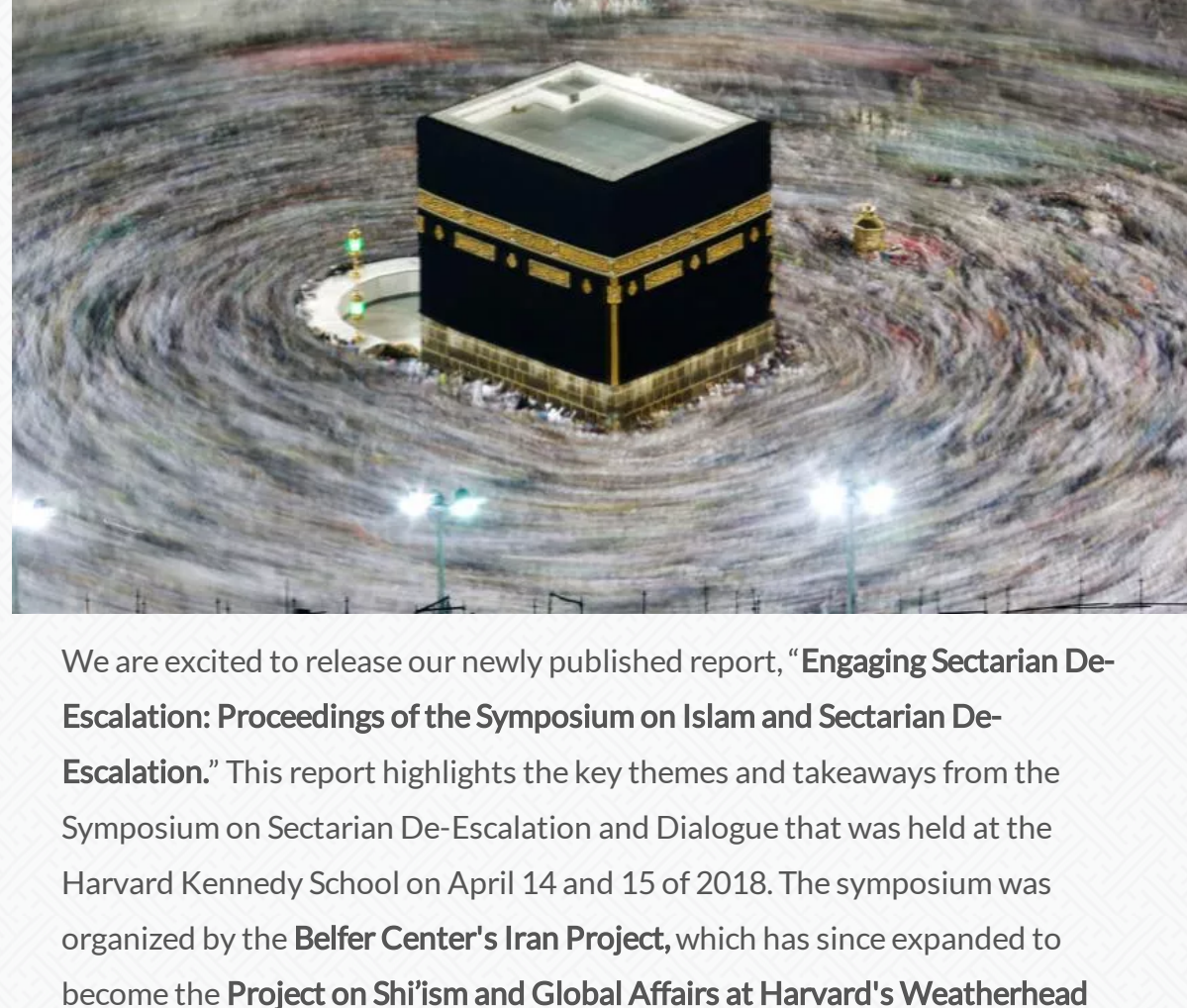


Engaging Sectarian De-Escalation

Proceedings of the Symposium on Islam and Sectarian De-Escalation at Harvard Kennedy School



We are excited to release our newly published report, "Engaging Sectarian De-Escalation: Proceedings of the Symposium on Islam and Sectarian De-Escalation." This report highlights the key themes and takeaways from the Symposium on Sectarian De-Escalation and Dialogue that was held at the Harvard Kennedy School on April 14 and 15 of 2018. The symposium was organized by the Belfer Center's Iran Project, which has since expanded to become the Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs at Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

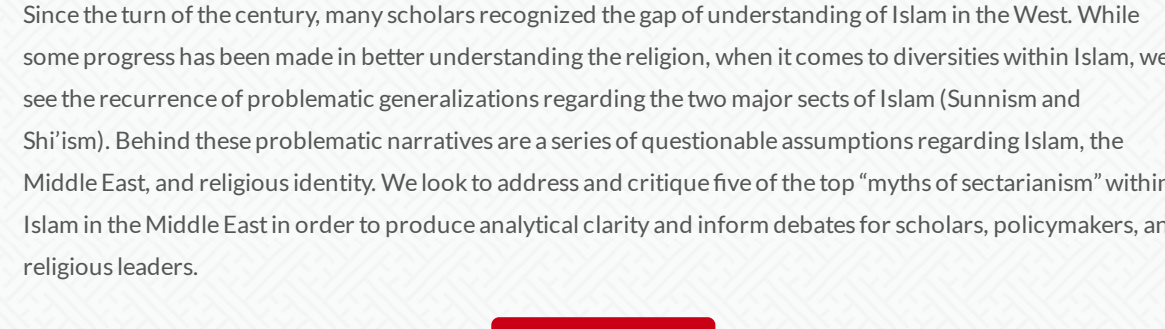
As part of a larger project on sectarian de-escalation, the symposium gathered key imams, scholars, policymakers and diplomats to cast doubt on simplified sectarian narratives, and to explore interlinked factors and different pathways in the pursuit of reducing the grounds of conflict. By tracing the different political, theological and socio-cultural roots of different narratives, the speakers provided nuance to our conception of sectarianism. This report highlights the key themes that emerged from the symposium, namely the importance of geopolitical literacy; the importance of religious and historical literacy and precedents for peace and diversity; and, recalling vehicles of culture and literature.

[View the Report](#)

Featured Content

Five Myths of Sectarianism

Payam Mohseni and Mohammad Sagha



Since the turn of the century, many scholars recognized the gap of understanding of Islam in the West. While some progress has been made in better understanding the religion, when it comes to diversities within Islam, we see the recurrence of problematic generalizations regarding the two major sects of Islam (Sunnism and Shi'ism). Behind these problematic narratives are a series of questionable assumptions regarding Islam, the Middle East, and religious identity. We look to address and critique five of the top "myths of sectarianism" within Islam in the Middle East in order to produce analytical clarity and inform debates for scholars, policymakers, and religious leaders.

[Read More](#)

Does Theology Matter?

Mehdi Hasan, Jonathan Brown, Mustafa Akyol, Ibrahim Kazerooni, Elizabeth Prodromou



In this discussion, panelists reflect on the salience of theology in debates on sectarianism in the Middle East. While some causal impact is afforded to theological discrepancies between Sunni and Shi'a interpretations of Islam as a reason for sectarian tensions, our panelists recognize the primary role of political competition for power in amplifying, manipulating, or distorting supposedly inherent – but definitely surmountable – doctrinal qualms between the sects; qualms which would not be destructive for inter-sectarian relations in and of themselves.

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Executive Summary

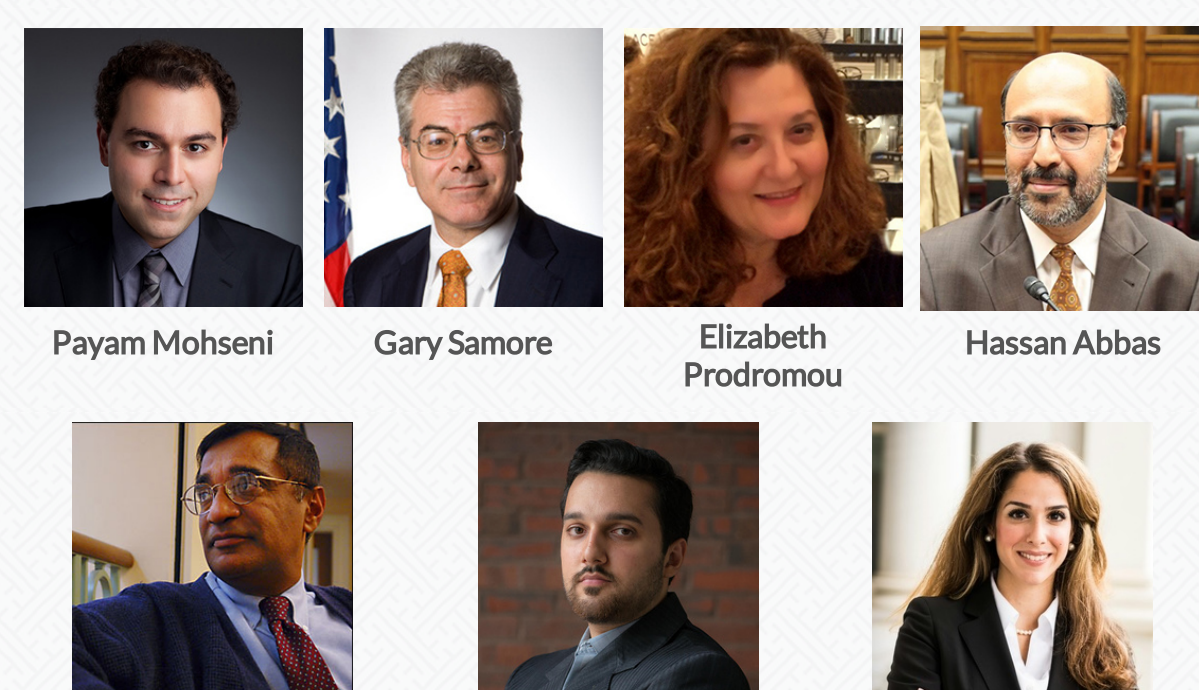


In mainstream analysis of the Middle East, the sectarian bifurcation dividing the world of Islam into a political conflict between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims is ubiquitous. The war in Yemen, the civil strife in Syria, and the devastation in Iraq and beyond are all framed as a geopolitical contest between a "Shi'a Crescent" led by Iran and Sunni groups in the region supported mainly by Saudi Arabia.

Although sectarian delineations between Shi'as and Sunnis may serve as convenient and easy explanations to understand the religious unrest and political turmoil afflicting the Middle East, the purpose of the international Symposium is to cast doubt upon these neat dichotomies. By "sectarian deescalation", we refer to the theoretical and practical means of re-conceptualizing sectarianism – a phenomenon in which individuals in the Muslim World and in particular the Middle East are increasingly affiliating along sectarian or denominational religious identities.

As part of a larger project on sectarian deescalation aimed at decreasing the exclusionary and violent aspects of sectarianism, we explore interlinked factors and different pathways in the pursuit of reducing the grounds of conflict. Scholars, journalists, and community leaders have participated in this symposium to disentangle multiple competing narratives and causal factors behind the rise of sectarian violence in the Middle East. Our contributors have attempted to trace the political, theological, and socio-cultural genealogies of competing narratives so as to nuance our conception of sectarianism and pave a tenable path towards greater unity and conflict de-escalation.

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MEET THE SPEAKERS

From our organizers to our guest speakers, we are thankful for everyone who helped make the Symposium a success

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Co-Sponsors

This symposium was co-sponsored by the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program, the Harvard Asia Center, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, and the South Asia Institute.

Event Announcement

YEMEN CONFLICT

NOVEMBER 2, 2019 SCIENCE CENTER B
3:00-5:00PM

Harvard Professor
Professor Steven Canton

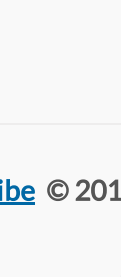
MSF Professional
Shinjiro Murata

Yemeni-International Student
Mohammed Alasharo

Join Harvard Undergraduate UNICEF Club in welcoming 3 amazing panelists, who will speak about the effects the Yemen Conflict has had on the citizens of the country

The [War in Yemen](#) has been ongoing for five years, ravaging the land and its people. The conflict has created both the largest cholera epidemic in modern history and the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The country of 28 million people is filled with families struggling to find food to eat and clean water to drink. The best way to learn about the ongoing conflict and its effects on the citizens is to talk about. Join the Harvard Undergraduate UNICEF Club, in co-sponsorship with the Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs, for a panel discussion on the humanitarian cost of war in Yemen. Hear from experts in various professions and fields of study, as well as people who have experienced the disastrous war first hand. The panel discussion will happen this Saturday, 11/02, in Science Center B from 3 pm to 5 pm.

[Find Out More](#)



PROJECT ON SHI'ISM & GLOBAL AFFAIRS

