

Middle East Institute @ National University of Singapore

THE MIDDLE EAST, RE-ORDERED

Annual
Conference
2025

2 September 2025

Orchard Hotel, Ballroom 1, Level 3
442 Orchard Road Singapore 238879

Israeli air defence systems are activated to intercept Iranian missiles over the Israeli city of Tel Aviv early on June 18, 2025. Israel and Iran exchanged fire again on June 17, the fifth day of strikes in their most intense confrontation in history, fuelling fears of a drawn-out conflict that could engulf the Middle East. (Photo by Menahem Kahana / AFP)



THE MIDDLE EAST, RE-ORDERED

The war in Gaza triggered by Hamas' attacks on Israel in October 2023 sparked several massive aftershocks that have redrawn the geopolitical map of the Middle East. After decimating Hamas, the Israel Defense Forces went on to effectively neuter Hezbollah in Lebanon, depriving Iran of its most potent forward threat to Israel. The overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria last December further weakened the so-called Axis of Resistance. With Iran at its most vulnerable in decades, Israel took the fight to the Islamic Republic in a 12-day offensive in June that left its chief regional foe reeling.

The aftermath of the violence has significantly altered the balance of power in the Middle East. Israel has emerged as the primary security power in the region, Iran has seen its influence evaporate, and other countries are calibrating their responses to the new reality. How do Arab states, particularly those in the Gulf, which have only recently moved to détente with Iran, respond to Israel's rise in tandem?

The Middle East Institute's Annual Conference 2025 will unpack the effects of a re-ordered region on the rest of the world via three panels staffed with experts. These panels will examine the impact of the far-reaching changes brought about by almost two years of war.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

09:00am	Conference Opens Welcome Remarks Professor Joseph Liow <i>Chairman, Middle East Institute, NUS</i>
09:05am	Opening Remarks Minister K. Shanmugam <i>Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs</i>
09:45am	Panel 1: Winners and Losers in a New Regional Order This opening panel will focus on regional reactions, and will include perspectives from Israel and Iran. Speakers: Dr Alam Saleh <i>Senior Lecturer in Iranian Studies, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, Australian National University</i> Dr Nanar Hawach <i>Senior Analyst for Syria, International Crisis Group</i> Mr Neri Zilber <i>Journalist and Analyst, the Financial Times and Israel Policy Forum</i>
10:30am	Q & A Session Moderated by: Dr Jean-Loup Samaan <i>Senior Research Fellow, Middle East Institute, NUS</i>
11:15am	Tea break

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

11:30am

Panel 2: The Middle East and External Powers

Panel 2 will dissect what the changes mean for big powers in the region, particularly the United States and China.

Speakers:

Amb Barbara A. Leaf

Senior International Policy Advisor, Arnold and Porter

Dr Chris Coulter

Executive Director, Berghof Foundation

Dr Zhu Zhaoyi

Executive Director of the Middle East Institute, Peking University HSBC Business School (PHBS)

12:15pm

Q & A Session

Moderated by:

Dr Clemens Chay

Research Fellow, Middle East Institute, NUS

1:00pm

Lunch break

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

2:00pm

Panel 3: What Lies Ahead?

This concluding panel will look ahead and attempt to divine future trends, including how the Gaza war will end, and the repercussions of changes on Singapore.

Speakers:

Dr Asaad Alshamlan

Director of the European Studies Center, Prince Saud Alfaisal Institute for Diplomatic Studies, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Mr Mohammed Baharoon

Director, Dubai Public Policy Research Center (b'huth)

Mr Shivshankar Menon

Visiting Professor, Ashoka University, India & Former National Security Advisor of India

2:45pm

Q & A Session

Moderated by:

Professor Joseph Liow

Chairman, Middle East Institute, NUS

3:30pm

Session Ends

SPEAKER PROFILES



Minister K. Shanmugam

Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs

Mr K Shanmugam is the Coordinating Minister for National Security, and concurrently, has been the Minister for Home Affairs since Oct 2015. He has also previously been the Minister for Law (2008–2025), and the Minister for Foreign Affairs (2011–2015).

As Minister for Home Affairs, he has transformed Singapore's counter-terrorism capabilities, introduced rapid response forces, and passed legislation to counter racial and religious extremism. He has also passed legislation to guard Singapore against foreign interference in domestic politics and hostile information campaigns.

As Law Minister, he put in place important legislative measures, including dealing with falsehoods against Government, protecting individuals from bullying and stalking, and various other measures relating to the criminal and family justice system.

Before entering Cabinet, Mr Shanmugam was a Senior Counsel of the Supreme Court of Singapore, and was consistently recognised as one of Singapore's top advocates.



Dr Alam Saleh

**Senior Lecturer in Iranian Studies,
Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies,
Australian National University**

Dr Alam Saleh is Senior Lecturer in Iranian Studies at the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Australian National University. He is also Reviews Editor for the British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. He received his PhD, MA and BA from the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. Dr Saleh is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and has previously taught undergraduate and graduate courses on International Relations, Security Studies and Middle East Politics at Lancaster, Exeter, Durham, Leeds, and Bradford universities.

He has also been engaged with policy practitioners and external professional bodies such as the UK Ministry of Defence, Nato, the European Council on Foreign Relations, and has also consulted for Transparency International Defence & Security, Unicef, and the BBC.



Dr Nanar Hawach

Senior Analyst for Syria, International Crisis Group

Dr Nanar Hawach is the Senior Analyst for Syria at the International Crisis Group, specialising in conflict and security dynamics, politics and governance. Based in Dubai, he conducts regular fieldwork in Syria, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including government and security officials, civil society, and non-state armed actors. His recent research centres on strategies to stabilise the country's transition and addressing security challenges. He frequently informs and provides analysis on developments in Syria to diplomats, policymakers and international organisations. Dr Hawach holds a PhD in Political Science from Université Libre de Bruxelles. Prior to joining Crisis Group, he worked as a researcher at Uppsala University, and consultant for the UNDP and the World Bank.

He has also been engaged with policy practitioners and external professional bodies such as the UK Ministry of Defence, Nato, the European Council on Foreign Relations, and has also consulted for Transparency International Defence & Security, Unicef, and the BBC.



Mr Neri Zilber

**Journalist and Analyst, The Financial Times
and Israel Policy Forum**

Neri Zilber is a journalist and analyst covering Middle East politics. He is currently a correspondent for the Financial Times, and an adviser to the Israel Policy Forum, where he hosts the Israel Policy Pod.

His work has appeared in The New York Times, Washington Post, The Atlantic, Politico, Guardian, and Foreign Policy, among others. He was previously an adjunct fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where he was the co-author of *“State with No Army, Army with No State: Evolution of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces 1994-2018”*.

He is the contributing author on Israel's social protest demonstrations for *“The Occupy Handbook”*, a chronicle of the global *“Occupy”* movement, and, more recently, authored an essay about Tel Aviv for the *“Jewish Priorities”* anthology.

Mr Zilber holds a bachelor's degree from the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, and a master's degree from the Department of War Studies, King's College London. He was raised and educated in Israel, Singapore, Spain, and the United States.



Dr Jean-Loup Samaan

**Senior Research Fellow, Middle East Institute,
NUS**

Dr Jean-Loup Samaan is a Senior Research Fellow specialising in Middle East strategic affairs, with a particular focus on Israel-Hezbollah conflict and the evolution of the Gulf security system. Prior to joining MEI, he held various positions in the policy sector. He worked as a visiting scholar with the Rand Corporation (2007-2008), and as an adviser at the directorate for strategic affairs of the French Ministry of Defence (2008-2011). He then gained extensive experience in the domain of military education and training, first as a deputy director for the Middle East Faculty of the Nato Defence College (2011-2016) and as an associate professor in strategic studies with the UAE National Defence College (2016-2021).

Dr Samaan has written four books, as well as various articles for academic and policy journals. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of Paris La Sorbonne (2009), and an accreditation to supervise research (2017) by the doctoral school of Sciences Po, Paris.



Amb Barbara A. Leaf

Senior International Policy Advisor, Arnold and Porter

Ambassador Leaf served as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs from 2022-2025, overseeing 21 diplomatic posts, US\$7.5 billion in foreign assistance, and policies and programmes from Morocco to Yemen. Appointed in January 2021 as Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa and Special Assistant to President Joe Biden, Ambassador Leaf left The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where she had directed the Arab Politics Programme from 2018-2021. She served as the US Ambassador to the UAE from 2014-2018, and was previously Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Arabian Peninsula and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq.

Her earlier assignments included Basra, Rome, Director of the Office of Iranian Affairs, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Paris, Cairo, Tunis, Jerusalem, and Port-au-Prince. Awarded the Distinguished Honor Award by former Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Ambassador Leaf received numerous Superior and Meritorious Honor Awards throughout her career.

In addition to her position as Senior International Policy Adviser at Arnold and Porter, a storied US law firm with a global practice, she is a Distinguished Diplomatic Fellow at the Middle East Institute of Washington, D.C.



Dr Chris Coulter

Executive Director, Berghof Foundation

Chris Coulter is the Executive Director of the Berghof Foundation. With over two decades of experience in conflict resolution across Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and South America, she has extensive expertise in inclusive leadership, mediation, peace processes, and security policy.

Prior to joining Berghof, Coulter served as Chief Operating Officer and Director of Programs at the Negotiation Strategies Institute (NSI) in the Middle East. She previously led the Peace Process Support Unit at the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), Sweden's government agency for peace, security, and development. She was a Special Adviser on peace and security to the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, where she played a key role in supporting multiple Track 1 and Track 2 peace negotiations.

Coulter holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Uppsala University (2006) and has an extensive academic background as a university lecturer, senior researcher, and lead consultant on gender, peace, and security. She is the author of *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers* (Cornell University Press, 2009) and previously directed the International Training Programme on UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Women, Peace, and Security, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).



Dr Zhu Zhaoyi

Executive Director of the Middle East Institute, Peking University HSBC Business School (PHBS)

Dr Zhaoyi Zhu is a Chinese scholar specialising in Middle Eastern studies, international economics, and Sino-Middle Eastern relations. He holds dual PhD degrees — one in Middle Eastern History from Tel Aviv University, and the other in Economics from Beijing Normal University. Fluent in English, Hebrew, Arabic, and familiar with French and Persian, Dr Zhu previously studied at Cairo University, and served as a visiting scholar at Yale Law School in 2022.

Currently, he is Executive Director of Middle East Institute at the PKU HSBC Business School, and founding director of the Israel Center and Middle East Institute at the Pangoal Institution. Dr Zhu has authored several works, including “*The Rock of the Desert: Anti-Semitism and Conspiracy Theories*”, and “*5000 Years of Jewish Civilisation*”. His research primarily focuses on global economic dynamics, China's strategic interactions with Middle Eastern countries, digital governance, and the geopolitical impact of technology.



Dr Clemens Chay

Research Fellow, Middle East Institute, NUS

Dr Clemens Chay is a research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute. His research focuses on the history and politics of the Gulf Arab states, including the geopolitics of the region. At MEI, he spearheads a public education series entitled “*Bridging the Gulf*”. His recent academic publications include a chapter that examines Kuwait's parliamentary politics in *The Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics* (2020), a chapter in the edited volume *Informal Politics in the Middle East* (Hurst, 2021), and a study appearing in the *Journal of Arabian Studies*, titled “*The Dīwāniyya Tradition in Modern Kuwait: An Interlinked Space and Practice*”. His commentaries also feature across different outlets, including CNA, ISPI, KFCRIS, Arab Reform Initiative, and The Washington Institute. He is currently working on a book project related to Kuwait's diwaniyas (affectionately known as diwawin, and more widely known as majalis outside Kuwait), the reception rooms for informal meetings that have implications for society, politics and diplomacy.

Prior to joining MEI, Dr Chay was the Al-Sabah fellow at Durham University, where he taught and completed his PhD in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, and where he also received an MSc in defence, development and diplomacy. He is also a Sciences Po Paris alumnus, having read his BA at the Menton campus.



Dr Asaad Alshamlan

**Director of the European Studies Center,
Prince Saud Alfaisal Institute for Diplomatic
Studies, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

Dr Asaad Alshamlan is Associate Professor of Political Science & International Relations and Director of the Center for European Studies at Prince Saud Al Faisal Institute for Diplomatic Studies in Riyadh. Among other things, he worked as a political consultant for the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) from 2012-2014. His teaching, research and publications relates to Gulf security, Saudi-American relations, Saudi-British relations, GCC-EU relations, Saudi-Russian relations, Saudi-Chinese relations, Political Islam, Foreign Policy Analysis, contemporary theories of international politics, The Concept of The Political, and Post-Structuralist approaches in political analysis. He holds a BA (Honors) from Carleton University-Canada, and an MA and PhD in Political Science from the University of Essex-UK.



Mr Mohammed Baharoon

Director, Dubai Public Policy Research Center (b'huth)

Mohammed Baharoon is the Director of the Dubai Public Policy Research Center (b'huth), which he co-founded in 2002.

Before that, he worked as Editor for Gulf Defense Magazine, and a number of media outlets.

He focuses on the interplay between geostrategy and policymaking in governance, stability, capacity building, and future-proofing.

Mohammed has also worked as Deputy Director of Watani (the UAE's first initiative on national identity), and was also a founding member of the board of the Bussola Institute, a think-tank in Brussels that focuses on the changing and emerging aspects of the partnership between the EU and GCC member states.



Mr Shivshankar Menon

**Visiting Professor, Ashoka University, India
& Former National Security Advisor of India**

Shivshankar Menon is currently visiting professor at Ashoka University, India, and Chair of the Ashoka Centre for China Studies.

He was National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of India, Jan 2010-May 2014; Foreign Secretary of India, October 2006-July 2009; and has served as the Indian Ambassador or High Commissioner to China, 2000-2003, Pakistan 2003-2006, Sri Lanka 1997-2000, and Israel 1995-97.

He has published “*Choices; Inside the Making of Indian Foreign Policy*” (2016), “*India and Asian Geopolitics; The Past, Present*” (2021), and “*India in a World Adrift; A Rising Power Takes its Place Among Rivals*” (Lowy/Penguin, 2025).



Professor Joseph Liow

Chairman, Middle East Institute, NUS

Prof Joseph Liow (Joseph Chinyong Liow) is Tan Kah Kee Chair in Comparative and International Politics, and Professor and former Dean at the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, and also the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. He is concurrently Chairman of the Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore. He held the inaugural Lee Kuan Yew Chair in Southeast Asia Studies at the Brookings Institution, Washington DC, where he was also a Senior Fellow in the Foreign Policy Program.

Joseph's research interests encompass Muslim politics and social movements in Southeast Asia and the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the Asia-Pacific region.

Joseph is the author, co-author, or editor of 18 books, the most recent being *Navigating Uncertainty: Our Region in an Age of Flux* (World Scientific 2024), *Islam and Political Power in Indonesia and Malaysia* (Cambridge University Press Element Series 2022), and *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia, fifth edition* (Routledge, 2022). A regular columnist for the Straits Times, his commentaries on international affairs have also appeared in New York Times, Washington Post, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, CNN, National Interest, Nikkei Asian Review, Wall Street Journal, and South China Morning Post. He has testified to the United States Congress and been invited to deliver a special closed door briefing to the ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting. In addition to scholarship and policy analysis, Joseph has also consulted for a wide range of MNCs including Shell, BHP Billiton, Morgan Stanley, Canon, Chevron, Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Temasek, Total, Global Dairy Platform, Evli, and Equinor. He is a member of the Trilateral Commission and the Experts and Eminent Persons Group of the ASEAN Regional Forum, and sits on the board of several peer-reviewed academic and policy journals. Joseph is also on the boards of the Social Science Research Council (Singapore), ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, and the National Arts Council.

He holds a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science, a MSc in Strategic Studies from the Nanyang Technological University, and a BA (Hons) in Political Science from the University of Madison-Wisconsin.

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