The Program on Civil-Military Relations in Arab States (CMRAS) is an initiative to develop policy tools, build civilian and military expertise in defense affairs, and enable civil-military dialogue. It aims to foster civilian oversight of defense sectors in Arab states, and to support the modernization and professionalization of Arab armed forces. Key stakeholders include defense sectors, academic networks, civil society and research organizations, government officials, the media, and parliamentarians.

Background

An unprecedented number of Arab states are at war or at risk of relapsing into armed conflict. Several face the challenges of rebuilding national armed forces and reintegrating militias, while others experience interventions by armed forces in politics and economies. In addition, the role of women in defense sectors remains largely unaddressed across much of the Arab world.

Collectively, Arab states account for some of the highest rates of military spending in the world, but many struggle to provide peace and security to their societies. Instead, militarization fuels authoritarianism and human rights abuses, and generates gender violence and humanitarian crises. It has created dependence on military employment for social welfare, and increased defense sector corruption.

Genuine civilian and military capacity in defense affairs is necessary to reverse these trends. It enhances the planning capacity of Arab defense sectors, improves military performance by generating internal accountability, and enables absorption of international military practice and assistance.
Starting Points

Public Discourse on Defense
Military restructuring and reform plans must be anchored and ratified in public debate, or else they will reproduce the same problems.

The Need for Civil-Military Partnership
Building mutually beneficial civil-military relations requires civilian expertise and institutional involvement in defense affairs—among civil society and research organizations, parliaments, civil services, and defense ministries.

The Future of Defense Policy Planning
Political opportunity and political will are critical, but they need to draw on preexisting policy planning and reform strategies or foster new ones.

Activities

Comparative Defense Atlas for Arab States
Building a knowledge base to shape positive military and civilian engagement, inform policy analysis, allow public scrutiny, and enable cross-regional comparison.

Foster Future Civil-Military Leadership
Developing civilian and military expertise in defense affairs and contributing policy recommendations and country-specific roadmaps as a basis for informed dialogue and professional civil and military parity.

Establish Trust as a Civil-Military Cornerstone
Engaging with civilian and military stakeholders in non-adversarial, win-win dialogue to transform attitudes, enhance civilian oversight, and complement international assistance aimed at professionalizing Arab armed forces.
ENDS, WAYS, MEANS

IMPACTS

- Enhanced oversight and governance of defense sectors
- Military modernization and professionalization

OBJECTIVES

- Effective military use of civilian defense expertise
- Government, parliament, and political party capacity to deal with defense affairs
- Sustainable civil society capacity to engage in defense affairs

OUTPUTS

- Cross-regional partnership and advocacy network
- High-quality data and policy expertise
- Media take-up of defense affairs
- Civilian support of military modernization, professionalization, and post-conflict restructuring

LINES OF EFFORT

- Participatory, multi-stakeholder design
- Data collection
- Input from regional and international partners
- Media engagement and capacity building
- Policy research and analysis
- Engagement with civil society, government, and defense sectors
- Transmission of lessons with international stakeholders

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