



The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)

Statement of Purpose

How challenges will be met is largely a function of who produces the knowledge and formulates the issues.

The Arab Reform Initiative is a network of independent Arab research and policy institutes, with partners from the United States and Europe. Its goal is to mobilize the Arab research capacity to advance knowledge and develop a program for democratic reform in the Arab World which is realistic and home grown. The Initiative also aims to produce policy recommendations that can help promote reform in the region.

The broad consensus on the need for reform of Arab socio-economic and political systems has created a momentum that can be seen as a progress in and of itself. However, the content and the modalities of this reform process have yet to be defined: how to start? Which forces to mobilize? What obstacles are to be overcome? How to prevent various forces – governmental, opposition or outside parties - from instrumentalizing it to serve narrow or short-term interests? How to avoid mistakes? How these and other challenges will be met is largely a function of who produces the knowledge and formulates the issues, both conceptually and practically.

The initiative is based on three main principles:

1- *The Arab world needs to develop its own conception of reform*, based on its present realities and rooted in its history. While there are basic universal criteria that apply to a process of democratic reform in any given society, the initiative seeks to generate knowledge by those who are the prime targets of reform.

2- *Reform is a comprehensive process* which can only succeed if the interaction between the political, economic, societal and cultural spheres is fully recognized. In the quest to build free, just and democratic societies, the initiative privileges issues of democratization and good governance, socio-economic and cultural transformations, and social justice.

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3- *Arab countries present very diverse situations* and this diversity is likely to become more salient as societies engage in processes of political liberalization. Thanks to its composition, with member institutes and experts from all countries of the region, the initiative is well positioned to produce analyses and recommend diverse solutions relevant to the specificities of each society.

The role of each member institute within its own national context is to foster an informed debate on reform inclusive of a wide range of representatives from various sectors of society and government. Policy options produced by the Arab Reform Initiative will be addressed to political leaders, elites and civil society groups in the Arab world with a view to generate knowledge and deepen the ongoing debate in the region. The Initiative also aims to promote a dialogue between policy institutes in the Arab world, the United States and Europe with a view to forge a shared vision which can advance the understanding of western policy makers on issues of reform in the Arab world.

Finally, the Arab Reform Initiative aims to raise awareness in the Arab world about successful transitions to democracy in other parts of the world, and of the mechanisms and compromises which made such successful transitions possible.

The network's recommendations will be formulated by scholars from the Arab region. Partner institutions from the United States and Europe will serve to facilitate the collaboration through organizational backing for the project and will help convey the message of the network to the relevant constituencies in their own countries.

The initiative engages in a range of activities, all conducted collaboratively between its members. Its agenda includes producing policy briefs, thematic and country studies, conducting comparative public opinion surveys, organizing workshops and conferences, and sponsoring occasional task forces, all with the aim of formulating policy recommendations that can advance reform in the Arab world.

The Founding Members of the Network:

The Arab Institutes:

- Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt.
- Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches en Sciences Sociales (CERSS), Morocco.
- King Faisal Foundation for Research and Islamic Studies, Saudi Arabia.
- The Arab Reform Forum at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt.
- The Center for Strategic and Future Studies, Kuwait.
- The Center for Strategic Studies, Jordan.
- The Center for Sudanese Studies, Sudan.
- The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, Lebanon.
- The Palestinian Center for Political and Survey Research, Palestine.

American and European Partners:

- The Center for European Reform, Great Britain
- The Council on Foreign Relations, United States
- Fundacion Para Las Relaciones Internacionales Y El Dialogo Exterior (FRIDE), Spain.
- Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Greece
- The European Institute for Security Studies, (based in) France.