

Council on Middle East Studies



MISSING IN ACTION: Empathy as a Means of Conflict Resolution in the Middle East and Beyond

MATT WALDMAN

Luce Hall Room 202 | 4:00 – 6:00 pm | Wednesday, November 8, 2017

This talk emphasizes the role of human beings in creating and resolving conflict. It considers the challenges of understanding the parties involved in conflict, especially under challenging conditions and given the prevalence of cognitive errors and biases, such as demonization and denial.

The speaker argues that empathizing can help to throw light on warring parties – including their identity, psychology and motivations – which are too often overlooked. Empathizing can also help decision makers overcome their own biases. It can give them a deeper understanding of others and their own role in conflict.

The speaker will reference cases, such as Afghanistan and Iran, to illustrate how the failure to empathize can contribute to false assumptions that underpin war, or, alternatively, how empathizing can build understanding that paves the way to negotiations. He argues that empathizing should be institutionalized in mediation, diplomacy and foreign policymaking.

Matt Waldman is Director of the Center for Empathy in International Affairs, Adviser to the UN Special Representative for Somalia, and Associate Fellow of Chatham House – The Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Matt specialises in high-level diplomacy, mediation and negotiation in armed conflict. He has served as an adviser to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, the UN Special Representative for Afghanistan and the EU Representative for Afghanistan. He had also undertaken mediation work in the Middle East and Africa as a Senior Adviser at the European Institute of Peace and Special Adviser to Inter Mediate.

Matt was previously a Research Fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, a Fellow at Harvard's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, and Co-Director of the Chatham House Opportunity in Crisis initiative on Afghanistan. He has been appointed as the Eric Lane Fellow at Cambridge University for Lent Term 2018.