Amb. Dennis Ross is the William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He is also a Distinguished Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service. He was the Director of Policy Planning in the State Department under George H. W. Bush, was Bill Clinton’s Middle East Peace Envoy, and served as Special Assistant to President Barack Obama.

Jeffrey Plevan (z”l) graduated from the University of Arizona in 2000. The Plevan family endowed this lectureship in Jeffrey’s memory to promote his values and interests on our campus and in our community. May his memory always be a blessing.
From the Director

Welcome to the first Spring Edition of the Arizona Center for Judaic Studies Newsletter. We are issuing this Spring update for two reasons. First of all, we hope this compact edition will provide an informative and useful update on our activities so far this year. Inside you will read about our courses, campus and community lectures, and some of our faculty members’ recent activities. Second, we offer this as an expression of our thanks for your continued support of the Center’s students, faculty and staff.

The Center continues to have an impact in the lives of many people and programs locally, regionally, nationally and around the world. I feel terribly honored to have led the Center for the past sixteen years. I am amazed at how far we’ve come, how broad is our impact, and how bright our future now looks. Again, all that is made possible by your continued support. So, I hope you enjoy this brief update on the success you have made possible.

Appreciatively as always,

Ed Wright, Director
The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies held its inaugural Modern Israel Symposium on December 6-7, 2015. The two-day event at The University of Arizona featured several renowned scholars from around the world and attracted 145 attendees.

The theme of the first annual symposium was “Israel’s Place in the Changing Middle East.” The speakers addressed the vexing and complex political, economic and military issues that Israel currently faces in the region.

The opening day of the symposium featured a presentation on the two-state solution of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two speakers for this substantial topic were Dr. Khalil Shikaki, Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, and Professor Shai Feldman, Director of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University. Shikaki and Feldman offered their insights on the challenges to the continued viability of the two-state solution among Palestinians and Israelis.

Professor Ami Pedahzur, Director of the Institute of the Israel Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, offered a thought provoking presentation on the emergence of Jewish special operations forces before the creation of the State of Israel. The University of Arizona’s own Asher Susser, Andrea and David Stein Professor of Modern Israel Studies in The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies, offered a rigorous critique and call for action by Israel’s leaders regarding the country’s continued involvements in the West Bank and their need to address Israel’s internal social fissures and international reputation. His impassioned, call for action was well received by the audience.

The second day of the conference began with an insightful lecture on Israel’s energy reserves and their potential impact on the region and on Israel’s economy and infrastructure by Simon Henderson, the Baker Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy. Professor Yael Aronoff, the Chair of Israel Studies at Michigan State University, then carefully detailed the strategic, diplomatic,
and moral dilemmas that Israel faces as it battles non-state actors in asymmetric wars. **Professor David Menashri** of Tel Aviv University and the Alliance Center for Iranian Studies addressed the complex history and current state of interactions between Iran, Israel and the United States.

The two-day symposium concluded with a dinner reception at the Arizona Memorial Student Union that attracted over 200 guests to hear the keynote address by **Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich**, former Israeli Ambassador to the United States, past-President of Tel Aviv University, and now the President of the Israel Institute in Washington, DC. Ambassador Rabinovich’s lecture focused on Syria and its role in regional and international politics. “The point I would like to make very strongly is that you cannot in fact just speak about the Syrian crisis,” Rabinovich said. “The Syrian crisis cannot be separated from the Iraqi crisis.” Rabinovich then offered his own analysis of Syria and when its issues could be resolved. He noted that Syria’s current struggles are leaving an impact on a number of countries including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and other regions of Europe due to fleeing Syrian refugees. “What we need to see is American leadership,” Rabinovich said. “This may not be coming in an election year with one year left for President Obama … we may have to struggle through the next year and it may have to wait for a new American president with a different outlook on the issues for America to take the role that only America can play …. It’s not something that the world can afford to ignore or to look the other way. The world needs to look after the problem.”

Ambassador Rabinovich’s hour-long lecture drew a standing ovation from the audience and concluded what was clearly a very successful inaugural Modern Israel Conference for The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies.

**Professor J. Edward Wright**, Director of The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies thanked the symposium’s many attendees, the scholars who offered their insightful lectures, and the donors whose generous support made the symposium possible. He also gave special recognition to Prof. Asher Susser, who conceived the idea of the symposium and its theme. “As we were talking about it, we realized there is a regional and a global component to this that we explored the past two days, and there is also a domestic component,” Wright said. “This is part of a process of bringing Israel Studies front and center here on campus and in the community.” Wright then revealed the theme for next year’s symposium: “Israel’s Changing Society and Politics.” The symposium is tentatively scheduled for December 4-5, 2016.

If you missed the symposium and would like to watch videos of the lectures, you can find them all on The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies website, as well as on our official YouTube channel and Facebook pages.
Hannah Gaber

As a Judaic Studies Graduate Certificate recipient, and dual master’s candidate in the Journalism and Middle Eastern and North African Studies programs, the Judaic Studies program has been central to my experience at the University of Arizona.

I began taking Hebrew courses my second year as a graduate student, and remained in the program until leaving for Oman last year. Through my Hebrew study, I received a FLAS fellowship for academic year 2014-15, and was awarded a Jen Hoffman scholarship from the Arizona Center for Judaic Studies, both of which were instrumental in helping me fund my education. I could not be more deeply grateful for the support from the Center for Judaic Studies through the years, which has come in so many more forms than funding. The caring mentorship of Anat Maimon, head of the Hebrew program, the warmth, close monitoring and example of academic integrity set by Professor Beth Alpert Nakhai, and the leadership and friendship provided by Director J. Edward Wright have all been formative in my experience at the Center, and the University at large. I have just returned from six months in Oman to film my final master’s project, a video documentary about Omani youth and the changing culture there. I will graduate in May and I have been granted a Pulliam Fellowship to the Arizona Republic in Phoenix beginning summer 2016. I will never forget the connections I made at the Arizona Center for Judaic Studies, and have no doubt the relationships formed there will last a lifetime.

Renée Polsky Silver

Renée Polsky Silver, alumna of the University of Arizona, has found herself very busy after graduating with a degree in Judaic Studies and Psychology. After her time spent in Tucson, Silverman earned her Master’s Degree in Social Work and Child Development at Loyola University Chicago. Renée is now working as a school therapist for children in elementary school. When looking back at her time spent in the Judaic Studies program, she recalls the influence that Associate Professor, Beth Alpert Nakhai, had on her. “Beth is my memory,” Silverman said. Renée loved learning from Professor Nakhai because of the passion in her teaching. Renée still feels the impact of her time spent working toward her Judaic Studies degree. She says that The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies and the University of Arizona Hillel Foundation created a culture and environment that has stayed with her since graduation.
Guy Shomroni and Yaniv Abraham, dance artists from Tel Aviv, will take the audience on an exploration of Gaga Dance, and its cultural impact on the field. As dancers with Israel’s internationally acclaimed company, Batsheva, Guy and Yaniv have worked closely with the company’s current director, Ohad Naharin, and have staged his choreography all over the world. In addition to preserving Naharin’s original creations, Guy and Yaniv are teachers of Gaga, a movement language and pedagogy developed by Naharin. Attendees to the evening will get to see excerpts of Naharin’s choreography, performed by the UA Dance Ensemble, will see film excerpts about Gaga, and will interact with Yaniv and Guy via lecture-demonstration and Q&A.

About the Artists
Yaniv Abraham and Guy Shomroni will set works by Ohad Naharin, artistic director of the renowned Batsheva Dance Company, for students in the UofA School of Dance. Abraham was a performer and soloist with Batsheva from 2003-11. A recipient of the Israel Ministry of Culture and Education Grant for Excellence and Achievement (1999-01), he performed at major dance venues around the world with Batsheva for many years. Shomroni danced with Batsheva for more than ten years and continues to work with Naharin on production. At the same time, based in Israel but teaching worldwide, he has become one of the premiere teachers of Gaga, the movement language developed by Naharin. Recently, he and Abraham have been choreographing together and their work has been performed in Israel and Russia. Their presence at the UofA is made possible by the support of the Schusterman Foundation and Linda and Ken Robin.
Jeffrey Plevan Memorial Lecture

Ambassador Dennis Ross

The Past, Present, & Future of U.S.-Israel Relations

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