complexity.
4. **Continued International Oversight:** The Office of the High Representative remains active, indicating incomplete transition to full self-governance.
5. **Reform Challenges:** Ethnic-based veto powers have sometimes slowed necessary reforms and legislation.

Differentiating Factors Between Palestine and Bosnia

Territorial and Sovereignty Issues

The territorial situation in Palestine presents distinct challenges not faced in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While Bosnia emerged from conflict as a continuous territorial entity, the Palestinian territories consist of the geographically separated Gaza Strip and West Bank. This discontinuity would necessitate innovative governance solutions to maintain administrative unity across physically disconnected regions. Transportation corridors, unified communications systems, and coordinated security arrangements would be essential components of any viable governance model. The sovereignty framework would need to be more nuanced than that of Bosnia, potentially involving phased implementation of sovereign rights and responsibilities as confidence-building measures progress. Arrangements for special access routes between Palestinian territories could draw inspiration from successful international examples of territorial corridors, adapting them to the unique geographic configuration of the region.

Economic Differences

The economic landscapes of post-war Bosnia and contemporary Palestine diverge significantly, presenting distinct challenges for any peace framework adaptation. Bosnia entered its post-conflict phase with damaged but existing industrial infrastructure, a technically skilled workforce developed during the Yugoslav era, and a geographic position within Europe that facilitated economic integration and access to substantial EU reconstruction aid. Despite these advantages, Bosnia has experienced persistent economic challenges, with high unemployment and sluggish growth suggesting that the Dayton model's economic provisions were insufficient for sustainable development—a cautionary lesson for any Palestinian application.



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By contrast, the Palestinian economy faces more fundamental structural challenges, including extreme dependency on Israel (with approximately 90% of exports going to Israel), physical separation between Gaza and the West Bank creating market fragmentation, restricted access to natural resources, and limited industrial capacity. These conditions would necessitate a more comprehensive economic framework than Dayton provided, potentially including designated trade corridors between Palestinian territories, shared resource management protocols, special economic zones, and significantly higher per capita international investment in infrastructure and institutional development. Without such enhanced economic provisions, a Palestinian adaptation of the Dayton model would likely encounter even greater economic difficulties than Bosnia has experienced, potentially undermining the political sustainability of any peace agreement.

Political Realities

The political landscape of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict differs significantly from the Bosnian context in ways that would require creative adaptation of the Dayton framework. Recognition issues present particular challenges, as some key actors do not formally acknowledge each other's legitimacy. However, the Dayton model's emphasis on pragmatic power-sharing rather than immediate reconciliation offers a potential pathway. A phased approach to political normalization could begin with functional cooperation on practical matters while gradually building toward more comprehensive mutual recognition. The model's provisions for entity-level autonomy could also provide a blueprint for addressing the complex reality of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, potentially through special administrative arrangements that balance demographic realities with principles of sovereignty.

International Context

The international context surrounding the Bosnia negotiations represented a crucial differentiating factor from the current Palestinian situation. In Bosnia, the United States emerged as a relatively neutral mediator, perceived by all sides as capable of even-handed facilitation despite having clear interests in regional stability. This neutrality was personified by Richard Holbrooke, whose determined leadership and "bulldozer diplomacy" provided the driving force necessary to bring the parties to agreement. Holbrooke's persistent shuttle diplomacy, willingness to apply pressure on all parties, and personal commitment to achieving results created momentum that overcame deadlocks and forced compromises. The combination of American diplomatic weight and Holbrooke's individual determination proved decisive in reaching an agreement.



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By contrast, the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict lacks such a universally accepted neutral broker with both the perceived impartiality and determination to drive a peace process forward. The United States, traditionally the lead mediator, is viewed by many Palestinians as biased toward Israeli positions, while alternative mediators lack either the diplomatic leverage or the sustained commitment needed to push difficult compromises across the finish line. A successful adaptation of the Dayton model would require identifying or developing a mediating entity or coalition that combines perceived neutrality with resolute leadership. Additionally, the international economic support mechanisms would need to be more robust than those provided to post-Dayton Bosnia to avoid the economic stagnation that has plagued that country's post-conflict development. Regional powers, particularly Arab states with normalization interests, could provide additional layers of support and guarantees not present in the Bosnian context, potentially creating more sustainable foundations for lasting peace.

Religious and Cultural Dimensions

The religious dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict introduce complexities not present in Bosnia, particularly regarding Jerusalem and its holy sites. While Bosnia's conflict had religious elements intertwined with ethnic identity, the centrality of Jerusalem to three world religions requires special consideration beyond anything in the Dayton framework. A governance model for Palestinian territories would need to incorporate arrangements for shared administration of religious sites, potentially drawing on historical precedents such as the Status Quo arrangements that have governed holy places since Ottoman times. The cantonal approach from Bosnia could be adapted to provide cultural and religious autonomy in various regions, allowing for local governance that respects the distinctive character of different areas while maintaining overall territorial integrity. Special provisions for religious education, access to holy sites, and protection of cultural heritage would need more elaborate development than was necessary in the Dayton context, potentially through dedicated institutions with multinational or interfaith composition.

Conclusion

The Dayton Accords represent both an instructive model and a cautionary tale for potential application to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their core strength lies in demonstrating how complex ethnic and territorial disputes can be resolved through creative institutional design that balances unity with autonomy, creating governance structures that accommodate diverse interests while maintaining state integrity. The power-sharing mechanisms, layered governance approach, and international oversight provisions offer valuable templates that could be adapted to address the unique challenges of the Palestinian situation.



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However, successful adaptation would require addressing fundamental differences between the two contexts. The Dayton model's implementation in Palestine would need a neutral, determined mediator comparable to Richard Holbrooke; stronger economic development provisions to avoid Bosnia's post-conflict stagnation; innovative solutions for territorial discontinuity; and more robust mechanisms for addressing religious dimensions, particularly regarding Jerusalem. Most critically, it would require willingness from all parties to accept pragmatic compromise solutions that may fall short of their maximal aspirations—a condition that was present in war-exhausted Bosnia but remains elusive in the current Israeli-Palestinian dynamic.

Despite these challenges, the Dayton framework offers an important reminder that seemingly intractable conflicts can be resolved through determined diplomacy, creative institutional design, and international commitment. With appropriate modifications to address the unique characteristics of the Israeli-Palestinian situation, elements of the Dayton model could contribute to a sustainable governance framework that accommodates the legitimate interests of all parties while establishing a foundation for long-term peace and development in the region. Success would ultimately depend not on perfect replication of the Bosnian model, but on thoughtful adaptation of its core principles to the distinctive context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



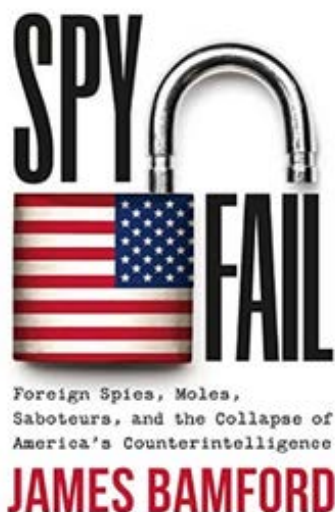
BY KEVIN BASSNEY
NGIC GLOBAL YOUNG LEADER 2025

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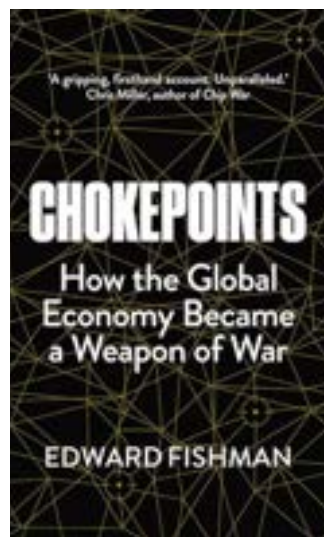
CHAIRMAN'S RECOMMENDATIONS

BOOKS YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS



Spy Fail **James Bamford**

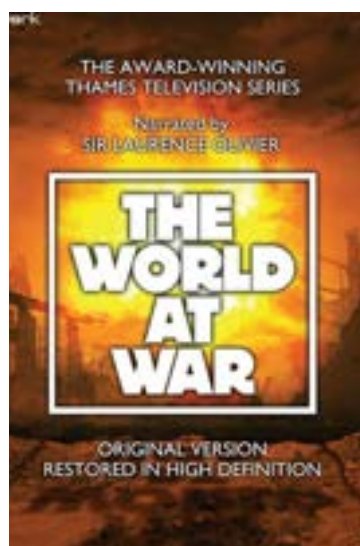
James Bamford exposes critical failures within the U.S. intelligence community, revealing how missteps and misconduct have compromised national security.



Chokepoints **Edward Fishman**

Edward Fishman examines the world's critical maritime arteries, revealing how control over these narrow passages shapes global power and security.

MOVIES & DOCUMENTARIES



The World at War- Laurence Olivier

The World at War – Narrated by Laurence Olivier, this iconic series offers an unflinching, immersive look at World War II through powerful narration and archival footage.



Dirty Money – A Netflix Documentary

Dirty Money – A Netflix documentary series exposing shocking cases of corporate greed, corruption, and scandal across global industries.



FELLOWS' RECOMMENDATIONS

MOVIES FROM FELLOWS

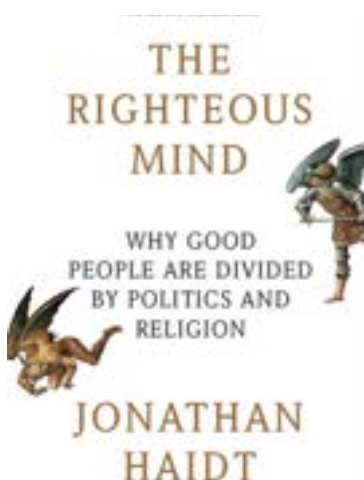


Das Boot – A gripping WWII film that follows a German U-boat crew, capturing the tension, fear, and survival struggles of submarine warfare.

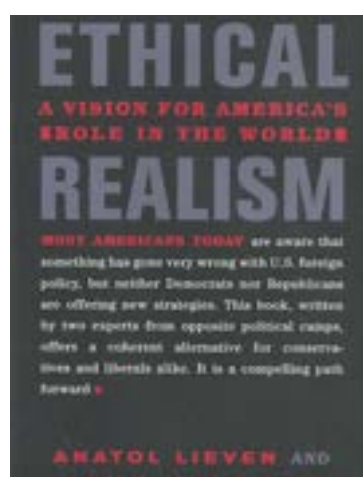


From Ground Zero – A powerful film capturing the aftermath of 9/11, exploring the resilience, struggles, and stories of those affected by the tragedy.

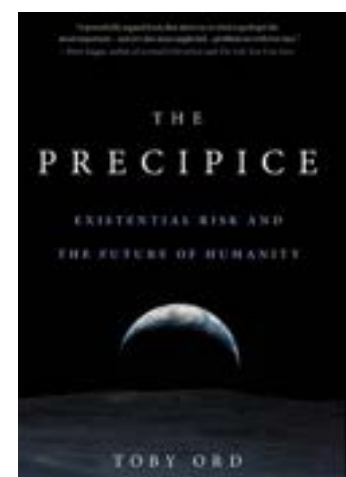
BOOKS FROM FELLOWS



The Righteous Mind – Jonathan Haidt explores the psychology of morality, explaining why people hold different political and moral beliefs.



Ethical Realism – Anatol Lieven & John Hulsman present a pragmatic approach to U.S. foreign policy, advocating for diplomacy and moral responsibility.



The Precipice – Toby Ord explores existential risks threatening humanity's future and the urgent need for long-term survival strategies.

April
2025

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Gustav Bauernfeind, A Street Scene, Damascus
Oil on panel

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