The Struggle for the State in Syria
Chatham House, London | 11 March 2020 | #CHSyria

The nearly decade-long Syrian conflict was sparked by a nation-wide civil uprising demanding a change from a regime-led state, characterised by political oppression, socioeconomic exclusion and abuse of state institutions, to an accountable state, governed by the rule of law with fair, just and inclusive institutions. The uprising turned into an armed conflict due to two interlinked reasons, the regime’s brutality in dealing with the civil demonstrations, and the external interventions which increased internal polarisation and militarised all parties involved in conflict. Consequently, armed groups became the de facto authorities in opposition-controlled areas, except for a few elected civil authorities which failed to build inclusive institutions in the areas they governed. After gaining control of the majority of Syria over the last two years, the regime seems to be in the process of establishing a more violent version of the regime-led state model implemented in the country before the conflict.

This conference brings together policymakers, experts, academics and civil society leaders to explore the current condition of the state in Syria. It will discuss the structure, interrelations and importance of the regime’s core institutions and their interactions with international actors. It will also highlight the regime’s different approaches in dealing with state institutions and non-state actors. Speakers will discuss governance dynamics in north-western Syria and the East Euphrates region, and will analyse governance variations between regions within the regime-controlled areas after the dramatic changes in 2018 and 2019. The conference will aim to evaluate the possibility for Syrians to move from a regime-led state to one that is accountable to its citizens and is governed by the rule of law.

**Agenda**

09.00 – 09.30  **Registration and Refreshments**

09.30 – 11.00  **Session 1: Governance Dynamics and Regional Variations**

The first session will discuss governance dynamics in regions under different de facto authorities focusing on the dramatic changes of the last two years. Speakers will shed light on governance mechanisms in the north-western region of the country and the East Euphrates areas. The session will also discuss governance in regime-controlled areas focusing on the governance variations within these areas.

**Speakers**
Haid Haid, Senior Consulting Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House
Reem Salahi, Independent Consultant
Wladimir van Wilgenburg, Independent Journalist

**Moderator:** Rima Maktabi, London Bureau Chief, Al Arabiya News Channel

11.00 – 11.30  **Refreshments**

The conference will be held on the record.
11.30 – 13.00  Session 2: Regime Relations with State Institutions and Non-state Actors

This session will explore the relations between the regime’s core actors and state institutions and non-state actors. It will discuss the mechanisms used by these actors before and during the conflict to abuse the judiciary system, public services and humanitarian aid and to exercise authority over non-state actors in different regions.

**Speakers**
Kholoud Mansour, Affiliated Researcher, Lund University  
Zaki Mehchy, Senior Consulting Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House  
Ibrahim Olabi, Director, Syrian Legal Development Programme; Barrister, Guernica 37

**Moderator:** Nadim Houry, Executive Director, Arab Reform Initiative

13.00 – 14.00  Lunch

14.00 – 15.30  Session 3: Core Institutions within the Regime-led State

This session will identify the regime’s core institutions that include military and security actors and will map their influence, resources and relations with the presidential office before and during the conflict. Speakers will shed light on these actors’ inter-relations and networks with other regime agencies and with external actors. The session will also discuss the ability of these institutions to build an accountable state.

**Speakers**
Sam Dagher, Independent Journalist  
Lina Khatib, Director, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House  
Reinoud Leenders, Reader in International Politics and Middle East Studies, King’s College London

**Moderator:** Lina Sinjab, Senior Consulting Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House

15.30 – 16.00  Refreshments

16.00 – 17.30  Session 4: Towards Accountability and Rule of Law

The final session will explore economic dynamics including possible reconstruction processes and the capacity of returning refugees to contribute to the creation of just and fair state institutions. Speakers will also discuss the capability of the constitutional committee to enact an inclusive constitution and the mechanisms to bridge the implementation gap.

**Speakers**
Rime Allaf, Independent Researcher  
Sana Mustafa, Founder and Manager, The Network for Refugee Voices  
Jomana Qaddour, Doctoral Student, Georgetown University Law Center

**Moderator:** Salim Salamah, Independent Consultant

17.30 – 18.30  Reception

The conference will be held on the record.