

MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE @ NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023
31 MAY 2023

Concept Paper

THE NEW MIDDLE EAST
RETURN OF THE GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Scope of the conference:

In the past twelve months, the world returned in earnest to the logic of great power competition. That competition is taking place between the US, China, Russia and if it focuses today on two main hot spots – namely Ukraine in Europe and Taiwan in East Asia – the policies of Washington, Beijing, and Moscow have ramifications in all other regions of the world – the Middle East being no exception.

But the return of great power competition after the post-cold war lull does not mean that regions like the Middle East or Southeast Asia are solely defined by that global phenomenon. In the past decade, the rise of the US-China rivalry coincided with the growing ambitions of Middle Eastern powers – Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or the UAE – to dictate the terms of their own foreign policies.

When considering Russia's invasion of Ukraine or China's forays in the Middle East, the traditional partners of Washington in Riyadh, Jerusalem, or Abu Dhabi opted for calculated ambiguity rather than full endorsement of the West's position. In other words, Middle East states are seeking more and more *not* to align themselves along the lines of great power competition, but rather want to use the competition for leverage to satisfy their interests.

The conjunction of this return to great power competition at global level with the rising ambitions of Middle East states at regional level has consequences in all the sectors of international affairs: from the fate of the Iranian nuclear issue to the disruption of energy markets; or from the revision of regional security arrangements to the emergence of a new nexus between the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific region.

Taking stock of these ongoing trends, this year's MEI annual conference will unpack them and venture on the future outlook of the Middle East and its implications for Singapore.

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ANNUAL CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Wednesday, 31 May 2023

Orchard Hotel, Ballroom 1, Level 3

442 Orchard Road Singapore 238879

Time	Event
0930hr – 1015hr	<p>Conference Opens</p> <p>Welcome Remarks Mr Bilahari Kausikan <i>Chairman, Middle East Institute</i></p> <p>In Conversation</p> <p>Mr K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law with Mr Bilahari Kausikan, Chairman, Middle East Institute</p>
1015hrs – 1100hrs	<p>Panel 1: The Middle East in the Shadow of the War in Ukraine</p> <p>This first panel will assess the consequences of the war in Ukraine on the Middle East. Specifically, speakers will review issues such as Israel & Gulf Policies towards the conflict, and the implications of Russia’s war economy for Moscow’s presence in the Middle East. It will also discuss if – and how – Ukraine may be a turning point signalling a US disengagement from the Middle East. Finally, as the Ukraine War might lead small states across the world to reconsider nuclear proliferation for their own defense, it is worth discussing such prospect in a Middle Eastern context, in particular at a time when the Iranian nuclear crisis still looms.</p> <p>Moderator: Dr Jean – Loup Samaan <i>Senior Research Fellow, Middle East Institute, NUS</i></p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">Ambassador Martin Indyk <i>Lowy Distinguished Fellow, US Middle East Diplomacy at the Council on Foreign Relations</i>Dr Nikolay Kozhanov <i>Research Associate Professor, Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University</i>His Excellency Nickolay Mladenov <i>Director-General, Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy</i>
1100hrs – 1145hrs	<p>Q & A Session</p> <p>Moderated by: Dr Jean – Loup Samaan <i>Senior Research Fellow, Middle East Institute, NUS</i></p>

<p>1145hrs – 1230hrs</p>	<p>Panel 2: The New Middle East Security Architecture: A Mirage?</p> <p>This second panel will discuss the prospects for a new Middle East security architecture. In recent years, the region witnessed major, and sometimes contradicting, changes. Whereas the US-China competition in the Middle East increased, the local rivalry between two blocs – one led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE and one led by Qatar and Turkey –has faded away (at least momentarily). The new era of de-escalation and reconciliation among regional powers has been felt across the Gulf and the Levant. It enabled an unprecedented wave of normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states (UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan). It also led Gulf states to engage with Iran in order to restore diplomatic ties and prevent clashes, in particular in war-torn Yemen. This current phase of Middle East diplomacy also triggered new initiatives that increasingly tie the region with other areas of the world, in particular the Indo-Pacific: minilateral groupings such as I2U2 and the trilateral dialogue between the UAE, India and France reflect such a trend. The key question then becomes if all these developments are sustainable and can bring about a more stable Middle East.</p> <p>Moderated by: Tan Sri Rastam <i>Former Secretary General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia</i></p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Shyam Saran <i>President, India International Centre and Former Foreign Secretary, Government of India</i> 2. Dr Ebtesam Al-Ketbi <i>President and Founder, Emirates Policy Center</i> 3. Professor Wang Zhen <i>Research Professor & Program Director of International Relations, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS)</i> 4. Mr Mike Singh <i>Managing Director and Senior Fellow, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy</i>
<p>1230hrs – 1315hrs</p>	<p>Q & A Session</p> <p>Moderated by: Tan Sri Rastam <i>Former Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia</i></p>
<p>1315hrs – 1415hrs</p>	<p>Lunch break</p>

<p>1415hrs – 1500hrs</p>	<p>Panel 3: Between a new Oil Boom and Climate Change Necessities</p> <p>This third panel will look at the evolving Middle East landscape in the field of energy: amid the war in Ukraine, the global economy is suffering from a major energy crisis that is forcing countries across the world to reconsider their energy consumption. For the US and European countries, this means relying more on Gulf states as an alternative to Russia’s gas supplies. But Saudi Arabia and other producers from the OPEC+ group have so far followed their own interests as reflected by the decision in October 2022 to reduce their daily production. Meanwhile this energy crisis coincides with growing needs for more consequential decisions with regards to climate change. Here too, the Middle East is today in the limelight as Egypt and the UAE hosted the COP 27 and 28.</p> <p>Eventually, the sudden surge of oil price as well as the growing pressure on climate governance put into question the fate of the much-awaited economic diversification plans in the Arabian Peninsula.</p> <p>Moderator: Mr Lee Tzu Yang <i>Chairman, Public Service Commission</i></p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ms Xiaowei Liu <i>Director, Special Projects Asia, World Energy Council</i> 2. Dr Adnan Shihab-Eldin <i>Senior Visiting Research Fellow, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies</i> 3. Mr Tan Chin Hwee <i>CEO Asia Pacific, Trafigura Group Pte Ltd</i>
<p>1500hrs – 1545hrs</p>	<p>Q & A Session</p> <p>Moderated by: Mr Lee Tzu Yang <i>Chairman, Public Service Commission</i></p>
<p>1545hrs – 1600hrs</p>	<p>Tea Break</p>

<p>1600hrs – 1730hrs</p>	<p>Closing session: The Year Ahead in the Middle East</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lieutenant General (Retired) Sir Thomas Beckett KCB CBE <i>Executive Director, Middle East Office, International Institute for Strategic Studies</i> 2. Ambassador Yuval Rotem <i>Former Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel</i> 3. Mr Akitaka Saiki <i>Former Vice Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan President, Middle East Research Institute of Japan</i> <p>Moderated by: Mr Bilahari Kausikan <i>Chairman, Middle East Institute, NUS</i></p>
<p>1730hrs</p>	<p>Session Ends</p>