

Milton Wolf Seminar 2016

The Paris Effect: Journalism, Diplomacy, and Information Controls Vienna, Austria, April 4 – 6, 2016

ABOUT THE MILTON WOLF SEMINAR SERIES

Launched in 2001, the Milton Wolf Seminar Series aims to deal with developing issues in diplomacy and journalism – both broadly defined. The 2016 seminar is jointly organized by the Center for Global Communication Studies (CGCS) at the University of Pennsylvania’s Annenberg School for Communication, The American Austrian Foundation (AAF), and the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna (DA). Guests include those working for state and multi-lateral organizations, journalists, media development practitioners, academics, and a select group of highly engaged graduate students whose studies relate to the seminar themes. The Milton Wolf Seminar Series particularly emphasizes the potential contribution of young and mid-career scholars, including a select group of outstanding graduate students selected each year to attend the seminar in Vienna as Emerging Scholar fellows.

The organizers envision the Milton Wolf Seminar as a meeting place for media practitioners, diplomats, academics, and students to share their perspectives, formulate new ideas, and identify areas where further research is needed. While the seminar incorporates various speakers and panels, it is designed as a two-day continuing conversation in which all participants are encouraged to openly engage in dialogue and explore potential synergies and future collaborations. In order to encourage an open exchange of ideas, seminar attendance is limited only to invited participants and students.

ABOUT THE 2016 SEMINAR

On November 13, 2015, the world watched as a coordinated team of individuals claiming allegiance to the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) unleashed a wave of suicide bombings and mass shootings at concert halls, concert venues, and stadiums across Paris, which claimed the lives of 130 people and injured hundreds of others. The Paris attacks were only the latest in a long list of Islamic State actions during 2015 that spanned multiple countries and venues. The size and scope of the Paris attacks and their symbolic targeting of Western everyday-life locales, however, brought home the fact that the rise of ISIS, destabilization in Syria, and the related refugee crisis were not a “Middle East problem.” No one and no country was safe.

For the 2016 Milton Wolf Seminar on Media and Diplomacy, the Paris attacks provide an entry point for discussion of the multiple anxieties they brought to the fore in international relations: a renewed sense of urgency to combat ISIS, panic over the “dangers” of Muslim refugees, and alarm over how to reassert control over both geographic and informational borders.

Milton Wolf 2016 also coincides with the centennial anniversary of the 1916 Sykes–Picot Agreement, which effectively divided the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire into areas

of French and British control. In the ensuing century, Sykes-Picot has become symbolic of the hubris of imperial powers and often credited with directly contributing to contemporary destabilization in the Middle East and by extension the rise of ISIS and related attacks. Its 100th anniversary provides an ideal occasion to consider the complex relationship between states with fixed geographic boundaries; state and non state symbolic actors; and flows of media, information, and people across borders.

Many have noted asymmetries in global media responses to the events in Paris and ISIS attacks in Beirut (November 12, 2015), Baghdad (November 13, 2015) and Boko Haram in Nigeria (November 17 & 18, 2015). Discussions about these asymmetries will take center stage at Milton Wolf 2016. Panelists will explore the role of actors across the geopolitical spectrum, from Western powers, to non state terrorist networks, to Iran, to Russia, to China. They will also discuss how recent events have opened up new geopolitical possibilities. For example, Iran long a Western antagonist, has surfaced as a necessary ally against ISIS and Russia is collaborating with France in intelligence gathering related to terrorist activities. Discussions will consider the implications of a range of new and old media, individuals, and institutions in undermining and or reinforcing these trends.

With a particular focus on the role of new and old media, panels will examine in detail:

1. the escalation and perpetuation of narratives of global conflict and their implications for diplomacy;
2. how the interaction of the press, diplomatic responses, and new media memes have shaped responses to migrants and refugees;
3. apprehension about the porous nature of contemporary media and information flows and the resurgence of calls for states to be able to control internet and media systems and content within their borders as a means of ameliorating the threats to geographic sovereignty;
4. the implications of these activities for free expression and state information controls;
5. the legacy of Sykes Picot 100 years later: one of the most significant attempts to divide geographic territories as well as a key symbol of Western attempts to shape and contain the Middle East;
6. and, the rise of new strategic communication actors and practices designed to shape and control these trends.

Draft Agenda

Milton Wolf Seminar, April 4 – 6, 2016

DAY ONE – MONDAY, APRIL 4, 2016

6:00 – 8:00 PM Welcome Reception and Registration (Location TBC)

DAY TWO: TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 2016

9:00 – 10:00 Welcome & Introduction

The conveners will introduce the Milton Wolf Seminar and panelists and participants will provide a short introduction to their work and background.

10:00 – 12:00 Session 1: Narratives of Global Conflict and Negotiation Post Paris

This introductory panel will set the stage for the two days of discussions. As attacks coordinated by or conducted in solidarity with ISIS have intensified, so too have narratives of global conflict and whispers of an impending WWII. Attempts to combat the threat of ISIS—a global, stateless, distributed network—have also placed additional weight on the importance of diplomatic relationships between traditional states and prompted shifting alliances and new rounds of diplomatic negotiations. Just as Vienna serves as the location of the 2016 Seminar, it also serves as a major locale for diplomacy, from the E3/EU+3 and Iran Nuclear talks to the October 2015 Syria negotiations. This panel will focus particularly on narratives of conflict and negotiation post-Paris. Panelists will discuss how competing actors—from ISIS, to Putin, to Obama—have put forward particular narratives that seek to define and frame contemporary understanding of terrorism and conflict and the implications of those narratives for diplomatic and humanitarian resolutions.

12:00 – 1:30 Welcoming Lunch

1:30 – 3:15 Session 2: Information Flows and People Flows: Refugees, Migration, and the Power of Journalism

Approximately 4.3 million Syrians are currently refugees and 6.6 million are internally displaced. While this almost unprecedented dislocation of people coincided with the beginning of hostilities within Syria almost six years ago, it has only recently moved to the forefront of diplomatic and media attention. After Paris and San Bernardino, the debate over the movement of people and the movement of ideologies, ideas and efforts to mobilize became conflated. The Syrian refugee crisis itself migrated into a crisis about identity and provides a starting point for a broader conversation about the the interaction between diplomatic responses and media coverage of refugees and migrants.

3:15 – 3:30 Tea Break

3:30 – 5:30 Session 3: Geographic Boundaries and Information Flows: Will Boundaries Reemerge for Communications as well as People?

While session 2 examines the influence of the media on attitudes and policies related to migration and refugees, this panel takes the converse approach. It examines how recent movements of people across borders and corresponding increases in the diversity of once relatively homogenous national populations have prompted changes in attitudes towards control over national and global information systems. Panelists will explore a range of responses, from efforts to combat ISIS's internet recruitment strategies, to European efforts to enact tighter media and internet legislation, to covert data collection and spying programs.

7:00 Dinner hosted by the US Embassy

DAY THREE: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6, 2016

9:00 – 10:30 Session 4: Free Expression, Globalism, and the New Strategic Communication

Recent geopolitical and technological changes have altered the ways in which state and non state actors think about the production and retention of popular loyalties. This panel considers the tensions between heightened national security concerns and the promulgation of freedom of expression norms. Panelists will discuss multiple dimensions of the debate over freedom of expression, from who does and should have access to major social media platforms, to changing conceptions of hate speech and incitement to violence, to the implications of freedom of expression norms for states of different geopolitical configurations.

10:30 – 10:45 Tea Break

10:45 – 12:15 Session 5: Geography and Symbolism in the Middle East: A Century Since Sykes Picot

Between November 1915 and March 1916, France and Britain, with Russian participation debated the future territorial boundaries of the Middle East – dividing pieces of the Arab world into British and French spheres of influence. One hundred years later, Sykes-Picot remains a symbol of Western oppression and arrogance vis-à-vis the Middle East. In 2014, ISIS, for example, released a promotional video entitled “the End of Sykes-Picot.” As the Syrian conflict enters its sixth year, Iraq continues to experience instability, and other Middle Eastern nations struggle to retain sovereignty, the 100th anniversary of the Sykes Picot agreement provides a particularly apt time to discuss its legacy as well as the uncertainties plaguing the symbolic and territorial geography of the contemporary Middle East. Panelists will focus specifically on the successes and failures of the Arab Spring, the resurgence of Cold War politics, and the chaos unleashed by asymmetric players (global powers and emerging network powers like ISIS) fighting both traditional and information wars. Discussions will explore the narratives put forward by regional and major power states such as Iran, Russia, and the United States as well as non state actors.

12:15 – 1:30 *Lunch*

1:30 – 3:30 Session 6: 1. New Players, New Tactics: The Evolution of Strategic Communications Practices in a Time of Geopolitical Turmoil

The rise of a networked, distributed and multi-modal media environment populated by professional journalists, activist media organizations, state funded operations, and citizens with social media accounts has critical implications for the role of media in diplomacy. This panel is focused specifically on the rise of new strategic communication strategies and actors focused on combating or forming foreign policy narratives and outcomes. The focus of this panel is on how new technologies are providing new means and mechanisms of strategic communication

3.30 – 4.00 *Tea Break*

4.00 – 5:00 Presentation of Emerging Scholars Research

7:00 Visit to a Heurigen (a traditional Austrian establishment that features “new wines” and classic Viennese food), sponsored by the City of Vienna