2021 Virtual MENA Think Tank Summit Report

Abstract
On November 23, 2021, TTCSP partnered with the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat) to host the 2021 Virtual MENA Think Tank Summit. This report outlines the key takeaways from the report. This summit was the last program Dr. James McGann, the Director of TTCSP attended before his tragic passing.

Keywords
Think Tank, Civil Society, NGO, Middle East, COVID, Pandemic, Global Partnerships, Women Empowerment, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania

Disciplines
International Relations | Public Policy

Comments
All requests, questions, and comments should be directed to:
gotoindex.ttcsp@gmail.com

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2021 Middle East and North Africa Virtual Think Tank Summit Report

November 23, 2021

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Editor's note: Tragically, Dr. James G. McGann, Ph.D, founder and director of The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) died on November 29, 2021. This Summit was the last public program he participated in.
Tuesday 23 November 2021

09.00—09.20  **Opening Remarks**
Opening Remarks on how to deal with continuing COVID Crisis, the potential of it turning into a hydramedemic, and the need to consider the possibility of COVID continuing another 4-5 years. What do our organizations need to do to prepare for a sustained crisis?
09.20—09:35 **Keynote Welcome Address: The Role and Influence of Youth on Policy**

The youth of a nation are invested in its future, yet are impacted by present policy-making, and with the rising challenges - brought by the pandemic or exacerbated by its implications, youth interests should be priority considerations that precede passing decisions. Research and sound intellect are the main instruments capable of creating policies that future-proof the youth.

**Aymen Tawfeeq ALMOYED | Bahrain**

HE Minister of Youth and Sport Affairs

9:35—10:35 **SESSION I: The Impact of COVID-19 on The MENA Region: Continuity or Change?**

This session will have a panel of Thought Leaders, who will provide an overview of the impact of COVID-19 (Public Health, Economic, Political and Social) on Middle East & North Africa (MENA). The Panel is intended to provide a regional overview with experts in the public health, economics, politics and social fields, each giving a status report on the impact of COVID-19 on the region. The Panelists will also discuss what we might expect to see in the next 12-24 months i.e. Do they see any light at the end of the tunnel? Do they envisage further political and social upheavals or economic crises? The session will have a question-and-answer segment after all the thought leaders have completed their presentations in 10-12 minutes.

**Chair:**

**James G. MCGANN,** Senior Lecturer International Studies and Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program

**Panelists:**

**Fabrizio CARBONI | Switzerland**

Regional Director for Near and Middle East, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

**On Social Impact**

**Roberta GATTI | United States**

Chief Economist, World Bank
On Health and Health Systems

Abla ABDEL-LATIF | Egypt
Executive Director, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies

On Economic Impact

Paul SALEM | United States
President, Middle East Institute

On Domestic Politics

Mounir ZAHRAN | Egypt
Fmr. Ambassador & Chairman, Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs

On International Relations and Cooperation

10:35 - 11:35  SESSION II: MENA Country Reports: In An Age of Transitions, Disruptions and Transformations
A Panel of Senior Think Tank Executives from a representative group of countries in MENA will provide a status report on the current situation in their respective countries. The country reports will focus on the impact of COVID-19 (Public Health, Economic, Political and Social). These will be brief presentations of 4-5 minutes. The session will have a question-and-answer segment after all the think tank executives have completed their presentations.

Chair: Natalie COLBERT |
Executive Director, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School

Maha YAHYA | 
Director, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center
Lebanon Country Report

Ebtessam AL-KETBI |
President, Emirates Policy Center
United Arab Emirates Country Report

Nabil BARKATI |
Chief Programs Officer, Maghreb Economic Forum
Tunisia Country Report

Osama EL-GOHARY |
Chairman, Information Decision Support Center
Egypt Country Report

Gil MURCIANO |
CEO, Mitvim – The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies

Israel Country Report

Sihem DRISSI |
Assistant Director, Strategic Fiker Center for Studies

Turkey Country Report

Nader KABBANI |
Director of research, Brookings Doha Center and Nonresident Fellow, Brookings Institution US

Qatar Country Report

Mohammed ALSULAMI |
Founder and president, International Institute for Iranian Studies (Rasanah)

Saudi Arabia Country Report

Zaid EYADAT |
Director, Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) - University of Jordan

Jordan Country Report

11:35–11:50 Closing Statement

Dr. James G. MCGANN
Director, TTCSP, University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Abdullah bin Ahmed AL KHALIFA
Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Derasat

Bahrain

2021-22 MENA Planning Committee
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Countries and Institutions Represented

Total Participants
Joined for part or all of the Summit

260

Countries Represented: 50

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**Institutions Registered & Represented: 145**

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Event Summary & Key Takeaways

Opening Remarks

Dr. James G. McGann | United States
Director | Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program

Dr. McGann began the Summit by thanking all the speakers, participants, and partners involved for their immense contributions. In particular, Dr. McGann acknowledged the exceptional work of Derasat, at the head of which is Dr. Sheikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa. He then noted that the purpose of these Summits is to mobilize the international think tank community, of which 14000 organizations belong to the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP)’s network. He noted that the TTCSP regional Summits uniquely provide a forum for international leaders to collaborate, initiate conversations, and ultimately, save lives.

Dr. McGann then stated that this Summit will be divided into three key sessions. During the first, Dr. Al Khalifa and himself will outline some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for think tanks and policymakers in the region. The second session will see a group of thought leaders discuss the impact of Covid on the MENA region in areas such as social welfare, the economy, health systems, and domestic and international politics. The final panel will provide a country-by-country assessment of the impact of Covid on the MENA region.

Dr. McGann then explained that he has devoted his life and career analyzing, even worrying about the challenges that Think Tanks face. He followed by keenly noting that the pandemic, though perhaps one of the biggest challenges think tanks have had to face in the 21st century, nevertheless provides the think tank community with a single opportunity to reconfigure their business models, making each organization more robust and placing it in a better position to face the ongoing challenges of the pandemic specifically, and of the policymaking world more generally.

Dr. McGann ended by noting trends such as advances in technology, AI, social media, strategic communications, and digitalization are already challenging the traditional business model of think tanks. This ineluctably forces think tanks to reconsider the way they manage their organizations. Dr. McGann elaborated that innovating ideas and conducting policy research and analysis must continue to be the primary goal of think tanks, but what must change is how think tanks communicate and deliver their research and policy to the world. Having great ideas
is simply no longer enough. Instead, Dr. McGann concluded that think tanks must reimagine how they engage policymakers and the public.

Dr. Abdulla bin Ahmed AL KHALIFA | Bahrain
Chairman of the Board of Trustees | Derasat

Dr. Al Khalifa began by extending Dr. McGann’s gratitude for all participants, speakers, partners, and interns involved in the success of the 2021 MENA Think Tank Summit. Dr. Al Khalifa then expressed his delight and excitement regarding the in-person 2021 Global Think Tank Summit held in Bahrain.

Afterwards, Dr. Al Khalifa elaborated that the Middle East region we see today looks crucially different than the Middle East most participants had grew up in. He noted that the problems previously described as “future threats” materialized into the region’s most pressing challenges, such as water shortages, food insecurity, and novel pandemics. However, in his position as a diplomat and chairman of a think tank, Dr. Al Khalifa explained that think tanks have never played such a pivotal role in policymaking. In fact, he pointed out that a think tank brief now bears immeasurable value in providing clarity and confidence for policymakers.

Dr. Al Khalifa then stated that it is not solely local partnerships and paradigms that represent the work of think tanks. Instead, he indicated that international partnerships can potentially play an even more important role in the work of think tanks. As a result, Derasat has actively sought to establish cross-border partnerships with think tanks across the globe, in order to play a constructive role in addressing the most pressing crises the world currently faces.

Dr. Al Khalifa concluded by expressing his gratitude towards Dr. McGann and his team at the TTCSP before introducing His Excellency Aymen Almoayed, the Minister of Youth and Sport Affairs in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Keynote Welcome Address: The Role and Influence of Youth on Policy

Aymen Tawfeeq ALMOYED | Bahrain
H.E Minister of Youth and Sport Affairs

His Excellency Almoayed started by applauding the elaborate theme of the 2021 MENA Think Tank Summit, “New Partners and Paradigms in the Age of Conflicts and Covid,” as it truly reflects the reality of the life we lead today. HE Almoayed referenced His Highness Sheikh Naser Bin Hamad, the Kingdom of Bahrain’s national security adviser and personal representative to His Majesty the King, and what he calls “the perfect storm,” wherein economic, social, medical, environmental, and security related turbulences all converge together in a single time frame. HE
explained that we live in a time where borders are no longer static, where physical travel was stopped, instead paving the way for the Metaverse, and where oil producers had to pay to have their oil taken away. In a time like this, HE invited the participants and speakers to consider the importance of think tanks, noting that such institutions enlighten the work of policymakers and prevent nations from slipping back into the dark ages.

Through a story about Derasat’s impact on the Kingdom of Bahrain’s policymaking, HE Almoyed told the participants that think tanks are in a unique position to create new narratives, and this is why governments should keep an open mind while working with their respective think tanks.

HE Almoyed ended by thanking the participants and speakers for their time, effort, and service, and expressed his hope that this Summit gives birth to new partnerships and opportunities, in particular with the Global Think Tank Summit only days away.

SESSION I: The Impact of COVID-19 on The MENA Region: Continuity or Change?

Chair:
James G. MCGANN, Senior Lecturer International Studies and Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program

Panelists:

Fabrizio CARBONI | Switzerland
Regional Director for Near and Middle East, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

On Social Impact

Mr. Carboni noted that he will be dividing his presentation between two main points. First, he explained that the impact Covid-19 has had on the MENA region adds on significant vulnerability to the citizens and residents of the Middle East and North Africa. He pointed out that the people of the MENA region simply could not relate to the pandemic. He asked, “how can you ask millions of people to stay home when they have to fight every day to have [enough money] to survive?” He exemplified his statement with the fact that the ICRC built and funded the only Covid treatment center in Yemen. Second, Mr. Carboni showed that there is a link between the capacity to respond to the pandemic and the degree of stability within the region, noting that violence and instability are not related to poverty, but to exclusion and inequality. He pointed out that low-income countries have a three percent vaccination rate, compared to the worldwide vaccination rate of 48%. He explained that the way people perceive their position in society matters, as it impacts their decisions.

Roberta GATTI | United States
Chief Economist, World Bank

On Health and Health Systems
Dr. Gatti explained that, according to her team’s research, the MENA region is the only one in the world where government spending has increased from 16% to 18% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the past decade, which means that debt in the region increased. However, government spending was not allocated towards public goods, which meant that health systems were severely underfunded. She noted that in Egypt, 60% of health expenditure is covered by individuals and families, as opposed to Western countries where that figure drops to a mere six percent. This is highly impoverishing for families in MENA, meaning that on the eve of the pandemic, there was a mismatch between the high demand for health systems and the relative high cost of healthcare and the unpreparedness of health systems to take in the peaking demand. Dr. Gatti pointed out that indices collected by the World Bank showed that MENA countries were overconfident vis-à-vis their health systems, which increasingly overburdened them.

Abla ABDEL-LATIF | Egypt
Executive Director, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies

On Economic Impact

Dr. Abdel-Latif explained that the effect of the pandemic on the economy varied heavily depending on the strength of the economic structures set within the respective MENA countries. She noted that unfortunately, most MENA countries struggle with bureaucracy, institutional problems, and weak health systems, among other things. Dr. Abdel-Latif then proposed two focal points of her presentation. First, she pointed out that during the pandemic, health policy should be seen as integral to economic policy, particularly as vaccination rates impact economic potential. Second, Dr. Abdel-Latif explained that the 5.3% decrease in economic output globally, especially in Chinese raw material markets, has led to a mismatch between supply and demand in the MENA region. She elaborated by saying that we cannot predict the development of the pandemic, which means that the global economic output is just as unpredictable.

Paul SALEM | United States
President, Middle East Institute

On Domestic Politics

Dr. Salem recalled previous speakers’ statements, saying that health systems impact social stability, which in turn impacts the economy, and ultimately define domestic politics and the geopolitics of the region. He wanted to note, however, that the MENA region should not be seen as one, but as multiple sub-regions, as some states have got ahead of the pandemic, while others utterly collapsed under the weight of the pandemic, wars, and crises. He added that the lack of data-driven policies has also taken a toll on the efficacy of political policies. In effect, the pandemic reflected social inequalities within highly affected MENA countries, whereas women, refugees, and other underrepresented groups bore most of the consequences of the pandemic. Dr. Salem explained that some vulnerable States were unable to provide social nets for those
heavily impacted by the pandemic, often leading to mass protests regarding the State’s inefficacy.

Mounir ZAHRAN | Egypt
Fmr. Ambassador & Chairman, Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs
On International Relations and Cooperation

Ambassador Zahran began by congratulating TTCSP and Derasat on the success of the MENA Summit. He moved to call on the participants and speakers to make use of such summits to share ideas and establish partnerships. Afterwards, Ambassador Zahran noted that the MENA region has suffered less deaths per million people due to the pandemic than the United States or Europe. However, the problem lies the inequalities among MEN countries and within MENA countries. On the one hand, the vaccination rates in some MENA countries ranged from three percent to as high as 50%. On the other hand, people themselves are disproportionately affected by Covid-19, given the intrinsic vulnerability of some groups. Ambassador Zahran ended by noting the recent collaborations between MENA countries and the European Union, encouraging others to follow suit.

SESSION II: MENA Country Reports: In An Age of Transitions, Disruptions and Transformations

Chair: Natalie COLBERT | Executive Director, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School

Maha YAHYA | Lebanon
Director, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center
Lebanon Country Report

Dr. Yahya wanted to focus on education throughout her presentation. She began by noting that according to UNICEF, around 15 million children were out of school. Digital illiteracy is at an all-time high, which means that with the advent of the pandemic, access to education has become near impossible for millions. Lebanon in particular not only struggles with the pandemic but is also feeling the full force of its strongest economic crisis in its history. As Dr. Yahya framed it, “Lebanon is literally disintegrating before our eyes.” As a result, educational institutions were considerably weakened, especially given the massive influx of students towards the public school system. Dr. Yahya ended by noting that these shifts fundamentally altered the identity of Lebanon, a country previously proud of its educational levels.

Ebtesam AL-KETBI | UAE
President, Emirates Policy Center
**United Arab Emirates Country Report**

Dr. Al-Ketbi shared some of the discussions she has had during the eighth Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate (ADSD) hosted by the Emirates Policy Center. She noted that the United Arab Emirates has been able to contain the pandemic efficiently, taking important diplomatic steps to control the pandemic without jeopardizing its foreign policies. Dr. Al-Ketbi explained that the UAE emphasized economic investments overseas and welcomed foreign investments so as to limit the damages to its economy. Finally, she explained that the key to the UAE’s success in dealing with the pandemic lies in its vaccination rollout and business policies.

**Nabil BARKATI | Tunisia**

Chief Programs Officer, Maghreb Economic Forum

**Tunisia Country Report**

Mr. Barkati noted that Tunisia has seen less than 80 cases per day nationwide, among a population of 12 million citizens. This has come through an increase in government spending to stimulate the economy. In fact, government spending increased to 2% of Tunisia’s GDP, mainly allocated for disproportionately disadvantaged groups. Mr. Barkati elaborated by saying that unemployment skyrocketed in Tunisia, in particular in the industrial sector. As a result, public debt has strongly increased, which he says means two things. On the one hand, States must now quickly sustain massive additional spending on strengthening their health systems, and on the other hand, States must find new ways of creating revenue.

**Osama EL-GOHARY | Egypt**

Chairman, Information Decision Support Center

**Egypt Country Report**

Dr. El-Gohary begins by presenting the political landscape in Egypt, explaining that the country has recently come out of two revolutions, with 30% of its population living below the poverty line. With the advent of the pandemic, Dr. El-Gohary explains that the tourism sector has particularly been affected, accounting for 12% of Egypt’s GDP and 10% of its employment. Additionally, he pointed out that with the help of think tanks such as the Information Decision Support Center, the Egyptian Government was able to implement an effective response plan that significantly relies on social media and artificial intelligence.

**Gil MURCIANO | Israel**

CEO, Mitvim – The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies

**Israel Country Report**

Dr. Murciano noted at the outset that Israel’s health and economic policies regarding the pandemic have lacked strategic planning. As he framed it, Israel’s policies could be described as
a “catastrophe, then a euphoria, then again a catastrophe.” Dr. Murciano explained that Israel’s mistake lies in its attempt to beat Covid-19, as opposed to implementing the adequate mechanisms to live with the virus. However, he ended by expressing his hope that Israel would use the pandemic as an opportunity to connect with foreign governments, the Palestinian government in particular, as this crisis affects everyone equally.

Sihem DRISSI | Turkey

Assistant Director, Strategic Fiker Center for Studies

Turkey Country Report

Dr. Drissi focused on the vaccination policy adopted by the Turkish government that allowed the country to suffer relatively lower casualties as a result of the pandemic. She explains that 56 million Turkish citizens have received the second dose. As a result, Dr. Drissi explained that this has allowed Turkey’s economy to expand by an expected 5%, especially given the 35% increase in startup investments within the country, matched with an aggressive financial policy implemented by the government.

Nader KABBANI | Qatar, United States

Director of research, Brookings Doha Center and Nonresident Fellow, Brookings Institution US

Qatar Country Report

Dr. Kabbani pointed out that Qatar’s infection rate has remained below one percent, as a result of a multi-faceted approach to dealing with the pandemic. First, Dr. Kabbani indicated that Qatar did not distinguish between citizens and non-Qatari residents of the country with regards to its health policies, which, as he stated, allowed the country to maintain a firmer grip on the outbreak. Additionally, Dr. Kabbani expressed that perhaps Qatar's most effective effort has been its mobilization of economic and health experts in order to guide their policymaking process. This has allowed the country to optimize spending on testing, tracing, isolation, treatment, and research. Lastly, he explained that Qatar remained proactive and adaptive, especially given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic.

Mohammed ALSULAMI | Saudi Arabia

Founder and president, International Institute for Iranian Studies (Rasanah)

Saudi Arabia Country Report

Dr. Alsulami began by noting that Saudi Arabia grappled with hosting the G20 in 2021, which forced the Saudi government to be particularly vigilant with regards to its policy making efforts. Dr. Alsulami explained that the Saudi strategy rested on three key pillars.
1. Coordinate the efforts of the T20 leaders to form the best policies to combat the pandemic.
2. Mitigate the economic ramifications of the pandemic for health systems.
3. Limit the number of pilgrims going to the holy cities of Mekkah and Medina for Hajj

Zaid EYADAT | Jordan
Director, Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) - University of Jordan

Jordan Country Report

Dr. Eyadat explained that Jordan had successfully limited the impact of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, further stated that once the second wave hit, it overwhelmed the Jordanian health systems and ultimately increased the infection rate to over 9.9%. Additionally, he noted that Jordan has failed to increase vaccination rates, with grave impact on the economy. He pointed out that the Jordanian people themselves share part of the fault why the country's health system failed, as skepticism prevented a number of people from getting vaccinated.

Closing Statement

Dr. James G. MCGANN
Director, TTCSP, University of Pennsylvania
US

Dr. McGann’s closing statements emphasized the importance of collaboration and partnerships in the era of the pandemic. He invited the participants and speakers to make use of these summits to establish those relationships, ultimately allowing them to take the lead on a number of different crises. He said that the time for conventional wisdom is over. The previous business models must be transformed to meet the challenges of the future. Think Tanks must rethink their role in the world of policymaking, since, in order to survive, they must be able to explain what is going on in the world.

Dr. Abdullah bin Ahmed AL KHALIFA
Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Derasat
Bahrain

On behalf of Dr. Al Khalifa, Dr. Hamad Bin Abdallah thanked all the guests and speakers for their time, efforts, and valuable contributions to the 2021 MENA Summit and expressed his excitement to host the 2021 Global Think Tank Summit in person only a couple days later.
Panelist Biographies

Opening Remarks

James G. MCGANN | United States
Senior Lecturer International Studies & Director | Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP), University of Pennsylvania

James G. McGann, Ph.D. is a Senior Lecturer of International Studies at the Lauder Institute, Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program and a Senior Fellow at the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to assuming his current post, Dr. McGann was Assistant Director of the International Relations Program at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. McGann has served as a consultant and advisor to the World Bank; the United Nations; the Asian Development Bank; the United States Agency for International Development; the Soros, Rockefeller, MacArthur, Hewlett and Gates foundations; the Carnegie Corporation; and foreign governments on the role of non-governmental, public policy and public engagement organizations in civil society. He was an assistant professor of Political Science at Villanova University where he taught international relations, international organizations and international law. He has served as the Senior Vice President for the Executive Council on Foreign Diplomats, the Public Policy Program Officer for the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Assistant Director of the Institute of Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He also served as a Senior Advisor to the Citizens’ Network for Foreign Affairs and the Society for International Development.

Dr. McGann earned his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. He was a National Fellow at Stanford University while writing his doctoral thesis, which examined the nature and evolution of public policy research organizations in the United States such as Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation, RAND, Urban Institute and others. He compared and contrasted the mission, structure and operating principles of these leading think tanks to determine how those factors influenced the institutions’ role in policymaking. His research and consulting have enabled him to work with governments and civil society organizations in over 100 countries. He has authored over...
On 31 January 2017, Dr. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa was appointed Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International and Energy Studies, in addition to serving as Deputy Secretary General of the Supreme Defense Council, and as Undersecretary for International Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain, a post he has held since August 2015. Previously Shaikh Abdulla held the post of Director General for External Communications (2014) at the Information Affairs Authority, during which he played a pivotal role in drawing up and implementing a strategy for strengthening the country’s national communications and public engagement. Prior to this Shaikh Abdulla served as a political advisor to the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Defense (2011) and as a Legal Specialist at the Bahrain Economic Development Board from 2007-2009. He also served as a Research Assistant with the Dean of Law Faculty at Queen Mary College, University of London from 2008-2009.

In 2015, Shaikh Abdulla was awarded a PhD in International Relations and Diplomacy from the École des Hautes Études Internationales, France. In 2008, he earned a Master of Law (LLM) from Queen Mary College, University of London, UK, focusing on negotiations and mediation. He also holds a Diploma in Political Development (Honors) from the Bahrain Institute for Political Development, Bahrain 2007 and a Bachelor of Law (LLB) (Honors) from the Applied Science University, Jordan 2006.

Shaikh Abdulla is an international expert in Mediation, accredited by the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR) in London where he participated in their training initiatives for international agencies and experts. He is also accredited as a Master Practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming by the United States’ National Federation of Neuro Linguistic Programming. Shaikh Abdulla has a passion for the arts and is proficient in Arabic, English and French. He has been Vice President of the Paris based, ‘French Bahraini Friendship Society’ since 2011 and a member of the Jordan-based ‘Arab Thought Forum’ since 2013. He is an advocate of cross-cultural public diplomacy and publishes papers in various fields on a regular basis. He enjoys scuba diving, chess and collecting antiques.
Keynote Welcome Address

H.E. Aymen Tawfeeq ALMOYED | Bahrain
Minister | Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs

Aymen Tawfeeq Abdulrahman Almoayed is a Bahraini diplomat and the youngest member in the Cabinet of Bahrain. H.E. Almoayed was appointed as the Minister of Youth and Sports Affairs in December 2018. Prior to public service, His Excellency played key roles in the formation of investment and consulting institutions, conglomerates, and family offices, among other industrial and strategic projects. He was retained as advisor, board member, and trustee, by institutions and high net-worth individuals and families throughout the Gulf region, assisting them with their strategic decision-making and corporate maneuverings.

SESSION I: The Impact of COVID-19 on The MENA Region: Continuity or Change?

Fabrizio CARBONI | Switzerland
Regional Director for Near and Middle East | ICRC

Fabrizio Carboni is the Regional Director for the Near and Middle East with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), overseeing some of the ICRC’s largest humanitarian response operations including Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. He has over 20 years of operational experience working in armed conflicts and situations of violence in the Americas, Asia and the Near and Middle East. Prior to his current role, he led operations in Afghanistan and Colombia, and served in the ICRC’s legal division focusing on the promotion and implementation of international humanitarian law. From 2010-2013 he served as ICRC Deputy Head for the Division of Multilateral Organizations, Policy & Humanitarian Action; 2013-2017 as Head of Delegation in Lebanon; and 2017-2018 as Head of Delegation in Myanmar. Carboni holds a bachelor’s degree in Law and a Masters in International Law from the Université Libre de Bruxelles. He currently resides in Geneva with the ICRC, a global humanitarian
organization that works to support populations affected by armed conflict and violence. The ICRC is present in over 100 countries with 18,000 staff members working around the world, including in armed conflict settings, humanitarian diplomacy hubs and its headquarters in Geneva.

**Roberta GATTI | United States**
Chief Economist | World Bank

Roberta Gatti is the Chief Economist of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region of the World Bank. In that role, she oversees analytical work to support the Bank’s operations and economic surveillance in countries in the region. In her previous capacity as Chief Economist for the Human Development practice group, she co-led the conceptualization and release of the World Bank Human Capital Index and oversaw the Service Delivery Indicators data initiative. Roberta joined the World Bank in 1998 as a Young Professional in the Macro unit of the Development Research Group. She has since led analytical agendas on growth, firm productivity, gender, social inclusion and labor markets, including as the Global Lead for Labor policies. She has also managed teams and lending portfolios in both the MENA and the Europe and Central Asia regions.

Roberta’s research is published in top field journals such as the *Journal of Public Economics*, the *Journal of Economic Growth* and the *Journal of Development Economics*. Roberta is also the author of numerous flagship reports, including *Jobs for Shared Prosperity: Time for Action in the Middle East and North Africa*, *Being Fair, Faring Better: Promoting Equality of Opportunity for Marginalized Roma*, *The Human Capital Project*, and *The Human Capital Index 2020 Update: Human Capital in the Time of COVID-19*. Roberta holds a B.A. from Università Bocconi and a Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University. She has taught at Georgetown and Johns Hopkins Universities.

**Abla ABDEL-LATIF | Egypt**
Executive Director | Egyptian Center for Economic Studies

Dr. Abla Abdel Latif is currently the Chair of the Presidential Advisory Council for Economic Development; and the Executive Director and Director of Research of The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (ECES). She is also a Member of the Central Bank of Egypt's Coordinating Council, and has been a Board Member of the National Bank of Egypt – the first female in this position, for over six years. In 2013, she was honored with membership of the Committee of Fifty, whose mission was to draft Egypt’s Constitution following June 30, 2013. In that capacity, she was officially representing the Egyptian Federation of Industries, and one of only five women in the Committee. She is also a cofounder and Board
Member of BASEERA (the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research), and “El Nidaa” Foundation for job creation for women and youth. In addition to her teaching career as Professor of Economics at the American University in Cairo (AUC) for over twenty years, she has been selected to be a Life Time Research Fellow at the Economic Research Forum (ERF) and has authored a large number of publications in class A internationally refereed Journals. She has also been a senior international expert in several UNIDO projects and other international organizations. Her professional experience is also extensive, starting from being the Policy Unit Manager in the Industrial Modernisation Centre (IMC) to being the Minister of Industry’s Advisor shortly after the 25th of January Revolution and since 2015, she became the main economic advisor to the President of the Republic. Dr. Abla received a special award for outstanding achievement and excellence in research from Sussex University in the UK and another faculty excellence teaching award from the American University in Cairo. She was also invited by the Singapore Government to participate in the 10th Leaders in Governance Programme in 2017. She is an Egyptian national with a B.A. in economics from the American University in Cairo (AUC) (with highest honors) and an M.A. and Ph.D. in economics from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, California.

Paul SALEM | United States
President | Middle East Institute

Paul Salem is president of The Middle East Institute. He focuses on issues of political change, transition, and conflict as well as the regional and international relations of the Middle East. Salem is the author and editor of a number of books and reports including Escaping the Conflict Trap: Toward Ending Civil Wars in the Middle East (ed. with Ross Harrison, MEI 2019); Winning the Battle, Losing the War: Addressing the Conditions that Fuel Armed Non State Actors (ed. with Charles Lister, MEI 2019); From Chaos to Cooperation: Toward Regional Order in the Middle East (ed. with Ross Harrison, MEI 2017), Broken Orders: The Causes and Consequences of the Arab Uprisings (In Arabic, 2013), "Thinking Arab Futures: Drivers, scenarios, and strategic choices for the Arab World", The Cairo Review Spring 2019; “The Recurring Rise and Fall of Political Islam” (CSIS, 2015), Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World (1994), and Conflict Resolution in the Arab World (ed., 1997). Prior to joining MEI, Salem was the founding director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, Lebanon between 2006 and 2013. From 1999 to 2006, he was director of the Fares Foundation and in 1989-1999 founded and directed the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, Lebanon's leading public policy think tank. Salem is also a musician and composer of Arabic-Brazilian jazz. His music can be found on iTunes. Salem holds a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from Harvard University.

Mohamed Mounir ZAHRAN | Egypt
Chairman and Ambassador | Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs

Dr. Mohamed Mounir Zahran holds a Licence Cum Laude from Cairo University, Diplomes d’Etudes Superieures from Cairo and Paris Universities, and a Ph.D in Public Law from Paris University.
He has been involved in Egyptian diplomacy ever since 1958. He has served in the Departments of International Organizations and International Economic Affairs. He was then an adviser to the Egyptian Foreign Minister. From 1985 to 1989, he served as the Egyptian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco and from 1991 through 1999, he was the Ambassador of Egypt in Geneva. Mounir Zahran was then appointed as the special envoy and personal representative of the President of Egypt for conflict resolution in Africa, and then as personal representative of the President of Egypt to the G-15 developing countries.

He chaired several legislative bodies and committees, inter alia, GATT/ WTO, the Conference on Disarmament (C. D), ILO, UNCTAD, WIPO.

In the United Nations system, he was elected by the U.N. General Assembly in 2002 as member of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions of the United Nations (ACABQ), and later appointed by the UNSG in 2006 as member of the Advisory Board of the United Nations Peace Building Fund (UNPB/AB).

At its 61st session in 2006/2007, the UNGA elected and then appointed Dr. Zahran was an Inspector in the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). In June 2009, he was elected as Vice-Chairman of the JIU and then in December 2010, he was elected as Chairman of the JIU twice for the years 2011 and 2012.

**SESSION II: MENA Country Reports: In An Age of Transitions, Disruptions and Transformations**

**Natalie COLBERT | United States**

Executive Director | Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School

Natalie Colbert is the Belfer Center’s Executive Director. Before coming to the Center, Colbert served in the Central Intelligence Agency for 13 years. Most recently, she was Director of Analytic Resources and Corporate Programs for the Near East Mission Center, where she led strategic management of analytic personnel resources and created a career development seminar for mid-level analysts.

Prior to this role, Colbert led multiple analytic teams to produce intelligence assessments covering fast-paced issues in the Middle East for the President and other customers in the policymaking, intelligence, and military communities. Colbert previously served as an intelligence analyst covering conflict zones in Africa and Latin America. Across her CIA career, Colbert has earned awards for leadership excellence and in 2021 received the Near East Mission Center Award for Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Colbert is a 2008 graduate of Harvard Kennedy School, where she earned a Master in Public Policy. She graduated in 2006 from New York University, majoring in International Relations and Francophone Studies.
Maha YAHYA | Lebanon
Director | Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center

Maha Yahya is director of the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, where her work focuses broadly on political violence and identity politics, pluralism, development and social justice after the Arab uprisings, the challenges of citizenship, and the political and socio-economic implications of the migration/refugee crisis. Prior to joining Carnegie, Yahya led work on Participatory Development and Social Justice at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA). She was previously regional adviser on social and urban policies at UN-ESCWA and spearheaded strategic and inter-sectoral initiatives and policies in the Office of the Executive Secretary which addressed the challenges of democratic transitions in the Arab world. Yahya has also worked with the United Nations Development Program in Lebanon, where she was the director and principal author of The National Human Development Report 2008–2009: Toward a Citizen's State. She was also the founder and editor of the MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies. Yahya has worked with international organizations and in the private sector as a consultant on projects related to socioeconomic policy analysis, development policies, cultural heritage, poverty reduction, housing and community development, and postconflict reconstruction in various countries including Lebanon, Pakistan, Oman, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. She has served on a number of advisory boards including the MIT Enterprise Forum of the Pan Arab Region and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. Yahya is the author of numerous publications, including most recently Unheard Voices: What Syrian Refugees Need to Return Home (April 2018); The Summer of Our Discontent: Sects and Citizens in Lebanon and Iraq (June 2017); Great Expectations in Tunisia (March 2016); Refugees and the Making of an Arab Regional Disorder (November 2015); Towards Integrated Social Development Policies: A Conceptual Analysis (UN-ESCWA, 2004), co-editor of Secular Publicities: Visual practices and the Transformation of National Publics in the Middle East and South Asia (University of Michigan Press, 2010) and co-author of Promises of Spring: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in Democratic Transitions (UN-ESCWA, 2013).
Dr. Ebtesam al-Ketbi is the President of the Emirates Policy Center (EPC), which she founded in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates in September 2013. EPC undertakes the task of studying and foreseeing future regional and international geopolitical projects and their impact on the Gulf region based on the region's self-perception of its concerns and interests. The center also focuses on exploring current and future issues that have an impact on the security of the UAE and the region as a whole. EPC provides strategic analysis and policy papers on these issues that serve the UAE and Gulf governments. The center is considered now as one of the most renowned think tanks in the region. Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate, which is organized annually by EPC, has also become one of the key platforms for dialogue in the world to discuss regional and international security. EPC has ranked 7th in the Middle East and North Africa region in the annual global think tank index report 2018 released by the University of Pennsylvania. The center has also ranked 10th in the top best think tank conference worldwide.

In recognition of her role as a leader of one of the most important think tanks in the Arab world and the great respect she enjoys as part of the distinguished elite, not in the UAE only, but also in the Gulf region as a whole, Dr. al-Ketbi was appointed in 2015 as a member of the Consultative Commission of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). She was also chosen by Arabian Business magazine in July 2018 in its list of 50 Most Influential Women in the Arab World as she was the first woman to lead one of the most important think tanks in the Arab world. Dr. Al-Ketbi also received the Women Super Achiever Award during the WORLD WOMEN LEADERSHIP CONGRESS (WWLC) that took place in Mumbai, India in Feb. 2019, and the Arab Social Media Influencers Award in the Politics Category by Dubai Press Club in Dec. 2018. In 2021, she was chosen as an advisor in the Global Commission for Post-Pandemic Policy for her distinguished contributions in research on the comprehensive consequences of COVID-19 pandemic on the world and the Middle East.

Before she founded EPC, Dr. al-Ketbi was a professor of political science at the United Arab Emirates University. She also held several posts such as the General Coordinator of the Gulf Development Forum, and served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Arab Association for Political Science and as a member of the board of trustees in the Center for Arab Unity Studies, the Arab Thought Foundation, and the Arab Anti-Corruption Organization. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington and the Global Advisory Board of Observer Research Foundation in India.

Dr. al-Ketbi published a number of research papers on Gulf Security, US-GCC relations, and War on Terrorism. She has recently published two books; the first titled The UAE Power-Building Model
and Foreign Policy Shifts (the Emirates Policy Center, 2021) and the second titled Iran and the Biden Administration: A Potential Return to Negotiations (the Emirates Policy Center, 2021). Moreover, she has participated in many conferences that address regional and global affairs, and is frequently hosted by many Arab news channels as an expert in the Gulf and Iranian affairs. She holds a PhD in political science from Cairo University.

Sihem DRISSI | Turkey
Assistant Executive Manager | Strategic Fiker Center for Studies

Sihem Drissi is the assistant to the executive director of Strategic Fiker Center for Studies (Think Tank/Turkey), where her research focuses on civil society, socio-economic policies, politics and regional balance of power in the Arab Gulf region. She has worked with International organizations and research centers as consultant on projects related to gender issues, voting behaviors and socio-economic analysis. She addressed the challenges of the democratization process in Tunisia (Phd dissertation). She is the author of numerous publications on Arab political reforms, foreign policies and analysis of International Indexes and public opinions.

Nabil BARKATI | Tunisia
Chief Programs Officer

Nabil Barkati is a researcher at the Maghreb Economic Forum. He worked on the research study “Tackling Youth Radicalization in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia Through Inclusion”. He has worked in several initiatives related to mitigating and preventing Violent Extremism in Tunisia since 2012. For instance, he worked on advocating alternative messaging as a tool to prevent and counter Violent Extremism. He, also, has been part of an initiative that promotes youth leadership to reinforce community resilience to radicalization. Additionally, Nabil worked on a project that worked on measuring youth susceptibility to violent extremism in vulnerable areas in Tunisia in order to reinforce youth resilience to radicalization and extremism.
Osama EL-GOHARY | Egypt
Chairman | Information and Decisions Center

Osama El-Gohary is currently the Prime Minister's assistant and Chairman of Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC). He previously held the position of the Head of the Technical Office of the Prime Minister of Egypt since 2016 and before that, he was the former Head of Department in the Minister of Petroleum Technical Office. Throughout his academic journey, he managed to achieve key milestones not only in the academic and research arenas but in the overall petroleum sector. He participated in many research works on the oil and gas industry and in task forces of international consultancy firms in preparing studies on the future of the petroleum industry in Egypt.

Over his long academic career, he played a dynamic role in bridging the gap between university graduates and knowledge and skills required in the workplace as Lecturer of Marketing & Consumer Behavior at Misr International University (MIU) (2000-2015). His career trajectory triggered the idea of enhancing personal skills and so he joined The HULT International Business School in the USA to study digital Marketing. He received a Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resources Management from The American University in Cairo (AUC) in 2008 and Certificate in Economics from Edinburgh Business School in the United Kingdom (2009).

Gil MURCIANO | Israel
CEO | Mitvim

Dr. Gil Murciano is the CEO of Mitvim. Gil serves (until September) as an expert on Israeli foreign and security policy at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), a Berlin-based think-tank, which advises the German and European foreign policy community. In collaboration with local partners, he founded and developed the Techne Initiative, which aims to turn members of the Middle-Eastern diaspora in Europe into foreign policy advisers. Gil is a member of the adjunct Faculty of the Hertie School of Governance Berlin, where he serves as a lecturer on the International Politics of the Middle East. He holds a PhD in International Relations from Freie Universität Berlin and served as Fox Fellow at the MacMillan Center/Yale University. His dissertation focuses on the role of honor in peace negotiations in the Middle East. Gil has also served as a senior foreign policy analyst at the Tel Aviv-based Reut Institute for Strategic Thinking (currently known as the Reut Group). In addition, he is a member of the Israeli-Arab forum of the London-based Atkin Foundation.
Nader KABBANI | Qatar
Director of Research | Brookings Doha Center

Nader Kabbani is Director of Research and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Doha Center (BDC) and Nonresident Senior Fellow with the Brookings Institution’s Foreign Policy Program. Before joining BDC, Kabbani served as Director of Policy and Research at the Silatech Foundation and before that was the founding Director of the Syrian Development Research Centre at the Syria Trust for Development. Kabbani also served on the economics faculty of the American University of Beirut and on the research staff of both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the California State Senate. Kabbani has been an ERF Research Associate since 2006. His current research interests include private sector development, social entrepreneurship, and post-conflict recovery. Kabbani holds a B.A. in Economics from Claremont McKenna College and a Ph.D. in Economics from Johns Hopkins University.

Mohammed ALSULAMI | Saudi Arabia
President and Founder | Rasanah

Dr. Mohammed Alsulami is the founder and president of the International Institute for Iranian Studies (Rasanah) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He received his Ph.D. from Leiden University in 2014, where he explored notions of the ‘other’ in modern Iranian thought. He is also a scholar of contemporary Iranian–Arab political, cultural and social relationships. Dr. Alsulami is a professor of Iranian Studies at Saudi Arabia’s Umm Al-Qura University. He is the founder and chairman of Rasanah: International Institute for Iranian Studies. His most recent publications include “Iran Attempting to Blackmail Iraq into Submission” and “Iran’s Expansionist Misadventures Prompt Domestic Crises.”

Zaid EYADAT | Jordan
Director | CSS

Zaid Eyadat is the Director of the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan. He is a member of the Arab Barometer’s steering committee.
Eyadat is a political scientist and game theorist. He is also the founding Dean of the Prince al-Hussein School of International Studies at the University of Jordan, where remains a full Professor. He has held Professorships and Visiting Scholarships at various US and European Universities. He has consultant and advisory roles in Government and Non-Governmental Institutions, including the Hashemite Royal Court in Jordan. Zaid Eyadat is also the founder of Jordan Youth Commission, an NGO that designs policies and programs that encourages political participation and civic engagement, aiming to integrate the youth of Jordan in the political process. Furthermore, Eyadat is Chair of the Board of Arab Renaissance for Development and Democracy (ARDD), a Member of the Steering Committee in the Center for Ethics and Global Politics at the University of Rome as well as the West Asia and North Africa Institute (WANA).
About the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the Lauder Institute of 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.

Since its formation, TTCSP has laid the foundation for a global initiative that will help bridge the gap between knowledge and policy in critical policy areas such as international peace and security, globalization and governance, international economics, environment, information and society, poverty alleviation and health. This international collaborative effort is designed to establish regional and international networks of policy institutes and communities that will improve policy making as well as strengthen democratic institutions and civil societies around the world. TTCSP at the Lauder Institute works with leading scholars and practitioners from think tanks and universities in a variety of collaborative efforts and programs.

About the Lauder Institute:

Founded by brothers Leonard and Ronald Lauder in 1983 in honor of their father, Joseph, the Joseph H. Lauder Institute for Management and International Studies provides a fully integrated business education to a new generation of leaders coming of age in a rapidly globalizing world.

About 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. As a world-class research institution, The University of Pennsylvania peer institutions are Stanford, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Dartmouth, Cornell, Cambridge and Oxford. Penn was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 to push the frontiers of knowledge and benefit society by integrating study in the liberal arts and sciences with opportunities for research and practical, pre-professional training at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Penn is committed to meeting the full demonstrated need of all undergraduates with grant-based financial aid, making this intellectually compelling integration of liberal and professional education accessible to talented students of all backgrounds and empowering them to make an impact on the world. Penn boasts a picturesque campus in the middle of Philadelphia, a dynamic city that is conveniently located between Washington, D.C. and New York.

About the Director

The late James G. McGann, Ph.D., was a Senior Lecturer at the Lauder Institute of the Wharton School and the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. He was also the Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania. He conducted research on developments and problems that think tanks and policymakers around the world face, and offered guidance and technical assistance to think tanks, governments and public and private donors on how to enhance the quality and effect of policy analysis. He was also a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a think tank based in
Philadelphia. Prior to joining the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. McGann was an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Villanova University, where he taught international relations, international organizations and international law.

His main research priorities included: analyzing global developments in research on safety and international affairs; influencing United States’ foreign and domestic policies through think tanks; strategic advice to BRICS and G20 countries from think tanks and transnational and regional public policy challenges. He was the creator and author of the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index which ranks think tanks in every region of the world.

Dr. McGann had served as a consultant and advisor to the World Bank; the United Nations; the United States Agency for International Development; the Soros, Rockefeller, MacArthur, Hewlett and Gates foundations; the Carnegie Corporation; and foreign governments on the role of nongovernmental, public policy and public engagement organizations in the US and developing and transitional countries. He also served as the Senior Vice President for the Executive Council on Foreign Diplomats, the Public Policy Program Officer for the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Assistant Director of the Institute of Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He served as a Senior Advisor to the Citizens’ Network for Foreign Affairs and the Society for International Development.

Tragically, on November 29, 2021, Dr. McGann passed away. His legacy will continue through the community of think tanks that he brought together to improve civil societies throughout the world.

"Helping to bridge the gap between knowledge and policy"

The mission of TTCSP is to increase the profile, capacity and performance of think tanks at the national, regional and global levels so they can better serve policymakers and the public.

TTCSP conducts research on the relationship between think tanks, politics and public policy, produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index, develops capacity-building resources and programs, manages and supports a global network of over 8,000 think tanks and trains future think tank scholars and executives. TTCSP is often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank.”

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