Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Virtual Think Tank Summit was hosted by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) on Friday, December 11, 2020. The Summit welcomed think tanks from all over the MENA region to discuss the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it changed different socio-political and economic regional dimensions. A momentous effort, the Summit invited panelists to highlight key issues plaguing the region that had been exacerbated by the pandemic and how certain areas, such as active war zones, have been disproportionately affected. The panelists offered recommendations to think tanks and policymakers on how to adapt to the transformed layout of the region and focused on taking an integrated and concerted approach, both regionally and globally. Security of civic rights, technological adaptation, and regional cooperation were some of the most prominent themes of the event. Finally, the panelists also discussed the role of G-20 countries and T-20 think tanks in alleviating the regional and global repercussions of the pandemic. Below is the access link to the recording of the Summit and a breakdown of the participants, countries, and organizations represented, followed by the MENA Think Tank Summit Report.

Access Link To Recording:

https://youtu.be/cn2jdt-zjsY
## Participants

### Total Participants

Join for part or all of the Conference

<table>
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<th>Total Participants</th>
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### Countries Represented:

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<td>France</td>
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### Institutions Registered & Represented:

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<th>Goldman Sachs</th>
<th>Middle East Political and Economic Institute</th>
<th>Russian Union on Geopolitics</th>
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<td>Governance &amp; Policy Think Tank (GPTT)</td>
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<td>Saudi Aramco</td>
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<td>African Centre for Economic Transformation</td>
<td>Derasat</td>
<td>Harf and Fasela</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University</td>
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<td>Economic Research Forum</td>
<td>Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC)</td>
<td>Mohammed VI Polytechnic University</td>
<td>Strategic Fiker Center for Studies</td>
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<td><strong>Al Nahda Thought Center for Research</strong></td>
<td><strong>Education Reform Initiative (Egitim Reformu Girişimi - ERG)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institut marocain d'intelligence stratégique (IMIS)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Synergics Saudi Arabia</strong></td>
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<td>Institut Montaigne</td>
<td>Naif Arab University for Security &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>Taibah Knowledge Waqf</td>
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<td>Elcano Royal Institute</td>
<td>Institut Supérieur de Gestion et de Planification (ISGP)</td>
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<td>Taibah University College</td>
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<td>Emirates Diplomatic Academy</td>
<td>Institute for Global Studies</td>
<td>Nanjing University Jinling College</td>
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<td>Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)</td>
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<td>ORDAF</td>
<td>The Middle East Research Institute</td>
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<td>Johns Hopkins University</td>
<td>Ortadoğu Araştırmalar Merkezi (ORSAM)</td>
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<td>Policy Center for the New South (PCNS)</td>
<td>Tunisian Observatory for Democratic Transition</td>
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<td>Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung</td>
<td>King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC)</td>
<td>Political Dialogue South Mediterranean, Regional Program</td>
<td>Turkish Center for Asia Pacific Studies</td>
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<td>Center for Economic and Social Development</td>
<td>Frontier Centre for Public Policy</td>
<td>King Fahd University of Petroleum &amp; Minerals (KFUPM)</td>
<td>Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University (PSAU)</td>
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<td>Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV)</td>
<td>l’Institut Marocain des Relations Internationales (IMRI)</td>
<td>Raisina House</td>
<td>Université de Sherbrooke</td>
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<td>Center for Strategic Studies</td>
<td>Fundación Alternativas</td>
<td>Liberal Democracy Institute</td>
<td>Robert Bosch Stiftung</td>
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<td>Center for Studies and Research in Social Sciences</td>
<td>Future for Advanced Research and Studies</td>
<td>Libyan Organization of Policies &amp; Strategies (LOOPS)</td>
<td>RomFactor</td>
<td>University of Pennsylvania Middle East Center</td>
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<td>Centre des Etudes Méditerranéennes et Internationales (CEMI)</td>
<td>Fuxi Institution</td>
<td>Maghreb Economic Forum</td>
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<td>Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection</td>
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<td>Cercle D’Action et de Réflexion pour l’Entreprise (CARE)</td>
<td>Global Leaders in Unity and Evolvement</td>
<td>MEDirections Programme, European University Institute</td>
<td>RSL Management</td>
<td>Yemeni Institute for Strategic Affairs</td>
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Session I: Opening Session

Opening remarks: James McGann, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, United States

Dr. McGann opened the summit by paying special thanks to TTCSP interns Emma Harris, Alisa Wadsworth, Ben Kosko, Elijah Fullerton, and the MENA research team. Throughout the pandemic, the TTCSP has sought to save lives and livelihoods by gathering together think tankers from around the world who help bridge the gap between knowledge and policy globally. Gathering for the seventh regional summit in the past nine months, scholars and institute leaders from MENA discussed the impact of COVID-19 and how its think tanks have responded to it. Time was also allotted to address the existential risks the pandemic poses to many think tanks and how they can continue to survive and innovate. Finally, Dr. McGann emphasised the summit’s intention to discuss the necessity for T20 to be more inclusive of think tanks from Africa, MENA, and Southeast Asia.

Session II, Panel I: The Invisible Black Swan: How COVID-19 Changed the World

Chair: Paul Salem, President, Middle East Institute, USA

Paul Salem began by thanking Dr. McGann and the TTCSP. He noted that this has been an exceptional year for the Middle East and compared COVID-19 to a black swan, noting that the novel coronavirus was not unpredictable in terms of its existence or spread but rather due to its timing. He then briefly introduced each of the speakers for the panel and asked each person to discuss the effects of COVID-19 on their countries or subregions of expertise with a focus on public health and government responses, the virus’ impact on social and economic policy, and how it has shaped domestic politics and conflict areas.

Maha Yahya, Director, Carnegie Middle East Center, Lebanon

Maha Yahya reiterated the widespread impact of COVID-19 on numerous global systems, especially so in the MENA region. She noted that the pandemic has triggered the search for new economic opportunities in the region and accelerated the shift towards jobs in artificial intelligence and technology. She explained that this trend may actually worsen income inequality, however, since many
of the workers in the region have not been trained to work in these fields. The effects of this will be even more prevalent in nations where the government does not have sufficient resources to appropriately stimulate the economy. She explained that a growing number of people are now entering poverty and that this number is expected to continue to increase dramatically. The disruption of the global supply chain is limiting income and adding further stress upon local economies. She also discussed the impact of the virus on education, especially in regions which were not appropriately equipped for the various resources that distance learning entails. Furthermore, she explained how the pandemic has actually increased restriction in many nations and she expects there to be many protests once the pandemic ends. Finally, she highlighted the drastic impact of the pandemic on systems that were already struggling, particularly in conflict zones; for example, Syria’s healthcare system was already overwhelmed, and COVID-19 worsened the situation many times over.

Nader Kabbani, Director of Research, Brookings Doha, Qatar

Nader Kabbani explained that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) had a relatively solid response to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of instituting lockdowns and other safety measures. They were also able to open up incrementally to balance the economic and public health sides of the issue. Although there were high rates of infection, fatalities remained low and hospitals were not overwhelmed with patients. He explained that the GCC is struggling economically however, not only because of the lockdown and decreased economic activity but also due to the drop in global oil and natural gas prices. To remedy this, the Council has been focusing on reducing future costs. This situation has also demonstrated additional need for economic diversification. This cost-cutting has disproportionately affected migrant workers and non-citizens putting them in a highly complicated position.

Güven Sak, Director, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Turkey

Güven Sak explained how the COVID-19 pandemic caught everyone off guard and that virtually no think tank imagined a potential pandemic as an immediate priority. He noted that everything has declined: the economy, oil prices, social protections, and much more. He also touched on the impact of industrial activities, including increasing robotization and digitalization, on heightening unemployment. More so than anything, he stressed that economic issues are looming over everyone’s heads and every sphere of life. He proposed developing countries convene more frequently to address these issues and formulate a more coordinated global strategy.
Eman Ragab, Senior Researcher, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt

Eman Ragab focused on how COVID-19 has impacted conflicts in the Middle East. She explained that many countries around the world neglected to prepare for crises in general, not just pandemics, and that this unpreparedness combined with the severity of COVID-19 has further perpetuated conflicts in the MENA region. During the pandemic, these grievances have worsened while humanitarian responses have decreased given the greater global need for medical resources and newfound restrictions around travel. Internal conflicts have not been resolved and minimal progress has been made, making it likely that these issues will persist. She also noted that among conflicting nations, even if they offered each other assistance related to COVID-19, this did not help facilitate progress regarding the conflicts themselves. Finally, she stressed that violent actors within these conflicts have only grown more powerful and that they need to be taken more seriously.

Session III, Panel II: Mandate for Ideas and Action in the Face of a Pandemic, Twindemic or Hydrademic

Chair: Rym Ayadi, President, Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association, Spain

Rym Ayadi opened the panel by framing the discussion surrounding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world and the uncertainty that has accompanied the crisis. She notes that bold policy actions are necessary to respond to this and in many parts of the world, and some are already being implemented, citing Europe especially. She then introduced the individual panelists.

To open the discussion, Ms. Ayadi asked the panel what specific actions and recommendations think tanks in the panelists’ respective countries have made thus far.

Abla Abdel Latif, Executive Director and Director of Research, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, Egypt

Abla Abdel Latif noted that when discussing a pandemic, twindemic, or hydramedic, there are three common areas that must be addressed: health concerns, the need for a strong economy, and increased support for the poor as a necessity. She then went on to make suggestions for each problem area in the MENA region. For health, she highlighted that public health policy cannot be looked at in isolation, but rather as an integral part of economic policy with governments behaving accordingly. Without better health services for all, no areas of government can move forward.
Dr. Latif continued, explaining that maintaining a strong economy makes a country more capable of handling systemic shock from a global or domestic crisis. The first tenant of a stable and strong economy is to fix existing weaknesses within respective economies. These weaknesses are not new, but they have been accentuated and worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are all institutional issues relating to human capital and governance. Secondly, there is an issue with the structure of economies in the Arab world, rendering them in need of serious diversification. A specific emphasis must be on growth in the production sector, notably manufacturing lacks small and medium-sized enterprises. Additionally, the goods that are being produced are not of substantial value, calling for a serious overhaul in production policy. Foreign investment levels are concerningly low, especially when looking at the substantial number of opportunities currently available. Governments must offer sufficient incentives to attract foreign companies to invest in the region. Fourthly, issues must be prioritized in order to efficiently enact these policies.

In addressing poverty, there has been a positive change in rhetoric towards the poor, but no accompanying action to provide substantive assistance. The level of funds provided to those in need is insufficient. Policies such as universal basic income and increased collaboration with small enterprises must be considered to provide sustainable solutions. Vital to this mission is to include social policies as an integral part of economic policy.

To answer Ms. Ayadi’s discussion question, Dr. Latif recognized that the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies has produced three series of studies. The first related to the impact of COVID-19 on various sectors, making suggestions on how governments may overcome the crisis and addressing the institutional issues associated with those specific sectors. Subsequent actions were taken by the government for all twenty sectors studied. The second series followed up on various potential scenarios regarding the progression of COVID-19 and compared them with what actually took place. The third series looked at drivers of change for the economy. To conclude, she highlighted the importance of international collaboration that is required to address issues in the region.

Dlawer Ala’Aldeen, President, The Middle East Research Institute, Iraq (Kurdistan)

Dlawer Ala’Aldeen opened by acknowledging the general problems related to all in attendance and specific ones which only affect a portion. Each attendee is already an expert on the general problems which were revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic including public health and the economy, among others, yet each has their own specific issues as a result. Last year, Iraq was in turmoil after many were killed during political demonstrations, most of whom were asking only to have better living standards
and general prosperity. The real issue concerning this is regarding Iraqi leaders who have not effectively built a nation or addressed economic concerns. During pandemic-related demonstrations, people reacted responsibly with demonstrators calming their protests and at the same time, a change in government took place. The new government appeared to be pro-reform and pro-change which aligned with the protestors, but has failed to respond to the institutional issues that are rife throughout the entire governing system.

As a result, Iraq is moving towards general fragility and financial insolvency with demonstrators appearing once more. The authorities have been using the pandemic as a scapegoat as opposed to accepting that it is poor governance which is the primary contributing factor for the country’s issues. For the first time, legislators and policymakers have begun coming to think tanks for ideas and solutions when previously, they had not been engaging with think tanks at all. For the next 12-24 months, the primary challenges that must be addressed is the need for government reform and a diversification of the economy to deal with the lack of finances in order to make ends meet.

Answering the final discussion question, Mr. Ala’Aldeen responded by saying that MERI has made steps to study the structural issues of governments which has seen a significant amount of influence and engagement by politicians when it was previously ignored.

Omar Al-Ubaydli, Director of Research, Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat), Bahrain

Omar Al-Ubaydli started by stressing the importance of advancing openness and research practices in the Gulf countries in particular. One reason for the amount of scientific advancements during the enlightenment era was the presence of shared language and the normalization of collaboration in the field. By the 21st century, we have been accustomed to the importance of peer reviewed research to the quality of a final product. In the Western world, there has been a prevailing policy of shared research and openness, similar to the way universities have operated. However, the same level of openness has not applied to the MENA region. In the COVID-19 era, there has been, unsurprisingly, a substantial amount of research about the pandemic — and a contributing factor to the quality of that research is how widely it was disseminated. In Gulf think tanks and Gulf research entities, there is a much lower propensity to share research than in the West. In many instances, research is conducted privately for governments and made confidential. Mr. Al-Ubaydli sees this as a mistake due to quality concerns from the lack of peer review. There is a culture in the region of shying away from accountability and quality safeguards. This is a primary reason why the research output of Gulf institutions has been low, with
poor citation rates and lack of use in government policies. To solve this issue, Gulf-based researchers must be informed on the importance of peer review and research openness to overall quality and understand that basic errors while conducting research are normal.

Mr. Al-Ubaydli’s response to the concluding discussion question highlighted BCSIES’ work in conjunction with UNDP in Bahrain to conduct a socioeconomic analysis of COVID-19 in Bahrain to produce a number of reports that are still ongoing.

Session IV, Panel III: The COVID-19 Effect: Accelerator, Transformer or Terminator: What Think Tanks Must Do to Survive and Thrive in a World Disrupted

Chair: Ebtesam Al Ketbi, President, Emirates Policy Center, UAE

Ebtesam Al Kebti thanked James McGann for facilitating the last round of speakers and this summit overall. She then clarified which country each speaker represented and welcomed them. She also noted that instead of giving five minutes to each speaker like in other sessions she would ask specific questions for each speaker to answer. The session resembled a Q&A.

Adam Sieminski, President, King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), Saudi Arabia

Adam Sieminski started off answering the question of how his organization has been handling COVID-19 by explaining the protocol KAPSARC took to sanitize offices, increase internet bandwidth, and encourage a working from home policy. KAPSARC’s Director of Research created a new task force to study how health, socio-economic issues, and the environment were affected by COVID-19 using many minds and think tanks from across the world. KAPSARC also called upon G20 countries to analyze how COVID-19 affected its institutions and global economic policy on how physical restoration packages should prioritize research. For example, using this new task force and research funding, KAPSARC learned more about how homeschooling due to the pandemic affected the outlook of students. He ended by summarizing the key findings of the task force, which were that pandemic solutions should also include research on bio-carbon emissions and climate-neutral solutions in the carbon economy. KAPSARC is an energy and resource think tank and supply and demand of resources of energy, its research priorities were those of national needs on energy data.
Ahmed Azirar, Professor, Moroccan Institute for Strategic Intelligence (IMIS), Morocco

Ahmed Azirar began by elaborating how think tanks in the MENA were surprised by the pandemic and had to plan how to allocate their resources in order to continue their research. Their rapid evolution of thinking is commendable. He listed all the crises think tanks overcame, including adapting to digital flexibility and having outreach to communities during an era of social distance. Though he noticed a lack of coordination between many directors disturbed by the crisis, he also noted that the crisis created many opportunities including a change in mindset to adapt to an uncertain future. He hopes such adaptation will ensure think tanks are less unprepared in the face of the next international crisis. Mr. Azirar also shared how IMIS is working with many useful sectors, such as the agrarian or pharmaceutical sector, to restart its growth. This is key for the organization of global communication and leadership.

Zaid Eyadat, Director, Center for Strategic Studies, Jordan

Zaid Eyadat shared his insight on how think tanks’ data science analysis in Jordan has been affected by COVID-19. He explained how COVID-19 has been affecting business and thus may similarly continue to affect Jordan’s think tanks. Jordan is well known for conducting polling and surveys and that was severely compromised due to shifting online while still needing to collect data on public opinion. Online interviews, in his opinion, are not as objective or accurate as in-person ones. This data is used to set public debate agendas and educate the public while making policy. Secondly, the structure and agenda of think tanks are not democratic but rather designed to acquire funding. He explained how the environment and degrees of freedom that think tanks operate on are greatly compromised in this online format because that is not how science is usually done. All think tanks have been making efforts to adjust and use their resources to be as accurate as possible.

Nizar Ben Salah, Research Director, Maghreb Economic Forum, Tunisia Lauder Institute | Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program | University of Pennsylvania, United States

Nizar Ben Saleh began by explaining how think tanks are now preparing to transition current research to a post-pandemic world. One proposal he had was to move all think tank communication online and create better communication channels with governments. He also is glad the pandemic allowed for think tanks to better develop their internal organization, delegation to teams, and adaptability to study while abiding to the constraints of a global health crisis. He sees the pandemic as temporary and its aftermath being seen in policy reform, crisis communication policy, and unilateral and multilateral corporations. Mr. Ben Saleh also agreed that decision makers should study think tanks to see how institutions can handle future crises. Governments can study think tanks as a governing plan not exclusive to one country.
Session V, Panel IV: The Post Pandemic Renaissance: An Era of Resilient, Responsive and Inclusive Government

Chair: James G. McGann, Director

James McGann introduced each of the speakers and the work of their respective think tanks. He immediately turned the conversation to the first guest. After each speaker finished, McGann shared his thoughts on their statements and commended them for their input.

Sihem Drissi, Executive Manager, Strategic Fiker Center for Studies, Turkey

Sihem Drissi began by elaborating on the instability that the pandemic brought upon the Turkish government. According to Drissi, civil society actors can make a huge difference and the energies of civic engagement and digitization of the post-pandemic era can lead to a positive change. She predicted a strong and active post-pandemic civic society with an example of Tunisia and Lebanon. In these two countries, the pandemic brought forward an opportunity to handle the gender inequality crises and socioeconomic issues that did not have the space to be studied as diligently before. She describes this era as a sort of renaissance where countries in the MENA are working together to address these systemic inequalities in solidarity.

Afterwards, she described how in a post-pandemic world Sudan, Iran, Lebanon, Turkey, and Tunisia may experience civil unrest and resistance as a function of their new egalitarian and democratic findings. Many people currently also have political frustrations with the political elite beyond just how officials handled the pandemic, and this new solidarity is polarizing compared to the status quo. She predicts civil society may also ask leaders for more accountability and transparency.

Amos Yadlin, Executive Director, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Israel

Amos Yadlin was unable to join. Karim El Aynaoui announced his absence. An unnamed guest reported in his stead, explaining that there were two main collapses from the COVID-19 crisis: in the oil market, which many of the MENA countries depend on, and the inward turn on problems at home. He saw some states take this crisis as an opportunity to promote vaccines and economic equality. He hopes that these steps taken can be used in the future, like maritime presence in the Red Sea. He sees the value of a post-pandemic ongoing working group to tackle some of the region’s issues that may be blamed for COVID-19’s economic outcomes.
Dalia Ziada, Director, Liberal Democracy Institute, Egypt

Dalia Ziada described that the pandemic brought a lot of optimism for the future of the region. MENA governments have had to collaborate and directly face the pandemic as an enemy to address the problem together. In this process, the relationship between the citizen and the state has been redefined in a way that will improve confidence in leadership. Civil society in countries that have gone through the Arab Spring have focused on political activism but not social grassroots and economic issues. This pandemic has changed that where governments now have to directly work with grassroots organizers.

Her second observation was that liberal, non-democratic governments internationally were much more equipped in fighting the pandemic because they had more control over the private sector and citizens. The way the government is looking at human rights issues is transformational, where issues such as housing and poverty are no longer seen as internal but transnational problems. This pandemic has also defined the limits of the nontraditional use of armies to enforce pandemic laws as an institution and that this autonomy has proven to be beneficial and not detrimental to the private sector.

Karim El Aynaoui, President, Policy Center for the New South, Morocco

Karim El Aynaoui addressed the topic by using Drissi’s term ‘renaissance’. He commented that history does not function this way and that our current era is perhaps not a renaissance but at a critical juncture between social reform and action. What the MENA does now and in the near-term future will influence what happens in the long-term future. Think tanks share values and in a scientific world, think tanks should share dialogue to predict a plan of action in an era of uncertainty. He describes this communication as a safe space for policymakers and researchers to listen to and learn from each other. In his words, the space for dialogue is a public good.

Session VI, Panel V: Making T20 Fit for an Uncertain Future

Chair: Abla Abdel Latif, Executive Director and Director of Research, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, Egypt

Dr. Latif began the session by stressing how the G20 is the best way for the think tanks to bring their opinions to the international community for implementation. She then went on to introduce the different panelists and their relations with the G20, emphasizing the expertise shown in the final panel of the summit. Knowing that the time allocated to this final panel was short, she urged the panelists to be as frank as possible on the realities facing the G20 and how it must adapt to this evolving time.

To conclude the panel, Dr. Latif questioned the panelists on what single item or action that can be done to improve the performance of the T20.
Fahad Alturki, Vice President and Head of Research, King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), Saudi Arabia

Fahad Alturki explained that the Saudi G20 and T20 has just recently concluded which gives us the opportunity to take a step back and assess it from a distance. The G20 began with strong hopes and a bold vision of creating a future of prosperity, sustainability and inclusion for all. One important thing that has been a topic brought up by other prior panels is that those in the G20 and those outside of it are not restrained by international borders. The solutions to the issues that we face require a multilateral and global approach. Therefore, we need, as think tanks, to think beyond our geographic area. We must engage closely with think tanks from around the globe in both scope and activity, as many members of the G20 have begun to do already. An emphasis on multilateralism and global cooperation has become especially important given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In fulfiling its inclusivity agenda, the T20 was determined to reach out all around the world to get the input from think tanks through its policy briefs. It has an impressive global coverage of over 650 authors from 77 countries.

Mr. Alturki then shifted focus to the issues facing the MENA region. On the issue of the climate crisis, he stressed the importance of creating circular recovery and advancing carbon management to support climate action. The region suffers from the scarcity of resources and we have discussed these challenges related to food, energy and water, as well as sustainability, affordability and accessibility for now and the future. We have made recommendations on social cohesion which was highlighted by the previous panel. For the future, participation by the MENA region should be promoted into the Italian G20. Mr. Alturki expressed he was happy to see 178 authors participate from the MENA region and encouraged more to come and continue engagement with Italy. One of the main advantages of participating in the G20 is the ability to adopt the recommendations that are put forward. In that context, 48 of the policy recommendations that were promoted by T20 law year were adopted fully or partially by the G20.

To respond to Dr. Latif’s concluding question, Mr. Alturki answered with urging closer cooperation with the T20 and Mr. Magri and the next G20 presidencies in particular.
Paolo Magri started by asking three brief questions. First, can we hope for a revival of international cooperation? COVID-19 has shown that the need for cooperation is there and that the will to act on that need may also be there. For now, Mr. Magri urged people to take an optimistic view for the foreseeable future despite these turbulent times. Secondly, if the need and will are there, what about the G20? The “my country first” narrative has inevitably affected the G20. For some, the critical issue is the format and for others it is the way that the G20 operates and its agenda. Among those skeptical about the format, they claim that the G20 is too large to be relevant and propose a move back to the G7 or a G10 makeup under the idea of keeping China, among others, out. On the other hand, some argue that the G20 is too small and not representative enough of the collective will of the world. These people have in mind a resurrection of the UN’s General Assembly. These two views are at odds, but they both represent a similar uneasiness to the G20 format. While acknowledging this uneasiness, we have to be careful not to be too rash with these assessments. The G20 has been and still remains as the only attempt to take a modern view of the makeup of the world, as opposed to a heavily outdated view as seen by the General Assembly and G7.

Mr. Magri then proceeded to describe three revisions that he believes are necessary to reform the way that the G20 operates, viewing them as far more important than revising its format and composition. The first revision is to streamline the agenda. The second is to reinforce the Troika. Third is to increasingly involve engagement groups. He then went on to ask, so what for the Italian T20? ISPI will do its best to prioritize the usually wide agenda by focusing on 3 P’s: People, Planet Prosperity. We will do our best to get the utmost out of the visions of the worldwide think tank community, facilitating the widest possible participation of think tanks from non-G20 countries. This is particularly relevant for the MENA region and Africa as both will be central to many topics addressed by the summit. Third, we will do our best to work actively with the Troika, incorporating as much as possible the advice from our Saudi friends and as soon as possible, Indonesia. Fourth, we will do our best to stimulate debate on reforming and improving the G20 and T20.

To respond to the concluding question, Mr. Magri reiterated the importance of streamlining the agenda.
**Güven Sak**, Director, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Turkey

In this situation that we are in with a definitively global crisis, global cooperation is required. G20 plays a pivotal role if there is to be any hope of continued globalization and a route out of this current global mess. Public-private sector dialogue is of utmost importance in order to make use of this opportunity. Güven Sak thinks this is a period where think tanks need to get out of our trenches and focus on this cooperation issue and design ways to improve this public-private sector dialogue.

Mr. Sak, in the final response to the concluding question of the panel, agreed with Mr. Magri’s suggestion while also inputting the need for a greater inclusive and representative process.

**Closing Remarks**

**James McGann**, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, United States

Dr. McGann acknowledged the “richness and value” MENA think tanks displayed throughout the program. It was also revealed that the next global summit will take place in the MENA region in Bahrain. Additionally, Dr. McGann emphasised how strengthening the MENA think tank network would facilitate discussion. With the pandemic’s end insight, Dr. McGann emphasised the need to preserve both institutions and optimism. Lastly, think tanks must be better, faster, stronger, more agile, and more digital to handle the coming challenges. To conclude, Dr. McGann thanked the participating guests and acknowledged his high hopes for the coming summit in Bahrain October 2022.
A special thank you to those who participated on our MENA Planning Committee:

Al Jazeera Center for Studies, Qatar
Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt
Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies, Bahrain
Brookings Institution, Qatar
Carnegie Middle East Center, Lebanon
Center for Strategic Studies, Jordan
Centre des Etudes Méditerranéennes et Internationales (CEMI), Tunisia
Cercle d’Action et de Réflexion pour l’Entreprise, Algeria
Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, Egypt
Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA), Egypt
Elcano Royal Institute, Spain
Emirates Diplomatic Academy, United Arab Emirates
Emirates Policy Center, United Arab Emirates
Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association, Spain
Ethiopian Policy Studies Institute (FNA EDRI), Ethiopia
Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Israel
Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (American University at Beirut), Lebanon
Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Italy
King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), Saudi Arabia
Liberal Democracy Institute (LDI), Egypt
Maghreb Economic Forum (MEF), Tunisia
Middle East Institute, United States
Middle East Research Institute (MERI), Kurdistan, Iraq
Moroccan Institute for Strategic Intelligence (IMIS), Morocco
Policy Center for the New South, Morocco
Rasanah: International Institute for Iranian Studies, Saudi Arabia
The Reut Group, Israel
Strategic Fiker Center for Studies, Turkey
Turkey Economic Policy Research Foundation (TEPAV), Turkey
A special thank you to our panelists:

Opening Session

James McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP), USA

James G. McGann, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer at the Lauder Institute of the Wharton School and the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also the Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania.

He conducts research on developments and problems that think tanks and policymakers around the world face, and offers 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 is 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 the University of Villanova, where he taught international relations, international organizations and international law.

Session II, Panel I

Paul Salem, President, Middle East Institute, USA

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); and Winning the Battle, Losing the War: Addressing the Conditions that Fuel Armed Non State Actors; From Chaos to Cooperation: Toward Regional Order in the Middle East. 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.
Maha Yahya, Director, Carnegie Middle East Center, Lebanon

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.

Nader Kabbani, Director of Research, Brookings Doha, Qatar

Nader Kabbani is a nonresident senior fellow in the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings and the director of research at the Brookings Doha Center. Kabbani works at the nexus of research; policy and practice. Most recently, he served as the director of policy and research at the non-profit organization, Silatech Foundation, and as the founding director of the Syrian Development Research Center at the non-profit organization, Syria Trust for Development. He has also held academic positions with the American University of Beirut and served on the research staff of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the California State Senate. Kabbani specializes in issues covering Economic Development and Labor Markets in the Middle East, focusing on education, youth employment, active labor market policies, poverty and inequality, and private sector development. Throughout his career, he has maintained an interest in institutional reform and has been involved in the design and evaluation of public programs and social initiatives.

Güven Sak, Director, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Turkey

Güven Sak holds a Ph.D. degree in Economics from the Middle East Technical University and M.A. degree from University of East Anglia. He worked as a senior researcher at the Capital Markets Board of Turkey, as a faculty member of the Department of Public Finance at the Faculty of Political Sciences, Ankara University and as an external founding member of the Monetary Policy Council of the Central Bank of Turkey. He became Professor of Public Economics in 2003. In 2006, he was transferred to the newly established TOBB University of Economics and Technology. He was the founding Managing Director of the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) in 2004 which is the first and only economic policy think tank in Turkey. Güven Sak writes on economic issues for Dünya, and Hürriyet Daily News. He is currently the President/CEO of TEPAV Global, Washington, DC, USA.
Eman Ragab, Senior Researcher, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt

Dr. Eman Ragab is a MED Fellow at the Research Division of the NATO Defense College. Her current research focuses on cooperation between NATO and North African countries in the area of countering terrorism. Before joining NDC, she was the acting head of the military and security unit at al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies ACPSS in Egypt. She is the 1st place winner of the ALECSO’s Arab Young Researchers Award - the Arab League. Besides being an expert researcher in security policies in the Middle East, she has experience in editing and in managing research projects. Since 2014 she has acted as the the editor in chief of Bada’el (a peer reviewed policy studies journal published in Arabic by ACPSS), and she is a co-coordinator of the national voluntary report on governance commissioned to the African Peer Review Mechanism APRM/African Union.

Session III, Panel II

Rym Ayadi, President, Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association, Spain

Rym Ayadi is an economist and the Founder and President of the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Associations (EMEA). She also holds various other leadership roles, including serving as the Chair of the Banking Stakeholders Group of the European Banking Authority and the Founder and Director of the Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES). Her work and expertise focus on inclusive and sustainable socio-economic models, financial architecture and stability and sustainable finance. She also holds a position as an Honorary Visiting Professor at the City University of London’s CASS Business School and is an Associated Scholar at the Centre for Relationship Banking and Economics (CERBE) at LUMSA University in Rome. Dr. Ayadi’s current research focuses on the redesign of a global stable, sustainable and inclusive financial system that better serves economic and societal long-term objectives. Her work led her to become an international academic expert on many other academic and advisory Committees and Boards.

Abla Abdel Latif, Executive Director and Director of Research, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, Egypt

Abla Abdel Latif is the Executive Director and Director of Research at the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (ECES). She also holds roles as the Chairwoman of the Presidential Advisory Council for Economic Development, a member of the Central Bank of Egypt’s Coordinating Council and becoming first female to ever serve as a Board Member for the National Bank of Egypt, among numerous other positions. Her expertise has been put to use as a senior international expert in several UNIDO projects and other international organizations. Dr. Latif has held several public service roles as an Advisor to the Minister of Industry after the 25th of January Revolution in 2011 and up until recently served as the main economic advisor to Egypt’s President. In 2013, she was honored as a member of the Committee of Fifty, whose task was to draft Egypt’s new constitution. Her work has extended beyond the professional sphere into teaching as she served as a Professor of Economics at American University in Cairo for over twenty years and another professorial role at Sussex University in the UK.
Dlawer Ala’Aldeen, President, The Middle East Research Institute, Iraq (Kurdistan)

Dlawer Ala’Aldeen is the Founding President of the Middle East Research Institute (MERI) and a Professor of Medicine at Nottingham University in the United Kingdom. From 2009-2012, he held the position of Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research for the Kurdistan Regional Government. While a minister, Ala’Aldeen instituted a program to radically reform Higher Education in Kurdistan, focusing on improving the quality of education, modernizing research and initiating social justice efforts. He has published extensively in peer-reviewed international journals and co-authored several books in the field of medicine. Dlawer co-founded the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association, an advocacy organization focused on protecting Kurdish human rights and influencing UK and US policies on the Kurds.

Omar Al-Ubaydli, Director of Research, Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat), Bahrain

Omar Al-Ubaydli is the Director of Research at the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies. He is also an affiliated associate professor of economics at George Mason University and an affiliated senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center. He previously served as a member of the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Joint Advisory Board of Economists and a Visiting Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago. In Bahrain, he has served as a member of the Higher Education Council Research Taskforce and the National Education Council Skills and Innovation Steering Committee. His primary research areas concern behavioral/experimental economics, political economy, the economics of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the economics of science. He has numerous peer-reviewed publications in international journals, and his research has been covered in mainstream media outlets, in addition to regularly writing newspaper and magazine articles in various outlets.
Session IV, Panel III

**Ebtesam Al Ketbi, President, Emirates Policy Center, UAE**

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 seventh 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 tenth in think tank conferences worldwide.

**Adam Sieminski, President, King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), Saudi Arabia**

Adam Sieminski was appointed as the president of KAPSARC in April 2018. Before his appointment, Mr. Sieminski held the James R. Schlesinger Chair for Energy and Geopolitics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Prior to that, he was a non-resident senior adviser to the CSIS Energy and National Security Program. He also served as the administrator of the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) from 2012 to 2017 and was the senior director for energy and environment on the staff of the United States National Security Council. Earlier in his career, Mr. Sieminski was Deutsche Bank’s chief energy economist and the senior energy analyst for NatWest Securities. In 2006, he was appointed to the National Petroleum Council (NPC), where he helped co-author NPC’s global oil and gas study.

**Ahmed Azirar, Professor, Moroccan Institute for Strategic Intelligence (IMIS), Morocco**

Ahmed Azirar holds a PhD in Economics. He also holds national and foreign certificates in international management, international negotiation and project management. He is a university professor of economics, international trade and market intelligence. He has experience in administrative management, ministerial cabinet and business, administrative and professional association counseling. He is the founder of the Moroccan Association of Business Economists AMEEN, co-founder of the Moroccan Institute of Strategic Intelligence IMIS and the MOROCCAN ASSOCIATION OF ECONOMIC SCIENCES AMSE. He is also an associate researcher at the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies IRES. He received the Wissam of the Order of Merit of the Kingdom of Morocco in 2014 and a distinction for services rendered by the World Customs Organization in 2011.
Zaid Eyadat, Director, Center for Strategic Studies, Jordan

Prof. Zaid Eyadat is a political scientist and human rights professor at the University of Jordan, with over ten years of experience in researching the democratization of the Middle East within the framework of game theory, as he has formally been trained in comparative and international politics and game theory methodology. Subsequently, his expertise lies in Middle East politics, with his current research focusing on human rights, conflict management and resolution, the democratization and politics in the Middle East, and Islamic politics. Through his membership in both governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as international institutions, he has extensively contributed to the analysis and advancement of Middle East politics within a comparative and international framework, working extensively on legislation, policies, and procedures with the Jordanian government and NGOs.

Nizar Ben Salah, Professor, Moroccan Institute for Strategic Intelligence (IMIS), Morocco

Nizar is a Lead Researcher at the Maghreb Economic Forum. He has worked on several youth empowerment and positive youth development projects in North Africa with organizations such as The International Institute of Debate, and UNESCO. Formerly an engineer, Nizar is interested in how technology can impact social change in the Maghreb.

Session V, Panel IV

James McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP), USA
**Sihem Drissi, Executive Manager, Strategic Fiker Center for Studies, Turkey**

Sihem Drissi is the assistant of executive director of Strategic Fiker Center for Studies 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.

**Amos Yadlin, Executive Director, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Israel**

Amos Yadlin served as the Executive Director of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University from November 2011 to May 2021. As the head of INSS, he positioned the Institute as a leading think tank, ranked first among think tanks in Israel and the Middle East, and ranked twelfth among think tanks worldwide on issues of defense and national security. Amos served in the Israel Defense Forces for 40 years, eight of which he was a member of the IDF General Staff. From 2006-2010, Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin served as the IDF’s chief of Military Intelligence. Prior to that, he served as defense attaché to the United States. In February 2002, he earned the rank of major general and was named commander of the IDF Military Colleges and the National Defense College. Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin, a former deputy commander of the Israel Air Force, commanded two fighter squadrons and two airbases. He also served as head of IAF Planning Department (1990-1993).

**Dalia Ziada, Director, Liberal Democracy Institute, Egypt**

Dalia Ziada, LDI Founding Director, is a civil society professional and socio-political analyst; observing liberal democratization, civil-military affairs, and countering violent extremism in the Middle East. Dalia studied international relations, with focus on international security studies, at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University (USA). Her areas of expertise include Civil-Military relations in Egypt and the Middle East, Political Islamists and terrorism, countering violent extremism and radicalization, International Security Studies, Internal political affairs in Egypt, regional political and security dynamics in the Middle East, liberal democracy, human rights, and women’s rights in the Arab world, Nonviolent action and strategies, Civil Society in the Arab world and United States Foreign Policy in the Middle East.
Karim El Aynaoui, President, Policy Center for the New South, Morocco

Executive President of the Policy Center for the New South, and Executive Vice-President of the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University and Dean of its Faculty of Governance, Economics and Social Sciences. From 2005 to 2012, he worked at the Central Bank of Morocco (Bank Al-Maghrib) where he served as Director of Economics, Statistics and International Relations. He was also in charge of the Research Department and was a member of the cabinet of the Governor. Prior to joining Bank Al-Maghrib, Karim El Aynaoui worked for eight years at the World Bank, as an Economist within the Middle East, North Africa, and Africa regions. He has published books and journal articles on macroeconomic issues in developing countries. His recent work includes co-authored books on renewing Morocco’s growth strategy and on the Moroccan labor market.

Session VI, Panel V

Abla Abdel Latif, Executive Director and Director of Research, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, Egypt

Fahad Alturki, Vice President and Head of Research, King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), Saudi Arabia

Dr. Fahad Alturki is Vice President of Research at King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC). He holds a B.A. in Business Administration from King Saud University, and Master’s and Ph.D. degrees in economics from the University of Oregon, Eugene. He oversees KAPSARC’s research programs and ensures they are strategically focused on impacts within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, both regionally and globally. Dr. Fahad interacts with key stakeholder groups within the Kingdom and internationally, in the private, academic, and government sectors and has 20 years experience as an economist.
Paolo Magri, Executive Vice President, Italian Institute for International Policy Studies (ISPI), Italy

Paolo Magri is Executive Vice President of the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) and Professor of International Relations at Bocconi University. He is member of the Strategic Committee of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, member of the Europe Policy Group of the World Economic Forum (Davos) and member of the Board of Directors of the Italy-China Foundation. He is also a member of the Scientific Committees of the Elcano Royal Institute, the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units and of the Military Center for Strategic Studies.
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, New York.
About the Director:

James G. McGann, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer at the Lauder Institute of the Wharton School and the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also the Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania. He conducts research on developments and problems that think tanks and policymakers around the world face, and offers 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 is 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 the University of Villanova, where he taught international relations, international organizations and international law.

His main research priorities include: 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 is 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 has 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 has 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 has also served as a Senior Advisor to the Citizens’ Network for Foreign Affairs and the Society for International Development.

“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.”
Contact:

James G. McGann, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer, International Studies, Lauder Institute
Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program
Wharton School and School of Arts and Sciences
University of Pennsylvania
256 S. 37th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104
Main Office: (215) 573-6267
Direct Line: (215) 746-2928
Mobile: (215) 206-1799
Email: jmcgann@wharton.upenn.edu
Website: gotothinktank.com

Recognizing and Thanking all TTCSP Interns Involved:

James G. McGann, TTCSP Director, University of Pennsylvania

Alisa Wadsworth, TTCSP Regional Summit Director, University of Pennsylvania

Emma Harris, TTCSP Regional Summit Director, University of Pennsylvania

TTCSP MENA Team:

Abigail Baggini, Milo Salem, Jarek Azim, Areej Alfeen, Ben Winer, Serena Liu