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Vienna School of International Studies  
Ecole des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne



The American Austrian Foundation



## Milton Wolf Seminar 2013

### Diplomatic Maneuvers and Journalistic Coverage in a Time of Reset, Pivot and Rebalance Vienna, Austria, April 16 – 18, 2013

#### DRAFT OVERVIEW

Launched in 2000, the Milton Wolf Seminar Series aims to deal with developing issues in diplomacy and journalism – both broadly defined. This year’s seminar addresses the critical role of diplomats and journalists in shaping the outcomes of what we call global geopolitical pivots. Pivots in this case refer to emergent geopolitical shifts around which multiple stakeholders – from major powers, to multilateral organizations, to bloggers working in isolation – seek to provide input on the most appropriate outcomes. As Zbigniew Brzezinski defined them, "Geopolitical pivots are the states whose importance is derived not from their power and motivation but rather from their sensitive location and from the consequences of their potentially vulnerable condition for the behavior of geo-strategic players. Most often, geopolitical pivots are determined by their geography, which in some cases gives them a special role in either defining access to important areas or in denying resources to a significant player."

Examples of contemporary global pivots that will be considered in this year’s Seminar include: the resolution of the Arab Spring, shifts in geopolitical approaches to Syria, calls for regime change in Iran, and the intense Western attention to reform movements and government change in Burma (Myanmar).

In the case of Syria, global diplomatic discussions surround the legitimacy of the al-Assad regime, the utility of international intervention in the civil war, and the viability of the disparate Syrian opposition movements. Burma, also known as Myanmar, a closed regime ruled by the military since 1962, underwent its first election in 2010. Although boycotted by the opposition, this election marked the first sign of emergent changes within the country and has ignited the diplomatic community. Burma’s return to geopolitical prominence was punctuated by visits by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in December 2011 and President Barak Obama in November 2012. They were the first senior US officials to visit the country in over fifty years. The third geopolitical pivot under analysis is the case of Iran. In 2009-2010 the world watched as election protesters took to the streets of Iran. While the Green Revolution failed to achieve regime change, those events, coupled with heightened security concerns over Israel, Syria, and the Iranian nuclear program, have placed Iran at the heart of global diplomatic conversations.

In each of these cases, different state and non-state actors have put forward competing narratives advocating particular outcomes. These narratives are circulated, among other mechanisms, through political speeches, in the press, and via the internet. This year’s Seminar will explore the critical role of this narrative construction in shaping diplomatic outcomes. How do diplomats, journalists, and other stakeholders seek to advocate for particular outcomes, and to what effect? Conversely, how do these geopolitical pivots or shifts affect ongoing narratives of democratization, shifts from authoritarian regimes, and the role of media and communications in diplomacy?



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## Draft Agenda Milton Wolf Seminar, April 16 – 18, 2013

### DAY ONE – TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2013

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**6:00 – 8:00 PM Welcome Reception and Registration (Diplomatic Academy)**

### DAY TWO: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2013

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**9:00 – 10:00 AM Welcome & Introduction**

#### **10:00 AM – 12:00 PM Session 1: Global Pivots: Controlling the Narrative**

Geopolitical shifts such as the Arab Spring, the fall of communism, or the openings up of closed regimes often bring flurries of speculation and negotiation about intermediate and long-term outcomes. With rapid changes in the communications environment, state actors are competing with an ever-increasing range of actors to interpret and proscribe these outcomes, often through the media. This introductory panel will address the changing role of media diplomacy, media actors, and non-state actors in shaping the outcomes of these global geopolitical shifts.

**12:00 – 1:30 PM Welcoming Lunch**

#### **1:30 – 3:15 PM Session 2: Burma**

Burma, also known as Myanmar, a closed regime ruled by the military since 1962, underwent its first election in 2010. Although boycotted by the opposition, this election marked the first sign of emergent changes within the country and has ignited the diplomatic community. This panel will focus on processes by which the international community, especially NGOs reframe the role of journalism and media law and policy.

**3:15 – 3:30 PM Tea Break**

#### **3:30 – 5:30 PM Session 3: Iran**

In 2009, protestors took to the streets and to the social media sites in the largest challenge to Iran's theocracy since 1979. Four years later, the "Green Revolution" has stalled, but Iran remains a geopolitical pivot, particularly in light of its participation in Syria. This session will focus on the role of the journalists and diplomats in shaping the ongoing narrative about Iran and its relationship to external events in the Middle East. Topics for discussion include the methods and ethics of efforts to expand networks of discourse within Iran and between Iran and the world on significant issues: the upcoming presidential election, the role of journalists, culture, public space and the arts.

**7:00 PM Evening Dinner Event**



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## DAY THREE: THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2013

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### 9:00 – 10:30 AM Session 4: The Absence of a Viable Narrative: Consequences for Diplomacy and Journalism

As the Arab Spring began in December 2010, a narrative of change swept the Middle East and North Africa as protestors took to the streets and long-sitting autocratic rulers in Tunisia, then Egypt and then Libya were deposed. This year's Milton Wolf Seminar will take place over two years since the protests in Syria began. Assad remains in power; and the death toll continues to mount as does discussion and debate on the best way forward for resolving the crisis. This session will explore diplomatic and other international efforts to fashion a convincing narrative about the future of the Assad regime and the government of Syria. It will pay particular attention to the points of discord between major Western powers and those of Russia, China, Egypt, and Iran and the role of the media in undermining or supporting these positions.

### 10:30 – 10:45 AM *Tea Break*

### 10:45 AM – 12:15 PM Session 5: The Struggle for a Syrian Strategic Narrative: Alternative Voices

This session will examine the successes and failures of external efforts to shape information flows in and out of Syria and international opinion about the ongoing conflict by journalists, bloggers, and other alternative means. Subjects of discussion include liberation technology, partnerships with social media and traditional media organizations, and non-conventional information transfers.

### 12:15 – 1:30 PM *Lunch*

### 1:30 – 3:00 PM Session 6: Are There “Pivots” and How Will They Affect Diplomacy and Journalism?

British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder first set out his theory that Eastern Europe was the "The Geographical Pivot of History" in 1904. His concept of a geographical pivot is often credited with invigorating the study of geopolitics. Over a century later, the world system has changed considerably. As multilateral organizations, non-state actors, global communications systems, and transnational activist networks move to the fore, the conduct of international relations surrounding these pivots has evolved and become exponentially more complicated. This session will examine emerging sites for renegotiation in the world system. It will explore a number of case studies, such as: Al-Jazeera's expanding operations in the United States and the Western pivot to Asia, and France's recent activities in Mali.

### 3:00 – 5:00 PM Break Out Sessions

### 7:00 PM Heurigen