

ALMUNTAQA'S VISION

A Welcome Letter From the Editors

Founded in 2011, The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) has sought to be at the cutting edge of research on the Arab world while also Maintaining its relevance to key current events in the Arab world. To this effect the center has created multiple divisions that vary between research oriented and policy oriented. The center is host, for example, to a research division, a political analysis unit, an Arab opinion index division, a book publishing division, a book translating division, and the Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic Project.

In line with its mission as a multidisciplinary research center, the ACRPS has also started to produce several peer reviewed Arabic language academic journals. These include: *Siyasat Arabiya* (Political Science), *Omran* (Sociology), *Ostour* (Historical Studies), and *Tabayyun* (Philosophy and Cultural Studies). It also publishes a futurology and forecasting studies yearbook in Arabic titled *Istishraf*. Moreover, since its inception, the ACRPS has also published around 250 Arabic books, establishing an academic publishing press to fill the existing gap of quality research in the Arab world, and hosted over 100 conferences and symposiums. This in addition to a steady stream of different types of policy analysis papers in Arabic which are released on a weekly basis. Thus, the ACRPS has been able to break new ground in furthering the state of the art in Arabic academic publishing and knowledge production. In doing so the center has maintained an interdisciplinary approach to the social sciences and humanities, based on the belief that insights from one field can inform research across all the other disciplines.

Given the ACRPS's role as a well established and respected center in the Arab world, *AlMuntaqa* brings this reality to a global audience of researchers who would otherwise be unable to access its Arabic language materials. With *AlMuntaqa*'s release, readers in the English speaking world will be able to access publications from the largest and widest ranging existing network of Arab social scientists, translated into English for ease of access. Being

rooted in the region, the scholars who make AlMuntaqa possible also have access to valuable fieldwork and rich data otherwise not available to English researchers or readers. This is not only because of the publisher's geographic location, but because of our central position within the Arab academe as an unrivaled center for non-partisan, independent thinking. The papers that AlMuntaqa will publish will demonstrate that the Arab academy, interacting with vibrant and dynamic societies, can make contributions to the wider academic world both empirically and theoretically, in a variety of disciplines. The research featured in AlMuntaqa will not only bring novel empirical data to light, but will bring myriad approaches in the social sciences and humanities to the forefront, given its belief in methodological diversity and multidisciplinary.

Turning now to the contents of our first issue, it is our aim to provide a selection of articles that reflect the most pressing issues facing the Arab world, viewed from an interdisciplinary lens. The featured articles reflect this aim. For instance, there is no doubt that the military was a critical actor in the Arab Spring and its aftermath, as it facilitated democratic transition in some cases like Tunisia, initially facilitated regime change only to come back with a coup against a democratically elected government as in the case of Egypt, effectively sided with the regime and repressed protestors as in the cases of Syria and Bahrain, and simply disintegrated leading to civil war as in the cases of Libya and Yemen. Yet most studies focused narrowly on the reactions of armies in the Arab world to the Arab Spring, often overlooking the roots and dynamics of civil-military relations in the Arab world, as well as the relationship between the military and political power. In his article "The Army and Political Power in the Arab Context: Theoretical Issues," Azmi Bishara examines the historical roots and dynamics of civil-military relations in countries where the military was a particularly dominant player in the political process. He finds that there have been two distinct types of coups in the Arab world: the first, a coup launched by the regime against a political process it had initiated, and

the second, a coup launched by radicalized officers with the aim of reforming or changing the regime. Finally, he argues that while there is no grand generalizable theory of civil-military relations in the Arab world, there are at least five common features that characterize the relationship between the military and political power.

Adel al-Shargabi's article "The Restructuring of the Yemeni Army" serves as a reminder that periods of regime transition are fickle and that restructuring an army is a particularly risky endeavor that could collapse without notice. The article was written in 2013 when the restructuring of the Yemeni army was still underway following the Gulf Cooperation Council's initiative to mediate the political transition of Yemen, and before the crisis with the Houthi movement which led to them successfully controlling the capital of Sanaa in 2015. Yet it is still relevant and important because it details the divisions within the Yemeni army and how the restructuring of the army proceeded. One can even infer from the article how and why the restructuring of the army failed to stave off the civil war in Yemen and may have even facilitated the crisis in 2015.

In "The Ottoman Tanzimat and the Constitution", Wajih Kawtharani, a historian and expert of the Ottoman period, details how the "sick man of Europe" sought to avoid European encroachment and its own implosion due to internal strife through a series of modernizing reforms termed the Tanzimat. These reforms and the constitution that the Ottoman Tanzimat promulgated formed "a critical juncture in Arab and Islamic history, and the cornerstone for modern constitutional thought in the region". Moreover, he argues that the Arab participation in the struggle for these reforms in the Ottoman Empire, and the interaction with and struggle against Western colonialism, eventually led to the earliest experiments in constitutional democracy in the Arab world.

Fourthly, speaking of colonialism in her paper "Criminals or Martyrs? Let the Courts Decide! —British Colonial Legacy in Palestine", Rana Barakat examines the British mandate period in Palestine (1919-1948). She finds that British rule "constructed a system of laws and legal

procedures during their colonial tenure... to control their colony and reinforce a particular and effective method of power that forms the basis of these echoes in the contemporary Palestinian-Israeli context”.

In “The Welfare State in Egypt, 1995-2005: A Comparative Approach” Ahmed Ezz Eldin Mohamed utilizes the typology of welfare state regimes developed by Esping-Andersen to classify Egypt as a “conservative/informal” regime, where social benefits are tied to employment in the formal sector. This leads to “the family, religious institutions, and clientelistic networks taking on important roles to meet the social needs of the larger informal sector”. He also proposes amending Esping-Andersen’s typology to consider mismanagement, quality considerations, the gap between stated goals and implementation, disparities created by gender and urbanization differences, and the role of the informal sector.

Finally, we introduce the Arab Opinion Index, a project that was launched by the ACRPS in 2011. The Arab Opinion Index is the largest, most comprehensive public opinion polling project in the Arab world to date and is headed by a team of specialist statisticians, and experts in survey methods. The survey aims to identify trends in Arab public opinion with regards to a range of economic, social, and political issues, including: democracy, citizenship values, equality, justice, religion, and civic and political participation. It also includes questions about their living standards, the general conditions of their respective countries, their evaluation of the state institutions of these countries, their degree of confidence in these institutions, their view of the private sector, the Arab world as a collective actor, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. A staple feature of *AlMuntaqa* will be a study that aims to demonstrate how the Arab Opinion Index can be utilized in the social sciences. In this issue, Dana El Kurd shows the variations of state capacity measurements using the Arab Opinion Index data. She then demonstrates how state capacity measures can be created in a new light, according to citizen perceptions in addition to material measures. Such a contribution will undoubtedly add both to the debate on this issue, as well as our understanding of the measures of state capacity and the limits of relying only on material measures.