2017 MENA Think Tank Summit: Thinking and Advising in a Time of Protracted Conflict and Sustained Instability: The Role of Think Tanks in Shaping the Future of MENA

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Abstract
Forty-eight participants from thirty-seven think tanks and twenty-one countries came together for the second MENA Think Tank Summit at the Dead Sea, Jordan. Though it had been four years since the inaugural summit, the instability in the region that delayed a second meeting did not extinguish the desire of the participants to reach their target audience and learn from one another. The diversity of the participants and the numerous recommendations and collaborative ideas proposed are a huge indication of the importance of such a meeting, as well as the simple fact that the issues MENA think tanks face are the same across the region. This is an extension of another truth touched upon at the summit: that national problems in MENA are regional problems and that no conflict is isolated. Participants in the summit convened for two and half days, with four roundtable discussions and three breakout sessions. The problems discussed included: the necessity for think tanks to collaborate closely and share data, concerns over think tank staffing due to the lack of focus in the MENA region on the social sciences in universities, how to influence government properly without immediately self-censoring, the constraints of the current political climate, and primarily; how to utilize and involve the youth of the MENA region to improve think tank success and ensure a future for them in the region. Similar to the 2013 MENA Think Tank Summit Report, this report will divide challenges and recommendations suggested by summit participants into two categories: institutional challenges and capitalizing on transitions.

Disciplines
Near and Middle Eastern Studies

Comments
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THINK TANK SUMMIT REPORT

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2017 MENA THINK TANK SUMMIT REPORT

Thinking and Advising in a Time of Protracted Conflict and Sustained Instability:
The Role of Think Tanks in Shaping the Future of MENA

Under the Patronage of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal

Dead Sea, Jordan
September 19-21, 2017
Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is in a period of tension. The fight against extremism persists, war in Syria continues, Jordan is facing a water crisis, nations impacted by the Arab Spring are rebuilding post-conflict, and the region at large is still dealing with the effects of mass displacement due to the refugee crisis. Though not all nations in the MENA region have been impacted directly, the turmoil has certainly had an impact on the entire region.

This environment creates a unique opportunity for think tanks in the MENA region. Never before have think tanks had the opportunity to bring about such crucial change, nor has there ever been such a need for their research and wisdom. The MENA region does not have a think tank tradition. There is no history of governments relying on think tank research or consulting scientific research. Compared to the rest of the world, the MENA region’s think tanks are tragically underutilized. This waste of talent and potential must be directly combatted. In a period of flux where MENA is in desperate need for guidance and tangible answers from quantitative and qualitative data research and analysis, think tanks have a unique opportunity.

Despite the necessity of think tanks in the current political climate in the MENA region, MENA think tanks must also face an issue that plagues their peers all over the world. In an advancing world where the only constant is change, the challenge to remain relevant is greater than ever. When coupled with a history of irrelevance in MENA, it becomes clear that the obstacles in the way of MENA think tank success are as prevalent and great as their potential.

The period of tension and sustained conflict in the MENA region has led to a shift in the political arena, one think tanks must take advantage of in a proactive manner. It is necessary to conduct research and put forward long-term solutions. Short-term, quick solutions focused on influencing governments and politicians looking for a rapid fix is dangerous in a political climate desperate for stability and sustainability. Think tanks must continue planning, coming together to meet, sharpening their operations and fine-tuning their strategies, and actively seek out new ways to reach their audience. Being passive has not and will not work. In order to be heard, think tanks must collectively be loud and utilize every tool at their disposal.
It was with this in mind that forty-eight participants from thirty-seven think tanks and twenty-one countries came together for the second MENA Think Tank Summit at the Dead Sea, Jordan. Though it had been four years since the inaugural summit, the instability in the region that delayed a second meeting did not extinguish the desire of the participants to reach their target audience and learn from one another. The diversity of the participants and the numerous recommendations and collaborative ideas proposed are a huge indication of the importance of such a meeting, as well as the simple fact that the issues MENA think tanks face are the same across the region. This is an extension of another truth touched upon at the summit: that national problems in MENA are regional problems and that no conflict is isolated. Participants in the summit convened for two and half days, with four roundtable discussions and three breakout sessions. The problems discussed included: the necessity for think tanks to collaborate closely and share data, concerns over think tank staffing due to the lack of focus in the MENA region on the social sciences in universities, how to influence government properly without immediately self-censoring, the constraints of the current political climate, and primarily; how to utilize and involve the youth of the MENA region to improve think tank success and ensure a future for them in the region. Similar to the 2013 MENA Think Tank Summit Report, this report will divide challenges and recommendations suggested by summit participants into two categories: *institutional challenges and capitalizing on transitions*. 
Institutional Challenges

Think tanks all over the world face similar institutional challenges. Whether it be securing a consistent source of funding, locating capable staff, communicating their vision efficiently, or attempting to create a unique think tank identity, it easily observable that these are not problems that are unique to the Middle East and North Africa. However, these issues are exacerbated in MENA due to the politically unstable environment and lack of think tank tradition. Securing funding must be negotiated to ensure that institutional independence is maintained, qualified staff must be located in spite of the MENA region’s lack of focus on the social sciences in universities, visions must be communicated delicately due to MENA’s restrictive political environments that breed censorship, and think tanks must differentiate themselves while simultaneously collaborate with their peers. If think tanks in MENA are to thrive and meet the needs of MENA’s changing society, these challenges must be answered clearly. Participants in Jordan discussed these issues in depth, putting forward potential solutions.

Diversifying Funding

Funding is a primary need for think tanks. Securing reliable sources of funding without compromising a think tank’s vision is an issue that is faced internationally, but is particularly pressing in MENA. Private funding is scarce. Private funders look for immediate returns on their investment, which can be a difficult pitch for think tanks in MENA. Public funding, while available in some countries within MENA, rarely comes without strings attached by governments. A think tank whose ambition is to influence public policy can struggle should their government be their primary source of funding. Western donors have been consistent think tank contributors in the past, though the threat of being forced to follow a “Western agenda” is present. This was a major aspect to the 2013 Summit, where recommendations were made to systematically cut off dependence on the West.

Short-term funding based on individual projects has been the norm for think tanks in MENA, similar to think tanks in other world regions. That being said, short-term projects breed short-term solutions, often tailored to meet the vision of the donor. Think tanks are designed to deliver well-informed, long-term analysis of issues being faced in their respective region or state. This is not conducive to a reliance on project-based funding, especially when coupled with the fact that a reliance on projects does more to bandage the issue of securing consistent funding rather than
solve it.

**Diversifying Funding: Looking to Private Donors**

The consensus amongst the participants at the summit in Jordan was securing consistent funding was crucial, particularly from sources outside of the public arena. This is where private donors have so much potential. However, the issues with that were evident and widely discussed. Private donors that make frequent donations to think tanks are few and far between - but private donors in general are not. The MENA region may be politically unstable, but it is filled with many businesses and has a vibrant public sector. This is where it is crucial that think tanks understand how to market themselves. The goal of a think tank is, and always has been, to influence public policy and usher in positive change. The goals of think tanks are not mutually exclusive to the goals of private industries and corporations within the region. In fact, particularly when it comes to matters of political stability and economic sustainability, think tank ambitions overlap very well with the desires of the private sector.

This is where think tanks must understand how to properly market themselves. It is important that think tank staff are not simply educated researchers, but capable entrepreneurs with the ability to sell their product and properly communicate to private donors how establishing a partnership could be beneficial to all parties involved. Despite think tanks not being businesses, they do produce a product. That product is more valuable than the private sector in the MENA region realizes at the moment.

There is, of course, the problem of convincing the private sector how their investment will pay off. Unlike in a business, investing in a think tank is not something private donors do to make their money back. This is where a proper understanding of marketing becomes so important. A think tank has the potential to bring about a great deal of change, should they have the financial means to support their research. Properly communicating that can be extremely attractive to prospective donors looking to make a tangible social impact.

**Diversifying Funding: Handling Public Donors**

Private donations are extremely attractive and may very well be the future of think tank financial sustainability. However, many existing think tanks today rely on public funding to remain active. Maintaining the delicate balance of relying on the goodwill of the government while simultaneously being independent and not losing touch with their vision can be a daunting task for a think tank. At the summit, censorship was discussed widely. Think tanks relying on government funding cannot afford to be controversial, nor can they take a public stance
dismissing or disagreeing with the government. Good intentions can easily lead to defunding. In a global environment where think tanks everywhere are struggling to remain relevant, a think tank in a politically unstable region like MENA must not throw itself into the fire, not when think tank guidance is so necessary.

Another form of censorship that was widely discussed was self-censorship. This, arguably, occurs more than flat-out censorship from the government. The fear of taking chances leads to think tank scholars and executives to censor themselves. Though this keeps them alive, it is hypocritical. A think tank must ask itself, what is our ultimate goal? What is it we are trying to accomplish? Self-censorship can lead to a think tank being a confirmation machine and arm of the government. This is not a think tank at all.

It was suggested that receiving public funding does not necessarily mean that a think tank cannot make tangible recommendations to the government, nor does it mean that they lose the ability to influence public policy. This is where “soft diplomacy”, as it was called, comes into play. Think tanks that receive public funding have the added advantage of having government officials as colleagues. This relationship with the government, while rigid, is a relationship nonetheless— one that think tanks reliant on private donors do not have. Properly utilizing these contacts and meeting with them to discuss policy initiatives and recommendations can go a long way. By attempting to influence public policy through private, friendly meetings, a think tank can ensure that its original ideas are heard. They can then use their presence on social media, or their published articles to ensure the public is aware of what exactly specific policies mean, while making gentle recommendations that will not catch the government by surprise. Though it is not necessarily the preferable way to usher in change, it does ensure that a think tank does not become complacent, or worse.

**Government Involvement in Solving Funding Issues**

Aside from maintaining civil relationships with crucial public donors, the 2013 MENA Summit discussed the possibility of lobbying the government to establish tax-breaks for private donations to think tanks, as tax laws in the Arab world currently give private donors no federal initiatives to donate.

**Diversifying Funding: Moving Past Short-Term Solutions**

Think tanks in MENA, similar to think tanks across the world, rely heavily on short-term project-based funding. This is not an issue in principle. Being commissioned by the private sector or public sector to conduct a study is beneficial to establishing a healthy relationship, as
well as increase public awareness of a think tank’s work. It becomes detrimental in MENA, however, due to the general scarcity of funding for think tanks. This leads to a scramble to secure funding, where short-term project after short-term project is conducted.

The key word in this is short-term. Rushed research leads to rushed conclusions, only relevant in the short-term. Think tanks thrive on their ability to conduct in-depth research, where their results make recommendations on concrete solutions in the long-term. Their ambition is to influence public policy, not politics- the distinction here is key. By accepting and relying on project-based commissions, think tanks do themselves a disservice. Not only is it unreliable in terms of consistent funding, it compromises a think tank’s vision, the capability of its scholars, and more often than not, censors findings to cater to the donor. The result is all the worst parts of relying on public and private donors.

Think tanks must look inwards and reestablish their purpose. Though funding is necessary in ensuring a think tank’s survival, nothing is gained from its existence if it does nothing but pander to donors and deliver rushed results.

**Core Funding**

Regardless of whether participants desired funding to come from private donors, or preferred soft-diplomacy with public donors, all agreed that increased, reliable funding was a necessity in order to support institutional capacity-building. By eliminating the ever-present concern of vanishing funding, think tanks could put more time in effort in addressing other pressing issues as the scarcity of qualified personnel and establishing a clear institutional vision.

**Staffing Issues**

Participants at the summit agreed that attracting and retaining qualified staff and personnel to work at think tanks was a daunting task, particularly when it comes to recruiting staff from within the region. It was noted at this summit, like the 2013 summit before, that think tanks often look to Western-educated staff. Participants acknowledged that this was due to various reasons. Universities in the MENA region do not emphasize enough the importance of the social sciences. Political science, philosophy, and psychology are not recognized as respected majors. Within the region, there is an association with them being less rigorous or less likely to lead to a high paying job. When coupled with the reality that social science programs in MENA universities actually are weak, qualified talent to work at MENA think tanks becomes scarce. Think tanks are also to blame. Due to their lack of history in the region and the public’s lack of familiarity with the work
that think tanks do, it is not a well-known job, let alone an appealing one.

When potential candidates for think tank work are located, think tanks struggle to convince them to work for less job security and lower salaries than government ministries would offer. Think tank employees need to genuinely believe in the impact a think tank can have. Asking an up and coming professional to sacrifice a sure thing for the potential to make a difference can be a tough sell. To counter this, the participants in the summit emphasized a focus on the youth.

**Youth Participation**

Participants largely focused on youth engagement and participation as a necessary component of strengthening regional think tanks. Several factors, including under-developed social sciences curricula, overly ideological educational approaches, and a lack of networking with students hinder youth involvement in think tanks. The combination of these factors currently lends to staffing issues, lack of qualified local talent, and lack of connection with younger generations.

In regards to educational trends, participants emphasized the need for a more robust social science curriculum across the region, as well as less of an ideological approach to such training. Many noted that the social sciences do not receive the same level of support as STEM fields, reducing the number of students qualified to work in think tanks. Participants also criticized the overly ideological framework applied in training students in these fields, which also impedes pragmatic training.

Think tanks serve to better the future of the internationally community, in which youth play an absolutely critical role. This issue goes hand in hand with the use social media platforms discussed earlier; if think tanks are not successfully keeping up with current issues that could influence the long term, then they are not achieving their purpose. The most pressing challenges facing the globe today are going to fall into the hands of today’s youth, which is why it is so important to make them a target audience for think tank research. MENA Think Tanks should be working together to hear out today’s youth and encourage them to conduct their own research and get educated on the issues facing their region. One way MENA Think Tanks can do this is to incentivize young people to pursue undergraduate and graduate level educations at some of the prestigious institutions found in the region. Too often MENA youth who pursue these higher levels of education come to institutions in Europe and the United States. This creates a
disconnect between these educated young people and the issues facing local communities. One scholar at the Summit believed that one of the main issues facing particularly Africa is the susceptibility of young people to find themselves drawn to extremist rhetoric. This issue faces not just Africa but the entire MENA region as a whole. In order to rectify this issue, think tanks must focus on educating youth about the dangers of extremism. It is also important for think tanks to reach out to community leaders and religious leaders to educate them about how their words influence the youth. Taking these steps will help foster a more conducive environment for youth engagement and meaning social change in the MENA region.

In regards to think tank initiatives, participants suggested that more organizations collaborate with universities through internship programs, particularly focusing on graduate students: graduate students are potential new hires who are not very costly and are very adaptable to institutional culture. Others suggested setting up think tank-sponsored policy analysis, research, and writing programs at MENA universities. Still others suggested establishing multilateral educational programs for the next generation of policymakers and think tank scholars. Setting up exchange programs with famous international institutions was also mentioned.

**Communicating More Effectively**

Participants at the summit agreed that the average policy maker has very little time to review long-winded, abstract academic publications. With only around half an hour of time to read policy recommendations per day, it is crucial for MENA think tanks to be able to condense their research in short, simple briefs. Proper usage of social media is also a necessity, as it provides think tanks the ability to reach policy makers that had been out of reach before.

This shift in communication is not only relevant to reaching policymakers, but to engage communities as well. It can be difficult to grab the public’s attention with lengthy articles and academic formalities. Utilizing media resources and being able to release interactive, intuitive versions of research is an efficient way to make it easier for the public to understand and be able to share think tank research.

**Improving the Inter-Relations of Think Tanks in the Region**

A fundamental issue of the MENA think tank network is that the link between think tanks in the region is weak, if it exists at all. While transnational cooperation is lower in the Middle East in general, regional think tanks would benefit by communicating and sharing knowledge. One particular challenge is the interaction between Israeli think tanks and those in neighboring
Arab states. While governmentally these countries may not have official relations, cooperation between think tanks could facilitate intellectual interaction where political interaction is not possible. Political boundaries should not prevent mutually advantageous academic relationships. Greater regional cooperation will also raise the baseline standards and expectations for individual think tanks themselves. This will lead to more innovation, legitimizing think tanks as a means to both identify and solve regional problems in the eyes of aspiring leaders amongst the newer generation.

A defining characteristic of think tanks is that they are separate from the politics of a specific region and restrict their focus just to pertinent policy problems. Whereas this exists in principle, it needs to better manifest itself in reality. This could take the forms of greater data sharing amongst regions, greater willingness to communicate across borders and an explicit recognition that the problems in these regions are complex and interconnected. One way this could be achieved is holding annual summits for the whole region to better establish and to necessitate the norm of communication amongst think tanks. Annual meetings will keep everyone accountable for actively pursuing proposals put forth at prior summits and will ensure that there is a designated time to regroup as a region and collectively assess changes and progress. Another way to improve communication is ensuring that data available to one country is accessible to others. This is rooted in the principle that policies and problems affecting one country have a high probability of affecting more than one country. If this increased communication is achieved, it will lead to multi-faceted solutions that address the needs of all relevant nations comprehensively and concretely.

**Capitalizing on Transitions**

Participants in the summit admitted that no MENA country, with the exception of Israel, has a political climate open enough for a think tank to thrive. Many MENA think tanks find themselves stifled and unable to research and publish freely due to the pressure or censorship from the government. That being said, even think tanks in these countries did admit that self-censorship was a significant issue. In an effort to avoid the negative repercussions of controversy head on, think tanks change the direction of their research or avoid research entirely that is perceived as risky. It is a delicate balance, but controversial issues must be faced directly if think
tanks in MENA truly want to have a positive impact on public policy. Participants also discussed the challenges of conducting meaningful research. In the 2013 MENA Think Tank Summit, the focus was on transitioning from international research to domestic research; shifting research agendas towards issues in their own nations. In the 2017 MENA Think Tank Summit, it became evident to all parties involved that in order to conduct meaningful research, the MENA region must take into account how intertwined the region is. There are no issues that plague individual nations within MENA that do not directly impact their neighbors. In order for think tank research to positively impact MENA, they must not be decisive, but unifying. There are no such things as matters of “national security” in MENA that do not threaten the security of the region at large.

Participants also discussed the trade-off between influence and independence. As discussed earlier, think tanks with access to policy-makers have the opportunity to act as advisors, but are effectively barred from suggesting particularly innovative ideas or potentially controversial opinions. On the other hand, think tanks that are not afraid of controversy and are more daring in their approach to research find that the government is not receptive to what they have to say.

During a break out session, summit participants discussed ways to increase think tank sustainability in a political environment filled with potential, but within a region of the world where think tanks struggle to be both influential and independent. In order to succeed, it is necessary to locate the “sweet spot” on the spectrum between influence and independence in order to maximize potential policy impact. This is something that think tanks must collaborate to locate. Participants also suggested shifting think tank goals from attempting to convince decision makers to take specific paths, to simply promoting healthy dialogue over policy. In an environment where think tank influence is scarce, it is a better idea to start with tangible, realistic goals. Think tanks must also work to make it obvious that their intention with government is not to lobby for specific policy changes like some sort of political faction, but instead a group of intellectuals genuinely trying to encourage constructive dialogue.

**Looking to the Future**

Several of the representatives who attended the Summit agreed that MENA Think Tanks are not being proactive in their handling of international affairs. In order to rectify this concern, the focus of think tank research must shift from short-term troubles to long-term analysis—rather than continually reevaluating the past and examining the present, there needs to be a fundamental transference to looking at the future. And in order to keep up with a turbulent and changing world, think tanks must anticipate challenges rather than waiting for issues to arise. If these research institutions cannot keep tabs on the matters that are plaguing the masses, then they will always be reacting to problems instead of preventing them. Despite the vast differences from country to country and even community to community in the MENA region, in order to foster sustainable change for the future, MENA Think Tanks must focus on putting aside these
differences. Only then will these organizations be able to work together to better not just their own respective countries but the entire MENA region as a whole.

Social Media in the Modern World
Think tanks in the region are not utilizing modern communication channels to keep their communities engaged. Technology has revolutionized public access to information, and MENA Think Tanks should be better equipped to keep up with these changes. Having a social media presence would allow individual think tanks to keep tabs on one another as well as keep tabs in their communities and the issues that they care about. By ignoring these modern platforms of communication, think tanks are hindering their own ability to keep up-to-date and access the most current form of information. One main issue in some MENA region countries is the censorship of social media platforms. Media outlets in the MENA region mostly provide weak reporting and are state sponsored making the use of social media platforms absolutely essential for the consumption of news and information. One representative from the MENA Summit believes that opinions and freedom of expression on social media and television is a necessity for the growth of think tanks as well as the growth of the society as a whole. This free flow of ideas will help create an environment where philosophical, political, and ideological thought can evolve and flourish having positive implications for what MENA Think Tanks are trying to accomplish.

CAPITALIZING ON TRANSITIONS: HOW CAN THE THINK TANK COMMUNITY ADJUST TO CHANGES IN MENA?

With the MENA region being in a state of rebuilding, it is imperative that think tanks adjust accordingly. Now more than ever, think tank guidance is crucial to ensuring that post-conflict state building is a smooth, effective process. There is a clear market for think tank research, should think tanks adjust their visions in favor of the long-term and utilize the power of engaging the public.

The Need for Long-Term Vision

Participants agreed that it was necessary to move past short-term thinking and instead focus efforts on long-term, in-depth research on problem solving that is conducive to concrete solutions. Short-term solutions are efficient in getting a think tank attention from decision makers. Populist leaders in MENA are quick to look for rapid fixes to issues. This is something that think tanks in the region have attempted to take advantage of in the past, hoping that by
offering short-term, quick solutions, policy makers will acknowledge them. This would lead to the evidence of influence that think tanks so desperately need to secure funding and be taken seriously in the region. However, these rapid fixes would be a detriment in the current political climate in the region. Short-term solutions are what led to the disarray that the Middle East and North Africa finds itself in today. Conflict cannot be solved by added conflict. The MENA region’s desire to move past conflict and become peaceful and sustainable goes hand in hand with MENA think tanks and their desire to come up with long-term, beneficial policy suggestions.

The Need for Greater Public Engagement

With the public in the MENA region becoming a more vocal, more political force within MENA, it is increasingly apparent that think tanks must be able to properly engage the masses. It is for this reason that think tank research must be digestible to the public. Research must be distributed in local dialect, think tanks must have a presence on social media and utilize the knowledge of younger scholars to ensure that they never seem out-dated or out-of-touch with the citizenry. Policy briefs must be published in a concise, easily understood manner. In a region where politics have become so polarized and citizens feel far from the political process, it is up to local think tanks to facilitate and foster meaningful, informative public debates. In this manner, the public will have a determining role in steering think tank agendas. Think tanks within MENA, like in other areas of the world, risk focusing on niche issues and losing touch with actual societal needs. Public forums must occur frequently, and above all, the youth in the region must be engaged in meetings. This, along with collaborating with NGOs and CSOs will effectively ensure that think tanks keep their finger on the pulse.

Traditionally, the role of think tanks has been to bridge the gap between the desires of the public and the agendas of policy makers. After the instability caused by the Arab Spring Revolutions, however, leaders within MENA have witnessed firsthand the potential power of mass movements. The Syrian Civil War is still ongoing. It has become apparent to governments in MENA that the public cannot be ignored completely. They’re now paying attention to public
opinion. This air of populism is not unique to MENA, occurring visibly in Western nations as well. Though this is not the case in all of MENA, the presence of this populist wave must be addressed. Think tanks cannot be cut out of the picture entirely. For this reason, think tanks must absolutely seek frequent audiences with the public. A number of participants from both the 2013 and 2017 summit emphasized the importance of having a recognizable presence on television. The public does deserve to have an impact on public policy, it is in the name after all. That being said, think tanks must ensure that the public, like decision makers, are educated on the matters at hand and have the knowledge to make informed decisions and rational opinions. This is another arena where engaging the youth is so critical. With youth in the MENA region having the loudest presence on social media, they have the potential to operate as vessels of reason and fact by spreading think tank research.
Conclusion

The second MENA Think Tank Summit was a productive, dynamic forum where regional scholars had the opportunity to discuss openly the issues they believed were most pressing in a time of protracted conflict and sustained instability. Participants were pleased and expressed great satisfaction with the work of the Summit organizers, the Center for Strategic Studies in Jordan, the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania, as well as the Italian Institute for International Political Studies. Following a successful summit in 2013, this second summit has already led to a scramble to figure out the details for next year’s summit. It has encouraged a strong desire to hold annual think tank meetings, as well as frequent regional meetings based on specific policies.

Key issues discussed fell into two major themes: institutional challenges and capitalizing on transitions. The necessity of diversify funding, solve perennial staffing issues, find ways to balance independence and influence, and the need for networking all pertain to institutional growth were all heavily discussed and regarded as issues of the utmost importance. In a period of sustained conflict, participants agreed that think tanks must take an active approach in shaping their perception and must remain committed to influencing public policy in the region, for the region. In all areas, participants stressed the importance of properly utilizing and motivating youth participation. Their unique voice, coupled with their desire to bring about change in the region and their ability to adapt to an ever-changing world makes them a necessity for think tank success in the MENA region.

All participants involved expressed their desire to make this conference a yearly tradition, viewing the opportunity to connect and network with other think tanks in the region as a powerful opportunity. Conferences such as the 2017 MENA Think Tank Summit must work as a catalyst for increased discussion and close collaboration in the immediate future. Participants expressed interest in smaller conferences as well scattered throughout the year, where nearby think tanks within MENA can meet and discuss policy-specific issues. A successful MENA think tank community is one that is well-connected. Frequent meetings give think tank scholars and executives the chance to collaborate on solutions to policy issues impacting the region at large, brainstorm to find new funding sources, and better engage the public moving forward. This spirit of cooperation will encourage the sharing of data between think tanks as well. Participants at the summit agreed that state problems in MENA are regional problems. The shared history, borders, and identities mean that no conflict is isolated. By banding together, the opportunity to make a difference and usher in change is drastically increased.
Out of all world regions, none needs the guidance and voice of think tanks more than MENA. There is a unique opportunity within the region now. In an era of post-conflict state building, think tanks have the chance to help shape policy in a world area desperate for stability and solutions to long-term issues. Think tanks must be active, vocal, and unafraid to play a major role in ushering in change.

With this urgency and need for action in mind, this is a list of relevant recommendations made by participants of the 2017 Think Tank Summit. Given the state of the MENA region and the unique opportunity afforded to think tanks to make genuine, lasting change, it is important that action is taken as soon as possible.

1. Think-tanks must concentrate research/recruitment on youth. Times are changing and think tanks in the MENA region must continue to adapt and move forward, or risk fading into irrelevance.
2. Shift research focus from short-term concerns and continual examination of past events aimed at influencing politicians to long-term analysis of issues spanning the next five to ten years.
3. Think Tanks should diversify their methods of disseminating and distributing research - use shorter policy briefs and utilize social media/other media outlets.
4. Establish a formal network of MENA think tanks across disciplines and sub-regions in order to enhance think tank research capabilities and influence. It then becomes crucial for think tanks to utilize the network to share quantitative/qualitative data with one another. Due to the MENA region’s shared history and conflicts, national problems are, more often than not, regional problems.
5. Establish internship programs that focus on teaching students research and writing skills in order to develop their ability to analyze and assess policy. Universities in the MENA region do not put enough emphasis on the social sciences. Think tanks must change the perception of these studies in order to draw potential think tank scholars.
6. Think tanks must continue to look to the public when deciding on research and advocacy agendas. By hosting forums and roundtables, as well as collaborating with NGOs and CSOs, MENA think tanks can establish themselves as an intermediary between the public sphere and the government.
7. Individual think tanks in the region must internally establish their mission and purpose. Think Tanks must address the vital question: what are you, as a think tank, trying to accomplish? Being able to come up with a clear answer is necessary in order to be influential and usher in positive change.
8. Annual meetings between MENA Think Tanks, as well as regional meetings focused around policy-specific issues. It is crucial that these meetings consist of think tank executives, as well as younger staff and future leaders to ensure all voices and perspectives are adequately represented. This space could also firmly establish common think tank goals and work as a unit to protect think tank interests.
9. In establishing a network for MENA Think Tanks, it is recommended that it activates contacts and cooperation with other regional Networks to reach the final target of a Global Think Tank Network.
10. Think Tanks in the region struggle with getting the ear of decision makers. By trying to recruit former decision makers and government officials to become involved and express their support, think tanks struggling to gain legitimacy can gain government attention.
11. Think tanks must consider new and push forward recommendations geared towards integration of women in the region in the labor market, as well as the reduction of legislative violations against them.
12. Think tanks must put a particular emphasis on attracting youth. One way to go about this is through setting up open think tank workshops, where potential researchers can approach senior researchers with research ideas they are interested/would like to personally work on. This kind of mentorship program on the local level can increase think tank reputations and the perception of think tanks by students. These interested individuals should be able to reach scholars via multiple channels, including online resources such as Skype.
13. Think tanks should establish foreign exchange programs between young scholars across the MENA region and the world at large.
Thinking and Advising in a Time of Protracted Conflict and Sustained Instability:

The Role of Think Tanks in Shaping the Future of MENA

Under the Patronage of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal

September 19-21, 2017

Day 1: September 19, 2017

4:30-5:00PM Registration

5:15-5:30PM Welcome Host and Organizers

Azmi Mahafzah, Ph.D
President
University of Jordan
Amman, Jordan

James G. McGann, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer, International Studies
Lauder Institute for Management and International Studies
Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program
Wharton School and School of Arts and Sciences
Senior Fellow, Fels Institute of Government
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA USA

5:45-8:15PM Official Welcome and Keynote Address

HRH Prince El Hasan Bin Talal Speech, Delivered by H.R Dr. Adnan Badran, Former Prime Minister of Jordan
Opening Session

This session will provide an overview of the security, political and economic issues and challenges facing the region from the perspective of thought leaders from the private sector, Media, and Policymakers.

Chair: Musa Shteiwi, Director, Center for Strategic Studies

Panelists 3-4 with 6-8 minutes each:

Hillary Wiesner, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Program Director, Transnational Movements and the Arab Region
Paolo Magri, Executive Vice President and Director of the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)
Rana Sabbagh, Executive Director, Arab Reporters for Investigative Reporting (ARIJ)

Dinner

Day 2: September 20, 2017

Think Tank Publication Bazaar and Networking

The Summit is conducted in a Roundtable Format with panels that are intended to frame the key issues and provide constructively provocative questions to stimulate the discussion that follows each Session.

Session One (Plenary)

Meeting the Challenge of Extremism and Radicalization in the MENA Region

This session will address the major developments in this area, implications for the region, and efforts to combat it. What programs and policies have think tanks developed to counter these movements in MENA and beyond.

Chair: Ebtesam Al Ketbi, President, Emirates Policy Center
Panelists 3-4 with 6-8 minutes each:

Elcano Royal Institute, Haizam Amirah Fernández, Senior Analyst
Center for Strategic Studies, Mohammad Abu Rumman, Director of Studies
Centre of Mediterranean and International Studies (CEMI), Ahmed Driss, Director
Moroccan Institute of International Relations (IMRI), Jawad Kerdoudi, President

10:15-10:30AM Coffee/Tea Break

10:30-11:30AM Morning Break Out Sessions

4 Concurrent Working Groups
Break out session that will include an assessment of critical policy issues as well as the challenges facing the challenges facing think tank scholars and executives. These sessions are intended to be inactive and focused on sharing best practices and the transfer of strategies, best practices and innovative approaches. Participants can select one of the four concurrent sessions listed below. The same sessions will be repeated in PM to give everyone the opportunity to participate in at least one session on policy and on think tank issues:

1. Post Conflict Inclusive State Building (policy)
   Chair: Oraib Al Rantawi, Director General, Al Quds Center for Political Studies
   Panelists 3-4 with 4-5 minutes each:
   Middle East Studies Center, Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, President
   Egyptian Center for Public Policy Studies, Ahmed Ragab, Executive Director
   Arab Reform Initiative, Hana Jaber, Senior Fellow
   African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), Larry Gbevlo-Lartey, Director

2. Is Anyone Listening?: Strategic Communications and Marketing for Think Tanks
   Chair: Marlos Lima, Director, Latin America Policy Center, FGV
   Panelists 3-4 with 4-5 minutes each:
3. The Role of Youth in Creating A Prosperous, Secure and Stable Future for the MENA Region

Chair: Sami Atallah, Executive Director, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)

Panelists: 3-4 with 4-5 minutes each:

Sadeq Institute, Anas El Gomati, Director General/Research Director, Governance and Security
Palestinian Centre for Peace and Democracy, Ekram Zubadi, Project Coordinator
Center for Studies and Research in Social Sciences, Abdelhak Saaf, General Secretary
Al Sharq Forum, Galip Daly, Director of Research

4. Strategies for Building a Sustainable Future for MENA Think Tanks

Chair: Khalid AlDakkan, Head of Research and Analysis Decision Support Center- Royal Court

Panelists 3-4 with 4-5 minutes each:

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation, Annette Ranko Resident Representative Jordan
Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Mir Ahmad Joyenda, Deputy Director
Brookings Doha Center, AlHasan Zwayne, Development Manager
OCP Policy Center, Mohamed Loulichki, Research Fellow

11:30-12:45AM Session Two (plenary)

Economic Development and Cooperation (plenary)
This session is hoped to discuss the major global and regional economic and developmental issues and to explore future regional and international cooperation.

Chair: Nader S. Kabbani, Senior Fellow, Brookings Doha Center Nader S. Kabbani, Brookings Global Economy and Development Center
Panelists 3-4 with 6-8 minutes each:
King Abdullah Studies and Research Center, David Hobbs, Head of Research
Dubai Economic Council, Irfan Al Hassani, Editor in Cheif
Cercle d’Action et de Reflexion Autour de l’Entreprise (CARE), Amel Belaid, Vice President
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Matthes Buhbe, Resident Director Jordan & Iraq

12:45-2:45PM  Lunch and Keynote Address

Ideas into Action Formulating an Effective Response to the Refugee Crisis: The Role of Think Tanks
Shaden Khallaf, Senior Policy Advisor, UNHCR MENA

3:00-4:15PM  Session Three (plenary)

Why Think Tanks Matter More Than Ever Before in MENA
A panel of think tanks, donors and policymakers will discuss why supporting and nurturing think tanks to help policymakers and the public meet the challenges and seize the opportunities in the MENA region.

Chair: James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania

Panelists 2-3 with 5-6 minutes each:
Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies, Mohammed Alsulami, Chairman
Future for Advanced Research and Studies, Amal Saker, Deputy Director of Executive Affairs
Center for Applied Policy Research, LMU Munich, Christine Strassmaier, Analyst

Concurrent Strategy Sessions (note sessions repeated from AM)
Break out session that will include an assessment of critical policy issues as well as the challenges facing the challenges facing think tank scholars and executives. These sessions are intended to be inactive and focused on sharing best practices and the transfer of strategies, best practices and innovate approaches. Participants can select one of the four concurrent sessions listed below:
1. Post Conflict Inclusive State Building (policy)
Chair: Orab Al Rantawi, Director General, Al Quds Center for Political Studies
Panelists 3-4 with 4-5 minutes each:
Middle East Studies Center, Diawer Ala‘Aldeen, President
Egyptian Center for Public Policy Studies, Ahmed Ragab, Executive Director
African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), Larry Gbevlo-Lartey, Director
Arab Reform Initiative, Hana Jaber, Senior Fellow

2. Is Anyone Listening?: Strategic Communications and Marketing for Think Tanks
Chair: Marlos Lima, Director, Latin America Policy Center, FGV
Panelists 3-4 with 4-5 minutes each:
Decision Support Center- Royal Court, Saleh Alshumrani, Supervisor of Data and Information Center
TRT World Research Centre, Jamal Abdullah, Senior Researcher
Egyptian Center for Public Policy Studies, Ahmed Aboueldahab, Advocacy & Outreach Officer
Dubai Public Policy Research Centre, Rama Al Jayyousi, Resident Fellow

3. The Role of Youth in Creating A Prosperous, Secure and Stable Future for the MENA Region
Chair: Sami Atallah, Executive Director, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)
Panelists: 3-4 with 4-5 minutes each:
Sadeq Institute, Anas El Gomati, Director General/Research Director, Governance and Security
Palestinian Centre for Peace and Democracy, Ekram Zubadi, Project Coordinator
Center for Studies and Research in Social Sciences, Abdelhak Saaf, General Secretary
Al Sharq Forum, Galip Daly, Director of Research

4. Strategies for Building a Sustainable Future for MENA Think Tanks
Chair: Khalid AlDakkan, Head of Research and Analysis Decision Support Center- Royal Court
Panelists 3-4 with 4-5 minutes each:
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation, Annette Ranko Resident Representative Jordan
Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Mir Ahmad Joyenda, Deputy Director
Brookings Doha Center, AlHasan Zwayne, Development Manager
OCP Policy Center, Mohamed Loulichki, Research Fellow

6:30-9:00PM Dinner, Networking and Keynote Address
6:45PM Dinner & Greeting: Giovanni Brauzzi, Italian Ambassador to Jordan
7:00PM Keynote Address: Abdelelah AlKhatib, Former Foreign Minister, Jordan and the First UN Envoy to Libya Minister (TBC)

Day 3: September 21, 2017

8:30-10:00AM Session Four: Regional Security (plenary)

Making Peace and Prosperity Possible: Meeting Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Challenges in the MENA Region
This session is supposed to discuss the most important security issues in the region both traditional and no-traditional.

Chair: Jamal Madaien, Major General (Retired)

Panelists 3-4 with 6-8 minutes each:
Institute for Iran-Eurasia Studies, Davood Kiani, President
Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, Ezzeddine Abdelmoula, President
European Union Institute for Security Studies, Florence Gaub, Senior Analyst
Egyptian Council For Foreign Affairs (ECFA), Ezzat Saad, Executive Director

10:15-10:30AM Coffee/Tea Break
10:30-11:45PM Session Five
Helping Build a Better Tomorrow: The Role of MENA’s Think Tanks

The key findings, recommendations and future plans will be presented by the Plenary Session Chairs From Day 1 and Day 2 who share the key take home points from each session.

Chair: Maha Yahya, Director Carnegie Middle East Center

Session Chairs: 7-8 Chairs with 3-5 minutes each to present key comments and conclusions from each session

Musa Shteiwi, Director, Center for Strategic Studies,
Ebtesam Al Ketbi, President, Emirates Policy Center
Jamal Madaien, Major General (Retired)
Sami Atallah, Executive Director, The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)
Nader S. Kabbani, Senior Fellow, Brookings Doha Center
James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania

11:45-12:00PM Concluding Remarks 2017 MENA Think Tank Summit

Thanks, Closing Comments from Hosts and Organizers and a Word From Next Year’s Host

Prof. Dr. Musa Shteiwi
Director
Center for Strategic Studies
Director, Jordan Scenarios: 2030 Project
University of Jordan
Amman, Jordan

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Lauder Institute for Management and International Studies Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program Wharton School and School of Arts and Sciences
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University of Pennsylvania
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2018 MENA SUMMIT HOST To Be Announced

MENA Think Tank Summit Planning Committee
Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS) (Egypt)
Carnegie Middle East Center, (Lebanon)
Center for Strategic Studies, (Jordan)
Decision Support Center- Royal Court (Saudi Arabia)
Future for Advanced Research and Studies (United Arab Emirates)
Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) (Italy)
OCP Policy Center, (Morocco)
Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania (United States)

List of Confirmed and Registered Think Tanks MENA Think Tank Summit
Amman, Jordan
September 19-21, 2017

African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT)
Al Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies
Al Jazeera Center for Studies
Al Quds Center for Political Studies
Arab Forum for Alternatives
Arab Thought Forum (ATF)
Arab Reform Initiative
Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies (AGCIS)
Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI)
Brookings Doha Center
Carnegie Corporation of New York
Carnegie Middle East Center
Center for Applied Policy Research (LMU Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU))
Center of Mediterranean and International Studies
Center for Strategic Studies
Center for Studies and Research in Social Sciences
Cercle d’Action et de Reflexion Autour de l’Entreprise (CARE)
Decision Support Center- Royal Court
Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)
Dubai Economic Council
Dubai Public Policy Research Centre
Egyptian Center for Public Policy Studies - ECPPS
Egyptian Council For Foreign Affairs (ECFA)
Elcano Royal Institute
Emirates Policy Center (EPC)
European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)
European Union Institute for Security Studies
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Future for Advanced Research and Studies
Gulf Studies Center Qatar University (Qatar)
IFRI (French Institute of International Relations)
Institut national d’études de stratégie globale (Inesg)
Institute for Iran-Eurasia Studies (IRAS)
Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)
King Abdullah Studies and Research Center
King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS)
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation
Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)
Latin American Center for Public Policy (FGV)
Middle East Research Institute (MERI Research Munich)
Moroccan Institute of International Relations (IMRI)
OCP Policy Center
Palestinian Center for Peace and Democracy
Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies
Sadeq Institute
Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Middle East and North Africa
Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania
TRT World Research Center
2017 MENA Think Tank Summit Participants

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Advocacy and Outreach Officer

Ahmed Driss
Center of Mediterranean and International Studies

Ahmed Ragab
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Executive Director

AlHasan Zwayne
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Head of Turkey/Middle East Program

Ebtesam Al Ketbi  
Emirates Policy Center (EPC)  
President

Eugenio Dacrema  
ISPI – Italian Institute of International Studies  
Research Fellow

Ezzat Saad  
The Egyptian Council For Foreign Affairs (ECFA)  
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Mohamed Elagati
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Director

Mohamed Loulichki
OCP Policy Center
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Mohammed Abu Hammour
Arab Thought Forum (ATF)
Secretary-General

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Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies (AGCIS)
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Mohammed Khogir
The Middle East Research Institute (MERI)
Researcher

Nader Kabbani
Brookings Doha Center
Director of Research

Oraib Al Rantawi
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Director General

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Head of International Studies

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Secretary General Assistant for Quality and Development

Ziad A. Akl
Al-Ahram Center for Political & Strategic Studies
Senior Researcher & Political Analyst
Participating Organizations
About TTCSP

THINK TANKS AND CIVIL SOCIETIES PROGRAM

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) of the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world. Often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank,” TTCSP examines the evolving role and character of public policy research organizations. Over the last 25 years, the TTCSP has developed and led a series of global initiatives that have helped bridge the gap between knowledge and policy in critical policy areas such as international peace and security, globalization and governance, international economics, environmental issues, information and society, poverty alleviation, and healthcare and global health. These international collaborative efforts are designed to establish regional and international networks of policy institutes and communities that improve policy making while strengthening democratic institutions and civil societies around the world.

The TTCSP works with leading scholars and practitioners from think tanks and universities in a variety of collaborative efforts and programs, and produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index that ranks the world’s leading think tanks in a variety of categories. This is achieved with the help of a panel of over 1,900 peer institutions and experts from the print and electronic media, academia, public and private donor institutions, and governments around the world. We have strong relationships with leading think tanks around the world, and our annual Think Tank Index is used by academics, journalists, donors and the public to locate and connect with the leading centers of public policy research around the world. Our goal is to increase the profile and performance of think tanks and raise the public awareness of the important role think tanks play in governments and civil societies around the globe.

Since its inception in 1989, the TTCSP has focused on collecting data and conducting research on think tank trends and the role think tanks play as civil society actors in the policymaking process. In 2007, the TTCSP developed and launched the global index of think tanks, which is designed to identify and recognize centers of excellence in all the major areas of public policy research and in every region of the world. To date TTCSP has provided technical assistance and capacity building programs in 81 countries. We are now working to create regional and global networks of think tanks in an effort to facilitate collaboration and the production of a modest yet achievable set of global public goods. Our goal is to create lasting institutional and state-level partnerships by engaging and mobilizing think tanks that have demonstrated their ability to produce high quality policy research and shape popular and elite opinion and actions for public good.
THE LAUDER INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies offers an MA in international studies, and conducts fundamental and policy-oriented research on current economic, political, and business issues. It organizes an annual conference that brings academics, practitioners and policy makers together to examine global challenges such as financial risks, sustainability, inequality, and the future of the state.

THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is an Ivy League school with highly selective admissions and a history of innovation in interdisciplinary education and scholarship. A world-class research institution, Penn boasts a picturesque campus in the middle of a dynamic city. Founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 and recognized as America’s first university, Penn remains today a world-renowned center for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. It serves as a model for research colleges and universities throughout the world.