Ms. Wright began by stating that she was not a Pollyanna and applauded the effort the Seminar Series’ effort to rethink national security. She was concerned that now in the 13th year of the 21st century, the US seems stuck in the 20th century models and understanding. The US is not looking ahead enough. She went on to describe briefly her Mid East experience:

- Arrived there first on October 6, 1973 – the start of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war
- Reported from the Mid East through 6 wars, plus various revolutions and terrorism attacks
- Was in Beirut for the Marine Barracks bombing – largest loss of American lives since Iwo Jima
- Met and interviewed the founders of Hezbollah as well as Yasser Arafat several times

What’s Happening in the Mid East Today
It is the most dynamic and important story of the early 21st century and one of the four most important turning points in the modern history of the region:
1. Collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I
2. The establishment of Israel after WWII
3. The 1979 Revolution which brought on the first Islamic government
   a. A seismic change for the Islamic world
   b. Clerics had not ruled a government in 14 centuries
4. The Arab Spring Uprising

What is happening today is on par with great changes that have gone on elsewhere in the world:
- Demise of Communism and the Soviet Union
- Collapse of the dictators in Latin America
- End of apartheid in South Africa and end of minority rule

All these instances indicated that the world was generally reaching a point of a common set of standards
- Reflected in but not fulfilled by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- People took the initiative to make changes in their own countries – change did not come from the top down
- The people pressured leaders to accept the inevitable
Such changes play out on two different levels:

- Challenge to autocrats as seen in the demise of the leaders of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen after a combined total of 129 years in power
  - All happened in the last 4 years
- The majority of the population rejected extremism as a way to achieve change
  - 10s of millions came out on the street to protest
  - Protests started out as peaceful, which changed over time to more violent
    - In Syria it took months before protestors took up arms
    - Very different than when a previous Syrian uprising was crushed quickly by the government by killing 25,000 people in a crackdown

New type of martyrdom in the region

- Arab Spring started with a fruit seller in Tunisia over a $7 bribe
  - He had paid it often before but it was a large portion of what he would make in a week
  - Decided not to pay it and government officials confiscated his stock and equipment
  - He was only trying to support his extended family
  - He tried to get back his equipment but was rebuffed by all government agencies
  - In frustration he went to the street outside the governor’s house and set himself on fire
- This was a turning point for Islamists
  - Did not protest by trying to kill foreigners or carry out other violent acts
  - He wanted to shame the government
- Result: within 30 days President Ben Ali, who had ruled for 23 years, had to leave the country
  - Protesters did what Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda had been trying to do for years
- The fruit seller’s story created a model for a new kind of martyrdom in the Mid East inspiring others including a 13-year-old boy in Syria
  - He was arrested for spraying anti-government graffiti on walls
  - This set off street protests that involved his parents and many others
  - The parents lost track of him during a protest
  - Days later his body was returned to the family with obvious signs of torture
  - Bottom line message: If you protest, this is what to expect to happen to your children
  - However, Syrians turned out in the street in greater numbers

Lots of terrible TV pictures related to these protests

- But must step back to look at both the political and cultural changes that are happening
- Cultural changes will actually have the greater impact on the long term future of the region

Factors in Determining What Comes Next

- For the first time the majority of the population in the region is under 30
  - Average age in Syria is 22, in Saudi Arabia it is 26 and in Yemen it is 18
- For the first time the majority of the population is literate
  - May not have finished high school, but do have enough knowledge to know what is happening elsewhere in the world
- Now have the tools of technology to give them access to the world – both learning about it and sending out their messages
  - Social media was very important during the Egyptian uprising
    - One family even named a new daughter Facebook
  - Also now have regional television channels that speak Arabic
• Previously had CNN but it was in English and not available everywhere
• Now over 500 Arabic channels bring more localized information
• Not just news but talk and entertainment shows
• People are beginning to see their own diversity
  • Bottom line: New generation sees that they can have their own views
• These factors won’t change over the next decade but they are rarely noted in daily news coverage of the region

Aspects of the Culture Change – Cultural Trends
Not often seen reflected in reporting from the Mid East

1. **Hip-hop Islam** – the rhythm of resistance in the region
   • Weeks before the fruit-seller set himself on fire, a young Tunisian rapper posted on his Facebook page a song with very angry lyrics of protest against the government
     • More anti-government than any politician could say
     • Started to be sung in the protests over the death of the fruit seller
     • Spread to Egypt and beyond
   • Three Palestinians living in Israel formed a group named DAM
     • They were angry because they did not have a state of their own
     • Their angry rap lyrics offered others an alternative to suicide vests
     • They eventually connected with some Israeli rappers, even preformed together
     • A very new interaction concept
   • In Egypt rap has become the idiom of opposition
   • In Iran rap has a pro-democracy message
     • A 70-year-old cleric opposition candidate distributed 10,000 CDs with such rap
     • This was in a country that banned all music after the Revolution calling it “Western toxification”
   • Rap is found in talent contests and political messages
   • All countries, even Saudi Arabia, have rappers challenging both autocratic governments and extremism

2. **New Muslim Superheroes – The 99**
   • A Kuwaiti psychiatrist wanted to give his 5 sons an alternative to bin Laden as a hero
   • He wrote stories about each of the 99 who had different strengths based on the 99 values of God in Islamic teaching
   • For diversity each comes from a different country – even one is American
   • Half are women; half of those dress like Super Woman while the other half wear hijabs

3. **New Muslim Theater** – trying to reclaim the word jihad from extremists
   • Plays like *Jihad Jones and Kalashnikov Babes* playing in the Mid East and even the US
   • Want to show that jihad is about being a good Muslim, not a terrorist
   • All kinds of plays including romantic comedies such as *Til Jihad Do Us Part*
   • Documentary films made, too, including *Jihad for Love*
     • A series of interviews with young men and women in countries with strong penal codes which are based more on local tradition than on Islam
     • Primarily about those who want to stay loyal to Islam but are gay or Lesbian
   • Effort is to redefine the word jihad (perhaps the most feared/hated word in the world)
     • Go back to its original meaning

4. **New Muslim Comedians** – acting as a tool of counterterrorism
• Young men and women from many places came to America and learned to do stand-up comedy (which is an American tradition)
• They talk about the problems they have with governments as well as problems with ordinary issues such as mothers-in-law
• They return home and run comedy workshops for other young people
• Example: Maz Jobrani – an Iranian-born comedian now living in California
  o Tells a story about how one guy can really mess it up for all the rest
  o Jokes about the lack of logic in the case of the underwear bomber who expected his reward to be 72 virgins in heaven
• Their impact is being felt all across the region and inspiring more
  o A cardiologist is considered the Jon Stewart of Egypt with phony new stories and interviews on his television show
  o This sort of thing could not have happened a decade ago
  o One comedian even calls himself the Jerry Seinfeld of Saudi Arabia
• Bottom line: comedians are encouraging others to make fun of authorities and to act or think in ways they never had done before
  o Makes this one of the most important turning points for the region

5. Progress for girls and young women
• For the first time increases in literacy also include girls and women
• 60% of the university students in Saudi Arabia are now female
• In Iran after the Revolution families thought it was safe to allow their girls to go to school beyond 6th grade which brought on a tremendous increase in literacy
  o Iran was given the highest ranking for increasing girls’ literacy
• But tremendous problems remain
  o Example: women can’t drive in Saudi Arabia
  o Example: 12-year old twin girls had never been allowed outside a 2-room house
    ▪ Father was illiterate and mother was deaf
    ▪ Neighbors finally called in the authorities
    ▪ Lack of stimulation and attention limited their development
    ▪ A 17-year-old made a movie about their coming out of the house, meeting people, learning to play, etc.
      • The Apple won the award for best new director at Cannes
      • Film was shown all over the world in festivals
• There are indications that women have made tremendous progress throughout region
  o But there is also a major problem in country where a father can lock up his daughters even after such exposure
  o See many young women in the Arab Spring protests now, organizing many of the things that only men would have done in the past

Ten Truths in the Region Two Years after the Start of the Uprising
1. 120 million people have been recently empowered or are struggling for empowerment
• One-third of the Arab world’s population
• But people are also afraid of this new balance of power
  o Have had 2 years of uncertainty that is taking a toll on the population
  o Old order is gone but a new one is not yet established
  o Only Egypt has a constitution of any sort
• There is always a period of upheaval after revolutionary changes – Example: Iran
Khomeini returned to Iran and intended to remain in the holy city of Qom
- Clerics were not to have a role in government
- Leaders were chosen from technocrats
But conflict continued within the country as it tried to write a constitution
- 4,000 amendments were made to the 62 versions that were proposed
When large numbers of people were assassinated or killed in protests, Khomeini stepped in again
- Factions were too fragmented to come together
- Called for the election of 12 experts to write the constitution
- Secular supporters boycotted the election so only clerics were elected
Clerics wrote a constitution that institutionalized the role of clerics in the government
- Each government segment was to be mirrored with an Islamic body
- The secular side was supposed to be stronger
Now under debate is whether the Islamic Republic of Iran is to be more Islamic or more of republic
- Bottom line: the US must recognize that a democratic election is not the final step in stabilizing a new government
  - US took 13 years to come up with a workable constitution after its revolution
  - Struggle in the Arab Spring countries now is often mean-spirited and violent in a law of the jungle atmosphere
  - Potential problem: more people becoming disillusioned could lead to a drop in voter turn-out
  - People don’t know who to vote for or why they are voting

People are generally worse off now than they were before the Arab Spring
- New fruit vendors in Tunisia say that they have more freedom but fewer jobs
- Must recognize that the protests were really striving for economic or social justice and protestors were not that interested in being able to vote in a democratic election
  - What people really want is economic stability
- To avoid uprisings Saudi Arabia’s leaders have dumped $136B into the economy (for housing, sports clubs, etc.) to keep the populace content
  - That was 30% of their GDP while the US stimulus package was only 8%
  - Even the very wealthy Saudi Arabia can’t continue at such a rate

There has been almost too much proliferation of democracy
- Libya had 80 seats in its parliament designated for parties – 130 parties vied for them
  - 120 seats were designated for individual candidates – 3,000 ran for them
- Tunisia has 60 parties
- Bottom line: all this factionalization is unmanageable
  - There is not enough sense of a common interest or a common good
  - There is a need for a greater sense of responsibility
  - It’s too much about “me, me, me” and my desires, my needs

There is an Islamic spectrum of thought, not just a dichotomy of secular versus Islamic
- Lots of different tendencies across the region and within countries
- Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood appeared to have 4 identifiable factions
  - Locals said that there were at least 20
  - One husband and wife couple were both running but even they did not share the same views
Bottom line: US must recognize that there is diversity and a plethora of views in what is usually seen as a monolith

Of great concern is the Salafi faction – new ultra-conservatives
  Believed much as Osama bin Laden did: need to build in the 21st century a pure Islamic society based on the first three generations of the Muslim founders
  They have been largely apolitical for 14 centuries until the Egyptian uprising
  - The Muslim Brotherhood has been gradually trying to be a political force for 84 years
  - The Salafis coming out of nowhere politically-speaking won 25% of the vote with no political organization 18 months previous

There are factions within the Salafis, too
  - The majority are willing to work inside the system
  - But some have been implicated on the attacks on US facilities in the region

Given their views, must hope that Salafis don’t make any further inroads politically

5. Security deterioration
  - Libya: 300 militia with 500,00 men – out of 6.5 million population
    - There has been an effort to bring them under some form of government control
    - Some only pretend to cooperate with authorities
    - Estimate: 4-5 guns per person (including children) in country
    - None want to give up their arms since they fear the other groups
    - It looks as though despite having a great deal of oil and a small population, Libya may not make it as a country
  - Egypt: some of the armed militias are really only riff-raff with no political interests
  - Syria: somewhere between 200 and 2000 militias – from different tribes/clans/neighborhoods

6. Clans are reemerging as political forces to fill up the vacuums
  - Clans cut across borders
  - US needs to learn who they are and what their interests are
  - As an independent observer of Jordan’s recent election as a transitioning democracy (which might be a sham), could see that people often voted along tribal lines

7. Demographics as a combustible element
  - The young want something for themselves and want it quickly
  - No country can afford to give them what they want
  - In some places like Saudi Arabia, there is actually a 3-4 generation gap between the majority of the people and the leaders
    - Average age is 26 but the king is around 90 with heirs apparent nearly as old
  - Despite all the oil money, unemployment among the young is about 39%
    - Time magazine will be doing an article on poverty in Saudi Arabia soon

8. Corruption
  - Libya: people are saying that they used to have one Gadafi but now there are 6.5 million
  - Everywhere: People try to protect their interests – either their own or that of their immediate social groups
  - Corruption happening even with the aid going into Syria – not getting to those in need

9. Women – despite all the changes, they are not fairing very well in the transition
  - This is not uncommon in democratization
    - Eastern Europe: women were part of the proletariat
After the fall of communism they tended to lose their protections and a significant percent of the political seats set aside for them
- Also have to deal with loss of physical security and the rise of crimes against women including sexual assault and rape
- Egypt: women are losing the quotas that they had in parliament –10% of seats reserved for women under Mubarak

10. Possible need to rethink the map of the Mid East
- May be the most contentious concept of the 10
- May need to rethink the Sykes–Picot Agreement that set the borders in the Mid East after the fall of the Ottoman Empire creating the modern countries
  - Could be a change the borders set out by Sykes–Picot
  - Could also mean more decentralization of authority or soft partition
- Had thought that Iraq would stay the same after the war there but reconsidering that given what is going on in Syria
  - Kurds in Syria are aligning with the Kurds in Iraq and maybe Turkey
  - Sunnis in Iraq have a tribal overlay with Sunnis in Syria – closer than connections to the Iraqi Shiites
- Bottom line: US needs to be open to such changes – not just think about the borders we now know
  - Syria could unravel a lot of things – because it is so strategically central and also highly fragmented ethnically and politically

Conclusion
Ms Wright noted that she had covered change for the last 40 years
- Having reported from Soweto immediately after apartheid, she went back years later to find that people are now worse off than before apartheid.
  - 20 of 25 million South Africans live in poverty
  - Average life expectancy has dropped from 60 to 41 years – not all related to AIDS, a lot have to do with government policies
- Russia, a generation after the fall of communism, is still run by an ex-KGB Communist official
- US may be expecting more of the Mid East than what has developed in other places in recent years of transitions
- The movie Lincoln demonstrates that it took the US 60 years to go from the 12th to the 13th amendment after a very bloody war
  - And a century more to get to the Voting Rights Act which is again undergoing Supreme Court scrutiny
- Bottom line: Change doesn’t happen in a straight trajectory, nor quickly and it will have many diversions

Expectation: a very turbulent decade is coming – more than the last decade
- But, more optimistic about the long term
- We are in a period of tremendous change – redefining the world order to a greater extent than in any time since the establishment of the nation state 500 years ago
QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION
Re: Mid East Challenges for the US

- Handling Iran will be a big challenge
- Syria is a pressing problem and there seems to be a mood change underway
  - US is still not likely to send in major equipment to help the opposition
- US must determine what to do with those countries in transition
  - There won’t be a Marshall Plan to help them out
  - Europe already had the skills needed to make a Marshall Plan work, the Mid East for the most part does not
- Arab-Israeli conflict
  - Israel actually knows the Palestinians better than its adversaries in any other country and could talk to them
  - US should be willing to be creative about these relations
- Egypt needs a lot of attention – it contains 25% of the population of the Arab world
  - Small and medium enterprises need help so that they can create jobs
  - Europeans will provide most of the help because of their proximity and since they would feel the greater impact of Egyptian migration
- Before he was killed Ambassador Chris Stevens was working on a project that would bring 5,000 Libyans to the US for short-term training in government operations and organization
  - They would also be exposed to how democracies should work
  - They were to go back and train others
  - The project died with Ambassador Stevens
- Overall, it looks like the US is not doing enough rethinking about the Mid East
- Iran: what do we really know about what they are doing?
  - There have always been suspicions about what Iran wants to do with nuclear energy
  - They were exposed to chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war
    - Have found that low-dose exposure has doubled the death rate over time to about 100,000 known victims
    - War ended in 1988 but people were still dying in 2002
    - Understandable that Iran would want nuclear weapons as a deterrent
  - There are things that the US can do
    - Iran probably doesn’t want a confrontation with the US
    - US needs to understand the extreme chauvinism of the Iranians
      - Iranians are like Texans but with 5,000 years of history behind them
      - So Iranians don’t want to be dictated to
    - Iran does have an ancient history of tolerance beginning with the Cyrus Cylinder (now at the Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian)
      - Ancient clay document concerns tolerance of religions, etc.
      - Thomas Jefferson recommended it as a starting point when considering tolerance issues
    - Americans don’t know about Cyrus but Iranians feel they have directly inherited his legacy – not to say that the leaders of Iran are good guys
  - Bottom line: Iran is not as straight forward an issue as some journalists make it out to be
Re: Syria
The situation is complicated and the US doesn’t want to make the same mistakes it did in Iraq
- Political issues
  - The Syrian National Coalition looks a lot like the Iraqi Congress, which is worrisome
    - It may not well represent what is happening in the country
    - They do have an opposition force that for two years has been both taking control of and administering territory
  - Recommendation: See the recent Time magazine piece on how Islamists are ruling the city of Raqqa
  - Revolutionary Councils have developed – not totally Islamists – acting as local coordinating committees
    - Appear to be more legitimate than the Syrian National Coalition
  - The Syrian National Coalition is in total disarray
    - Chairman has resigned
    - New prime minister (from Texas) was rejected by the Free Syrian Army
      - Often hear complaints about exiles returning, trying to take over
      - They know what happened in Iraq
    - Syrian Free Army merely coordinates the great number of militias who don’t take orders from them
  - Ms Wright feels haunted by the Afghanistan situation where the Saudis paid for weapons given to the Mujahedeen
    - US is still buying back parts of Stinger missiles given away in 1980s
    - There are ways to give Stingers a shelf-life but they still can be sold to others
    - Israel’s proximity is another complicating factor
  - Very nervous about the US arming the Syrian opposition but it should be doing more
    - Given $60M in humanitarian assistance
    - Given $155M in refugee assistance to Jordan where the problem is tremendous since the refugees make up about 10% of the population
  - There are between 2 and 4 million internally displaced Syrians moving the country toward a humanitarian catastrophe
    - More aid is needed even though much of what has been sent was ripped off

Re: Problems of New Democracies
- Beware of models like Venezuela’s when it became the first democracy in Latin America in 1952
  - They democratically elected a man who tried to stage a military coup
  - When people start worrying about their future, or their security or jobs, or the safety of their families, they tend to turn to strong leadership and discipline
- If Egypt gets much worse, it could turn to a military dictatorship like Turkey did in its early years
- Concerned that the US may pay dearly down the road in failed states, etc., if these transitioning countries don’t get the support they need early on
  - Must think bigger during these transition phases

Re: Recommendation for US Actions in the Iran
- Must hope that the US does not engage in a military conflict in Iran
  - Would make wars in Iraq and Afghanistan pale in comparison
- Problem: don’t know what could be coming next
- US has proven that it doesn’t know how to build nations even though it always means to do well
US is not sure what we want Iran to be next – except that they should not have nuclear weapons
  - But can’t bomb knowledge away
  - However, Iran does need nuclear energy since it will be running out of oil by 2025
- Any US intervention might cause the people to rally around the flag
  - Happened in 1980 when Iraq invaded Iran as the Iranian revolution was running out of steam
- Iran is one of the few countries in the region where its populace actually likes Americans and American culture
  - Can even discuss American political situations
- US primarily wants a moderation of Iranian views and actions

Re: Palestinian-Israeli Problem and Arab World Relations
- Palestinian-Israeli situation
  - Problem should have been settled long ago
  - The two sides know each other the best throughout the region
  - The outlines of the solution are known by everyone
    - Whether the two-state solution or an alternative
    - Need political will to get there
  - If this problem gets solved, many other issues will fall into place
  - President Obama could do more in foreign relations since he is in his second term
    - He is likely to do more in his last two years when he will be a lame duck
    - This pattern has been repeated in a number of presidencies
  - Turkey could play a major part especially since it is a rising economic power – could be the 8th largest economy
    - How they deal with Israel is important
    - Islamic world can say that even Turkey, a member of NATO, is no longer dealing with Israel
  - Bottom line: the atmosphere has changed somewhat and more could be done to solve these problems
- Saudi Arabia
  - History will wonder what the US was thinking in its support of such a strange place
  - One problem of many: there are now over 60,000 princes
    - The founder had 43 sons and even more daughters
    - Now on the third generation, the numbers are enormous
    - Almost need to form a new royal family
  - There is less potential for turmoil in Saudi Arabia than elsewhere
  - To the rest of the region the US look like a hypocrite
    - US appears to support democracy throughout the region, but not where oil is involved
    - US ignores the fact that Saudi Arabia has a terrible human rights record
- Jordan
  - Worrisome situation
  - Sometimes it is cited as the model alternative to Syria
    - But its parliament has no power and has continually changing prime ministers
    - So the people believe they can do anything
  - Votes have become a commodity – people are willing to “sell” their votes if they can get something tangible for it since it makes no difference who they vote for
- It doesn’t matter who gets into office anyway
  - In the information age there is no way to have a gradual reform
  - Jordan is alright for now but it does have its problems

Re: Turkey and Israel
- Israel’s recent apology to Turkey on the killing of some of its citizens in an attack on a ship by Israel is a start in the right direction but it isn’t enough
- Turkey is growing in importance in the region
  - Already has a big impact on Iran and Lebanon
- Turkey is happy not to be in the EU now given the Euro’s financial situation
  - Prime Minister Erdoğan has been very savvy economically
- Turkey could play a role in Libya’s effort to rebuild the country
  - Could include giving security jobs to the militias

Re: Jordan
- The king is a bit naïve about his own country and may have too Western an outlook
- The king first used the term Shiite Crescent in an interview with Ms Wright
  - Described an arc on influence that went from Iran, through Iraq, into the Alawite regions of Syria and into Lebanon
  - His office called afterwards to say that the term should not be used
  - He also talked about a Shiite Crescent but he really meant a Salafi Crescent
    - Language gets in the way here
    - Such a crescent would challenge him, too
- Muslim Brotherhood is the largest opposition party in Jordan
- Since the King spent so much of his youth in the West, he is not as well-connected to his people as his father was
  - He may say things that are clumsy or in short-hand or are controversial in some circles

Re: Pakistan
- In the Bush Administration Pakistan got mixed in with the Mid East but it is a whole different part of the world in South Asia
  - It does have a longer history of both democracy and revolutions
- President Clinton called it the most dangerous country in the world because of its nuclear capability and instability
  - May not be the most dangerous but it is of concern
- SecState Kerry apparently met with the head of Pakistan’s military security in Jordan
  - Did not go to Pakistan to avoid other issues such as drones
  - Those issues and the shift in US strategy could cause another type of backlash
- Discussing Pakistan would require another whole discussion