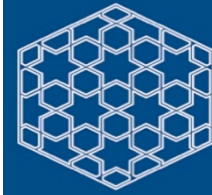




2018 Gabr Fellows at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy with Dr. Robert Satloff



The  
SHAFIK GABR  
Foundation

# The Gabr Fellowship Newsletter

November 2019, Issue 28

## IN THIS ISSUE

*Your biggest asset in life is your connectivity to family and friends. Last month, protests broke out throughout the world as various social and economic triggers pushed people to the brink. Some of these protests were spurred by attempts to limit connectivity between people.*

It is through education and exposure that we can build bridges between people and strive to make the world a better place. Dialogue plays a requisite and critical role in the process of building long-term peace. And it is through the Art of Dialogue that we expose civil society to real solutions that can be implemented to achieve this noble aim.

When trust in institutions is eroded, civil society will raise its voice. The majority of protesters are youth. They are the present and the future. They are tomorrow's leaders and the ones who will pave the path ahead for all who come after them. This is just one of so many reasons why I am certain that the Gabr Fellows will always be a source of pride for my Foundation and its legacy by continuing to make the world a better place for all of its inhabitants. I hope the journey ahead is one of greater inclusivity and peace for all.

**M. Shafik Gabr**

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## ***News and Updates...***

### **Dalia Ihab performed music at the Klaxics Project at Room Garden City**



**Dalia Ihab, 2017 Gabr Fellow**, held a public performance at the Klaxics Project at Room Garden City which was hosted by ROOM Art Space & Cafe. Dalia is a voiceover performer, creative copywriter and copyeditor. She is especially interested in entrepreneurship and passionate about innovation, and she likes to use her singing and music skills to bring people together.

### **Becca Doten gave birth to a baby girl named Olivia**



**Becca Doten, 2013 Gabr Fellow**, embarked on the adventure of a lifetime and welcomed four-week-old baby Olivia into her life. Becca is overjoyed to serve as Olivia's foster mommy and provide a safe and loving home for her as long as she needs it. At five months, Olivia loves to put all of her toys in her mouth, is ambivalent about oatmeal, and has a beautiful smile and laugh.

### **Ahmed Mostafa will participate in an “intensive program in law and economics”**



**Ahmed Mostafa, 2018 Gabr Fellow**, will participate in an “intensive program in law and economics” that will be held in 3 countries (Latvia, Belgium, and Luxembourg) for 6 weeks. The program will focus on European neighbourhood policy as well as European laws, and institutions. It is funded by both the Latvian and American governments.

### **Shady Saleh completed an exchange semester in a Masters of Art (MA)**



**Shady Saleh, 2018 Gabr Fellow**, completed an exchange semester in a Masters of Art (MA) at Tübingen, Germany in Comparative Middle East Politics and Society. Shady graduated from Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University. Prior to this, Shady worked for the Egyptian Foundation for Strategic Studies and the Arab Bank PLC.

**Reham Gamal is pursuing her PhD in Spain**



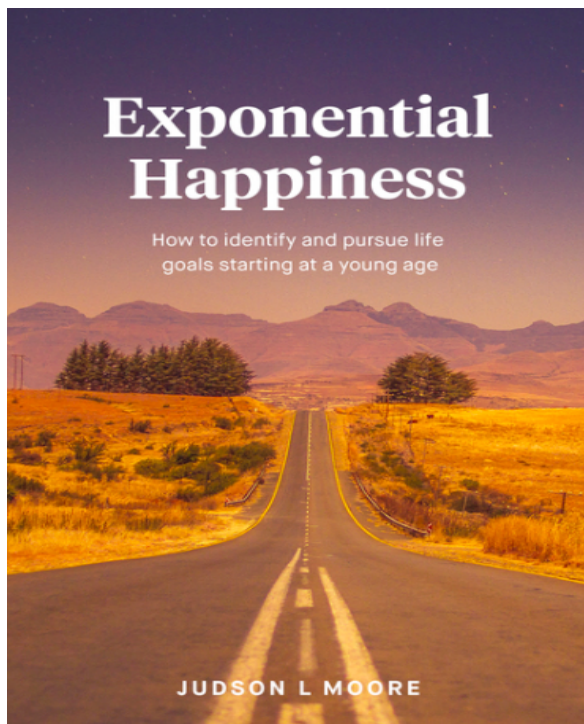
**Reham Gamal, 2017 Gabr Fellow,** currently works as a Research Assistant and is fulfilling a funded PhD program from the Spanish government in Valencia. Prior to this, Reham worked as an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Political Mass Media at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo.

**Afnan Elwy recently moved to Abu Dhabi**



**Afnan Elwy, 2015 Gabr Fellow,** recently moved to Abu Dhabi and joined Al Tamimi and Co. banking team. Altamim is the biggest regional law firm in the UAE and the Mena region. Prior to that, she worked for the National Bank of Egypt. She received her LL.B Degree from Faculty of Law, Cairo University class 2009.

**Judson Moore Has Released His New Book “Exponential Happiness”**



**2015 Gabr Fellow, Judson Moore** has released his new book, “Exponential Happiness”, which is the result of his journey across the world, exploring diverse lands, cultures, and careers. He has also been interviewed about his motivations for writing the book. In this interview, Judson spoke about his background, his parents' activism regarding the rights of people with disabilities and their families, his time with the Peace Corps setting up a distribution network for journalists in Kyrgyzstan, and his eventual return to Germany, where so much of his story got its start. Judson was born in Kentucky and raised in Louisiana before deciding to call Texas his home. He currently resides in Germany, where he works as a product management professional.

# Meet The Gabr Fellows

## Dalia Ihab, 2017 Gabr Fellow, Egypt

**Name:** Dalia Ihab

**Profession:** Communication Officer at UNICEF Egypt

Dalia has always wanted to see the real face of America from an insider perspective. She recently fulfilled the opportunity of a life time during a trip to some key locations in the United States where she met with many decision makers and had the chance to listen to stories from youth her age who come from different backgrounds of the American society.

The great people she met in her cohort and other cohorts and the chance to see America in Autumn was always a childhood dream for her.

Dalia is currently working on ways to make two of her non-profit music projects financially self-sustainable. They are "[Klaxics](#)" and "[The Singing Circle](#)".



## Heidi Green, 2016 Gabr Fellow, U.S.



**Name:** Heidi Green

**Profession:** Full-time translation supervisor for an NGO working with teams in the Middle East and Asia. Part-time consultant for the Ministry of Education in Pakistan.

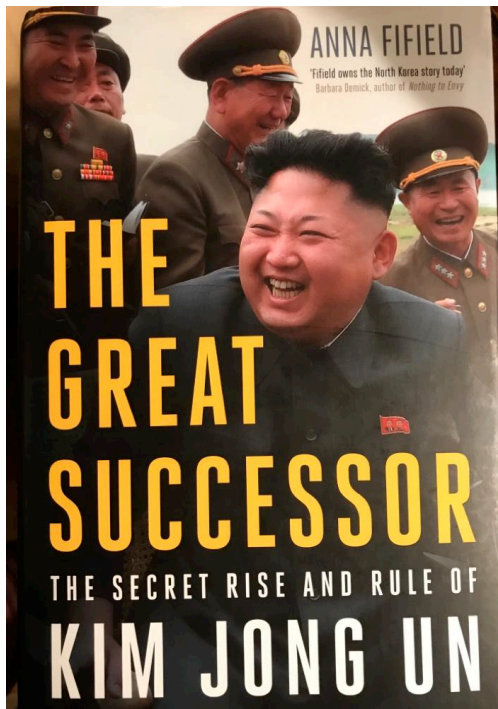
Heidi loves Arabic, the Middle East, and making a positive impact on society, especially when the projects involve cross-cultural exchange and communication. After the fellowship, Heidi learned so much and was so inspired that she felt a sense of urgency to accomplish all her goals right away. Three years later, she is still working on her goals and making an impact because of the things she learned during the fellowship three years ago. Looking back, she says she knows that a huge part of the progress she has made is a result of the fellowship. Heidi believes the fellowship will continue to influence her life going forward in a positive way and that it will have a ripple effect on the people she works with too. She respects and values Mr. Gabr and says she made some close friends from the fellowship. She noted that the Fellows were all supportive of each other and had a great time together which allowed for the greatest inspiration.

## Chairman Gabr Meets with the Gabr Fellows



In his latest meeting with the Egyptian Gabr Fellows on October 31, **Mr. Gabr, Chairman of the Shafik Gabr Foundation**, imparted wisdom and insight unto the Fellows as subjects like the influence of art/culture and politics on civil society were explored and debated. Adelle Nazarian was introduced to the Fellows as the newest member of the Shafik Gabr Foundation and ARTOC Group.

## Gabr Foundation Reading Corner



The Foundation Reading Corner is encouraging Fellows to critique the books that have been recommended over the past many issues. For this issue, **Mr. Gabr** recommends “The Great Successor: The Secret Rise and Rule of Kim Jong Un” by Anna Fifield, which explores the behind-the-scenes story of the rise and reign of power of a man who has been described as the world's strangest and most elusive tyrant, Kim Jong Un. Fifield reconstructs Kim’s past and present using her exclusive access to sources near him to bring a unique understanding about the Kim family’s dynastic rule in the so-called “Hermit Kingdom.”

## Question of the Month: A Pulse of the Gabr Fellowship Community



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 ramped up 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.

1. Do you think the U.S. should be more involved in the Syria-Turkey crisis?

Yes: 67%

No: 33%

I don't know: 0%

2. Do you think U.S mediation between Egypt and Ethiopia to resolve the Renaissance Dam crisis will succeed?

Yes: 30%

No: 37%

I don't know: 33%

3. Egypt is the current head of the African Union. In this capacity, do you think Egypt should launch an Africa – US summit, just like Russia launched the first Russia - Africa summit?

Yes: 78%

No: 15%

I don't know: 7%

***Stay tuned for next month's question of the month and the Gabr Fellows' takes on current events, as our community of future leaders grapple with the most pressing challenges of today and tomorrow.***

# The Danger of Abandoning

## Our Partners

The Syria policy reversal threatens to undo five years' worth of fighting against ISIS and will severely damage American credibility and reliability.



By: Elizebeth Dent and Joseph Votel

The abrupt policy decision to seemingly abandon our Kurdish partners could not come at a worse time. The decision was made without consulting U.S. allies or senior U.S. military leadership and threatens to affect future partnerships at precisely the time we need them most, given the war-weariness of the American public coupled with ever more sophisticated enemies determined to come after us.

In northeastern Syria, we had one of the most successful partnerships. The Islamic State was using Syria as a sanctuary to support its operations in Iraq and globally, including by hosting and training foreign fighters. We had to go after ISIS quickly and effectively. The answer came in the form of a small band of Kurdish forces pinned up against the Turkish border and fighting for their lives against ISIS militants in the Syrian town of Kobane in 2014.

We had tried many other options first. The U.S. initially worked to partner with moderate Syrian rebel groups, investing \$500 million in a train-and-equip program to build their capabilities to fight

against ISIS in Syria. That endeavor failed, save for a small force in southeastern Syria near the American al-Tanf base, which began as a U.S. outpost to fight ISIS and remains today as a deterrent against Iran. So we turned to Turkey to identify alternative groups, but the Pentagon found that the force Turkey had trained was simply inadequate and would require tens of thousands of U.S. troops to bolster it in battle. With no public appetite for a full-scale U.S. ground invasion, we were forced to look elsewhere.

I (Joseph Votel) first met General Mazloum Abdi at a base in northern Syria in May 2016. From the start, it was obvious he was not only an impressive and thoughtful man, but a fighter who was clearly thinking about the strategic aspects of the campaign against ISIS and aware of the challenges of fighting a formidable enemy. He could see the long-term perils from the civil war, but recognized that the most immediate threat to his people was ISIS. After a fitful start in Syria, I concluded that we had finally found the right partner who could help us defeat ISIS without getting drawn into the murkier conflict against Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), initially composed of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), was then conceived: a fighting force that eventually grew to 60,000 battle-hardened and determined soldiers. The decision to partner with the YPG, beginning with the fight in Kobane, was made across two administrations and had required years of deliberation and planning, especially given the concerns of our NATO ally Turkey, who regards the SDF as an offshoot of the designated terrorist group the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Eventually, the YPG became the backbone of the fighting force against ISIS in Syria. Without it, President Donald Trump could not have declared the complete defeat of ISIS.

With support from what grew to be the 80-member Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which included air power, advisers on the ground, and equipment, the SDF became a force to be reckoned with and led a string of victories. In August 2016, it liberated the Syrian town of Manbij, which once functioned as a hub for

ISIS fighters to cross into Turkey and is believed to be where the attackers who carried out the November 2015 Paris attacks transited. Mindful of the need for credibility as it pushed to liberate Arab-dominated areas, the YPG had succeeded in incorporating Arab units into its structure as a united Arab-Kurd fighting force. That force, the SDF, went on to liberate the so-called capital of the caliphate, Raqqa, and towns in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, culminating in the territorial defeat of ISIS in Baghouz this past March.

Over four years, the SDF freed tens of thousands of square miles and millions of people from the grip of ISIS.

Throughout the fight, it sustained nearly 11,000 casualties. By comparison, six U.S. service members, as well as two civilians, have been killed in the anti-ISIS campaign. Key to this effective relationship was mutual trust, constant communication, and clear expectations. The partnership was not without its difficulties. That included working through the December 2018 announcement of our sudden departure and our subsequent agreement with Turkey to pursue a security mechanism for the border areas. But each time, the strong mutual trust built on the ground between our military members and the SDF preserved our momentum. The sudden policy change this week breaks that trust at the most crucial juncture and leaves our partners with very limited options.

It didn't have to be this way. The U.S. worked endlessly to placate our Turkish allies.

We engaged in countless rounds of negotiations, committing to establishing a security mechanism that included joint patrols in areas of concern to the Turks, and deploying 150 additional U.S. troops to help monitor and enforce the "safe zone." Yet Ankara repeatedly reneged on its agreements with the U.S., deeming them inadequate and threatening to invade SDF-held areas, despite the presence of U.S. soldiers.

A possible invasion from Turkey against the Kurdish elements of the SDF, coupled with a hasty U.S. departure, now threaten to rapidly destabilize an

already fragile security situation in Syria's northeast, where ISIS's physical caliphate was only recently defeated. Nearly 2,000 foreign fighters, about 9,000 Iraqi and Syrian fighters, and tens of thousands of ISIS family members are being held in detention facilities and displaced-persons camps in areas under SDF control. What happens if we leave? The SDF has already stated that it will have to

fortify defense mechanisms along the Syrian-Turkish border, leaving ISIS detention facilities and encampments with little to no security. This is particularly troubling, given that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed caliph of ISIS, recently called on supporters to break fighters out of these facilities. There have also been violent attacks in the al-Hol refugee camp, where tens of thousands of women and children are housed and where ISIS sympathy runs rampant.

The Pentagon and White House later clarified that the U.S. was not abandoning the Kurds and did not support a Turkish incursion into Syria. But the damage may already be done, because it appears the Turks have taken the shift to signal a green light for an attack in the northeast. This policy abandonment threatens to undo five years' worth of fighting against ISIS and will severely damage American credibility and reliability in any future fights where we need strong allies.

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***Disclaimer:** The views presented in this article are the authors' alone and do not represent the opinion of the Foundation. This article was originally published on [The Atlantic](#).*

Elizabeth Dent is 2015 Gabr Fellow and a non-resident scholar with the Middle East Institute's Countering Terrorism and Extremism program and a senior consultant with NTT Data.

**Stay tuned for more articles and thoughts from Gabr Fellows in the next newsletter.**



# Egypt's farmers tackle climate change with comedy and community



By: Menna A. Farouk

A small village 45 minutes from the city of Assiut, in southern Egypt, a group of farmers and their families gathered to watch a theatre performance that aimed to find the funny side of climate change. The hour-long comedy, which has so far been performed in 50 villages in the Upper Egypt region, in the country's south, tells the story of a farmer who refuses to pay for a new, more water-efficient agricultural canal.

When a snake bites him and he is thought to be dead, the farmer hears how much his family and neighbours hated him because he rejected modern farming methods. At the end of the show, he changes his perspective.

The play is part of a \$7-million project funded by the World Food Programme (WFP) and managed by the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture that aims to help farmers in the region cope better with climate change threats through modern technology, sustainable growing techniques and better understanding of climate issues.

Organisers say the project, which started in 2013 and is scheduled to end early next year, has boosted the production of some major crops by at least a third and drastically cut water consumption on the farms involved.

It is one in a series of efforts the Egyptian government has made over the past decade to limit the negative impact of climate change on farmers across the country.

“Community mobilisation on the issue of climate change can encourage many people to embrace the ideas of the project. And theatre is one of the methods to mobilise the community,” said Ayam Abu el-Hagag, an actor in the traveling troupe and also an agricultural advisor.

He noted that each time the troupe delivers a joke on stage, the characters explain the information to make it accessible to all farmers, even those with little or no formal education.

“Comedy helps people understand things easier,” he added.

## HIGHLY VULNERABLE

Climate change has been a major challenge for Egypt and according to the WFP, “southern Egypt is one of the areas most vulnerable to climate change within the region”.

Environmental groups regard Egypt as one of the countries most threatened by the negative effects of climate change, which include sea-level rise, water poverty, and deteriorating public health and ecosystems. The WFP forecasts that Upper Egypt could lose up to 30% of its food production by 2050 as climate change brings more extreme weather and other threats.

Saber Osman, director of the climate change adaptation department at Egypt's Ministry of Environment, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that losses could lead to a major crisis for Egypt's farming sector.

Agriculture represents almost 15% of the country's gross domestic product and employs about a third of the workforce, he said.

The idea behind the WFP project is to get farmers involved in the frontline fight against climate change and stamp out bad farming habits, said the project's director, Othman el-Sheikh.

That includes encouraging farmers to plant crop varieties that require less water and to follow new irrigation methods to reduce water consumption.

Farmers also learn how to combine traditional farming techniques with more modern technology, such as solar-powered irrigation pumps and an app that alerts farmers to incoming weather events.

One main focus for the project is to help farmers work together, to cut the cost of seeds by buying them in bulk and planting them across several neighbouring farms, el-Sheikh explained.

“Fragmented agricultural holdings are common throughout Egypt in general and in Upper Egypt in particular,” he said.

When they work independently, many farmers cannot afford to access high-quality resources, which lowers

their productivity and leads to about 10% of land lying fallow, he added.

The initiative helps farmers organise into groups of at least 70, who agree to pool their resources.

Every planting season, the Society Development Association in Sahel Selim, which is working with the WFP on the project, buys enough seed for all 70 farmers and divides the seeds equally among them.

The farmers carry out the sowing and eventual harvesting together, cutting costs by sharing equipment and manpower, el-Sheikh explained.

The hope is that once the project ends, the farmer groups will be making enough revenue to allow them to buy high-quality seeds for themselves, he said.

El-Sheikh added that almost 2,000 farms have been consolidated into larger farming groups through the project in the past three years.

## **FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE**

The WFP project also runs a loan program that provides villagers with goats and ducks to give them an alternative source of income in case their crops fail.

Sabrine Haridi, a 33-year-old mother of four children in Sahel Selim, said she got a loan to acquire 38 ducks, which allow her to cover the family's expenses, even in seasons when her husband's wheat harvest falls short.

She sells some of the ducks for their meat and rears more from eggs, selling them when they mature. Any profit she makes goes toward paying off the loan.

"Two years ago, I was desperate because my husband could not afford our daily needs. I am now financially independent," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"When my husband fails to get the expected money from his crop due to climate change, I pay for whatever we need, including food, clothes and school expenses," she added.

## **'IN GOD'S HANDS'**

Since the project was launched in Egypt in 2013, half a million farmers have become involved, said el-Sheikh

He told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that applying the new methods has increased wheat production by 30% to 40%, boosted sugarcane output by about 30% and reduced water consumption by a third.

But getting to that point was not easy, said Osman at the environment ministry.

"Community resistance to adopting methods for coping with climate change is common in Egyptian villages," he said, adding that some farmers do not see climate change as an issue that can be addressed because it is "in God's hands".

El-Sheikh said that some farmers used to ask him, "What would you do to combat climate change? Would you change God's weather?"

He told them the efforts only aimed to help farmers cope with changing weather, not shift the weather itself.

"Convincing farmers to use modern technology and advanced agricultural means, as well as encouraging women to take part in the project, are some of the biggest challenges we face," El Sheikh added.

Hassan Bekheet, 53, said he didn't need much convincing to swap his maize crops for drought-tolerant sorghum when he joined the project in Sahel Selim.

Once he made the switch, his crop yield increased by about 25%, as did his revenues, he said, while his costs went down by 15%. He was so happy with what he learned from the project that he got together with other participants to pass those lessons on to neighbours. "We are all in the same boat and we should fight these changes together," Bekheet said.

***Disclaimer:*** *The views presented in this article are the authors' alone and do not represent the opinion of the Foundation. This article was originally published in [Reuters](#).*

Menna A. Farouk is 2017 Gabr Fellow and a journalist for four years and is currently Front-page Editor of The Egyptian Gazette.

**Stay tuned for more articles and thoughts from Gabr Fellows in the next newsletter.**

# The Gabr Fellowship Newsletter

For more information on the ShafikGabr Foundation and its *East-West: The Art of Dialogue* Initiative, please visit the website <https://eastwestdialogue.org/>.

For earlier itineraries of the US program, please see the previous years' reports at <https://eastwestdialogue.org/fellowship/brochures/>



Ludwig Deutsch – *A Gathering around the Morning News, Cairo*  
The Shafik Gabr Collection

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