China’s Expanding Influence in the Middle East
Trade, Energy, Security, and Multipolarity

September 28, 2017 from 9:30 A.M. to 3:30 P.M.
Venue: Issam Fares Institute Auditorium
CONCEPT NOTE

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Syria/Iraq Office and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs will host a one-day conference on China’s engagement in the Middle East, its bilateral relations to regional powers, and the resulting implications for Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

In recent years, China has significantly increased its political visibility in the region. In 2016 alone, China undertook unprecedented diplomatic efforts in the Syrian conflict, began to construct its first military base outside China in Djibouti, and published its first Arab policy paper. Given these endeavors, the growing divergence from its constitutional foreign policy paradigm of ‘Non-Interference’ becomes evident.

Although Beijing’s foremost interest in the Middle East continues to be the uninterrupted access to the energy resources of the region, the Middle East also offers China unprecedented business opportunities. With Beijing’s ambitious ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR) Initiative, Xi Jinping’s most important strategic initiative during his presidency aims to economically connect 60 countries throughout Asia and Europe by rebuilding the ancient Silk Road, completed by a Maritime Silk Road. Given its pivotal role in the ancient Silk Road, the Middle East continues to play a vital role in the implementation of ‘OBOR’ and the challenge of Western influence and presence in the region. Besides its economic interests, China commands a significant Muslim minority of 23 million people, particularly in its Western region of Xinjiang, making the fight against radical Islamist terrorism a major priority on China’s foreign policy agenda. Politically, the Middle East offers Beijing the opportunity to reshape the international system according to its vision of a multipolar, harmonious world, but also to participate in the global arena.

In light of China’s interests in the region and its increased political efforts, this conference seeks to determine the extent and impact of Chinese involvement in the Middle East. The event will bring together renowned international China experts as well as scholars from the Middle East and will consist of two panels of 90 minutes each, followed by a discussion and wrap-up panel.
PROGRAM

Venue: Issam Fares Institute Auditorium, American University of Beirut, Beirut

09:30 – 10:00 Registration and Coffee Reception

10:00 – 10:30 Welcoming words by Dr. Tarek Mitri, Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs and by Nils Wörmer, Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Syria/Iraq Office

10:30 – 12:00 Panel 1: “One Belt, One Road”: China’s Interests, Goals, and Long-term Visions in the Middle East
Chair: Michael Winzer, Head of Office in Beijing, China, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Input 1: China’s Vision of a Multipolar World: Challenging Western Dominance
Dr. Nadine Godehardt – German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Input 2: Trade Interests, Economic Approach, and Chinese Soft Power
Dr. Christina Lin – Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies, University of California, Irvine

Input 3: China’s Military Build-up and Security Interests in the Region
Dr. Bingbing Wu – Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Beijing University, Beijing

Questions and Answers

12:00 – 13:30 Lunch
13:30 – 15:00  Panel 2: China’s Policies on the Ground
Chair: Rayan El-Amine, Assistant Director, Issam Fares Institute

Input 1: The Afghanistan-Pakistan Theatre
Dr. Alessandra Cappelletti – Research Center on Contemporary China, Milan

Input 2: China in the Persian Gulf: Relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq
Dr. Moritz Pieper – School of Arts and Media, University of Salford, Manchester

Input 3: China’s (Non-)intervention Policy Towards the Syrian Conflict
Dr. Imad Mansour – Department of International Affairs, Qatar University, Doha

Questions and Answers

15:00 – 15:30  Coffee Reception
WELCOMING WORDS

Dr. Tarek Mitri

Dr. Tarek Mitri is the Director of AUB’s Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs since 2014 and Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General in Libya. Mitri has also been a minister in four Lebanese governments: Information, Environment, Administrative Development, and Culture; and Acting Foreign Minister. He is also a member of the Strategic Board of Lebanon’s Université Saint-Joseph; the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Institute of Palestine Studies; and a Member of the Board of Directors of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. He has lectured in a number of universities in Lebanon, Europe, and North America.

Nils Wörmer

Nils Wörmer has headed Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung’s Syria/Iraq Office since September 2015, which was established under his management. Prior to this, he was in charge of the foundation’s Afghanistan program in Kabul for two years, and was a Senior Associate in the Middle East and North Africa Division of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP) in Berlin. From 2005 to 2010, he held leadership positions at the platoon and company levels in the German Federal Armed Forces through which he was deployed to the ISAF headquarters in Kabul and PRT Kunduz as a human intelligence officer for 15 months. He obtained his degree in political science and Islamic studies in 2005, after studying at the Helmut Schmidt University of the German Federal Armed Forces and the University of Hamburg, Germany.
SPEAKERS’ BIOGRAPHIES

Michael Winzer

Michael Winzer is the Director of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung’s (KAS) Beijing Office in China. After graduating (Dipl. Oec.) with degrees in Economics and Business Administration from the University of Hohenheim in Germany and Gothenburg University in Sweden, he joined KAS as a Project Assistant in the regional office for Central Asia and the South Caucasus, based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. At the headquarters in Berlin, he first worked as Desk Officer and later as Deputy Head of the Finance and Project Administration. During his time at the headquarters, he was also a member of the Admissions Committee for the KAS scholarship program and of the working group “Young Foreign Policy Experts.” In 2013, he became Resident Representative and Head of the KAS Country Office in Bangkok, Thailand. In 2015 he also became Project Director of the EU co-funded project “Environmental Empowerment for Grassroots and Non-State Actors” in Thailand before accepting his current position.

Dr. Nadine Godehardt

Dr. phil. Nadine Godehardt is the Deputy Head of the Research Division Asia at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP) in Berlin. Dr. Godehardt has worked extensively on China’s Belt and Road Initiative and China’s role in Central Asia. She frequently travels to China and Asia and is currently part of a joint research project with ETH Zurich and University of Geneva on “Which region? The politics of the UN Security Council P5 in international security crises.” Since 2015, Dr. Godehardt has been further engaged in collaborative research on the relationship between urban space, security, and international politics with ANCB the Aedes Metropolitan Laboratory in Berlin. She has also recently become a member of a network of German researchers who work on the relationship between visuality and global politics.
Dr. Christina Lin

Dr. Christina Lin is a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of California, Irvine, and Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations at SAIS-Johns Hopkins University, focusing on China-Mediterranean relations. She was a Visiting Academic Fellow at the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) in Berlin and a former Transatlantic Academy Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Dr. Lin has extensive US government experience working on China security issues, including policy planning at the US Department of Defense, the National Security Council, and US Department of State. Her foreign policy portfolio includes defense planning; transatlantic cooperation with China on non-traditional security issues; and regional security architecture such as OSCE and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Dr. Bingbing Wu

Dr. Bingbing Wu is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for International and Strategic Studies (IISS), Deputy Director of the Department of Arabic Language and Culture, as well as Director of the Institute of Arab-Islamic Studies at Peking University. His research interests focus on the politics of the contemporary Middle East, China-Middle Eastern relations, Shi’i Islam and Iranian studies, and Islamist movements. He is the author of The Rise of the Modern Shi’i Islamism (CASS Press, 2004), and has also published a number of academic articles. He is currently a board member of the Chinese Society of Middle Eastern Studies, the China-Arab Friendship Association, and the China-Iran Friendship Association.
Rayan El-Amine

Rayan El-Amine is the Assistant Director of AUB’s Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs and member of the Institute’s steering committee (ex-officio). Previously, he coordinated the “Arab Uprisings Research Initiative” at AUB. Before moving back to his native Lebanon, he held a variety of positions at organizations and academic institutions in the US, including Program Coordinator and Lecturer at the Middle East Studies Program at City College of San Francisco.

Dr. Alessandra Cappelletti

Dr. Alessandra Cappelletti is member of the Board of Directors of the Research Institute on Contemporary China (CSCC) and President of the Cultural Association Cinaforum. She is currently Guest Research Fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP) in Berlin, and she was Joint Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the IN-East Institute of East Asian Studies and at the Centre for Global Cooperation at the University of Duisburg-Essen. An expert on Xinjiang development issues, her current research focuses on Chinese modus operandi in foreign policy, with a concentration on Pakistan. Dr. Cappelletti holds a PhD from Minzu University of China, Beijing, and the University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’. She worked as a consultant for KFW for the Sino-German Poverty Alleviation Program Xinjiang in 2011 and 2012.
Dr. Moritz Pieper

Dr. Moritz Pieper is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Salford, Manchester. He holds a PhD from the University of Kent, and has been a visiting Research Fellow at China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU), Beijing, at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs’ (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP) Brussels office, and at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London. He recently published his monograph on non-Western foreign policies towards the Iranian nuclear program.

Dr. Imad Mansour

Dr. Imad Mansour is Assistant Professor at the Department of International Affairs, Qatar University. His research interests lay at the intersection of International Relations and History with an emphasis on narratives in governing, and the social roots of international politics, especially conflicts and rivalries. Of particular interest to Dr. Mansour is the construction of theoretical propositions that draw empirically on non/pre-Westphalian orders and ontologies. He is currently investigating historic political influences and contemporary manifestations of the Silk Roads in relation to West Asia.
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