



# Middle East and North Africa Program

## Anticipating Conflict in a Transforming Region



Factions flags on display after east Mosul was liberated from ISIS by Iraqi Army Forces, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and Shia militia.

### Our Mission

The EastWest Institute (EWI) is an independent organization committed to and engaged in building trust and preventing conflict. Our distinguished track record and reputation as informed and credible brokers for peace allows EWI to drive dialogue through back-channel diplomacy, generate innovative ideas and advocate recommendations for resolving persisting and potential future political, economic, environmental, maritime and security threats. It is here that

our added value, expertise, knowledge, networks, unique access to influencers, and 36-year track record of trust-building plays a pivotal role.

Our work is urgently needed as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is undergoing historic, complex and rapid transformations and transitions. The results are profound: violent geopolitical shifts, a reshaping of state-society relations, polarization, fragmentation and an ongoing contest for power and influence

between the region's main protagonists. It is against this background, and in the absence of a regional security structure—which could manage, prevent and resolve conflicts—that renders EWI's work all the more valuable. We look at evolving scenarios, and potential conflict triggers and dynamics that could emerge as a consequence of the current policies and politics. We then facilitate confidential meetings where political and social leaders, organizations, academics

and media professionals can engage in constructive dialogues, generate balanced recommendations and innovate ways to defuse tensions and mitigate conflict.

In this way, we are able to build trust, complement and initiate new channels of communication between national and regional rivals, promote inclusive politics and governance, favor cooperation over competition and deliver win-win solutions.



# What We Do

A Shiite fighter on patrol after a battle with Islamic State militants at the airport of Tal Afar,

## Trust Building Between Iran and Saudi Arabia

Locked in an ever-escalating “Cold War,” the Iranian-Saudi contest for influence and power is a major driver of conflict and sectarianism across the region, with both countries backing militant groups and proxy forces in weak and fragile neighboring states. In cooperation with the Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO), this confidential, Track 2 project convenes former Iranian and Saudi politicians, media professionals, academics, columnists, think-tank representatives and influencers to capitalize on shared interests and work on finding practical ideas for cooperation on common security, economic and environmental challenges. EWI and CARPO also hold workshops with the aim to deconstruct mutual misconceptions, and curate innovative mechanisms to address negative and inflammatory rhetoric.

## Common Plans for a Peaceful Post-ISIS Iraq within a Stable Regional Order

While the U.S.-led coalition is primarily focused on the military defeat of ISIS, the absence of a clear strategy as to what comes next for Iraq is likely going to fuel longstanding ethnic and sectarian conflicts, as well as domestic and regional rivalries long after ISIS is defeated. “Iraq Beyond the Islamic State” is a multitrack project that aims to contribute to conflict prevention, stabilization and peacebuilding efforts in Iraq and improved relations with its neighbors.

## Iraq-GCC Relations: From Fragile Rapprochement to Consolidated Cooperation

Iraq’s strained relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) continues to undermine regional, international and developmental efforts to peace and stability. With the rise of jihadi threats and proxy agents, and flaring sectarian

conflict, the need for dialogue is acute to both further regional security cooperation and to avoid increased polarization and accidental escalation. Furthermore, as Iraq’s reintegration involves both anti-ISIS efforts and regional sectarian polarization, this project serves as an entry point to broader discussions on effective regional security mechanisms.

In partnership with The Century Foundation (TCF) and Gulf Research Center (GRC), this project focuses on intra-regional relations and supports the current national and international efforts to normalize Iraq’s ties with its Gulf neighbors. Bringing together participants from Iraq, the GCC and in later stage, non-Arab countries including Turkey and Iran, this dialogue also provides an important opportunity to discuss prospects for normalizing discussion of Iran’s interests in the region, and opening the possibility of more constructive engagement between Iran and Arab Gulf governments.

## Iraq’s Transition from Theater of Proxy Wars to Centerpiece of Inclusive Security Structure

EWI and CARPO aim to capitalize on the geopolitical momentum generated by the above-mentioned developments and dynamics through initiation of discrete Track 1.5 and Track 2 conferences between key, influential Iraqi, regional and international stakeholders and experts. The overall objective of the project is to lay the foundation for a new and inclusive regional security regime focused on the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq—politically and economically—reducing regional tensions, enhancing economic development and regional cooperation.

## Irish Lessons for Iraq

In cooperation with both Irish organisations, Rethinking Conflict and Social Change Initiative, and Iraqi partners, this project aims to derive lessons from the Good Friday

Iranian navy conducts the "Velayat-90" naval wargames in the Strait of Hormuz.



Agreement and transition in Northern Ireland. The protracted Irish conflict and peace process provides valuable insights on the following topics: 1) the role of inclusive religion and inclusive politics in peacebuilding, 2) how paramilitaries and (even terrorists) should be engaged in the national reconciliation process with the aim of ending a sectarian conflict in a deeply divided society; 3) how ex-militants can transition to become active and peaceful members in political life; and 4) how to achieve community and national reconciliation through inclusive state institutions & and rule of law.

### **Maritime Security: Preventing Incidents at Sea in the Gulf Region**

Following the example of the 1972 agreement between the United States and the former Soviet Union to prevent negative incidents at sea between their ships and

aircraft, EWI and Search for Common Ground, aim to build on this exact same model to prevent an inadvertent outbreak of hostilities from taking place, and enhance maritime security for countries of the Gulf region including Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Gulf States, as well as international powers, including the U.S., the UK, France, Russia, China and India. This Track 2 dialogue brings together naval and security specialists from the above mentioned countries to determine the factors required in order to develop and put into effect an "Incidents at Sea document", and engage Gulf countries and other nations with navies in the Gulf region to endorse, support and sign such a document.

### **Algeria-Morocco Business Dialogue**

Due to the decades-long Western-Sahara "frozen" conflict, there is no communication between the governments of Algeria and Morocco. Borders between

both countries are militarized and closed since 1994. As a result, a form of "Cold War," coupled with a general struggle for dominance in the Maghreb region, define bilateral relations. These tensions present a danger for the stability of the Maghreb, and the wider North-Africa region, as well as block joint ventures and approaches to the refugee crisis and energy politics.

This Track 2 project aims to contribute to creating better economic conditions and reduce tensions by concentrating on common economic challenges: high levels of unemployment, insufficient economic diversification and inadequate support of the private sector.

EWI aims to implement a series of business and economic dialogues in the pharmaceuticals/chemicals, energy, machinery, automotive, tourism, transit/transport and agriculture sectors. The

goal is to incorporate key, cross-cutting topics such as housing, professional training and education, improvement of the business climate, promoting SMEs and start-ups, infrastructure, the environment, resource management and public-private partnerships.

### **Countering Violent Extremism: Stemming ISIS Financing**

EWI, Quilliam and St George's House held a confidential consultation for experts in counter-terrorism financing (CTF) and anti-money laundering (AML) to address the topic of ISIS financing. The experts identified policy gaps and recommended urgent actions to stem the financing of ISIS as well as other terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeed and its affiliates. The meeting report was shared with a select and influential group of regional and international institutions and stakeholders.

Pigeons at  
the Bastakia  
Heritage  
District, Dubai



## Impact & Outreach

**Confidential Dialogues:** EWI facilitates high-level, Track 2 and Track 1.5 dialogues, forums and workshops where local, regional and international stakeholders, the donor community and policymakers work to consolidate best practices and policies on common political, security and economic threats and devise joint policy recommendations. Between 2015 and 2017, EWI held numerous consultations in neutral locations throughout Europe. EWI also regularly hosts discussions and seminars in Brussels with key influencers, authors and academics from Europe and the Middle East; engaging the wider European policy

community in an open, constructive and interactive dialogue on political, security and economic and energy challenges.

**Briefings:** EWI holds briefings with governments, relevant EU bodies, policymakers, influencers and the donor community on major meeting findings and key policy recommendations. In 2016, EWI held three briefings.

**Policy Briefs:** In cooperation with diverse local and regional think tanks and influencers, EWI produces concrete policy briefs, recommendations and meeting reports on key, common regional challenges.

These include Iranian and Saudi perspectives on ISIS, refugee crisis, climate change, “post-oil” economy, Iraq’s path to recovery and countering ISIS propaganda.

**Thought Leadership & Media Coverage:** Our Middle East and North Africa Program Director, Kawa Hassan, is author and co-editor of numerous publications, provides speeches and lectures at think tanks and universities and is a frequent contributor to international and regional media outlets on Iraq, Syria, the Kurdish issue, Middle East affairs and countering violent extremism. He has also provided thought

leadership as an expert to the Atlantic Council’s Task Force Report on the Future of Iraq: “Achieving Long Term Stability to Ensure the Defeat of ISIS.” This Task Force brought together 25 top Iraq experts from around the globe and prepared policy recommendations to the current U.S. administration on how to deal effectively with the challenges posed by the conflict in Iraq. In addition, Kawa Hassan was Co-leader of the Working Group Rights & Protection of Minorities in the Middle East, Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme (FMSH), Paris.

## Our Funding

Generous contributions from our supporters allow us to maintain our signature independence and impartiality. The EastWest Institute is extremely thankful to those who continue supporting our work including the German Federal Foreign Office, Kathryn Davis Peace Initiative and Konrad Adenauer Foundation. We also cooperate with partner organizations on ad-hoc activities including The Century Foundation (TCF) and Search for Common Ground (SFCG).

For more information, visit our website at [www.eastwest.ngo/pillars/middle-east-and-north-africa](http://www.eastwest.ngo/pillars/middle-east-and-north-africa), or contact Michael Zumot, Donor Relations Officer, (mzumot@eastwest.ngo, +32(0)473 7222 73).