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Re-Ordering the Middle East?
Peoples, Borders and States in Flux

by Andrea Dessì

New-Med
research network

ABSTRACT

This report summarises the proceedings of an international conference convened within the framework of the New-Med Research Network in Amman on 18 July 2016 and organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies (CSS). Invited experts addressed the question of borders, ethnicities and confessions in the MENA from World War I to the present. Participants explored whether the precedent set by the decisions taken during and after the Great War can ultimately be linked to the present unravelling of state authority in the region. Session two moved to address the phenomenon of power vacuums and state fragility, the emergence of non-state and quasi-state actors and their impact on the intensification of inter-state rivalry and conflict. The final panel focused on the relationship between socio-economic, political and military developments in the Middle East, including the role of foreign powers and sub-national, ethnic and religious minorities.

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Re-Ordering the Middle East?
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Introduction

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) organised an international conference in Amman on 18 July 2016. Invited experts were called to comment on the crisis of the Middle Eastern state, the role of ethnicity and sectarianism, foreign intervention and the recent upsurge in inter-state and intra-state conflict across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Convened in the framework of the New-Med Research Network, the event was made possible through the support of various governmental and non-governmental entities including Compagnia San Paolo (Turin), the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the OSCE Secretariat and the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF).

Launched in 2014, the New-Med Research Network aims to facilitate the development of a network of analysts, practitioners and research centres from both sides of the Mediterranean to foster dialogue on contemporary security trends in the Mediterranean region. Within this framework, the Network also aims to create formal avenues for cooperation in support of the objectives of the OSCE-Mediterranean Partnership. Since its inception, the New-Med Network has organised eleven international conferences and workshops and published twenty-eight research papers on various themes surrounding Euro-Med relations.[1] Most

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[1] For more information on the New-Med Research Network, including access to published papers and past events, please visit the IAI website, http://www.iai.it/en/node/2004. See also the OSCE website: http://www.osce.org/networks/newmedtrackII. Past conference reports include: Andrea Dessì, "A Multilateral Approach to Ungoverned Spaces: Libya and Beyond", in *Documenti IAI*, No. 15|10 (June 2015), http://www.iai.it/en/node/4262; Andrea Dessì, "Radicalisation in the Mediterranean Region: Old and New Drivers", in *Documenti IAI*, No. 15|27 (December 2015), http://

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. Report of the international conference "Re-Ordering the Middle East? Peoples, Borders and States in Flux" held in Amman on 18 July 2016 and jointly organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) within the framework of the New-Med Research Network.

recently, the Network has produced an in-depth report and an edited volume containing a collection of studies on the current refugee and migration crisis in the Mediterranean.[2]

Participants at the Amman conference included local media representatives and academics, researchers and diplomatic practitioners from Lebanon, Jordan, France, Egypt, Belgium, Turkey, Iraq, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. Organised to coincide with the centenary of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement, the one-day conference focused on the causes and implications of the fraying state system in the Middle East and was structured around an introductory keynote address and three panel sessions.

Introductory remarks were delivered by **Azmi Mahafdah**, president of the University of Jordan in Amman, who welcomed participants and provided an overview of the overlapping and multi-dimensional challenges facing the region. In highlighting how the question of refugees remains the most urgent challenge today, the speaker also pointed to the absence of democracy as reflective of a deeper failure of governance in the Middle East. Geopolitical rivalry and competition between states and non-state actors, repeated foreign interventions, the persistence of frozen yet destabilising disputes such that in Palestine were all mentioned as major challenges that have affected the development and consolidation of the regional state system over the past century.

From left to right: Ettore Greco, Azmi Mahafdah, Musa Shteiwi

Musa Shteiwi, Director of the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan, joined his colleague in calling on world powers to redouble their efforts to support regional countries that are bearing the brunt of the Syrian refugee crisis. Noting how 6 million Syrians have been displaced since the conflict began in 2011, Shteiwi emphasised that refugees today account for almost 30 per cent of the populations of host countries.[3] Five years since the Arab uprisings began, the regional order is fraying under the combined pressure of military conflicts, extremism and the emergence of new groups and actors that aspire for a different political order in the region. The breakdown of trade routes, tourism and inter-

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www.iai.it/en/node/5747.

[2] Paola Monzini, Nourhan Abdel Aziz and Ferruccio Pastore, *The Changing Dynamics of Cross-Border Human Smuggling and Trafficking in the Mediterranean*, Rome, IAI, October 2015, http://www.iai.it/en/node/5522; Lorenzo Kamel (ed.), *Changing Migration Patterns in the Mediterranean*, Rome, Nuova Cultura, November 2015 (IAI Research Papers 22), http://www.iai.it/en/node/5702.

[3] Dana Al Emam, "New Middle East being re-shaped – analysts", in *The Jordan Times*, 18 July 2016, https://shar.es/1Z2m6S.

regional cooperation were also highlighted as a detrimental by-product of current challenges. Many of these trends, including those related to extremism and violence, are not limited to the Middle East however and are also detectable at the international level in various forms and manifestations. Taken as a whole, these developments have led to a recent surge interest on the sustainability of the current Middle East state-system that partially grew

From left to right: Ettore Greco, Azmi Mahafdah, Musa Shteiwi

out of the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. While the redrawing of borders was described as unthinkable only a few years ago, Shteiwi noted how unprecedented debates are today being held about this topic, both in the region and further afield.

Ettore Greco, Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), ended the introductory session by praising the multi-disciplinary nature of the New-Med Research Network and its efforts to involve regional and international experts in a balanced dialogue on the future of the Mediterranean. As a communal space with a shared history based on the cross fertilisation of ideas and people, the Mediterranean continues to be a prime area of international significance. The New-Med Network has addressed numerous of the most pressing challenges from both a historical and contemporary standpoint, combining academic and policy-oriented prescriptions with an effort to move away from Eurocentric approaches to these issues. From migration and the refugee crisis, to state resilience and sustainability, radicalisation and foreign fighters, these challenges necessitate communal and multilateral responses. Contemporary developments demonstrate the degree to which the MENA region is experiencing profound transformations in the social, political, economic and military spheres. These developments are already having far reaching implications for the international system, from Europe, to Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. Enhanced regional and international cooperation is therefore necessary to address these challenges, in an effort to put the Middle East and the broader Mediterranean on a more sustainable path for the future.

Keynote Speech

The conference began with a keynote speech by **Shibley Telhami**, Anwar Sadat professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and a non-resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC. Speaking about the recent upsurge of interest in the Sykes-Picot agreement, Telhami challenged the notion that state fragility, sectarianism and conflict in the Middle East can be traced back millennia to early divisions within the Muslim faith or that the drawing of colonial borders a century ago sowed the seeds of the

current crises. More recent drivers can be found to explain these developments, pointing in particular to the long history of foreign meddling and interventions. Noting that the Middle East as been the most penetrated and contested region in the world, Telhami emphasised that sectarianism and ethnic tensions are the *outcome* of declining state capacity and fraying state-society relations, not its underlining cause. Identities are created over time, said the speaker, explicitly noting how the

Shibley Telhami

borders of Jordan were themselves "invented" and yet remain largely accepted by its population and the broader region. The current turmoil is not a result of ethnic or the multi-confessional nature of certain states, but rather a result of the growing geostrategic rivalry and competition between regional actors, exacerbated by repeated foreign interventions since the 1950s and, more fundamentally, the failure of the Arab states to meet the needs and demands of their populace. Popular protests that resulted in a collapse of state authority in countries like Iraq and Syria were not about identity politics or religious diversity. Similarly to what was the case in other countries that experienced protests during the Arab uprisings, the population was not calling for a dismantling of the state. Instead, demands largely focussed on socio-economic and political issues. Calls for political and institutional reform, the renegotiation of new social contracts, a strengthening of the rule of law and new, more direct and legitimate forms of political representation were at the heart of these Arab protest movements.

Citing a number of public opinion polls conducted over the years on the topic of identity, Telhami noted that a majority of respondents in both Iraq and Lebanon were united in identifying themselves as Iraqis and Lebanese and not on the basis of their ethnic or religious background, whether this be Sunni, Shia, Christian or Kurdish. In the wake of 9/11, increasing numbers of respondents in the Arab world have cited their identity on the basis of Islam or ethnicity. Yet these responses tend to relate more to the way Arabs and Muslims consider their identity *vis-à-vis* the outside world and the West in particular. These are more reflective of contemporary times and the growing popular disillusionment with Western, and particularly US, policy in the region. The US-led military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the close identification between the US and Israel, were cited as primary reasons for this. It is no coincidence, noted the speaker, that those states which have suffered the most from foreign intervention – Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain – have witnessed some of the worst communal violence and civil wars. In particular, Telhami emphasised how the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq was the major underlining driver for the present fragmentation of the region. Globalisation was cited as a second driver for the current weakening of state capacity. The advent of new technologies, from Arab satellite TV channels to the spread of mobile

devises, social networks and the Internet have contributed to raising awareness among Arab populations, breaking the once state-run monopoly on information and contributing to the creation of new popular networks calling for change. In reference to the important impact of new technologies, Telhami referred to the recent coup attempt in Turkey, noting that one of the major reasons for its failure was the army's inability to monopolise the flow of information.

Moving to address US attitudes towards Muslims, Islam and US priorities in the Middle East, Telhami referred to three recent public opinion surveys he conducted in the United States (November 2015; May 2016; June 2016).[4] The last survey was conducted in close vicinity to the attack in Orlando, Florida in mid-June 2016 and aimed to assess how public opinion was impacted by this event. In highlighting how US attitudes towards Muslims and Islam vary significantly on the basis of party affiliation, the data demonstrates that US perceptions towards Muslim people are significantly more favourable compared to attitudes towards Islam as a religion (62 per cent compared to 44 per cent in June 2016). Thus, total favourability ratings on Muslim people increased from 53 per cent in November 2015 to 62 per cent in June this year, while US perceptions on Islam increased from 37 per cent to 44 per cent over the same period. Attitudes shifted significantly according to party affiliation however, with Republican ratings towards Muslim people remaining relatively stable between November (41 per cent) and June (42 per cent) and declining slightly on Islam as a religion (26 per cent to 24 per cent). Favourability ratings towards Muslim people increased among respondents that identified with the Democratic Party (67 per cent to 79 per cent), as did perceptions about Islam as a religion (51 per cent to 64 per cent).

In reporting these finding, Telhami emphasised that the increase in favourability ratings among Democratic Party supporters may be explained in terms of the 2017 US presidential elections. In this respect, the findings might demonstrate the extent to which respondents want to dissociate themselves from the divisive rhetoric coming from a number of Republican candidates, in particular but not limited to the Republican Party nominee, Donald Trump. The results may also be explained in terms of demographic trends and America's growing ethnic, religious and socio-economic diversity. On the whole, the data has confirmed the underlining diversity of American public opinion and the fact that there exists no "single America." Middle Eastern issues, in particular, continue to be among the most contentious and divisive issues in US politics, a divisiveness that is greater compared to that which exists on other important themes such as gun control or abortion.

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[4] See Shibley Telhami, *American Attitudes toward the Middle East: Key Findings*, survey sponsored by the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and presented at The Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution on 11 July 2016, https://sadat.umd. edu/node/813. For a summary of the key findings and the complete power point presentation, see Shibley Telhami, *American attitudes toward Muslims and Islam*, Brookings Institution, 11 July 2016, http://brook.gs/29ZmajZ.

Moving to address the topic of US foreign policy priorities in the context of the upcoming presidential elections, poll data demonstrates that Middle Eastern issues, with the exception of the fight against ISIS (also known as *Daesh* or the Islamic State) and Al-Qaeda, do not figure as priorities for the US populace. When asked which global issue respondents considered a top priority for the next

Conference participants

presidency, the fight against ISIS topped the charts while other Middle Eastern issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, US-Saudi relations, or the civil wars in Yemen and Libya received little attention. Respondents were comparatively more preoccupied by US immigration policy, the trade deficit, North Korea and the rise of China, results that tend to transcend party lines and therefore point to a relative consensus among the US population. Iran was one issue that received comparatively more attention compared to the rest. These results led Telhami to speculate that whoever is elected in November, Middle Eastern issues that are not directly related to the war against terrorism will likely not figure prominently on the agenda of the next administration.

Session I: The Collapse of Authority: Order in the Middle East?

Chaired by **Mustafa Hamarneh**, ex-member of the Jordanian Parliament and former director of CSS in Jordan, speakers in the first session concentrated on the processes of state formation in the Middle East. Particular focus was given to the short- and long-term outcomes of the peace settlements that followed World War I, as speakers explored the various causes and implications of the current crises of state authority in the region.

Rami Khouri, former Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and editor at large for the Lebanese-based newspaper *The Daily Star*, opened the debate by noting that there exists no single, mono-casual driver for the present challenges facing the region. The region has been shaped by a number of cumulative phenomena that have led to a gradual erosion of state legitimacy in the Arab world. In addressing contemporary developments in the region, Khouri noted that many of these challenges have a distinctly Arab dimension to them. While acknowledging that there exist even today some good examples of positive coexistence and legitimacy in some areas of the Arab world, unfortunately these trends have receded and are at present largely limited to certain "pockets." On the whole, the present challenges confronting Arab states in the Middle East can be summarised on the basis of simultaneous and overlapping crises of identity, equity, legitimacy and sovereignty. These crises, however, should be recognised as recent phenomena and cannot be

blamed entirely on ethnic diversity, identity politics or intra-communal tensions.

Between the 1920s and the mid-to-late 1980s, for example, Middle Eastern states made important strides, particularly in the realm of education. Socio-economic indicators were improving, with female schooling rising at a faster rate compared to East Asia for example. By the end of the 1980s, however, these positive trends slowed, as population growth, corruption and economic stagnation combined to

First session panelists

weaken state capacity, cohesiveness and legitimacy. The end of the Cold War was also significant, as states could no longer rely on external backing and support. Slowing economic growth and the impact of neo-liberal reforms furthered the erosion of state legitimacy, as ruling elites monopolised sectors of the economy through privatisation schemes and crony capitalism. Declining opportunities and growing socio-economic vulnerabilities led to a resurgence of authoritarianism as ruling elites became more fearful of their populations, allowing a number of non-state actors to fill the vacuum of the receding state. The clearest indications of the failures of Arab states are given by emigration trends and the fact that 40 per cent of the Arab labour market is concentrated in the informal sector. Arab states continue to suffer from the highest levels of youth unemployment in the world, with 56 per cent of new workers having no option but to enter the informal sectors of the economy.

In summarising these gradual trends towards fragmentation, Khouri focussed seven "early warning" signs that together have contributed to the present collapse of state authority in the Arab world. The first sign was the significant increase in popular support for various incarnations of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood did not necessarily mean an embrace of religiously inspired governance, however and should be considered an attempt to seek alternative forms of political representation. The second trend highlighted by Khouri was the significant rise in emigration from the Arab world, particularly towards Europe. This brain drain has further weakened state capacity. A third trend was the rise of small violent non-state actors, particular in Algeria, Iran and Lebanon. While the state successfully countered these groups in the short-term, their appearance can be considered an early sign for the future. By the 1990s and early 2000s, Khouri noted how public opinion demonstrated a significant drop in support for state institutions. These trends worsened the crisis of state legitimacy and furthered a vicious cycle that saw the growth of new movements and groups opposing the state through both violent and non-violent means. Next came the Arab uprisings of late 2010, a major popular indictment of the Arab state. Finally, the seventh trend highlighted by Khouri revolved around the significant growth in non-state and quasi-state actors in the region, a trend that received a further boost

in the wake of the Arab uprisings and subsequent interventions by regional and international states. These actors are not limited to violent and Islamist inspired movements, however, but include others of a civic and secular nature, such as trade unions and student organisations for example.

In concluding his argument, Khouri noted that the above trends all point to a failure of Arab governance and representation. In this respect, the drawing of colonial borders, and the religious and ethnic diversity of many of the states in the region are not the underlining causes for the present crises of the state in the Arab world. Rather, it is the failures of political representation, governance and declining socio-economic opportunities that are the root causes for the fragility of the Arab state system. It is the internal software of the region (governance) not the hardware (borders) that needs change, concluded the speaker.

Şaban Kardaş, President of the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) in Ankara and the second speaker of the first session, began by providing a Turkish outlook on states, conflict and ethnicity in the Middle East. In emphasising that developments in the Arab Middle East directly impact non-Arab states such as Turkey, Iran and even Europe, Kardaş noted that Turkey itself has experienced similar challenges. While expressing his view that it is hard to establish a direct casual relationship between ethnic diversity, declining state capacity and conflict, Kardaş echoed the previous speakers' emphasis on foreign interventionism in the MENA, combined with the failures of political and economic governance as among the root causes for the present instability. In challenging what was described as a tendency in the West to consider the redrawing of borders as a political solution for some of these challenges, Kardaş expressed his view that a sustainable regional order in the Middle East must begin at the domestic level. States must respond to the wishes and aspirations of their citizens in order to retain legitimacy and in turn enhance their ability to respond to the many overlapping challenges confronting the region.

A major challenge has been the inability of Arab states to effectively control their borders, a dynamic that has only increased in light of declining state authority and the related growth of non-state or quasi-state actors in the Middle East. These trends have to some extent undermined the nation-state model. The redrawing of borders and the breakup of states cannot provide answers to these challenges, however, and indeed may even exacerbate them by furthering the fragmentation of the region and in turn the ability of regional and foreign powers to meddle in the internal affairs of states. Pointing to what was described as a somewhat peculiar characteristic of the Middle East, Kardaş noted how in general terms it is thought that economic development fosters political development and that these two dynamics can serve as important motors propelling state capacity and legitimacy. In the Middle East however, these trends have failed to materialise and indeed a vicious circle of sorts has developed between (unequal) economic development and declining political legitimacy, with each trend weakening the other. The lack of popular representation and democracy, widespread corruption and weak state institutions were all cited as important reasons for the current crisis of the state. Regional

rivalries and mistrust among states in the broader Middle East and the lack of cooperation mechanisms in the economic, political and security domains have further exacerbated this crisis, contributing to a regional architecture dominated by zero-sum rivalry and competition. In ending his presentation, Kardaş expressed Turkey's willingness to contribute to a more sustainable regional

Conference participants

architecture in the Middle East by supporting trade and economic development but also improvements in political representation and burden sharing in the security realm. The objective is to develop win-win scenarios for the region based on the sharing of responsibilities and more equal forms of development. In answering a question about Turkey's support for Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated political parties across the Arab world, Kardaş emphasised that only by fostering increased cooperation among states and people in the region can the underlining challenges confronting the Middle East be addressed in a sustainable manner.

Lorenzo Kamel, Senior Fellow at IAI and Research Fellow at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, began by underlining that the widespread narrative of the end of the "Sykes-Picot order" has been exploited in all directions and for diverse purposes, despite its very limited explanatory value and scope. Indeed, virtually none of the issues discussed in 1915-16 have been implemented, and this includes the internationalisation of Jerusalem. None of the post-Ottoman borders of the Middle East were settled then: Sykes-Picot, for instance, aimed to divide present-day Syria and Iraq into three or four states, while the 1920 San Remo conference explicitly postponed the determination of borders. Kamel emphasised that what it is still relevant is instead the mindset through which British and French authorities approached the region particularly in the historical phase in which that agreement was signed. London and Paris defined local realities and dissent as expressions of primitive religious cleavages. Communal and judicial structures envisioned and implemented in the second decade of the last century, in other words, succeeded in legally enshrining religious differences: this has been the most far-reaching outcome of the Sykes-Picot *Zeitgeist*.

It is meaningful that, from a comparative perspective, Sunnis and Shias, but also Christians, Jews and other religious groups and confessions have lived in the region for centuries reaching a level of coexistence higher than any registered in most of the rest of the world. As such the recent upsurge in commentaries and articles supporting a gradual rearrangement of borders along ethnic lines is largely based on ahistorical premises and doomed to fail. Ethnic tensions and religious differences are not the root causes of the current instability in the region, and neither are they the main causes for the crisis of the state in the Middle East. These are instead found in economics and the persistence of inter-state rivalry and competition in the region, often exacerbated by outside powers, particularly during

the Cold War. Together these forces have used sectarianism and religion to further their geostrategic goals. The idea of an ethno-centric reordering of the Middle East therefore cannot lead to a stabilisation of the region, noted Kamel, pointing instead that stabilisation can be achieved by supporting the reconfiguration of existing states so that they can be more responsive and accountable to their citizens.

Within this framework, there are little doubts that few matters will affect the region's future more than the ongoing regional demographic trends. In 2015, about 65 per cent of the world's 20 million refugees were in the Middle East. 4.9 million refugees have fled Syria and violent displacements are occurring in many countries, including Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad, supported by Teheran, has stripped thousands of refugees of their citizenship, not renewing their ID cards and making possession of updated biometric documents compulsory. Meanwhile, a number of Shia refugees from Iraq in Syria are being given citizenship by the regime, while ISIS is seeking to create a largely homogeneous Sunni demographic reality through the brutal use of force in territory straddling both Syria and Iraq. Kamel expressed his view that a reconfiguration of internal authority and governance within states holds out the best hope for a more sustainable regional order in the Middle East. Federal arrangements, decentralised authorities and a renegotiation of state-society relations are preferable to an artificial reorganisation of borders and states along ethnic and religious lines. Western observers should approach this tragic reality avoiding any "medievalisation of the Middle East," that is the growing tendency to juxtapose an allegedly medieval Arab world to a modern, secular and normative West.

Gamal Soltan, Associate Professor at the American University of Cairo, concluded the first session by expressing his view that, for all its problems and flaws, there exists no real alternative to the regional state-system partially inspired by the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement. The principle of territorial sovereignty that flowed from that agreement effectively replaced that of imperial control that existed in Ottoman times. The fact that this principle has survived for the past century points to its relative sustainability and acceptance in the region, but also to the fact that it is extremely hard to think of alternative arrangements. In this respect, other organisational principles such as pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism or sectarianism cannot be viewed as more sustainable guidelines for the Middle East and indeed might even contain the seeds for further instability, conflict and disorder. While in the past prominent pan-Arabists, as well as Islamists consistently opposed the Sykes-Picot order, characterising it as a foreign conspiracy aimed at dividing and dominating the Middle East, today many people in the Arab world are reluctant to advocate for the breakup of existing states. For Soltan, the problem is not with the organising principle of borders and nation states *per se* but instead with the internal dynamics of these states, the "units" of this regional order and the broader failures of governance and representation.

The Sykes-Picot agreement was created as a means for the colonial powers to consolidate influence through the creation of protectorates and spheres of influence based on newly formed states in the Middle East. Yet these states have survived and even experienced periods of successful consolidation and economic growth, independently from the presence of competing identities within them. Soltan noted how the Middle East has a peculiar characteristic in the sense that

First session panelists

ideas, identities and ideologies are in many ways of a supranational nature. This dynamic has also weakened state capacity in the region. Arab states, as well as external powers, have instrumentalised these ideologies to advance their regional influence, as evidenced by Nasser's promotion of pan-Arabism for instance. The success of pan-Arab TV channels such as *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya* also stem in part from this phenomenon. More recently, non-Arab states, such as Turkey and Iran have also used these ideologies for their own purposes, and together with Saudi Arabia, promoted sectarianism and political Islam as alternatives to the previous secular versions of Arab nationalism. These trends have furthered the fragmentation of the region, exacerbating intra-state tensions. The relative diffusion of global power and influence on the world stage, with Western states no longer capable of influencing and dictating policies in the region, has furthered the zero-sum nature of regional interactions in the Middle East as states in the region compete to fill this vacuum.

In concluding his argument Soltan noted that the current crises of state legitimacy is likely to be long-term and focus in particular on borders as the most contested areas in the region. Yet, according to the speaker, the Kurds remain the most likely candidate capable of actually redrawing borders. In other settings, the more likely scenario will be that of increasingly decentralised states, based on the devolution of authority and new arrangements of a federal or constitutional nature.

Session II: State Vacuums and Non-State Actors

Chaired by **Charlotte Brandsma**, from The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) in Brussels, the second session of the conference focussed on the phenomenon of non-state and quasi-state actors in the Middle East. Speakers examined the various drivers that contributed to their emergence while exploring difference scenarios relating to the interplay between state disintegration and polarisation in the context of widespread inter-state tensions and resurgent proxy wars across the region.

Re-Ordering the Middle East? Peoples, Borders and States in Flux

Raffaele Marchetti, from the LUISS Guido Carli University in Rome, opened the debate with a presentation focussed on the parallels between declining state capacity in the Middle East and broader trends occurring at the international level. Marchetti noted that when it comes to such notions as the Westphalian order based on national sovereignty and territorial integrity, there are a number of global trends that are combining to blur the traditional divide between the domestic and the international. These trends have not only weakened state capacity and authority in many sectors where the state has traditionally maintained control, but have also strengthened the influence of non-state actors. By seeking assistance and support from supranational institutions and/or international organisations, sub-national groups are able to go around their national governments and increase pressure on national authorities in order to raise awareness about their particular grievances, whether these be political, military, socio-economic or humanitarian in nature.

Civil society movements, international organisations promoting human rights and gender equality, labour movements and religious or communitarian-based organisations have all contributed to this relative decline in state sovereignty by fusing the national with the international. In some respects, national governments have themselves promoted and encouraged this trend, allowing non-state actors and international organisations to fill the vacuum left by the retreating state. This retrenchment of the state is not necessarily negative *per se*, and yet it does constitute a significant transformation of the state, its role *vis-à-vis* its citizens and the overall authority and influence enjoyed by the central government. These trends have been strengthened by globalisation and the considerable expansion of supranational, and some would say global, concepts and norms such as human rights or the UN-sponsored millennium development goals. In light of these trends, Marchetti expressed his view that it is impossible to think about going back to the characterisation of states as closed boxes and that instead what we are witnessing today is a slow emergence of a post-Westphalian order. In the Middle East, where state fragility and fragmentation are more pronounced, these trends have also led to the emergence of more violent and uncompromising groups and non-state actors which rely on supranational ideologies to advance their objectives. Al-Qaeda, ISIS and other groups are examples of these phenomena. ISIS itself contains a strange mix of Westphalian and non-Westphalian objectives, and the fusion between the domestic and international is particularly pronounced. In concluding his argument, Marchetti pointed out that the challenge today is to develop new rules and regulations at the regional and international levels that are capable of establishing new modes of operation in foreign policy based on consensus, burden sharing and long-term sustainability.

Florence Gaub, Senior Analyst at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) in Paris, joined the debate by challenging the widespread notion of there being a direct causal relationship between state fragility and the emergence of non-state actors. Pointing out that many states, including but not limited to the Middle East, have encouraged and in some cases used these groups to serve their own different objectives, Gaub expressed her view about the need to differentiate between different kinds of non-state actors and groups.

In the Middle East, as in Africa and East Asia, the concept of borders is more malleable, and ethnic, tribal or religious identities often do not correspond to these demarcations. These groups and communities have often maintained closer contact with each other than with the central authorities in the national capital, a dynamic that has weakened state authority but has also allowed for an important cross fertilisation of ideas and networks of support and sustenance. Non-state actors

Conference participants

therefore should not be associated entirely with negative connotations, as is the case with armed groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, but have also preformed positive roles in the realms of welfare, representation and even security. In this respect it is important to differentiate between different kinds of non-state actors. Certain groups such as Al-Qaeda seek to destabilise the state, others, such as ISIS or Hamas, seek to replace the state and act in its name. Others still perform services at the meso-level, between the central state and society, operating both in the security and socio-economic realms, as is the case with Hezbollah in Lebanon. Finally there are other groups that have helped and assisted the state in providing services, seeking improvements in political representation or advocating for increased rights and abidance to international norms and values. The Muslim Brotherhood, in its various incarnations before the 2010-12 Arab uprisings, has preformed many welfare services, and indeed in some instances these activities were even encouraged by the central authorities. Citing the example of Libya since the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, Gaub noted how the central authorities have effectively outsourced security tasks to the militias, all of whom are paid by the central government(s). Libya was a prime example of what happens when the relationship between state and non-state actors fails or is handled badly, noted Gaub. The outsourcing of security to the militias set a precedent, allowing arms to become political tools.

In concluding her argument, Gaub cautioned against an excessive emphasis on the crisis of statehood, both in the MENA region and further afield. The nation state model has undoubtedly been weakened and yet the state remains the central focus of all these non-state groups and movements. Moreover, it is the central state that remains the number one employer in these countries, commanding a powerful public sector and coordinating the redistribution of resources. Nation states have never been capable of providing all of the services for their population and in this respect it is natural that some will come to rely on other actors to preform certain activities.

The third speaker in the panel, **Randa Slim**, Director of the Track II Dialogues Initiative at the Middle East Institute in Washington DC, began by expressing her view that the present overlapping crises affecting the Middle East are slowly hollowing out the state. Yet these trends are unlikely to lead to the end of the nation state model in the region. Internal dynamics and modes of representation and cooperation will be affected, but the general organisational principle as well as the overall boundaries and borers will likely survive. The underlining motives for this state fragility were characterised by Slim as the lack of a shared and consensual organising principle of national identity in many states in the region. In this respect, the speaker pointed directly to the role of constitutions in the Arab world and the fact that the blueprints of many of these have been imposed by colonial powers and local elites, while subsequent amendments were drawn up and approved by single parties with little or no oversight or consultations. More recently, referring to the cases of Iraq and Lebanon, Slim noted that the Iraqi constitutional dialogue was sped up and ultimately undermined by the US's haste to have an elected Iraqi government formally take over from the occupying forces. In Lebanon, the post-1989 Ta'if Accord and amendments to the Lebanese constitution was also disrupted and instrumentalised by an outside power, Syria. Today the Tunisian case remains one, important, ray of hope in the region as the constitutional drafting process has proceeded along a more inclusive and consultative path.

Turning to the specific case of Lebanon and Hezbollah, Slim agreed with the previous speaker in describing the group as a quasi-state actor, serving as an intermediary between sections of society and the state. Hezbollah itself is also made up of and based on multiple overlapping identities. Since 1992 it is represented in the Lebanese parliament and has performed some responsibilities of national governance. At the same time, Hezbollah has not hesitated to use force against the state or neighbouring states when its interests are under threat. This has occurred in Lebanese context in 2007 and is today happening in Syria since late 2011. The group has combined violence with political activities and has effectively contributed to the weakening of the state, by undermining its monopoly on the use of force. In Lebanon and abroad it has assumed many roles and identities, from Islamism to political governance, resistance movement and ethno-centric Shi'a nationalism. All of this has had deep impacts on Lebanon and its political system. However the group is also often misunderstood in the West due to its association with Iran. Hezbollah retains autonomy from Iran at the domestic levels in Lebanon while its external and international relations are somewhat more exposed to Iranian influence, especially *vis-à-vis* the US and Israel. Today Hezbollah is also facing significant challenges of identity and objectives. Its focus on resisting Zionism has receded and its involvement in the Syrian conflict has considerably strained the groups overlapping identities and allegiances. Looking to the future, the group is likely to face particular challenges in reintegrating its fighters in society, while reinventing its ideology and priorities, concluded Slim.

The final speaker in the session, **Abdulhakeem Khasro Jawzal**, from Salahaddin University in Erbil, provided a Kurdish viewpoint on the debate. Noting that borders should be considered meeting points and bridges for communication instead of

walls, Jawzal reported that the border crossings between the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), Turkey and Iran remain open and that relations have improved based on the principles of complementarity and interdependence. The Kurdish people in Northern Iraq have long expressed their preference for independence, but it is important to stress that this is based on the principles of peaceful coexistence and inclusive citizenship for all. Agreements on energy with Iran and Turkey were cited as laying

From left to right: Nadim Shehadi, Hisham Gharaibeh, Jawad Al-Anani, Adeel Malik

a good precedent for these principles of complementarity and interdependence, demonstrating the KRG's willingness to coordinate policies with its neighbours.

With respect to the relationship between the KRG and Syrian Kurds, particularly the Kurdish Peoples Protection Units (YPG), Jawzal expressed the view that deep divisions persist between the two groups. Kurdish Democrats have a different view of the future compared to the Kurdish Workers Party and Syrian Kurds. The claim that the KRG is seeking to unite with the Kurds in Syria to create a corridor to the Mediterranean is a problematic vision, noted the speaker, who expressed concern about the emerging competition and rivalry between the two movements in Syria and Iraq. These challenges will likely impact and perhaps even define the future of the Kurdish movement as well as its broader relations throughout the region, concluded Jawzal, who called on the international and regional states to increase their material and political support for the Kurdish Regional Government in Northern Iraq.

Session III: The Role of Economy and Global Issues

Moving to address the overlap between economic and security issues, the final session of the conference was chaired by **Hisham Gharaibeh**, from the German-Jordanian University in Amman and former Jordanian Minister of the Environment. Speakers addressed the underlining economic dimensions of the various crises unfolding in the region, highlighting the impact of the successive military interventions and the structural, economic and demographic dimensions of these challenges.

Jawad Al-Anani, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Industry for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, opened the session by highlighting the social, economic and security challenges confronting Jordan in the context of overlapping crises unfolding in its neighbourhood. In agreeing with a previous speaker that the 1980s was supposed to be the "decade of development," Al-Anani

emphasised how booming oil revenues during the 1970s allowed states in the region to put off important structural reforms. Oil and energy reserves became a curse, weakening Arab resolve and fostering corruption and mismanagement. In this respect, Al-Anani drew a parallel with medieval times, when the Arab world controlled many of the most important trade routes to Europe. This led Arab rulers to become complacent and less interested in their populations, while European states redoubled their efforts to find alternative routes. The circumnavigation of Africa by the Portuguese broke this Arab monopoly, leading to steep declines in revenues and consequent economic strains on the region and its populace. Much of the same is occurring now with the energy revolution and declining oil revenues, exposing many states to significant challenges in the medium and long terms.

There is a serious risk of fragmentation and disintegration among certain states in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria, where different groups are contributing to the emergence of Sunni or Shi'a dominated entities. These trends are worrying and Jordan, which finds itself in the midst of these numerous conflicts, has expressed its view that the redrawing of borders cannot solve many of the most pressing challenges of the region. As a small country, Jordan is dependent on regional and international powers and while the country stands ready to help, it cannot do so alone. Presently home to over 1.3 million Syrian refugees, the Jordanian economy is already experiencing severe strains. Its geographic positioning in between such conflict states as Palestine, Syria and Iraq make Jordan a major poll of attraction for refugees and displaced persons, but a small country like Jordan, with under 6.5 million residents, is already experiencing problems in terms of providing for its citizens. With the help of international and regional powers, Jordan could become a testing ground for a new economic development plan based on integration and sustainable growth, yet what is needed is nothing less than a sort of Marshall Plan for the country. Jordan's strengths are found in the ability of the country to whether repeated political, military and economic storms, yet the challenges that lay ahead are potentially even grater than those of the past. The World Bank has recently warned that MENA countries will need to create 60-70 million new jobs by 2025. With the highest rates of youth unemployment in the world, the major challenge is to reform the economy away from its traditional favouritism towards the older generations and make jobs and opportunities available for the youth, and particularly young women who have consistently outperformed their male contemporaries in education and productivity indicators.

Economic growth and development cannot alone resolve the underlining challenges confronting the region. As noted by numerous speakers in the conference, these revolve around questions of governance and political representation. Inequality, terrorism and radical ideologies that are targeting the youth all demand a mixture of socio-economic and political approaches. In the Gulf and Saudi Arabia the most pressing challenge is that of diversifying the economy away from the energy sector. The exposure to fluctuations in energy prices has had damaging effects on such strong states as Russia and Iran, and it is hard to think how the Gulf monarchies can survive for long without significant structural reforms. Many of these challenges therefore also have international dimensions and are not unique to the Middle East.

Citing the French economist Thomas Piketty, Al-Anani highlighted inequality as the major challenged of our times, noting the serious damage this is having on state legitimacy even in Europe and the United States.

Nadim Shehadi, from the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies at Tufts University in Boston, joined speakers in the session to emphasise the global dimensions of state fragility and rising popular disillusionment with their governments. Beginning in 2010-11 popular protests broke out not only in the MENA but also in Spain, Greece, Russia, the UK and the United States. Inequality and growing state-society tensions were at the root of

From left to right: Nadim Shehadi, Hisham Gharaibeh, Adeel Malik

these crises, resulting in a significant loss of legitimacy for state institutions and a crisis of traditional politics. Global ideas and concepts travel freely across borders and have in turn had an impact on Middle Eastern states as well. Even in Ottoman times, the Tanzimat reformers were influenced by European concepts, while later reformers in the region have also incorporated broader global trends. The present tensions in Turkey between Kemalists and AKP supporters for instance are another manifestation of opposing worldviews and priorities, each also influenced by outside regional and global trends.

Turning to address the Sykes-Picot agreement, Shehadi noted that the post-World War I settlement also applied to Europe; it was an attempt to deal with a collapsed global order and imagine something better in its place. One may even argue that the prescriptions contained in these agreements have proven more successful and enduring in the Middle East as compared to Europe, which experienced another World War leading to mass population displacements. In echoing other speakers in the conference, Shehadi emphasised that the regional state order we see today in the Middle East did not follow the letter of the Sykes-Picot agreement but instead was developed gradually and over a long period of time. In themselves the Arab uprisings have demonstrated the failures of Arab governance and representation, leading to a clash between two extremes while the moderates are being squeezed in the middle, losing significance and appeal. In concluding his argument, Shehadi paraphrased from John Maynard Keynes in noting that a major characteristic of mankind is that of becoming excessively complacent and dependent on its immediate surroundings. It is hard to accept that how we have lived over the past half a century cannot represent a sustainable solution for the future, emphasised Shehadi, who ended his talk by calling on the audience to show courage and imagination in advancing alternative frameworks for the future. One should not remain caught in the past and seek to reconstitute those states that have abjectly failed to provide for their citizens. The risk otherwise is that of seeing a repetition of the Arab uprisings in the future, this time with much graver implications both

for the region and the outside world.

The final speaker in the session, **Adeel Malik** from the Oxford University's Department of International Development, structured his talk around four propositions and key claims relating to the economy of political violence in the Arab world. In opening his talk, Malik by emphasising that violence is not a random phenomenon or event. It is a tool that like any other follows its own distinct logics of power. Disorder can be an important political tool for order, and violence is part of the survival calculations and state-society relations of any state or group of states. Violence is also a tool of last resort, a method used by both elites and broader society when all else has failed; it is employed by both the powerful and the powerless for different purposes. In his final introductory proposition, Malik noted that power and violence themselves are forces that transcend the traditional dichotomy between the national and international, domestic and foreign dimensions of states and their societies.

Moving to the key claims, Malik emphasised how order and disorder, often contextualised as opposing phenomena, are in fact two sides of the same coin and both are an integral part of the present international system. In this respect, when talking about the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement, one should not loose sight of more recent trends that have in a way continued the legacy of Sykes-Picot through other means. Here Malik referred directly to the 2003 US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and the subsequent constitutional drafting process that effectively drew up a political system based on sectarianism and the division of power along confessional lines. This effectively institutionalised the fragmentation of authority and the emergence of deep divisions and rivalries between Iraqi's different ethnic and religious groupings, to an extent reproducing the experience of Lebanon's confessional political structure. In this respect, post-2003 Iraq should be highlighted as having greater significance as compared to the older Sykes-Picot agreement on which much of the media and policy debate had focussed as of late. Violence becomes a trap, feeding a cycle of more violence that leads to the destruction of those same institutions and forces that are needed to foster peace and coexistence. Thus only by restoring a sense of complementarity and interdependence in the social and economic spheres can the current turmoil in the region be addressed in a sustainable and long-term manner. Yet it is precisely those forces calling for these kinds of relations, and the related infrastructure and state capacity needed to implement them, that are the worst affected by the current violence in the region. In this respect, the redrawing of borders cannot alter the fundamental economic conditions of the region and will not lead to more conducive regional atmosphere for cooperation.

In addressing the underlining causes for these conflicts, Malik pointed to the lack of intermediary conflict management mechanisms across the region, in itself a result of the persistence of rivalry and mistrust among various regional powers. The middle classes in the Arab world have been the worst affected by the structural adjustment programmes imposed by international organisations on many countries in the Middle East and this contraction has allowed for the spread of

crony capitalism and corruption which in turn has undermined state capacity and legitimacy even further. It was from the informal sectors of the shadow economy that calls for popular protests and socio-economic and political change first arose in the run up to the Arab uprisings. In Syria and Iraq, it is those areas at the periphery of the economy that have become the primary recruiting grounds for such groups as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. It is no coincidence, noted the speaker, that these areas were precisely those where the informal sectors of the economy were directly controlled through racketeering by important members of the Ba'athist ruling elite, who were handed these concessions by the central authorities in order to buy support and allegiance. In ending his argument, Malik emphasised that complementarity and interdependence in the economic, social and energy realms are perhaps the best prescription for the region as we look into the future. Politics and external support are however also indispensable. Tunisia, which has made important strides in the political and constitutional realms, necessitates financial support and yet this assistance has been lacking or is not sufficient. The international community must do more to help Tunisia, as the model it has come to represent in the region cannot be allowed to fail.

Conclusion

Concluding remarks were delivered by **Musa Shteiwi**, Director of the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan, who thanked participants for the informed debate on these urgent and pressing challenges confronting the region. In noting that it is rare to have a debate at this level focussed on the processes of state formation and fragility, Shteiwi emphasised

From left to right: Lorenzo Kamel, Laura Quadarella, Musa Shteiwi

that 2016 is not only the centenary of the Sykes-Picot agreement but it is also, and perhaps more importantly, the anniversary of the great Arab Revolt against Ottoman rule. This dynamic should receive greater focus as in many respects it represented the first major Arab project for independence and self-rule, a truly revolutionary movement with far reaching implications for the region and indeed the wider international system. **Laura Quadarella**, an Analyst with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, joined her colleague in summarising the major themes addressed by the various panels and individual speakers. In recognising how many of these challenges are not unique to the MENA and indeed have a direct impact on many other regions of the world, Quadarella praised the activities of the New-Med Research network and the need to foster more direct and balanced modes of interaction and cooperation between the southern and northern regions of the Mediterranean. Moving to the issues of terrorism and radicalisation, Quadarella emphasised that all states have a shared

interest in responding to these threats, noting that while the international anti-ISIS coalition has made important advances as of late in both Syria and Iraq, the threat of loan wolf attacks as well as that of the underling ideologies promoted by these groups will necessitate a more long-term, socio-economic and political solutions.

In closing the conference, **Lorenzo Kamel** thanked partners, speakers, organisers and participants at the Amman conference while summarising the next and upcoming initiatives convened in the context of the New-Med Research Network. Among these, the Network, in collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation, will organise an international conference at the Italian Chamber of Deputies on September 8, 2016. This will focus on the role of intercultural dialogue in times of crisis. Moreover, the Network has recently promoted a call for papers aimed at a select number of young professionals from academia, the media and civil society organisations based in the MENA region. Tailored around a number of specific themes tied to security and governance issues in the region, candidates are expected to hold a valid passport or residency permit from one of the countries in the MENA,[5] be under the age of 32 and willing to contribute a policy paper that critically addresses the complex interlinkages between conflict, security and radicalisation in the region. Further information about the application process, remuneration for successful candidates and plans for an international conference in which selected authors will be invited to present and discuss their ideas can be found from the IAI website.[6]

Updated 3 September 2016

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[5] Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Israel, Lebanon, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia. Applicants from Turkey are also eligible.

[6] New-Med Research Network, *Call for Papers: Youth and the Mediterranean: Exploring New Approaches to Dialogue and Cooperation* (deadline for applications 15 September 2016), http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/new-med_youth.pdf.

Conference Programme

Amman, 18 July 2016

Opening Session

Introductory Remarks

Azmi Mahafdah, University of Jordan, Amman

Musa Shteiwi, Center for Strategic Studies (CSS), University of Jordan, Amman

Ettore Greco, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

Keynote Speech

Shibley Telhami, University of Maryland, USA

Session I

The Collapse of Authority: Order in the Middle East?

It is often claimed that the Middle East is witnessing the "end of the Sykes-Picot order," or that the region is experiencing the re-arrangement of populations "to better fit" the nation states which were established after WWI. Session I will put these and related claims to test by presenting different historical and analytical perspectives on the drivers of current Middle Eastern instability. The panel will also engage in a forward-looking discussion of viable organising principles of a new regional order.

Chair   **Mustafa Hamarneh**, former Director of the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS)

Panelists   **Rami Khouri**, American University of Beirut (AUB); Harvard Kennedy School

               Şaban Kardaş, Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), Ankara

               Lorenzo Kamel, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI); Harvard University, CMES

               Gamal Soltan, American University of Cairo (AUC)

Session II

State Vacuums and Non-State Actors

Governance failures combined with 21st century social, economic, environmental and demographic conditions paved the way for the rise of non-State and quasi-State actors in the Middle East. Are States irremediably undermined or will the current transition lead to the emergence of new State entities? How to reconcile the crumbling of States and the redrawing of borders with the exacerbation of traditional inter-state competition, including through proxy wars? The panel will analyse developments in the region focusing on the interplay between disintegration and polarisation.

Chair   **Charlotte Brandsma**, The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), Brussels

Panelists **Raffaele Marchetti**, LUISS Guido Carli University, Rome

Florence Gaub, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Paris

Randa Slim, Middle East Institute, Washington, DC

Abdulhakeem Khasro Jawzal, Salahaddin University-Erbil

Session III

The Role of Economy and Global Issues

Do sectarian lines align with economic realities on the ground or partly transcend them? In other words, what is the underlying economic matrix of Middle Eastern conflicts, and in what ways has it evolved since 2010-2011? Is this a doomed geography of economic disruption, structural inequality, and chronic underdevelopment, or can positive economic developments be identified even amidst confrontation and conflict? Will US decreasing dependence on Middle Eastern oil and the West's weakening position in the region affect the broader economic outlook or not?

Chair   **Hisham Gharaibeh**, College of Economy, German-Jordanian University and former Minister of Environment of Jordan

Panelists **Jawad Al-Anani**, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Industry of Jordan

Nadim Shehadi, Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies, Tufts University, Boston

Adeel Malik, Oxford University

Concluding Remarks

Musa Shteiwi, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, Amman

Laura Quadarella, Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Lorenzo Kamel, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI); Harvard University, CMES

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
Founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (The International Spectator), an online webzine (AffarInternazionali), two series of research papers (Quaderni IAI and IAI Research Papers) and other papers' series related to IAI research projects.

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