

# Middle East Studies Forum

Year in Review  
2018



2018 was another busy year for the Middle East Studies Forum! We held our biennial conference on Trump and the Middle East, hosted six seminars on topics across the Middle East, and gave regular interviews to media organisations both in Australia and abroad. In 2018, our website attracted nearly three times the amount of web traffic as 2017, with 3,811 unique users and 14,087 page views.

## Events

Our successful event program continued throughout 2018. Our Trump and the Middle East conference brought together a diverse range of Australian and international scholars and researchers to discuss and debate a range of topics relevant to the contemporary Middle East. We were excited to welcome keynote speakers including our very own UNESCO Chair and Alfred Deakin Institute director Professor Fethi Mansouri and the University of Washington's Professor Anita Weiss. The conference also hosted the launch for Anthony Bubalo's new Penguin/Lowy Institute book, *Remaking the Middle East*. In conversation with Dr Susan Carland (Monash University), Anthony outlined the 'green shoots' that may portend positive change in the Middle East.

Our seminar series welcomed Former Bahrain parliamentarian Jasim Hussein to discuss the state of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the University of St Andrews' Dr Fiona McCallum, who shared her new research on Christians in the Middle East, and Dr Michelle Burgis-Kasthala from the University of Edinburgh, who discussed her findings on the role of international criminal justice during and after the Syrian conflict. We were also fortunate to hear from our Council of Australian-Arab Relations speaker Zaki Mehchy, who runs the Syrian Centre for Policy Development and shared his cutting edge research

on the economic and human development costs of the Syrian conflict. For the first time ever, we live-streamed our events through Twitter, and now have a growing archive of event recordings on our [website](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

MESF scholars also spoke at events throughout the year in both Australia and internationally. Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dr Dara Conduit spoke at a MESF event on the Iran nuclear deal, Associate Professor Benjamin Isakhan, Dr Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Tezcan Gumus presented research at the IPSA/APSA conference in Brisbane, Dr Ali Mozaffari spoke at the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies conference, Dr David Tittensor gave a paper at the American Academy of Religion, and Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, Associate Professor Benjamin Isakhan and Dr Dara Conduit shared their research at WOCMES.

MESF teaching staff led another successful Middle East Study Tour to Jordan and Qatar, with generous support for the DFAT Council for Australian-Arab Relations.

## Academic publications

MESF members made a significant contribution to the research community throughout the year, publishing in top ranked journals including *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *The Middle East Journal*, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Current History*, *Middle East Policy*, *International Politics*, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, *The Muslim World* and *Third World Quarterly*. MESF members also published four new books, including Dr James Barry's research monograph *Armenian Christians in Iran: Ethnicity, Religion and Identity in the Islamic Republic* with Cambridge University Press. Dr Ali Mozaffari's book *World Heritage in Iran: Perspectives on Pasargadae* was released in paperback.

In addition to this, MESF members published 25 journal articles and 12 book chapters. A full list of publications is available [here](#).

## New Grants

Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh	Leadership course for multi-faith women leaders from Indonesia	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Shahram Akbarzadeh, Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Dara Conduit	Assessing the impact of external actors in the Syrian and Afghan proxy wars	Carnegie Corporation of New York

## Engagement

MESF recognises the importance of sharing research with, and giving back to, the policy community and the general public.

Members contributed to policy debates globally, with interviews with media outlets including *Voice of America*, *ABC*, *Al Jazeera*, *3RR*, *BBC Persian*, *SBS Urdu*, *The New Daily* and *RTHK*. MESF members published opinion pieces in outlets including *The Washington Post*, *Al Jazeera*, *The Australian Financial Review*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Australian Outlook*, *the Interpreter* and *My Fair Observer*. while Professor Ihsan Yilmaz and Dr James Barry's research on social cohesion in Shepparton in an interview in the *Shepparton News*.

Dr Zahid Shahab Ahmed was invited to attend the Regional Capacity Building Workshop on PVE-E, organised by the UNDP, Hedayah, the EU and the Commonwealth in Kuala Lumpur. Professor Fethi Mansouri made a submission to the Australian parliamentary inquiry into Australian aid in the Indo-Pacific, while Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, Dr Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Dr Dara Conduit were separately invited to speak at the Australian Institute of International Affairs.

## Postgraduate research

MESF's postgraduate cohort continued to excel throughout 2018, undertaking high quality original research and public engagement activities on topics ranging from the role of strongmen presidents in Turkey, Australian and German aid distribution in Afghanistan, the influence of foreign states on the Afghan civil war, Russia-Iran relations and R2P. MESF students published in journals including the *Australian Journal of Political Science*, *International Politics*, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* and *The Middle East Journal*.

MESF postgraduate researchers also regularly shared their insights with media organisations including *Al Jazeera*, *The Washington Post*, *My Fair Observer*, *BBC Persian*, *3RRR* and *the Interpreter*, and attended conferences including *IPSA/APSA* and the 2018 United Nations Ministerial conference on Afghanistan.

The excellent doctoral research recently completed by some of our staff members was also recognised. Dr Niamatullah Ibrahim was awarded his PhD from the Australian National University, while Dr Dara Conduit was announced as a runner up for the Terrorism Research Initiative's (TRI) Best Thesis Prize.

2019 is already shaping up to be an even more exciting year, and we very much look forward to working with you soon!



Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh  
MESF convener