

2017 in review

The Middle East Studies Forum had a very productive year in 2017. We began the year with the launch of our new website (mesf.org.au) which hosts news, event announcements, publications, and our monthly Iran and Central Asia news briefings. Over the course of the year, the site had 1415 unique visitors and 11,138 page views.

MESF has also established a presence on social media through a twitter account [@mesf_Deakin](https://twitter.com/mesf_Deakin)

In 2017, MESF hosted seven national and international visitors to share their research and explore future collaboration. Among these was the VIP visit by Dr Farah al-Siraj, a sitting Member of Parliament in Iraq who shared with a full house, a first-hand account of the Iraqi efforts to push back ISIS and promote inclusive politics. MESF's in-house expertise was also on display in relation to the Turkish referendum, and Iran's presidential election. A full list of 2017 seminars maybe found [here](#).

Events:

Our events were attended by almost 250 guests. We also sponsored events with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, the University of Adelaide and ADI's Cultural Heritage Asia Pacific Network. MESF organised a panel on 'New Patterns of Politics and Political Contestation in the Middle East' at the [Australian Political Studies Association annual conference](#) (25-27 September). An edited collection on this theme will be published in 2018.

In 2017 MESF hosted two closed-door meetings with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to discuss regional dynamics and challenges for Australia, and the MESF Convenor was invited to offer a briefing to the Shadow Foreign Minister The Hon Penny Wong on the implications of the Trump administration for the Middle East. These meetings are a measure of MESF's capacity to contribute to our understanding of the complexity of the Middle East.

MESF teaching staff led students on several exciting international study trips, including the Middle East Study tour to Qatar and Jordan, with students visiting diplomatic missions and NGOs/UN agencies across the two countries. Four Deakin Arabic language students also participated in the [4th International Universities Arabic Debating Competition in Doha](#).

Publications:

MESF members made a significant contribution to the research community throughout the year, publishing in top rankings journals including *The Washington Quarterly*, *Iranian Studies*, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* and the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. In total, MESF members published 2 books, 6 book chapters, and 12 journal articles. A full list of publications is available here: <http://www.mesf.org.au/academic-publications-since-2014/>

Members also contributed to policy debates globally, with OpEds and interviews with media outlets including *Voice of America*, *Bloomberg*, *al-Jazeera*, *BBC*, *BBC Persian*, *Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) ABC*, *The Australian*, *ManatoTV*, *Trend News Agency*, *SBS Urdu*, *SBS Punjabi*, *The Interpreter*, *Australian Outlook* and *The Conversation*. Members also presented research at conferences across the world, including the American Academy of Religion conference, the Australian Political Studies Association, the China and the Middle East conference and the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation conference.

Grants:

MESF members were successful in securing several research grants in 2017:

Shahram Akbarzadeh, Costas Laoutides and Zahid Ahmed: *Securitising of Minority Identities in Iran* (Gerda Henkel Stiftung)

Shahram Akbarzadeh and Rebecca Barlow: *Women NGOs and Policy Change in Iran* (Australian Research Council)

Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh: *Muslim Women Leadership in Indonesia* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

Dara Conduit: *Sharing Syrian scholarship on ISIS with the Australian public* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Council of Australian-Arab Relations)

Fethi Mansouri *et al*: *A transcultural approach to belonging and engagement among migrant youth* (Australian Research Council)

Fethi Mansouri *et al*: *Democracy Education in Tunisia – Building Capacity among Youth Leaders* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Council of Australian-Arab Relations)

MESF looks forward to what is shaping up to be a very exciting 2018!



Prof Shahram Akbarzadeh
MESF Convenor