



middle east political
and economic institute

EuroDefense
Romania

Report

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Seventh Forum

Middle East and North Africa: the Changes for a New Beginning

Thursday, 02 December 2021

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Thank you!



Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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01 / December, 2021

Executive summary

On 2nd December 2021, the Bucharest-based think-tanks the Middle East Political and Economic Institute (MEPEI) and EuroDefense Romania, in partnership with IPIS (the Institute for Political and International Studies), Tehran, and with the special support of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Romania organized the seventh annual conference on the MENA region titled **“Middle East and North Africa: The Changes for a New Beginning”**. Taking into consideration the changes the international community is going through, the conference created a channel of communication between diplomats, academics, politicians, as well as independent researchers and civil society representatives, to cover the most important issues for a key region of the world. The speakers - brought together through an online platform - came from Austria, China, Hungary, Lebanon, Iran, Italy, Malaysia, Pakistan, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Syria, Turkey, the UK, and the USA and addressed the new transformations at the global level, the reverberations of a large-scale crisis in Afghanistan, energy and geopolitical influence for global, regional, and emerging players, the economic setbacks in the Middle East, with an emphasis on the crisis in Lebanon, economic resilience under the sanctions regime, assessing the case of Iran, and the engagement of the European Union with the Middle East and North Africa region.

Also, the conference addressed elements of novelty in terms of the security environment, the political engagement of world and regional players, and economic challenges in the Middle East (in a broad understanding).

Executive summary

In order to better accommodate the above-mentioned domains, the webinar was structured into seven sessions and started with the following keynote speakers: **Mr. Flavius CABA-MARIA**, President of MEPEI, Bucharest, Romania, **HE Dr. Seyed Hossein Sadat MEIDANI**, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Romania, **Dr. Liviu MUREȘAN**, President, EuroDefense Romania, **HE Dr. Muhammad Hassan Shaykh al-ISLAMI**, President of Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, MoFA, the Islamic Republic of Iran, **HE Dr. Werner FASSLABEND**, President, the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), President EuroDefense Austria, and Former Minister of Defense of Austria (1990-2000), **Prof. Teodor MELEȘCANU**, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Romania, **Prof. Adrian SEVERIN**, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Romania, and **HE Dr. Alibeman Eghbali ZARCH**, Senior Expert, IPIS, former Ambassador to Albania, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the following pages, you will find all of the speakers who contributed to the conference's specific topics such as **Session I.** Power Games towards a New Security Architecture in the MENA Region; **Session II.** Afghanistan - New Power Games and Security Dilemmas; **Session III.** Emerging Presence of the New Actors in the Middle East; **Session IV.** China in the Middle East. The New World Power on the Scene in the Great Game of International Relations; **Session V.** Lebanon at a Crossroads: Politics and Economics in the Wake of a Decisive Social Crisis; **Session VI.** EU and the Future of MENA; and **Session VII.** The Assessment of the Economic Sanctions on MENA's Countries and Innovative Instruments for Trading.

Organizers and partners

Middle East Political and Economic institute MEPEI - EuroDefense - IPIS

Middle East Political and Economic Institute (MEPEI) is a Romanian independent think-tank, established in 2009. Its mission is to foster dialogue and cooperation between institutions, people, and business environments within the European Union and their peers from the Middle East.



EuroDefense's aim is to: promote a European security and defense identity to the general public, and concretely contribute to developing a European defense spirit to establish and reinforce links with fellow associations in each European Union country.

The pivotal mission of the **Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS)** of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to contribute to the collection, organization, and promotion of research in various fields of foreign policy, and help the process of introducing and explaining Iran's foreign policy in academic, as well as think-tank communities.



Opening Remarks

Bringing together keynote speakers from Austria, China, Germany, Hungary, Lebanon, Iran, Italy, Malaysia, Morocco, Romania, Russia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the UK, and the US, the webinar created a channel of communication between diplomats, officials, academics, business leaders, politicians, as well as independent researchers, think- tank representatives, journalists, and other civil society representatives.

HE Dr. Seyed Hossein Sadat MEIDANI, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Romania

Mr. Flavius CABA-MARIA, President of MEPEI, Bucharest, Romania

Dr. Liviu MUREȘAN, President, EuroDefense Romania



Keynote speeches

HE Dr. Muhammad Hassan Shaykh al-ISLAMI

President of the Institute for Political and
International Studies (IPIS) and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, MoFA,
the Islamic Republic of Iran

- The West-Asian region has witnessed significant developments in recent months, such as the withdrawal of United States troops from Afghanistan and Iraq.
- The presence of foreign forces has had no fruit other than security colonization and the spread of poverty and violence in the countries of the region.
- I am hopeful that the countries of the region and their intellectuals will have enough insight to take advantage of these opportunities and establish cooperative relations, despite challenges.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran and the new administration have always emphasized the realization of peace through dialogue and negotiations within the region. "Regionness" is the current and real need of our region.
- The most urgent need of the West African region is the immediate cessation of daily attacks on Yemeni children and people, a country that is now in its sixth year of conflict. There is no military solution for Yemen and we must all do everything we can to stop this bloody conflict. This could even be the prelude to implement a collective security architecture in the region.



"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always emphasized the realization of peace through dialogue and negotiations with the region."

Keynote speeches

HE Dr. Werner FASSLABEND

President, the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES),
President EuroDefense Austria, Former Minister of Defense of Austria (1990-2000), Austria

- The departure of United States troops left a huge vacuum in the region, which was - surprisingly - quickly filled by the traditional powers of the region, Iran and Turkey.
- Iran already had a substantial presence in the region, so the real surprise is Turkey: in just the last two years, its behaviour has changed dramatically, as it interfered in Libya, Syria, in the South Caucasus region in favor of Azerbaijan, and even in Afghanistan.
- Both countries have "big muscles", meaning strong military capabilities. For Turkey, this was made evident by their humiliating defeat of Russian forces, both in Libya and in the Southern Caucasus.
- However, both Turkey and Iran have to deal with the fact that they also have "weak lungs" - weak economies, too weak to be able to dominate such a large and diverse region.
- Overcoming economic underdevelopment is their big challenge now. Iran deserves a normal economic development and, in my view, the two rounds of the Vienna negotiations have so far been quite positive.



"The departure of United States troops makes for a new situation. It came too late and it had surprising results."

- Another development, which came as a surprise to no one, has been the breakdown of Saudi power-plays within the region. The Saudis need to develop a new strategy for the region, both in Yemen and in their relationship with Iran.

Keynote speeches

Prof. Teodor MELEȘCANU

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Romania

- When we speak about the MENA region, we should discuss starting from the 2010 moment when large scale street demonstrations erupted in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, and Bahrain using modern means such as Twitter and Facebook to organize demonstrations. Unfortunately, in some cases, these protests have degenerated into civil wars (Syria, Libya, and Yemen), which even now are creating refugees and casualties.
- We cannot blame all the havoc currently in the Middle East on Western countries: Islamist groups, among others, are active in the region.
- In the Middle East, it is worthy of notice that the US is still prepared to deploy "significant forces" in the region if necessary. This statement comes in the context of the US's commitment to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, even though Iran has repeatedly stated that it has no plans of becoming a nuclear country, provided all economic sanctions are lifted.



"North African countries are interested in having deeper political and economic ties with the European Union"

Because of rising energy prices in the EU and the US, the Middle East is emerging as one of the most important areas in the world, in geopolitical terms. The truth is that without the MENA countries, a lot of countries in the world would not be able to continue their economic development. That is why more cooperation and coordination are needed between MENA countries and less outside influence. During the 2019 Romanian Presidency of the EU Council, this is what we tried to facilitate, through the first ever EU-Arab League Summit, which took place in Egypt.

Keynote speeches

Prof. Adrian SEVERIN

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Romania

- Three major processes of global significance that influence developments in the MENA region can be observed:
- The rise of the "Asian Century", with China as a new global superpower; The world Neo-Marxist revolution, based on the collectivization of cultural identities triggered by the US in an attempt to keep "Pax Americana" as a model of world order.
- The emergence of neo-Ottomanize and the federalization of the former Eastern empires (Russia, Ottoman, and Persian), as a reaction to the so-called "progressive globalism" of the US and its allies (mainly the former Central European multinational empires, as well as the former Western European colonial empires) which, with the help of the above-mentioned world revolution (it could possibly be defined as a "global cultural revolution"), seeks to impose a "new normal" through a "global reset" based on ideological grounds (which are characterized by cultural dogmatism).



"The rise of US' interest in playing out the rivalry with China reduces its interest in the MENA states"

Keynote speeches

Prof. Adrian SEVERIN

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Romania

- China as a superpower has different cultural characteristics and geopolitical traditions compared to the (former) superpowers of Europe, and to the US: China is multilateral, non-expansionist, and consensual.
- The containment and deterrence therapies that the US has been applying to China risk to induce, according to the principle of action and reaction, changes in Chinese geopolitical behavior, transforming China into a nationalistic, exclusivist, and militarist superpower.

"The best option for the US is to give up its Atlantic-centric claims of world-order management and to associate itself with China, in an Asian context, in order to jointly define a new, post-American world order."

- The growing US interest to solve its rivalry with China through confrontation has led to a reduction in its interest in the MENA region, even if less interest does not mean fully giving up on the region.
- Under the current conditions (when neither China nor Russia are able or willing to take the US's place as a guardian of stability and of the geostrategic status- quo in the Middle East, where they only have economic and technological interests and offers), it would be preferable for the MENA states to associate themselves with China (by seeking mutually-advantageous formulas), instead of getting involved in a Euro-Atlantic war against it.

Keynote speeches

Prof. Adrian SEVERIN

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Romania

- The ever more threatening NATO encroachment on Russia's borders (the memory of 1941 and the broken agreements of Malta, 1989, are obsessing Russian planners) is pushing Russia towards a deeper alliance with China and an "entente cordial" with Turkey, previously its adversaries.

"The association between the descendants of the old oriental empires - Russia, Turkey, and Iran - constitutes the reaction to a US policy that seeks global confrontation as a way out of its domestic and international crisis."

- Turkey's involvement in the geopolitics of the areas that the US has abandoned (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, etc.) constitutes an expression of Turkish neo-imperial behaviour, which can bring Ankara into a conflict of interests with Moscow and Teheran.
- A refined cooperation between the three, and of the three with China would maintain the strategic balance and the regional geopolitical status-quo that at least China, Russia and Iran want.

SESSION 1

Power Games towards a New Security Architecture in the MENA Region

The panel covered salient issues for a transforming security structure of a key region of the world. It investigated how the rivalry of Great Powers, combined with the already existing regional rifts between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the rise of Turkey's engagement with the region, and Israel's role, all contributed to the creation of a new security architecture.

Chair: Dr. Liviu MUREȘAN, President EuroDefense Romania

Prof. Kayhan BARZEGAR, Senior Academic Advisor at MoFA, Professor at the Islamic Azad University / Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Dr. Basam ABOABDOLAH, Professor of International Relations and Director of the Central School of the Ba'ath Party, the Syrian Arab Republic;

Dr. Konstantin TRUEVTSEV, Leading Research Fellow, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Federation;

Dr. Qin TIAN, Assistant Director of Institute of Middle East Studies, CICIR (China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations), the People's Republic of China.

Dr. Nicola PEDDE, Director of Institute for Global Studies, Rome, Italy;

Dr. Şaban KARDAŞ, Associate Prof. Department of Political Science and International Relations, TOBB University of Economics and Technology, Ankara, the Republic of Turkey;

Prof. Davood KIANI, the Islamic Azad University, Vice President at the Institute of Iran and Eurasia Studies (IRAS), the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Prof. Hussein MAKLAD, Dean of the Faculty of international relations and diplomacy at Al-Sham Private University, the Syrian Arab Republic.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Kayhan BARZEGAR

**Senior Academic Advisor at MoFA, Professor at the Islamic Azad University/
Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran**

- In Iran, my country, we see the establishment of a new government and administration headed by President Raisi in my belief is a progressive-conservative government that is prioritizing state security and the state economy. In this context, the survival of the state and the removal of the greater security threats from the state are Iran's main strategic and geostrategic goals in dealing with the US and Western powers.
- The three fundamental concepts of state - ideology - war are changing or combining in the region. For example, countries like Egypt, Iraq, and Syria are returning to a more minimalist but authoritarian state that cares more about state security than anything else. Additionally, states like Iran, Turkey, and Russia are using domestically-shaped ideologies and traditions to increase the power of the state apparatus.



"The survival of the state and removal of the greater security threats against the state are Iran's main strategic and geo-strategic goals in dealing with the US and Western Powers."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Kayhan BARZEGAR

Senior Academic Advisor at MoFA, Professor at the Islamic Azad University / Tehran,
the Islamic Republic of Iran

- War is also changing and becoming more asymmetric: this means Great Powers cannot go ahead with their previous style of conducting wars.
- In substance, we see different transformations of the concepts, and sometimes the combination of these concepts, that goes directly to managing the current conflicts in the region and somehow forming the power games or geopolitical conflicts in the region.
- We saw that Azerbaijan won a war with the help of Turkey. Here, the reactions of Russia and Iran were different.
- Iran tried to not take the side of any party in this war but, at the same time, never allowed for a change in the geopolitics of the borders of the region, not because of Turkey's role in the area, but in terms of not being willing to change the borders, because Iran sees the northern part of its country as part of the supply chain of goods and politics.

"The technology of war is changing and is going to be more asymmetric, and Great Powers could not go ahead with their previous style of conducting the wars."

Now the situation is quite complicated and I think the two sides realized that they need to accept the reality of Russia and Iran in this region, and I think Turkey went too far in thinking to establish a group of Turkic-speaking countries, because this is not keeping with the reality of the ground – these states feature their own style of government and their own state structures. Even Azerbaijan, which is very close to Turkey, has its own way of state governing. I think that for the countries of the region, it is wise for them to be aware of their levels of influence and power and to go ahead only after taking into consideration the geostrategic elements of the region.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Kayhan BARZEGAR

Senior Academic Advisor at MoFA, Professor at the Islamic Azad University / Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- The Afghanistan issue is a fiasco for the US – it shows that the US does not have its previous political clout in the region.
- Right now, the world is debating how to recognize or deal with the Taliban - we have two discourses: one considering the Taliban in the context of good governance, human rights, women's rights, environmental rights, and human security, and, at the same time, accepting the reality on the ground because the Taliban have the power in the country.
- Of course, Iran sees the Afghanistan issue in a bigger picture of trying somehow to balance its foreign policy.
- In Iran, the public opinion is against the Taliban because of its way of governing, but, at the same time, Iran is realistic in dealing with the Taliban in a consistent way to moderate the Taliban's policies. I am sure that, one day, the European countries will go to Iran and try to get the help of Iran to contain the Taliban's policies.
- China is working with the Taliban in an economic context, the US is working behind the scenes, and Turkey is trying to make its way into Taliban political issues. The main elements of Afghanistan-related future conflicts are Russia, Iran, and Pakistan.
- These three countries had been active on the ground, had been attached to the country and, at the same time, the Taliban believe that interacting with them is how they can manage to establish stable governance in the manner they desire.

China is working with the Taliban in the economic context, the US is working behind the scenes, and Turkey is trying to make its way into Taliban political issues.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Basam ABOABDOLAH

Professor of International Relations and Director of the Central School of the Ba'ath Party,
the Syrian Arab Republic

- Why is Syria important? The Syrian war is a mirror of the balance of powers: in Syria, we can see the presence of superpowers like Russia, the US, China, as well as the main regional poles like Iran, Turkey, and Israel. Syria is strategically relevant for the balance of Great Powers, regionally and internationally.
- After 2000, the US build its strategy on the idea that "the 21st century will be an American one", occupying Afghanistan and enacting in Syria conditions for change: the transformation of Syria's regime was to be done through diplomacy, economic sanctions and through the assassination of the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafik Hariri; when they could not succeed in that, they attacked. The US wanted to prevent their main competitors, Russia and China, from gaining more influence.
Now Russia has two important points: Ukraine in the Black Sea and Syria in the Mediterranean Sea.



"All powers should concentrate on the economic issues first and end their ideological confrontation, as well as stop using Islam as an instrument for foreign policy in the region. We should think about peace. "

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Basam ABOABDOLAH

Professor of International Relations and Director of the Central School of the Ba'ath Party,
the Syrian Arab Republic

- All of these issues are also driven by the gas confrontation, energy, and the strategic position of Syria. The US wanted to stop the economic road between Teheran, Damascus, and Beirut. If this road opens, China will have arrived to the Mediterranean.
- In the future, I foresee that America will change its instruments in the MENA region, China will be an established MENA presence and it will be a very important power, and so the balance of power will change.

"The balance of power will change. The ideological confrontation in the region is finished; the Ottoman project has failed, Turkey and President Erdogan cannot continue the plan through Syria."

- Conclusion: the ideological confrontation in the region is finished; the Ottoman project has failed, Turkey and President Erdogan cannot continue the plan through Syria, therefore the project should be changed; the US is not the protector of anyone in the region after their withdrawal from Afghanistan and Israel cannot continue as an apartheid state.
- All main players should change their strategy and try to concentrate on the economy, because everyone is tired of war, concentrate on development, and finish with the ideological confrontation, and at the same time, refrain from using Islam as an instrument of foreign policy. If we think about the future of the region we should think about peace, which firstly needs the will to change the old mentalities of thinking about the future.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Konstantin TRUEVTSEV

Leading Research Fellow, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
the Russian Federation

- In terms of the current situation in the region and the role of both global and regional players, I like to use the following formula: the global presence in the Middle East can be described as the presence of the "Big Four +", meaning the US, Russia, China and India, with the "+" referring to the European Union.
- India is a growing global power. In all of the conferences that take place in Russia, we notice that the Indian presence started to be more and more active, having a growing interest in what is happening in the Middle East.
- Why do I say "plus EU"? Because, unfortunately, after many discussions, I've had with my colleagues, members of parliament and specialists from Germany, Austria, and other European countries, and also people from the European Parliament, insist that the European Union has not worked out its own agenda towards the MENA region. They have a position on Pakistan, on Libya, but not for the Middle East - North Africa region as a whole.



**"India is a growing global power(...)
The Indian presence started to be more and more active, having a growing interest in what is happening in the Middle East."**

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Konstantin TRUEVTSEV

Leading Research Fellow, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
the Russian Federation

- Speaking about the Big Four, it should be said that the problems of the MENA region are actually falling out of the first priorities of such countries as the US or Russia because the priority of the US is now the Pacific and also Europe. It is quite evident that US military-political presence in Europe increases, while in the Middle East it has declined. They don't intend to let the MENA region slip absolutely out of their attention, but their influence is declining.
- Russia's main priorities are: Europe as a whole, especially Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but the issue of the Middle East is very important for their security because the region is directly connected to the Black Sea, Caspian Sea, and Central Asia.
- The main priority for China is also the Pacific. The presence of China maybe can be better described not through a big political presence, but through a big interest from this area.
- As the presence of the US declined in relative terms, Russia developed unprecedented good relations with all Arab countries, with no exception, as well as with Turkey and Iran.

"Russia has neither the intention, nor the ability to try to drive the US out of the region; there are limits to the Russian presence."

- Russia has neither the intention nor the ability to try to drive the US out of the region; there are limits to the Russian presence. We don't have to claim a regional leader. This situation makes more space for the local players and this is one of the reasons why it led to the elevation of the role of some of the regional countries.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Qin TIAN

Assistant Director of Institute of Middle East Studies, CICIR (China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations), the People's Republic of China

- Romania has played a very important role between Europe and the Middle East in the past decades and Romania had been a good channel between China and Iran when the two countries were going to establish relations in 1970.

- There are two big trends currently identifiable in the MENA region. First is the general "détente" taking place in the region. We see Iran and the US at the negotiating table again, albeit with few hopes of reviving the JCPOA. We also see the Saudis and the Iranians engaging with each other, and the Saudi-led countries have ended the blockade against Qatar earlier this year. UAE and Turkey are also re-approaching, not to mention that, as our Syrian friends mentioned earlier, the Arabic countries once opposing the Syrian regime are now trying to reconnect with the Bashar regime.

- The second trend is the great impact of the global green energy transition on the MENA region, especially oil producers. They are doing massive efforts to adapt to this transition. What is the end state of this transition?
- The question about how long the oil-based economies, once popular in the Middle East, can be sustained, is becoming more and more important. From this perspective, China can play an important role: during the energy position, China's energy imports will reduce but the overall levels are still relatively large, while MENA energy producers will be glad to continue to export quite a lot of oil. So, China and the MENA countries will be in need of each other in the long-run of development.



"China will promote the MENA economic sector. China and the Asian countries can be a positive force."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Şaban KARDAŞ

Associate Prof. Department of Political Science and International Relations, TOBB
University of Economics and Technology, Ankara, the Republic of Turkey

- I will talk about the regional security architecture from Turkey's point of view in a conceptual sense, first of all how I understand the situation and the Turkish position. I am not here to speak on behalf of official Turkish policy.
- As others have mentioned, what is important is the provision of order and security and different regions solve these problems in different ways. Unfortunately, our region, the Middle East, does not have a good record of cooperative security arrangements and, for many decades, we have been discussing the factors of the regional security architecture, the penetration of international actors and how we may create a genuine and effective regional security architecture.
- What happened in the last decade, the lasting systemic impact of the Arab Spring on the state and the region aggravated those problems to a large extent, and Turkey, as a country that sees itself as a major regional power, considered itself obligated, under some sort of geopolitical, geostrategic, to some extent civilizational imperative, including historical responsibility, to build a regional order.



"Turkey (...) considered itself, under some sort of geo-political, geo-strategic, to some extent civilizational imperative, including historical responsibility, to build a regional order. "

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Şaban KARDAŞ

Associate Prof. Department of Political Science and International Relations, TOBB
University of Economics and Technology, Ankara, the Republic of Turkey

- Turkey has a regional vision in which the major roles belong to the most important stakeholders. Personally, I was one of those analysts who spoke against this "neo-ottomans policy" and rather I supported the importance of regional level institution building, the regionalization of politics. We need to pay attention to another characteristic of Turkish policy: Turkey being a multiregional power and, at the same time, Turkey has to act in different regional contexts, thus, making Turkish foreign policy unique in some aspects.
- In the last two decades, the focus was more on the Middle East than other regions, attempting to create a regional order in which Turkey is the central power. In this stress test, everybody realizes their limits, not only outside actors but also the local actors. To some extent, Turkey realizes also its limits regarding its ability to shape the regional dynamics after its own image. Most actors are in a process of rethinking their strategy, their limits, considering whether to push forward or cut back or, whether to reevaluate.
- In this transition phase, what is important is the lesson learned in a negative or positive sense from the experience of the last ten years regarding the capacities of internal actors to implement their own agenda in ways that different agendas don't clash with each other and affect the overall state policy performance and national outcomes.
- Sometimes, Turkey's agenda may be seen as aggressive or may be seen as expansionist by the other actors, and the main factor emphasized is how Turkish strategic policy is created at the original level and at the international level, from a conceptual perspective.

"Turkey has a regional vision in which the major roles belong to the most important stakeholders."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Şaban KARDAŞ

Associate Prof. Department of Political Science and International Relations, TOBB
University of Economics and Technology, Ankara, the Republic of Turkey

- In the last years, we have experienced tension in the US-Turkey relationship, the US being a source of instability for Turkey and a threat to its basic interest.
- On balance, despite the tensions with other major regional actors, such as Iran or Russia, Turkey is in need of fostering closer regional cooperation.
- For Turkey, the main motivation is to manage the tension with the US, build a cooperative relationship with Russia and Iran, and ease relations with certain countries, such as the Gulf countries, Egypt, and Israel, to some extent.
- We are in the middle of a geopolitical reorientation and Turkey needs to reengage with the regional actors in a deeper sense.
- The biggest test remains: can we create a regional cooperative security order? And we see that this order is beyond Turkey's capabilities.

"For Turkey, the main motivation is to manage the tension with the US, build a cooperative relationship with Russia and Iran..."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Nicola PEDDE

Director of Institute for Global Studies, Rome, Italy

- From a Mediterranean perspective, a European perspective on the issue that we discuss, first of all, I want to focus on the critical analysis of the European role. It seems that we suffer from the incapacity of defining a unified strategy over the region and a unified approach to all the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Region.
- At the same time, we have to realize that there is a growing influence from external actors which are deeply influencing the European role in the region and are also affecting the capacity of European countries to play a constructive role in the region.
- There are several examples where we can identify this critical situation: Libya in the Mediterranean is certainly the most obvious and my country, Italy, is not excepted from this responsibility, including for the failure of the process which could have provided a much better and more suitable role in defining the solution to the crisis.



"It seems that we suffer from the incapacity of defining a unified strategy over the region and a unified approach to all the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Region."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Nicola PEDDE

Director of Institute for Global Studies, Rome, Italy

- The European perspective, in my opinion, is characterised by several factors: the most important is the perception of the changing role of the US in the region, which several analysts consider a complete reshaping, a redefinition of the US' role in the Middle East or a lack of interest of the US in the region. It is difficult to think that it is a lack of interest from the US point of view.
- There is certainly a change, a decrease in the military posture, but I think that there are few changes in terms of the political and economic interests of the US in the region, especially in contrast with some of the key elements of the global US strategy: in particular, the Chinese role in some of these areas, but also the growing Russian presence in the Levant and Mediterranean.

So, from my point of view, it is difficult to describe the new American posture as a decline of their capacity.

On the other side, there are several elements that characterize the crisis we deal with which seem to be largely ignored by the international community: the economic aspects, shaping the crisis in the most part of the region, which continuously affects the society and remains unaddressed by most of the local governments and by the external counterparts of the region.

- We have a common trend, a common pattern across the region, which is characterising the protests in Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Iraq, and yet, it is unheard by the political leaders of the region and by international actors.
- We make the same mistakes we did ten years ago that we called (maybe inappropriately) the Arab Spring – these social elements are emerging again in a new form.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Nicola PEDDE

Director of Institute for Global Studies, Rome, Italy

- On the other side, it has to be stressed that, aside from a European failure in defining a common strategy or at least a coherent strategy in dealing with the region, we also see a growing capacity of external actors (I mean non-Mediterranean actors, aside from Turkey) in the regional intervention and the reshaping of the general pattern of the strategic elements affecting regional stability.
- There are actors that totally replace the Europeans, in particular Qatar, Turkey and Russia are representing the most relevant actors in defining this role and the position of Europeans and the international community.
- It's difficult to see what could happen in the foreseeable future because these new actors are seemingly not ready to cope with the social phenomena reshaping this region. So, basically, what Russia, Turkey, Qatar are doing there is to replicate the kind of mistakes already done by the Europeans and the US ten years ago.
- The only approach which was applied by the US and the Europeans on the ground was from the security point of view, based on the principle of stability – no security is possible without stability.

"These new actors are seemingly not ready to cope with the social phenomena reshaping this region. (...) no security is possible without stability."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Davood KIANI

the Islamic Azad University, Vice President at the Institute of Iran and Eurasia Studies (IRAS), the Islamic Republic of Iran

- The main focus of my speech is my perception of the security in the region and the perspective of the foreign policy of Mr. Raisi, the new President of Iran, and his possible agenda regarding the Persian Gulf and the Middle East.
- Regarding the first part, I think that, in the last 10 years, the leading states in terms of regional security in the Middle East - Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel - have come to a cooling-off period.
- Thus, things are cooling off with regards to security and political confrontation - each of these states obtained some advantages with a huge cost: they have come to the conclusion that they need to temper and manage the level of tension in the Middle East. From this point of view, Iran sees three security trends in the Persian Gulf and Middle East, each of these trends being a matter of concern for Iranian national interest and security.
- First, the normalization of the relation between Israel and the Persian Gulf Arabic states. For Iran, Israel can use these features that exist between Iran and Arab states and may infiltrate the systems of these states to turn them against Iran.



"The problem with Russia and China is whether they are ready to take the Iranian side in a strategic manner and somehow change the balance of power."

- The second security trend is the reconsideration of Iran towards Iraq, which depicts the conclusion that we have to accept the political establishment of Iraq and, instead of confronting it, it is better to cooperate with it.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Davood KIANI

the Islamic Azad University, Vice President at the Institute of Iran and Eurasia Studies (IRAS), the Islamic Republic of Iran

- The third trend, a new one, is about the ambitious foreign policy of Turkey regarding Central Asia and the Middle East. Moreover, the question is what Iran's foreign policy is and can Mr. Raisi's administration cope with the security in the region and affect the balance of powers.
- There are three tracks of policy that the new government of Iran has taken: it has decreased the level of tension with the neighbors, it has deepened ties with Central Asia and has begun talks with the Taliban.

"The second security trend is the reconsideration of the Iranian state regarding Iraq [...] we have to accept the political establishment of Iraq and, instead of confronting, it is better to cooperate."

- The problem with Russia and China is whether they are ready to take the Iranian side in a strategic manner and somehow change the balance of power. There is not yet a serious common project.
- I mean it requires a new focus on the neighborhood policy and a look at the East policy: China and Russia are so important because of a lack of optimism towards the US and Western Europe.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Davood KIANI

the Islamic Azad University, Vice President at the Institute of Iran and Eurasia Studies (IRAS), the Islamic Republic of Iran

- With regards to the JCPOA, if the new government can manage to advance the JCPOA, Iran's energy from the point of foreign policy will be released and Iran's hands will be freer.
- Nonetheless, the problem with the JCPOA is that Iran has concerns about the capability of the new US Administration to deliver because the Biden Administration has weak support from society.
- How can the deal be processed and advanced?
- And who can guarantee us that the next president of the US (possibly a Republican one) will continue the negotiations?

"The problem with JCPOA is that Iran has concerns about the capability of the new US Administration to deliver, because the Biden Administration has weak support from society."

SESSION 2

Afghanistan - New Power Games and Security Dilemmas

In the current context, Afghanistan could stand for an arena where the emerging Asian power rivalry is racing in the aftermath of Washington's decision to withdraw. The panel considered whether it is possible to avoid a collapse from a security and economic point of view while reflecting on ways to navigate away from the ill-fated condition.

Chair: Prof. Kayhan BARZEGAR, Senior Academic Advisor at MoFA, Professor at the Islamic Azad University / Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- **Gen. Carlos BRANCO**, Former Director of the War College and Defense Research Center, the Portuguese Institute of International Relations, Portugal;
- **Dr. Amina KHAN**, Director Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa, the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan;
- **Prof. Silviu NATE**, Director of the Global Studies Center, "Lucian Blaga" University, Sibiu, Romania.
- **HE Dr. Hossein Molla ABDOLLAHI**, Senior Expert, IPIS, Former Ambassador to Serbia, the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- **Dr. Andrin Jerome Nevis RAJ**, Director, the Nordic Counter Terrorism Network, Helsinki, Finland, The Southeast Asia Regional Director, the International Association for Counterterrorism and Security Professionals – Center for Security Studies, Kuala LUMPUR, Malaysia, Fellow Researcher, the Religion and Security Council, Rome, Italy.

Message From Our Speakers

Gen. Carlos BRANCO

Former Director of the War College and Defense Research Center, the Portuguese Institute of International Relations, Portugal

- Afghanistan is on the brink of becoming the world's worst military debacle. If nothing is done, millions of civilians will not have access to food, will die on the streets. In fact, already the economy is in ruins, millions of Afghans are suffering from a lack of food and other basic needs and millions of people need urgent assistance.
- The first international responses are not very encouraging. The sanction regime has aggravated already the desperate situation. The consequences are dramatic. Western governments should not ignore the Taliban and repeat history, repeating mistakes done in 2001 when they excluded the Taliban from the discussion on the future of Afghanistan.
- Among other decisions, there is the suspension of the \$9.5 million in assets frozen by the United States, the \$400 million to mitigate the pandemic, and other actions that are under the control of the US.



"Afghanistan is on the brink of becoming the world's worst military debacle. Western governments should not ignore the Taliban and repeat history - the regime must be heavily engaged with."

Message From Our Speakers

Gen. Carlos BRANCO

Former Director of the War College and Defense Research Center, the Portuguese Institute of International Relations, Portugal

- The decisions in Afghanistan should not rest on the support versus recognition of the Taliban; it is a much more complex issue.
- Providing just humanitarian assistance and basic needs is a short answer for such a challenging task Afghanistan is going through. Western Governments should not consider putting the regime aside – it must be heavily engaged.
- Some relaxation of sanctions and unfreezing of the funds are needed. It should be convenient to start right now a long-term political process linking assistance to progress in other domains such as human rights, economic recovery, and others.
- This would involve creating a testing period for approximately six months for the Taliban government, limited recognition of the Taliban, and compromise solutions. To demonstrate that it would care for its citizens, by making steps towards human rights protection and inclusive governance.

In addition, the European Union declared the intention to assist Afghanistan with 1 billion euros, but, so far, no money arrived in Afghanistan.

"It should be convenient to start right now a long term political process linking assistance to progress in other domains as human rights, economic recovery and others."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Amina KHAN

Director Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa, the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

- The situation has left many questions unanswered, mainly on how the group will govern the country, on domestic issues such as political freedom or human rights, and on whether the group can deliver counter- terrorism assurances.
- Even if its ideology remained the same, the group has evolved. They have learned the art of diplomacy; they have established ties with a number of countries, particularly countries that would not have been perceived as having relations with the Taliban.
- Even though no country has so far recognized the regime, the international community has been engaging with the Taliban through the Doha Conference.
- The Afghan economy was extremely fragile and heavily dependent on the international community. It is imperative for the international community to push forwards for a consolidated, collective effort to ensure that the Afghan state does not fall into a humanitarian catastrophe.



"It is imperative for the international community to push forwards for a consolidated, collective effort to ensure that the Afghan state does not fall into a humanitarian catastrophe. "

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Amina KHAN

Director Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa, the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

- If the Taliban fails to consolidate power, a civil war is unlikely to take place, but some transnational terrorist groups may take advantage of the situation and try to fill in the vacuum. Since the Taliban took power, we have seen increased attacks from such groups.
- Speaking about the regional approach, this could be done by entering a geostrategic agreement with the new dispensation, a thing which Pakistan wanted to do before, but there was not enough support from the other side. This is not only limited to Pakistan, as the previous Afghan government signed strategic partnerships also with India and Iran.
- Pakistan has a lot more to gain from a stable Afghanistan and for sure a lot more to lose from an Afghanistan that is out of control.

"If the Taliban fails to consolidate power, a civil war is unlikely to take place, but some transnational terrorist groups may take advantage of the situation and try to fill in the vacuum."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Silviu NATE

Director of the Global Studies Center, "Lucian Blaga" University, Sibiu, Romania

- What is Afghanistan today? The tragedy of a nation or the fulfillment of the tribes? Starting from this idea, it can be said that the Taliban victory over the Afghan government would lead to further humanitarian and security challenges in the years to come.
- The Islamic State, which maintains a network in Afghanistan, rejects the legitimacy of the Islamic Emirate there. But al-Qaeda regional affiliates in MENA see it as a sign that they can win and that local governments can build their jihadist emirates.
- Therefore, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will most likely continue to serve as a model for jihadists around the world. The Taliban Islamic Emirate is an authoritarian regime that will impose strictly rules on the people.
- Together with al-Qaeda, it has been fighting for decades to impose a version of sharia and this is one element that they will not be willing to compromise on. Both the Taliban and al-Qaeda offer recognition as the Islamic Emirates.



"The Taliban victory over the Afghan government would lead to further humanitarian and security challenges in the years to come."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Silviu NATE

Director of the Global Studies Center, "Lucian Blaga" University, Sibiu, Romania

- The Taliban want to restore the caliphate according to the old prophetic methodology.
- Now, the US and its allies no longer have a footprint inside Afghanistan so any attempt to assess the potential of al- Qaeda will be at a disadvantage. Some analyses assert that the UN can fight terrorists in Afghanistan on the model of Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. But, unlike these three countries, Afghanistan is different; it has a different geography and has no access to the sea.
- Therefore, a legitimate question arises: does President Biden's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan predict a new 9/11? Most likely, the US will press the Taliban to not keep terrorists in the government and will continue negotiations with members of the old government, who play a central role even now.
- However, it is unlikely that they will adopt a western style of governing just to improve their economic condition. For example, the North Korean regime has repeatedly shown that the attractiveness of economic aid is not enough to make them give up their basic principles.

Pakistan is China's strongest ally for managing Afghanistan right now and China is likely to rely on Pakistan to make sure that its regional projects are secure.

For example, Beijing is more predisposed to ask the Pakistani military to intervene in Afghanistan before deploying Chinese troops. The question is whether Pakistan is able to deal with the situation there.

India's primary and immediate concern is that Afghan territory should not be used for anti-Indian or terrorist actions.

- Although India has developed a close relationship with the US, including on the acquisition of American military techniques, it also declared its readiness to work with Russia to tackle down terrorism, illegal migration, and drug trafficking.

Message From Our Speakers

HE Dr. Hossein Molla ABDOLLAHI

Senior Expert, IPIS, Former Ambassador to Serbia, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- The US military forces withdrawal from Afghanistan on 1st. May 2021 was part of the strategy initiated a major shift in the US Policy from Afghanistan to Persian Gulf and the Middle East Region.
- This development is causing serious changes to the security arrangements and balance of power in the entire Region and generated a real security threats and challenges not only for Afghanistan but also for neighboring countries as well as all the key players in the Region and outside the Region. In fact all players are concern about unexpected events and consequences which may emerge from present vacuum of power in Afghanistan.
- Today's reality is that, the previous establishment in Afghanistan has totally collapsed, Taliban as a fundamental jihadi group came to power, but people of Afghanistan did not welcome them, there is no responsible and legitimate government, no parliament, no national flag, no constitution, no public support, and no recognition from countries of international communities.



"European countries should play a positive role in this process."

Message From Our Speakers

HE Dr. Hossein Molla ABDOLLAHI

Senior Expert, IPIS, Former Ambassador to Serbia, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- There is no international financial and political support. As it seems, major players are not any more interested on the development in Afghanistan as they were in the past.
- There is a danger of instability and insecurity inside the country. Due to the lack of proper establishment and lack of strong interest of the key foreign Players, Afghanistan may become a free land and a heaven for terrorist and jihadist fundamental groups, criminal activists and as a result they may pose security threats and instability to the neighboring countries.
- In fact the situation is very much complicated, there is a strong doubt about the capability of ruling group to manage the current situation properly, people are severely afraid and they are trying to leave the country by any means and ways, leaving behind all properties, relatives and all their belongings, just to save their lives, though the future is not clear.



"European countries should play a positive role in this process."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Andrin Jerome Nevis RAJ

Director, the Nordic Counter Terrorism Network, Helsinki, Finland, The Southeast Asia Regional Director, the International Association for Counterterrorism and Security Professionals – Center for Security Studies, Kuala LUMPUR, Malaysia, Fellow Researcher, the Religion and Security Council, Rome, Italy

- There are many actors involved in the situation, such as the EU, the US, Russia, India, and China. How we will address this situation?
- This issue of migration has been reoccurring multiple times during the Afghan wars. But we need to address how the EU and the US will work with the Taliban.
- This may not be a solution as President Obama tried to reach out to them while in office. They do not believe in global jihad and they incorporated sharia violent laws according to their way.
- We cannot solve the situation if we cannot address the Taliban because of the influx of immigration that is going to happen.
- How could we reach out to the Taliban if our countries will not accept the Islamic State?
- If we are going to agree and work with the moderate Taliban, then any other jihadist group is going to come up with their own proceedings. The EU will not be able to do anything about it due to human rights regulations.



"This issue of migration has been reoccurring multiple times during the Afghan wars. But we need to address how the EU and the US will work with the Taliban. "

SESSION 3

Afghanistan - New Power Games and Security Dilemmas

The session focuses on the prolonged consequences of the Arab Uprisings, the decline of the post-Cold War order, and increasing global rivalry between the world powers, which have all offered an increased role to regionalism. In this context, new actors have emerged, such as entities engaging in regional axes of collaboration and external players, namely Asian powers, such as Japan, South Korea, or Singapore (largely holding economic interests in mind). Together with the increased interest of Asian powers towards the Middle East, we note the ever-growing influence of China with its long-term strategy for development, entitled the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which gives a new dimension to reciprocal interaction in the MENA region.

Chair: Prof. Davood KIANI, the Islamic Azad University, Vice President at the Institute of Iran and Eurasia Studies (IRAS), the Islamic Republic of Iran

HE Dr. Dato' Ku Jaafar Ku SHAARI, Secretary-General Developing 8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8), Malaysia;

HE Mr. Viorel ISTICIOAIA-BUDURA, Former Ambassador of Romania to the People's Republic of China, Former Head of the European Union Delegation to Japan, Managing Director, Head of Asia and Pacific Department, European External Action Service, Romania;

Dr. YAO JINXIANG, Assistant Research Fellow, Department for Developing Countries Studies, CIIS (China Institute of International Studies), the People's Republic of China.

Prof. Selçuk ÇOLAKOĞLU, Globalization and Development Programme, Division of Humanities and Social Sciences (DHSS), Beijing Normal University – Hong Kong Baptist University, United International College, Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, the People's Republic of China;

Prof. Ecaterina MAȚOI, Programme Director at MEPEI, Romania;

Dr. Muhammad Taimur Fahad KHAN, Research Associate, the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Key notes speeches

HE Dr. Dato' Ku Jaafar Ku SHAARI

Secretary-General Developing 8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8),
Malaysia

- My point of view will be more from an economic point. The Middle East geographical and strategically uniqueness has made every great power in history seek and advance the interest in the region, especially in the interest of oil. Due to its geopolitical importance, any intern conflict in the Middle East has the potential not only for destabilizing the region as a whole but also affecting global stability.
- The last few years have witnessed a paradigm shift in US foreign policy – the US has increasingly disengaged from direct involvement in the Middle East. Washington has significantly reduced the US troops in Irak and President Joe Biden has focused on a small number of objectives in the region, the US is moving towards a more indirect role in approaching Middle East conflicts.
- This situation has provided opportunities for other powerful outside actors including Russia and China to increase their presence in the region and position themselves as alternative partners and patrons: China's economic relationship with the Middle East is not limited to energy; the country is also expanding its style and influence through more initiatives.



"China's economic relationship with the Middle East is not limited to energy; the country is also expanding its style and influence through more initiatives."

Key notes speeches

HE Dr. Dato' Ku Jaafar Ku SHAARI

Secretary General Developing 8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8),
Malaysia

- China is now the region largest investor and the largest trading partner to eleven Middle East countries; it has financed the construction of ports and industrial parks in Egypt, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
- The regional conflicts that began to Arab Spring in 2011 in this region have drowned many external actors: Russia as well as the US and its allies and provoked extra-territorial move.
- But none of those past conflicts have formed a formal solution, with the possible exception of Libya.

"China is now the region largest investor and the largest trading partner to eleven Middle East countries."

"What approach the Middle East should and could now lead to collective security."

- It is clear that the most immediate beneficiary will be the strongest economies, according to the need for regional structures with investments and infrastructures as well as skills to spread the benefits and to be resilient against future shocks from public health to oil crisis.
- It may also extend to considering in the light of the new pragmatism and rapidly involving geo-political landscape of the region, what approach the Middle East should and could not lead to collective security.

Key notes speeches

HE Mr. Viorel ISTICIOAIA-BUDURA

Former Ambassador of Romania to the People's Republic of China,
Former Head of the European Union Delegation to Japan, Managing Director, Head
of Asia and Pacific Department, European External Action Service, Romania

- As a diplomat, I have spent more than half of my career in East Asian countries and today I would like to share with you some of my observations and a few opinions. Over the past centuries, it was almost a sort of natural law that the great and middle powers look invariably at the Middle East and North Africa region. The reasons are history, geography, economy, and so on.
- And we are living now through a century which also goes to various transformations under the pressure of specific characteristics like globalization, interconnectivity, and many other things.
- The strategic implication is less clear in MENA region. We notice that global trends have an impact: the growth of China and the US competition, the impact of a pandemic, and the challenges brought forward by the force of technological and industrial evolution. These trends may suggest that the countries from East Asia may have a more direct and substantial interest in getting involved in the MENA region.
- Currently, the Middle East with its regional structures and its security agenda may limit involvement of external powers.



"The countries from East Asia may have a more direct and substantial interest in getting involved in MENA region (...) US is still the dominant power, but in the same time China, India in particular are on the front floor."

Key notes speeches

HE Mr. Viorel ISTICIOAIA-BUDURA

Former Ambassador of Romania to the People's Republic of China,
Former Head of the European Union Delegation to Japan, Managing Director, Head
of Asia and Pacific Department, European External Action Service, Romania

- The Covid-19 pandemic had the effect of accelerating these global trends, the rise of Asia being sort of the epicenter especially because most security and political dynamic, as the competition between the US and China was more visible there.
 - Why are they interest in the Middle East countries and why Middle East countries may welcome their interest? Of course, the energy needs of the East Asia countries, Middle East being a supplying for gas, oil, electricity.
 - But in the same time, the countries that I have mentioned, starting with China, Republic of Korea, India, Japan, Singapore, India – all of them have enjoyed a certain domestic political stability despite the fact that their political system may be defined with various characteristics imprinted by national, historical, traditional elements.
 - Most of them are successful stories in terms of modern economics and are front floor of the technological evolution; all of these are motivating and justifying their effort in linking better with the Middle East.
 - Every of these countries have developed a specific relation with US.
 - China was mentioned in many ways and I want to bring in your attention two things: the comprehensive partnerships that China established with a several countries supported by technological and industrial agenda;
 - The second point is about Shanghai organization which involved major players in Middles East including Iran, Turkey – has shown strong interest and willingness to play a certain role in stabilizing the region, developing a multidimensional cooperation agenda.
- Most of them (author note: countries interest in Middle East) are successful stories in terms of modern economics and are front floor of the technological evolution.**

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. YAO JINXIANG

Assistant Research Fellow, Department for Developing Countries Studies, CIIS (China Institute of International Studies), the People's Republic of China

- We have connections with Middle East countries nearly two thousand years ago, much longer before the US or some Western Countries.
- These Asian countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and India are so interested in the Middle East – what does this mean for Middle East countries?
- I believe that after Covid-19, there will be a trend of multi-polarization in the Middle East in two aspects: one within Middle East countries such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, and another aspect with these new actors such as China, Japan, India, and Syria. Those new actors are more and more active in the Middle East. They are part of an alliance or competition.
- I am pessimistic about the cooperation in the Middle East also because the US retreated from the Middle East but it has a major influence in the region and most of these new actors are allies or partners of the US and they don't go near China.



"After Covid-19, there will be a trend of multi-polarization in the Middle East: one within Middle East countries such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, and another aspect with these new actors such as China, Japan, India, and Syria. "

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. YAO JINXIANG

Assistant Research Fellow, Department for Developing Countries Studies, CIIS
(China Institute of International Studies), the People's Republic of China

- Two years ago US and Iran were very dangerous, Japan actively wanted to act as a bridge between US and Iran, and the Prime Minister of Japan also visited Iran in 2019.
- China and Japan have the same interest in this region and can cooperate together to promote the US – Iran negotiations.
- But many countries, especially US allies have difficulties in developing relations with China independently and they master the US opinion and interest.
- Therefore, I think we will see more competition in the Middle East in the future especially among these new actors. This may be good news for the Middle East because they will have more choices.

**"But many countries, especially
US allies have difficulties in
developing relations with China
independently and they master
about US opinion and interest."**

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Selçuk ÇOLAKOĞLU

Globalization and Development Programme, Division of Humanities and Social Sciences (DHSS), Beijing Normal University – Hong Kong Baptist University, United International College, Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, the People's Republic of China

- The biggest economy in MENA region is China, but because the next section will cover China, I will focus only on Japan, India and South Korea.
- Japan is the oldest power in the region and has become the dominant economy in the region during the '60s, '80s, '90s, and until today. Japan has usually a balanced policy in the Middle East with neutral politics in different conflicts such as Iran and Iraq wars.
- In the last two decades, Japan also tried to adjust its own policy in the region and respect US policy in the region. Japan has no capacity to develop a very different policy from Washington.
- But Japan tries to keep its dominance or importance for the region and basically competing with other economic powers like China, South Korea, and India.



"Japan tries to keep its dominance or importance for the region and basically competing with other economic powers like China, South Korea and India. "

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Selçuk ÇOLAKOĞLU

Globalization and Development Programme, Division of Humanities and Social Sciences (DHSS), Beijing Normal University – Hong Kong Baptist University, United International College, Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, the People's Republic of China

- Japan tries to develop a strategic cooperation with Turkey but its purpose was not carry out fully because Turkey involved very deep in some regional conflicts and disputes so that made Japan hesitant.
- India is also another emerging power that needs to keep its economy's interests in the Middle East. The other objective of India is to keep a balance basically against China and Pakistan also.
- Iran is the epicenter of China and India's initiatives in the region.
- When the Trump administration set new sanctions on Iran this delayed some Indian investments in Iran – there were some back steps in the infrastructure cooperation between India and Iran.

Iran is the epicenter of the China and India initiatives in the region.

- Also, Iran is very important for India. But there are some difficulties regarding the regional integration projects and perspectives.
- In the coming years, we will see more Asian powers involvement and also competition. In that regard, MENA will increase.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Ecaterina MAȚOI
Program Director at MEPEI, Romania

- This region never ceases to surprise us and according to nowadays, prospects remain an important space in which power projects will lead to new alliances and new divisions.
- The classical global paradigm in which the US and its allies dominated the planet is increasingly questioned directly and indirectly.
- Turkey and Israel raise also the question, Israel and MENA policy resemble at least a partial influence of the US in the region. The failure in the Western alleys to achieve a quick military and political success in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria empowered reactionary actors and fueled instability.
- Climate change and obvious tendencies of some state or non-state actors which actually monetize on the new roles rather than addressing them, on-going pandemic and associated economy and associated problems, the weaponization of mass-media and the online environment – a space race that has military-strategic components diminished all together the amount of political capital require that reshape a better home planet for all of us.



"The classical global paradigm in which US and its allies dominated the planet is increasingly questioned directly and indirectly."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Ecaterina MAȚOI
Program Director at MEPEI, Romania

- The generalization of sanctions or trade tariffs, not only between the opponents but also between traditional allies like European, US, end the chances of diplomacy to achieve resulting breakthroughs.
- If we took the example of Lebanon, the effect of sanctions in the time of crisis went well beyond pressuring the governments and affect paths of individuals that do not have a second choice.
- For some countries war and conflicts means business as the rule applies with sanctions.

The effect of sanctions in the time of crisis went well beyond pressuring the governments and affect paths of individuals that do not have second choice.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Muhammad Taimur Fahad KHAN

Research Associate, the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad,
the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

- The importance of the Middle East is lost on us, historically, strategically, economically; the Middle East has remained one of the most important regions in the world.
- Historically the Middle East is the birthplace of three monotheist religions and home for some early civilization, strategically the Middle East is a continental path that unites Asia, Africa, and Europe, economically is one of the largest oil generating regions of the world.
- Have such a diverse social, strategically and political, economically landscape, the Middle East region has remained in the focus of many regional powers that end to having major stakes conflicting in otherwise in the region.
- The Middle East is also undergoing a geostrategic and economic transformation: new actors are emerging and increasing with different stakes and rules in the region.



"The focus in Middle East is now to a shifting to geo-economics which probably stand out of the realization of the regional countries that their security, sustainability and progress is depending upon regional cohesion and economic interdependency."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Muhammad Taimur Fahad KHAN

Research Associate, the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad,
the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

- The focus in the Middle East is now to shifting to geo-economics which probably stand out of the realization of the regional countries that their security, sustainability, and progress is depending upon regional cohesion and economic interdependency.
- Consequences of the conflicts in the Middle East emergence of multiple of world order.
- The emergence of the new actors has a profound effect on the Middle East opening up a new ways of cooperation of the region.

"Consequences of the conflicts in the Middle East emergence of multiple of world order."

"There is a need in understating the properly the different nations and people habitat."

- The new actors in the Middle East are showing regain the trust in what the region has to offer. Middle East offers great opportunities and potentials for positive social impact.
- The region is vast and complex and there is a need in understating the properly the different nations and people habitat.

SESSION 4

China in the Middle East. The New World Power on the Scene in the Great Game of International Relations

This session focuses on the way China has significantly increased its economic, political, and secondarily security footprint in the Middle East during the past year, marking its entrance to a Great Game of International Relations. China's engagement with the Middle East focuses mostly on its own need for energy supplies and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Chair: HE Mr. Viorel ISTICIOAIA-BUDURA, Former Ambassador of Romania to the People's Republic of China, Former Head of the European Union Delegation to Japan, Managing Director, Head of Asia and Pacific Department, European External Action Service, Romania

Prof. Erzsebet N. ROZSA, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of World Economics, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary;

Dr. Khalil SHIRGHOLAMI, Senior Expert, IPIS, the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Presentation made by **Dr. YAO JINXIANG** on behalf of **Dr. Li ZIXIN**, Assistant Research Fellow, Department for Developing Countries Studies, CIIS (China Institute of International Studies), the People's Republic of China.

Dr. Robert MOGIELNICKI, Senior Resident Scholar, the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), USA;

Dr. Garineh Keshishyan SIRAKI, Head of Department of Political Science and International Relation, South Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Prof. Zeno LEONI, Lecturer in War Studies, Defense Studies Department/Defense Academy UK, Affiliate - Lau China Institute, King's College London, the United Kingdom.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Erzsebet N. ROZSA

Senior Research Fellow, Institute of World Economics, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary

- China is a newcomer to the area, but it is not alone in the MENA region. MENA is a penetrated region, meaning that external actors have been present in its development and they are sometimes behaving as being part of it.
- It is due to historical reasons, starting with the colonization process, then the mandates, it goes through the United States-Soviet Union competition during the Cold War, and to the Helsinki Conference in 1975. In the post-Cold War period, a very strange situation emerged. On the one hand, the US had a unipolar moment in MENA, which was very short. Then the withdrawal took place, and now we have more powers in the arena. The region is not a priority for the external actors, not for the US, not for Russia, and not even for China.
- The European Union is the only one that has several reasons to be involved in the region. Russia is back after the end of the Cold War, with arms strength and civilian nuclear energy, with some participation in Syria and Libya. Regarding China, it established some connections here through the Belt and Road Initiative.



"The region is not a priority for the external actors, not for the US, not for Russia, and not even for China. The European Union is the only one that has several reasons to be involved in the region."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Erzsebet N. ROZSA

Senior Research Fellow, Institute of World Economics, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary

- China is not alone on the road from Asia to Europe. Other powers are competing and they have overlapping neighborhoods. One example is Russia, President Putin being one of the very few politicians that can come into contact with anyone in the region. Then there is India, whose presence is increasing in the area, by pushing through Central Asia. Finally, we have China, which has to cut through all these territories. All the mentioned actors have different strategies in the region.

"President Putin being one of the very few politicians that can come into contact with anyone in the region."

- We can claim that the Middle East and North African region still represents the western peripheries of the western periphery. BRI is a new development and in the long run, it will bring along important changes. But we should also look upon the strategic shifts. Several European countries have spoken about eastern opening, for instance, Hungary, which launched such a policy in 2010. Now, the countries situated west of China have started turning towards eastern Asia. But if the west started looking to China, the country considers that they should also come to the west. This point had significant importance for the reformulation of the new Silk Road.

- One of the main aims is to keep the US as far from Asia as possible. In this sense, there is an agreement with other great Asian powers, such as Russia and India, even though India has established some relations with the United States.
- For now, China still does not perceive MENA as a unit. It has bilateral relations instead and it prefers it this way, even though there have been some Chinese-Arab initiatives. There are separate relations with Turkey, with Iran, with Israel. Also, China has comprehensive strategic partnerships with only five countries: Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran. With Israel, there is a comprehensive, innovative partnership.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Khalil SHIRGHOLAMI

Senior Expert, IPIS, the Islamic Republic of Iran

To be part of a Great Power Game requires some elements and preconditions:

- Political Will and Determination
- Multi-dimensional Engagement
- Strategic Allies
- Strategic and Geopolitical Insight

- We doubt about all four factors when we talk about China's engagement in the region.

- **First**, as for political determination, China still has a limited appetite for challenging the US-led security architecture in the Middle East. China's narrative is that its involvement in the region does not advance its geopolitical goals. China pursues a narrative of neutral engagement with all countries in the region.

- **Second**, China's engagement in the region is purely business oriented. China has other fronts where security and geopolitics is a priority. The Middle East is a secondary region in China's foreign policy.

- While the Middle East is peripheral in China's foreign and security policy, with the possible US efforts in future to disrupt the China interests in the region including free flow of energy, this region will be upgraded into critical national interest for China.



"Is China on the scene of Great Power Game in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf?"

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Khalil SHIRGHOLAMI

Senior Expert, IPIS, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- **Third**, China has no real strategic ally in the region. Iran could be that ally, but China is not going to antagonize the US on it. Most of the countries in region are dependent on America and act as satellite of Washington in the region. Some of them including Saudi Arabia try to use China as a bargaining chip in their interactions with the US.
- In the circumstance of disruption of China's interests in the region, Iran is the only country to rely on. Other countries military and security ties with the US will limit them significantly.
- **Fourth**, China has focused on building economic exchanges with the region and has avoided taking sides in regional conflicts. If China is willing to play power politics game as a looming great power, this will have some requirements and first of all to have strategic insight. China must adopt a more assertive policy when it comes to principal views and positions in strategic issues.
- **Altogether**, it doesn't seem that China is willing to be part of a Great Power Game in the region. But, we see some signs for further entanglement of China in the region in strengthening ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
- This is aimed at making concern and anxiety in the side of the US so that the US still remains engaged in the region and not to focus full-fledged on the Pacific and the South China Sea.
- Great Power competition between America and China is likely to intensify in the coming years and no doubt, the Middle East will be an important competition scene.
- Unlike the US, the China's approach toward the region is not based on the cold war mentality of zero-sum game and hegemonic dominance. So, maybe China can act as a balancer and game changer in the region if determined to do so.
- In any case, the potential US-China rivalry in the Middle East shall not disturb the peace and stability in the region and generate turbulence there. For this, multi-centric distribution of power and empowering regional states themselves based on corporative peace is the solution.

Message From Our Speakers

Presentation made by Dr. YAO JINXIANG on behalf of Dr. Li ZIXIN,
Assistant Research Fellow, Department for Developing Countries Studies,
CIIS (China Institute of International Studies), the People's Republic of China

- China does not want to get into strategic competition with the United States. Still, it wants to get in the Middle East, but it does not want to be trapped there. Also, China has its non-intervention principle and does not want to get into the domestic politics of those states. In regards to the Afghan issue, China has two concerns. The first is stability, especially in the western province of Xinjiang.
- The second is that China is not the only country to have connections with the Taliban and it did not assist them, but it wants to persuade the Taliban to be a moderate power. Even though China is a big country, it is not strong and smart enough to know how to exert its power. It is still trying to learn how to use the power, as it was accumulated in recent years. So, there are hopes that China will achieve a certain degree of maturity and cleverness, but for that it needs time.
- In recent years there is a combined influence of three foreign factors. The first is represented by the construction of the US-MENA strategy. The second is China's expanding influence in the Middle East.



"China does not want to get into strategic competition with the United States. Still, it wants to get in the Middle East, but it does not want to be trapped there."

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CIIS (China Institute of International Studies), the People's Republic of China

- The last one consists of the tensions between China and US and the latter's concerns towards three areas, namely: high-tech, large infrastructure development, and arms sales. In the high-tech sector, the United States fears that China will promote Chinese standards around the world which will compete or even replace the western ones.
- Based on this, the United States began to complain about China's cooperation with the regional countries. However, in the face of US provocations, China has neither confronted the US-MENA policy nor has it asked regional states to choose a side.
- In recent years, security cooperation between Israel, Arab states, and the United States has increased and Iran, Turkey, and Russia have coordinated with each other in a closer way.
- China has maintained good relations with players from both sides, having stronger economic ties with the United States and more steady political ties with Russia. Moreover, Iran is US's greatest enemy in the region and China has not cooperated with it, due to a possible deterioration of Chinese-American relations.
- According to the Chinese customers, China imported \$6 billion of oil from Iran in 2019 and only \$1.3 billion in 2020. China signed a 25-year cooperation plan with Iran, but it is a long-term cooperation, based on the socio-economic needs of both sides and it does not aim at constraining the United States.
- In fact, China can maintain good relations with all parties in this region, because of them construct of western countries. The US, for example, used sanctions, economic, technological, and scientific influence in MENA. China used economic, scientific, and technological soft power and never imposed economic sanctions in this region. In the last decade, China and regional countries have collaborated more and more in international politics and the global attention was focused on China's economic relations with MENA.

"In the face of the US provocations, China has neither confronted the US-MENA policy nor has it asked regional states to choose a side."

Message From Our Speakers

Presentation made by Dr. YAO JINXIANG on behalf of Dr. Li ZIXIN, Assistant Research Fellow, Department for Developing Countries Studies, CIIS (China Institute of International Studies), the People's Republic of China

- The rapid economic development of China and regional states is a fact, but it also, partly, imagination and misinformation.
- Lots of foreign scholars, some Chinese scholars, and the media imagine that the China-MENA policy is a lack of separation between government and business, with business being the instrument of state strategy and the government being in the backstage of the business.
- Such ideas underestimate both the level of professionalism in the state's government and Chinese diplomatic principles.

"Unlike the United States, China's approach towards the region is not based on a Cold War mentality or hegemonic dominance."

- China wants stability in MENA, but it is not trying to reshape the regional order, it does not see the Middle East as the arena for major powers.
- It rather calls for other actors to stop interfering in the region's internal affairs. China does not advocate the so-called rule-based international order, because the rules should not be defined by a hegemonic state.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Robert MOGIELNICKI

Senior Resident Scholar, the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), USA

- There are three areas where the Chinese presence in MENA is exaggerated. The first instance is with regards to the Belt and Road Initiative. It largely goes, if we look at the map, upwards and below the Middle East.
- Chinese officials say that the BRI is open to all states, but it consists mainly of partners and the focus is on China's immediate neighborhood. Of course, there are some important pieces of the initiative, such as the Suez Canal or the Pakistan corridor, that cross through MENA.
- But, by and far, we do not see a major BRI presence on the ground. Governments in the region tried very hard to brand economic collaboration as part of BRI and there are many reasons to do so. In many cases, the branding, the marketing and the pledges for millions of dollars and all the cities in Oman do not materialize.
- The digital silk road and the maritime corridor represent significant parts and this is why it is important to separate different dimensions of BRI.



"There are three areas where the Chinese presence in MENA is exaggerated. The first instance is with regards to the Belt and Road Initiative."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Robert MOGIELNICKI

Senior Resident Scholar, the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), USA

- The second issue deals with China's implication in Iran as an economic partner. China has a hierarchy of strategic partnerships, so not all of them are equally important.
- For example, comprehensive strategic partnerships with the Gulf countries are much more important. The figure of \$400 billion of investment, associated with the 25-year strategic partnership, has no basis on historical data.
- Over the last several years, trackers have suggested that Chinese investments across the entire MENA region have a total of around \$200-300 billion. This means that there is absolutely no way for the \$400 billion investment to be reached.
- Third, there is not much evidence that confirms that China wants to play the role of a security guarantor in the Middle East.
- It has done a much better job seeking areas that it has a comparative advantage in, rather than competing in spaces dominated by the US or by other actors.
- Of course, energy security is an important consideration for China, but it seems like regional powers at the moment, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran and taking more responsibility at the regional level for creating dialogue and security frameworks, for trying to reduce tensions and conflicts in the region.
- China is more likely to support these initiatives, rather than to replace the United States as the security guarantor. Now, there are also some instances where China's presence is understated.

"Over the last several years, trackers have suggested that Chinese investments across the entire MENA region have a total of around \$200-300 billion."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Robert MOGIELNICKI

Senior Resident Scholar, the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), USA

- Firstly, many doubt the importance of China's economic influence, citing low investment levels, unfulfilled investment pledges, and low levels of job creation in the region, while US or EU partnerships have the chance to be more influential in the long run.
- But, if we think especially about the Gulf region, the oil, and gas-producing states, this view does not get us the whole picture, because these governments heavily rely on gas revenues.
- So, China's economic influence is much deeper in an indirect sense.
- The second argument focuses on the GCC region. The fields which are important for economic diversification and development are areas in which China has a comparative advantage. Examples are renewable technology services, and luxury tourism.
- These are high-priority areas and their continuous development will allow Chinese companies to play a bigger role in the years to come. Finally, the digital Silk Road is a more suitable role than BRI to think about Chinese engagement in the future. But, the proliferation of Chinese technologies, from telecommunication to media apps is set the foundation for the region's youth. The youth is eager to consume technology, and they are likely to become long-time users of Chinese technology.
- They fund more than 70% of the public sector budgets and in this region, the public sector is the main driver of the economic activity, it employs the most citizens, it provides subsidies and incentives. Here, China is the most important driver of hydrocarbon commodities.

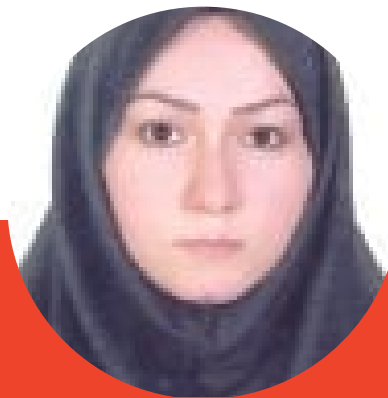
"The youth is eager to consume technology, and they are likely to become long-time users of Chinese technology. "

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Garineh Keshishyan SIRAKI

Head of Department of Political Science and International Relation, South Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- China's One Belt One Road Initiative was introduced by President Xi Jinping during his visits to central and southern Asia in late 2013 has rapidly gained momentum, with its impact on trade and investment in Africa.
- Africa has long been an important market for China, with investment from Chinese companies, both private and state-owned. Moreover, the strength and the depth of these relationships continue to grow.
- The abundance of natural resources in Africa makes the continent an excellent trading partner and an attractive investment area, considering China's need for raw materials and the excess of infrastructure development capabilities.
- BRI is a transformational development strategy promoted by the highest levels of the Chinese government. It focuses on connectivity and cooperation among countries along with both the land and the sea routes. Particularly, the maritime Silk Road touches several African countries, such as Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa in the southern and eastern parts, and Sudan, Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria in the north. Visions and actions are jointly building maritime silk roads.



"BRI is a transformational development strategy promoted by the highest levels of the Chinese government."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Garineh Keshishyan SIRAKI

Head of Department of Political Science and International Relation, South Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- The initiative aims at promoting connectivity between Asia, African and European countries and to strengthen the partnership among the Belt and Road setup.
- Key sectors of One Belt One Road include energy and power, infrastructure, public utilities, construction, transport and logistics, communication, media, and information technology, as well as financial markets.
- This underlines China's push to have a more significant role in global affairs and its need to export in sectors where there is overproduction, such as steel, manufacturing, and infrastructure construction.
- The initiative demonstrates a high level of political commitment in China to work with participating countries to facilitate an increase in interconnection in trade and investment. It focuses on reducing trade barriers, whether it is on the airways, on rails, or roads, and on enhancing trade liberalization.
- The Chinese political, military, and economic activities in Africa build US Chinese competition in North Africa. Surveys show us that democrats and republicans do not take a different approach to Africa and that this region as a whole does not have significant importance for Washington like South East Asia or the Middle East do.
- Despite the expansion of the US military presence in Africa, American trade in Africa has declined in recent years and bilateral trade declined from \$100 billion in 2008 to \$39 billion in 2017. The lack of realistic American strategy for Africa was a golden opportunity for Beijing and now China is the major player in Africa's economy, politics, and security.

"China's action in Africa has turned the continent, especially the northern part, into a rivalry area between China and the US."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Zeno LEONI

Lecturer in War Studies, Defense Studies Department/Defense Academy UK,
Affiliate - Lau China Institute, King's College London, the United Kingdom

- The United States and China have found, perhaps involuntarily, a sort of modus vivendi in the region. This is due to the fact that the two powers have different priorities, to the extent that they do not clash. There is a balance between the two, equilibrium.
- On the one hand, we have the US that is focusing on the Indo-Pacific and who wants to maintain an offshore balance in the MENA region.
- This is happening ever since the Obama administration was in charge, throughout Trump's presidency. There is a strategic continuity between the American presidents, especially between Obama and Trump. Now, President Biden is going back to the approach used by the Obama administration, to some extent.
- Of course, for Biden too, China and the Indo-Pacific area are priorities, but for the US to focus on the Pacific area, stability in the Middle East is needed. This explains why on the top of the United States agenda for MENA there are issues like peace in Yemen or the establishment of a stable relationship with Saudi Arabia.



"The US is focusing on the Indo-Pacific and wants to maintain an offshore balance in the MENA region."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Zeno LEONI

Lecturer in War Studies, Defense Studies Department/Defense Academy UK,
Affiliate - Lau China Institute, King's College London, the United Kingdom

- On the other hand, China's interests in the region are rising.
- It is increasingly committed to continuing to invest economically and technologically in the area, but it is not interested in being a military power or a security provider here. China has neither the power and the logistics, nor the interest to take such a role.
- This is why, although the United States is unhappy with China's economic and technological successes, it is not keen to conduct the kind of business that China is processing here.
- Likewise, China is unable to provide the degree of security that the US is providing. Of course, at some point, this balance will be disrupted. What we see now in the Middle East is a transition towards multipolarity. It is not only about the United States and China, but also about Iran, Saudi Arabia, and others.
- This might be a problem for the United States, but we have seen Trump complaining about other powers not doing enough to guarantee security in the region.
- It would be wise for both the US and China to think about cooperation from this point of view, in order to share the burden. It is uncertain if this will happen soon, especially because we are in a new Cold War, and in many fields, there is already a lot of competition.

"What we see now in the Middle East is a transition towards multi polarity..."

SESSION 5

Lebanon at Crossroads: Politics and Economics in the Wake of a Decisive Social Crisis

This panel addresses the economic challenges of Lebanon. After an awful tragedy in August 2020, Lebanon hangs in bearing bigger questions about how many shocks such fragile, vulnerable countries can absorb. Is there a way out for the small Mediterranean state that lies in the middle of one of the worst economic crises, political deadlock, and social divisions? The speakers will try to come up with solutions that could ensure the future continuation of the Levantine society.

Chair: Mr. Flavius CABA-MARIA, President of MEPEI, Bucharest, Romania

Prof. Laura SAYAH, Beirut Arab University, La Sagesse University and Lebanese University, the Republic of Lebanon;

Dr. Abdul Halim FADLALLAH, Chairman, the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation, Beirut, the Republic of Lebanon;

Dr. Mojtaba FERDOWSIPOUR, Senior Expert, IPIS, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Emiliano STORNELLI, Charmain and Founder, the Religion and Security Council, Rome, Italy;

Dr. Corneliu PIVARIU, Security and International Relations Senior Expert, Romania.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Laura SAYAH

Beirut Arab University, La Sagesse University and Lebanese University,
the Republic of Lebanon

- Lebanon's economic performance was dependent on different factors such as imported inflation, political instability, public mismanagement, and corruption, but mostly sectarianism and high dependency on foreign politics.
- COVID-19 came only as the last straw, also the tragic blast that occurred last August, destructing more than half of the capital. So, COVID-19 and the destruction of Beirut Port only increased the suffering of those who were vulnerable.
- It is also destructing the social structure as we know it in Lebanon. Away from the pandemic, the consecutive governments failed to face all the disastrous challenges that were progressively filing throughout the last three decades.
- The catastrophic economic downturn was observed since summer of 2019 announcing a freefall of the Lebanese economy.



**"What we see now
in the Middle East is
a transition
towards multi
polarity."**

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Laura SAYAH

Beirut Arab University, La Sagesse University and Lebanese University,
the Republic of Lebanon

- The fate of economic growth has been observed for long periods in Lebanon, stated with economic deficits, corruption levels, intense public debts, leading to dramatic retreats of billions of US dollars, causing the banking sector to be struck by a liquidity crisis, and consequently adopting at a later stage different restrictions on all the operations.
- On the other hand, besides an economy based on vulnerable and low productive sectors such as banking, tourism, the war in Syria came to increase the pressure on the national economy.
- So the growth rates kept falling since 2009 and the average inflation started increasing a lot since mid-2019.
- Lebanon, as you all know, is one of the most indebted countries in the world. In fact, half of the budget revenues are absorbed by the public debts. On another hand, instead of alleviating the impact of all the crises, the government was more or less absent from all that could have been implemented; actually, the government was totally absent.
- The only possibility presented by the government was to give the poor household some grant of 400000 Lebanese lira that is equivalent to nothing now, with the crises.
- They were given to the poorest families and most disadvantaged individuals, but in fact, no one could take advantage of that.
- On the other hand, the industry is being struck by additional crisis.
- The latest one would be in fact the boycott of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.
- The boycott is in fact hitting Lebanese exports, while the Gulf countries are considered to be the market or the first market for the Lebanese exports. This introduces another variable to the Lebanese economy, which is purely political.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Laura SAYAH

Beirut Arab University, La Sagesse University and Lebanese University,
the Republic of Lebanon

- The industry is suffering from the currency crisis, scarcity of material, liquidity crisis and the fall in national and international demand.
- This means that national economy relies more and more on non-tradable sectors which is the first sector hit by the pandemic or by any other political factor.
- One of the most threatening parts of this crisis is that it is totally changing the structure of the society: those who work and are still paid in Lebanese lira become one of the most disadvantaged people, while those who get paid in US dollars, whatever the amount is, are seeing themselves as more amid class individuals.
- This might create at a later stage important social conflicts, only due to the exchange rates. Another problematic right now is that the Government not only remains an observer but the measures taken by it has led to additional problems and deepened even more the crisis.
- Examples of such government decisions is that the price of bread has been increased; also the decisions made by the Central Bank that massively increased inflation.
- There is also the question of food security and food scarcity, especially because the local production never suffices the local consumption.
- Also, a high number of individuals are leaving the country: contrary to other periods of time, the people leaving accept job in dire conditions and extremely low salaries.
- The unemployment is accelerated; it will worsen because a lot of people who worked in the Gulf countries are losing their jobs because of different reasons. Not to mention the economic impact of the exchange rate: while the official rate is 1 dollar equals 1500 Lebanese pounds, now 1 dollar is equivalent to 25000. The exchange rate is actually created by mobile applications and the government is doing nothing about that.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Laura SAYAH

Beirut Arab University, La Sagesse University and Lebanese University,
the Republic of Lebanon

- I find alarming the impact of all these crises on the educational sector. The students are obliged to stay at home for the most of the time, but a lot of them do not have access to electricity or internet, do not have laptops or cell phones, especially families with more than one kid.
- We can add the massive migration of university lecturers and school teachers. This will lead to a poverty trap that will never stop in the next 10-15 years from now.
- A lot of children will not be able to access education. What is currently happening in Lebanon is that COVID-19 only exacerbated what we have experienced for the last 30 years.
- The situation will only become worse with the regional conflicts and the absence of any political will to find a solution for this chaotic frame.
- There are two major threats: one on education and one regarding the sudden restructuring of society. In Lebanon, we do not see any perspective or any horizon, also because the deadlock is associated with the regional policies.
- There are two major threats: one on education and one regarding the sudden restructuring of society. In Lebanon, we do not see any perspective or any horizon, also because the deadlock is associated with the regional policies.

"The situation will only become worse with the regional conflicts and the absence of any political will to find a solution for this chaotic frame."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Abdul Halim FADLALLAH

Chairman, the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation, Beirut,
the Republic of Lebanon

- Lebanon is a clear example of the consequence of interactions between three types of problems and crises. The political crisis is especially due to the presence of an imbalanced and ineffective political system which works without a center of gravity.
- The second factor or crisis is the regional and international crisis which pushes the country into the regional fire. The third thing is the bad governance and the economic problem and the crisis-related to bad governance and the new liberal choices, the Western new liberal economy choices based on rental resources.
- As mentioned in the last bank report, Lebanon is facing one of the worst economic crises in the world since 1850. We have a terrible list of events and numbers and indexes which describe the declining trend of everything in Lebanon.
- We have had the highest rate of unemployment in the last three decades. The lucky people now in Lebanon are the ones keeping their jobs.



**"Lebanon is facing
one of the worst
economic crises in
the world since
1850."**

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Abdul Halim FADLALLAH

Chairman, the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation, Beirut,
the Republic of Lebanon

- Despite this vulnerability and fragility of Lebanon, the country still has the ability to avoid the worst end, because it managed to overcome the most dangerous challenge and crisis, which is the impact and consequences of the Syrian war, the terrorist attacks and Israeli threats.
- These strong and positive points in Lebanon are linked to correct strategic choices which are represented mainly by its active role in the region which enables Lebanon to protect itself from the dangerous consequences of conflict.
- Despite this vulnerability and fragility of Lebanon, the country still has some points, preventing Israel from attacking, defending from terrorist takfiri groups, and keeping unity - this is so important: keep the unity of country despite some claims to shift the regime and the system; this bad political system to shift this regime from concessional into the federation system.
- Despite the sectarian escalation managed by pro-American and Saudi groups and parties, but we have an opposite side at a critical point and in the deep national the interest of Lebanon and Lebanese people.
- The first one the foreign interference which concentrates now to transform the economic crisis into political crisis as approached to change the political map and manipulate the national balances.
- This could lead to a more dangerous level of internal tensions, but the main and final goal is to change the political position of Lebanon to be closer to the West.

"These strong and positive points in Lebanon are linked to correct strategic choices which are represented mainly by its active role in the region."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Abdul Halim FADLALLAH

Chairman, the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation, Beirut,
the Republic of Lebanon

- The American approach now is threatening the upcoming Parliament elections. The US is utmost to prevent the deep solution for the economic and monetary and financial and social crises inside Lebanon since two years ago. The first American choice is to increase its presence in Lebanese institutions, to be an insider in the governmental institution, but not only as an influencer on the institution.
- We can witness this fact in the conditional aids. In other words, the US frequently ignore the role of the Lebanese Government, but concentrates its efforts on the role of a deep state of some part of this deep state as the base of influence and presence in the state.
- America tries to isolate its relations with the institution that constitutes this deep state from the relation with the formal government and the formal state.
- The second American choice is related to Lebanon is refusing or putting obstacles in the face of any program to rebuilt not only Beirut Port but also the economy, via the Lebanese official institutions as a way to put the international aids in the hand of NGOs.
- This is a use of proxy tools in the American political battle in Lebanon against resistance. The third thing is preventing any immediate form of ease for Lebanon especially from its rich allies, and also putting obstacles in the way of Lebanese attempts to develop economic relationships with East countries, such as China and Russia and Turkey and Iran and other Eastern countries; although these countries are ready to help Lebanon especially on the infrastructure fields.

The main factors now that influence the Lebanese situation and lead to more escalation and tension are the first one - the conflict and the struggling for changing the Lebanese position and to be pro-American.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Abdul Halim FADLALLAH

Chairman, the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation, Beirut,
the Republic of Lebanon

- But on the opposite side, there is a potential emerging of other points and factors such as a new regional change that reflects the Arab position towards Syria - which in the near future will influence the situation in Lebanon - and the second one is the Saudi failure in the Yemeni war which leads to escalation in Lebanon now, the third thing is the unclear future of the American military presence in Syria and Iraq and the American defeat in Afghanistan and the return to nuclear negotiations with Iran, all these factors change the position of Lebanon into the regional conflict.
- This transformation reflects on the current situation in Lebanon which should adapt to this new fact.
- The way out of the crisis in Lebanon stands in saving the Lebanese independence and liberty, adopting diversification in foreign relations - economic and political, a more positive role in the Arab world, struggling to go out of American umbrella, because it is so dangerous now and so critical. The consequence of being pro American now has a high price: political and economic.

**"The consequence
of being pro-
American now has
a high price:
political and
economic."**

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Mojtaba FERDOWSIPOUR

Senior Expert, IPIS, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- With regards to Lebanon, a country of great importance in West Asia, despite all the problems, it is important to examine and to answer the main questions related to the crisis which are of utmost importance:

1. Lebanon has a triple power system, which is a good, but corrupt system;
2. It is a rich country in energy resources, which should be better exploited;
3. The triple power system is based three main institutions: the army, the nation and the resistance, though discontinuous elements, but which help the country;
4. There are external elements which make the country prone to civil war, with the intention of destroying the parties involved in it;



"The waking of Lebanon is the waking of the Arab world and this is a significant matter."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Mojtaba FERDOWSIPOUR

Senior Expert, IPIS, the Islamic Republic of Iran

5. The main problem of the region of West Asia is the Israeli regime and the continuation of the occupation, thus the waking of Lebanon is the waking of the Arab world and this is a significant matter;
6. The economic problems of Lebanon are the result of sanctions;
7. The West blocked financial and credit transfers, together with remittances, and this Western practice in the Middle East has intensified and perpetuated the crisis in the region.

**The economic problems of
Lebanon are the result of
sanctions.**

Message From Our Speakers

Mr. Emiliano STORNELLI

Charmain and Founder, the Religion and Security Council, Rome, Italy

- Lebanon is currently in a critical situation, while the prospects are not very good. Therefore, the important aspects to look at are the economic crisis, the political deadlock, and the social division. These factors are not separate threats, but they are intertwined, and it is not possible to solve the situation just by solving one threat, but rather by addressing them at the same time to be able to solve this complex situation.
- In these past years, no substantial measure was taken to address the situation or make the political process more viable, and thus, to alleviate the suffering of the people.
- In what regards the upcoming elections from March 2022, it is difficult to predict the results in order to envisage the relaunching of the political situation and to address the economic crisis. Most probably, the future government will be similar to the current one, this meaning that no further adjustment of the economic governance will be introduced, and it will make the economic situation even worse.



"The important aspects to look at are the economic crisis, the political deadlock, and the social division. These factors are not separate threats, but they are intertwined."

Message From Our Speakers

Mr. Emiliano STORNELLI

Charmain and Founder, the Religion and Security Council, Rome, Italy

- The role of the NGOs will increase because they have become the only help for some people. However, the country needs strong institutions to take charge of the governance of the country, with no private end involved. Unfortunately, the surrounding world and the financial institutions worldwide do not trust Lebanon for lending financial support as it was before.
- The future parliament could feature new members, independent representatives of the revolutionary movement of the October Revolution, activists advocating for new institutions. For the moment, they have not been able to gather around a common platform, but they continue to work individually, not in a unified platform. They could still steer the political process towards positive developments for change.
- With regards to the traditional parties, the current establishment are enabling the current crisis and creating obstacles for the political crisis, while they should actually strive towards consensus to relaunch the political process.
- Although there are different views in terms of foreign affairs, common ground can be found, having in mind the wellbeing of the Lebanese people, which was overlooked by the political parties, for the sake of their future. They should implement some temporary agenda of reforms and programs in coordination with the international community, the essential thing being to put the country back on track. Cooperation is important between the political parties for the common ground in rebuilding the Beirut Port for example, otherwise it will be abandoned like the railway was, thirty years after the war. The population will start trusting the politicians if they focus on the wellbeing of the population and let aside differences, and take the time to work for their country, not for their individual agenda.

Although not very optimistic about changes, it is important to specify that Lebanon is also known as the land of miracles and all religions being present there could help improve the situation for the sake of the country and the population.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Corneliu PIVARIU

Security and International Relations Senior Expert, Romania.

- Lebanon is an iconic country for the Middle East, a true barometer of the regional geopolitical situation and also the Lebanese situation of the last decade fits the profile of numerous countries around the world, whose resources raised the interest of foreign powers, and which suffer from foreign influence, confronted with massive immigration, sheltering refugees and overcome by corruption.
- The August 4, 2020 explosion has aggravated the already existent economic crisis and gave birth to a political crisis, until a new government was put in place in 2021.
- With a sectarian political system, in which the power is shared by the three main religious communities, Lebanon is heading for parliamentary elections in 2022, while next autumn, the parliament is supposed to elect a new president.



"For change, timing is not an issue, but the willingness to do so is more important, therefore the situation in the Middle East will have a positive impact on Lebanon."

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Corneliu PIVARIU

Security and International Relations Senior Expert, Romania.

- Nonetheless, it would not be surprising if the elections are postponed and thus, a new political crisis emerges. The hesitation to reform the current political system is emphasized by the initial promises of granting seats in the parliament for the diaspora, a promise which is not found in the final form of the electoral law.
- From an economic standpoint, the country is suffering the most severe crisis in the last 150 years, with a shrunken GDP, going from 55 billion \$ in 2018 to 33 in 2020 and even more expected for 2021, based on the estimations of the World Bank, whereas the GDP per capita decreased by 40% and the unemployment rate increased to 40% at the end of 2020, thus increasing the poverty rate.
- The Lebanese lira diminished its value by approximatively 90%, in comparison with October 2019. Corruption of the current government was also exposed in the latest published Pandora Papers, together with the governor of the Central Bank and other important political figures.
- The clientelist political system with regards to the way public contracts are assigned may be subject of an extensive debate.
- The brain drain phenomenon is present especially since 2019, due to people with professional training and proper education which can ensure them a proper lifestyle having migrated to other countries. This will further diminish the possibility of Lebanon recovery. Also, the country underwent several immigration waves which currently affect the country.
- The sectarian groups of interest are overwhelming and also, they are used by different foreign interests, such as France, Iran, US, Saudi Arabia, China, Russia etc., to attain their own interests in concerned areas.
- On a short run, the economic situation in Lebanon will continue to deteriorate. On a long run, the situation in the Middle East and in Lebanon are defensible. Whereas for change, timing is not an issue, but the willingness to do so is more important, therefore the situation in the Middle East will have a positive impact on Lebanon, depending first on the Lebanese people, whether they are within the country or abroad.

SESSION 6

The EU and the Future of MENA

The panel covered aspects regarding the EU's presence in the MENA, as turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa directly affects Europeans (see a continuous migration Crisis). The EU has not seen a deal-breaker and stands far away from retaining a decisive role in major events. How can it overcome obstacles and line-up a more powerful policy? For the mid and long-term range?

**Chair: Dr. Liviu MUREȘAN, President,
EuroDefense Romania**

HE Dr. Alibeman Eghbali ZARCH, Senior Expert, IPIS, Former Ambassador to Albania, the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Mr. Sergiu DUR, PhD Candidate and Researcher, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania;

Dr. Mihai Sebastian CHIHAIA, Policy Analyst, the European Policy Centre, Brussels, Belgium;

Prof. Marius NEACȘU, University of Economic Studies (ASE), Romania Bucharest, Romania.

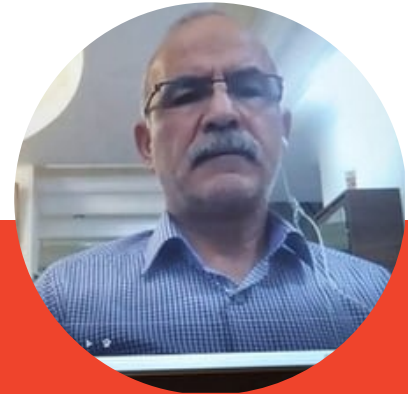
Dr. Alexandru GEORGESCU, Strategic Analyst, EuroDefense Romania.

Message From Our Speakers

HE Dr. Alibeman Eghbali ZARCH

Senior Expert, IPIS, Former Ambassador to Albania,
the Islamic Republic of Iran

- This year has brought together several crises starting with the Covid-19 pandemic, regional crises in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, political instability in Latin America and the escalation of nationalist and populist movements in Europe. All this has had different and important effects on the world, world powers, and other states. The world powers, and especially Europe, did not pay attention to the Middle East but relied on a wide range of political, economical, cultural, social, and traditional features. There is no clear and convincing picture of relations between the EU Member States and most countries in the Middle East. The position of the major European governments towards the Middle East, especially those in France or Germany, as well as the support for US unilateral action in the region in the recent decades, is not satisfactory. Looking at the occupation of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and the conflict in Syria today, it must be realized that, despite the loss of many billions of euros and many armed forces, Europe has not achieved any significant results. The surprising unilateral withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, without consulting its European partner, can teach Europe a good lesson.



"The position of the major European governments towards the Middle East, especially those in France or Germany, as well as the support for US unilateral action in the region in the recent decades, is not satisfactory."

Message From Our Speakers

HE Dr. Alibeman Eghbali ZARCH

Senior Expert, IPIS, Former Ambassador to Albania,
the Islamic Republic of Iran

- The question of EU-Middle East relations concerns Europe's double standard in relation with the states in the region: one day it is friendly with Iran, the other day is misbehaving, as seen in the nuclear agreement, all for the US to contribute to the failure of its regional opponents - Russia, China, and Turkey. Why is Europe pursuing uncertain and confusing policies? In general, Europe has highlighted its relationship with the Middle East in the following areas over the last two centuries:
- First and foremost, energy - Europe has seen Iran and regional countries as fast and stable resources to meet its energy needs, benefiting from energy imported from Iran.
- On the other hand, Russia has carried out complex energy projects in Europe over the years, reducing the dependence of West Asian energy countries and thus the USA has the ambition to bring energy to Europe. Secondly, the consumer market – EU has paid attention to the regional consumer market. With 7% of the world's population and more than 20% of world trade, Iran is the world's largest exporter and second largest importer.
- However, in relation to the EU, Iranian oil exports have fallen over the past 10 years, reaching their lowest level of 6 billion euros in 2020. Due to its geostrategic position, Iran is an ideal market access platform for over 150 million people, for the 15 neighboring countries as well as for the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.
- Another reason would be to attract elite workforce, and Iranians are smart. Today, Europe needs experts more than ever, and we are witnessing the highest level of migration of young people and capital to Europe.
- The role of the Middle East community, and especially Iran, in many European countries in terms of job creation and services is extraordinary.

Due to its geostrategic position, Iran is an ideal market access platform for over 150 million people, for the 15 neighboring countries as well as for the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Message From Our Speakers

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- Another reason would be to attract an elite workforce, and Iranians are smart. Today, Europe needs experts more than ever, and we are witnessing the highest level of migration of young people and capital to Europe.
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"The use of exclusive products from the region, such as handmade carpets, pistachios, caviar, petrochemicals, and Iranian saffron are well known and appreciated among Europeans."

- The use of exclusive products from the region, such as handmade carpets, pistachios, caviar, petrochemicals, and Iranian saffron are well known and appreciated among Europeans.
- Another topic of discussion in the EU- MENA relationship is the democratic value, because if the EU supports free movement in the region, regional democracy will emerge and the role of a hegemon in the area will be enhanced.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Mihai Sebastian CHIHAIA

Policy Analyst, the European Policy Centre, Brussels, Belgium

- When discussing the MENA region from the perspective of external actors, there are some important points to consider:
- For the USA, there is a reorientation towards the Asian pivot, with less military commitment and more diplomacy in the MENA area;
- For Russia, there is military engagement, military presence, and arms sales;
- For China, things revolve around economic cooperation, more present in areas where it has a competitive advantage;
- For the EU, the discussion refers to the lack of influence and its inability to engage in major development in the region.
- However, when considering EU engagement in the region, several points need to be considered:



"For the USA, there is a reorientation towards the Asian pivot, with less military commitment and more diplomacy in the MENA area"

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Mihai Sebastian CHIHAIA

Policy Analyst, the European Policy Centre, Brussels, Belgium

- The EU-MENA interaction is taking place on major political and security issues, such as nuclear negotiations, the Middle East peace process, and other conflicts. There are also other layers of cooperation, such as trade, association agreements, development assistance, humanitarian assistance, and various aspects of regional cooperation.
- It is important to focus on success stories, areas that work, areas where there could be some improvements for the future. how the EU can do this or already pursue those areas of involvement, thus illustrating the issues that need to be pursued in the future.
- What actually works in EU-MENA cooperation? What are the success stories? Firstly, there are a number of regional cooperation projects mainly in the area of EU- Southern Neighborhood which focuses on several areas, such as migration, judicial cooperation, civil society, growth, youth, etc.
- These projects are quite small, in terms of budgets and in terms of the level of interaction, but they are important.
- The EU has allocated 800 million Euros for projects in the Middle East and North Africa, such as: EUROMED Justice and EUROMED Police covering Police and Judicial Cooperation with the Southern neighborhood.
- Over 300 million Euro in the past 2 years for: Development Assistance; Support during COVID; Examples of Bilateral projects, EU developed with countries from the Middle East and Africa; economic and business growth; Institution building; Anti – money laundry; Fighting terrorism; Border security; - Aviation security. As well as other activities such as exchange of know-how by which helped the Middle East and North Africa.
- Challenges and opportunities the region faces: Climate change and rising temperatures; High potential for natural disasters; Reduced food supply; Digitalization of the region specially during COVID that increased the number of cyber frauds.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Mihai Sebastian CHIHAI

Policy Analyst, the European Policy Centre, Brussels, Belgium

- Opportunities: Energy transition – immense potential for renewable energy both solar and wind – a field in which the EU could enhance the cooperation; Maritime issues in the region – high amount of traffic and an important supply chain through the region – EU could be more influential; How Europe could operationalize the above-mentioned aspects; New Agenda for the Mediterranean – launched by EU in February and that includes: Investments; Growth on business; Green transition; Digital transition.
- EU should focus on the implementation of the above points are included in the Agenda.
- EU Cyber-security strategy; Energy transition- EU and the Middle East & North Africa could cooperate in the transition.
- **Maritime presence – the EU is already present in Hormuz but it is important for EU to develop more tools that will increase its maritime presence in the region.**
- EU-Gulf relations – the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs recently visited the region to reinforce the ties in the fields of renewable energy, water security, civil protection, nuclear safety, maritime safety. EU Global Gateway – a new tool launched to support the infrastructure in the Middle East. Cooperation in these areas could act as confidence-building measures that could lead EU to have a more influential and important role in political and security issues in the region.
- Issues to follow in the next couple of years:
- The Persian Gulf and especially the Red Sea and its growing importance and development – EU should adapt and understand what this development means from the trade, security and economic point of view.
- The EU has a potential role in the reconfiguration of the relations in the region. An example could be the past years' warming of relations between countries that were at odds with each other such as Iran and the Gulf, the Gulf and Turkey, Turkey, and Egypt. It is important for the EU to be present in the discussions and have an active role.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Alexandru GEORGESCU

Strategic Analyst, EuroDefense Romania

- MENA has very different issues that can be approached from the critical infrastructure perspective: new dimensions of competition and multilateral power games; too many competing and conflicting narratives for its countries to coordinate effectively; sub- regional and trans-regional dimensions; the question of whether MENA is a border region, a buffer region or a bridge; significant differences resulting from bloc building.
- Critical infrastructure protection analyzes an issue that is vital to the functioning of all societies, especially the advanced societies, - energy, transport, agriculture, health, etc. and this provides a perspective that allows us to analyze both the security environment and also to increase resilience and the protection of those societies. So, regional and global infrastructures present special challenges. MENA is one such region because is crossed by global critical infrastructures and also by future projects. And these infrastructures suffer from risks, vulnerabilities, and threats. Cascading disruptions can affect numerous countries and related systems. EU is dependent on critical infrastructures that originate or pass through the Middle East and this means that is affected by the risks propagated from the region.



"Is MENA a border region, a buffer region or a bridge?"

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Alexandru GEORGESCU

Strategic Analyst, EuroDefense Romania

- Critical infrastructure protection is a framework that was first developed in the USA. During the Clinton administration and applied after the 9/11 attacks. Then it was applied by the EU starting with 2004.
- It states that a country is only as safe and as prosperous as its infrastructures will allow and provides a comprehensive framework for managing the key infrastructures, assets, and resources on which countries depend at all levels. The EU can provide assistance to MENA on critical infrastructure issues and this framework can address various issues affecting the region.
- Global networks have become a source of systemic threats through domino effects in critical infrastructure, the pandemic spread through rapid travel and transportation hubs. Therefore, predictability and controllability are important, but also to promote resilience through backups, new standards, and meaningful interaction between stakeholders.
- We have seen recently the issue of supply chain risk and the MENA region is also affected by supply chain risk.
- Supply chains face a combination of risks triggered by operational processes, informational and environmental deficiencies. We are facing infrastructure development but, while this will shorten the lead times, increased geographical distances raise new challenges to managing supply chain flows, such as disruption risks and sustainability issues. Risks include unsustainable supply management, unbalanced risk-sharing partnerships, lack of transparency, inadequate project evaluation, incompatible corporate governance structures, and cyber security. The pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of long logistics chains, both during and after the initial surge. First, there was a cut in the chain, then the inability to keep up with the demand.

Global networks have become a source of systemic threat through domino effect in critical infrastructure, the pandemic spread through rapid travel and transportation hubs...

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Alexandru GEORGESCU
Strategic Analyst, EuroDefense Romania

- The MENA region has various critical infrastructure priorities. It needs: Infrastructure security and resilience; to manage risk perceptions and confidence in authorities; to build new strategic infrastructure in the challenging environment; generate business continuity during crises and maintain quality of life; to establish proper regional interconnections; to manage successful digital transition;
- There are some MENA countries totally dependent on oil revenue that need to diversify their economy;
- Infrastructure concerns in the MENA region: lack of true institutional security architecture; risk perceptions in the area; persistent conflict and uncertainty; aging in existing infrastructure; uneven and unsecured digitalization; geopolitical conflicts are instigators of hybrid threats.
- What needs to be taken into account? tangibles and intangibles; long-term interdependencies; key assets and key resources; perceptions of risks;

Romania can offer assistances to other countries in the region such as Assistance for drafting the documents of reference in CIP.

- How could the EU contribute to this? The EU developed an extensive system to protect the critical infrastructure at national level and has a lot of knowledge in critical infrastructure protection cooperation; Individual countries can support critical infrastructure protection in the MENA region.
- Romania can offer assistance to other countries in the region such as assistance for drafting the documents of reference in CIP;
- Assistance in setting up continuing education programs for experts and decision-makers, contacts for knowledge transfers between counterpart institutions.

Message From Our Speakers

Dr. Alexandru GEORGESCU
Strategic Analyst, EuroDefense Romania

- Cooperation for setting up CIP-related bodies such as Interinstitutional Working Groups, Technical Secretariats, Crisis, and Emergency Management Centers, etc.
- Cooperation at the non-governmental level in order to set national critical infrastructure and services protection associations for experts and companies;
- Another contribution the EU can make is the expansion of the European Program for CIP to include non-EU countries in the MENA region which will help to create regulations through law and best practice in the region, to identify the critical infrastructures, and to transfer knowledge;
- Create national contact points and security liaison officers;
- Recent evolutions in the field: nowadays the critical infrastructure program only involves energy and transport but the new EU directive proposes other fields such as health, banking, financial market, drinking water, wastewater, digital infrastructure, public administration to be included as critical infrastructures that have trans-regional / trans-border effect. All of these have potential of cooperation in critical infrastructure protection between EU and the MENA region.

"Nowadays the critical infrastructure program only involves energy and transport but the new EU directive proposes other fields such as health, banking, financial..."

Message From Our Speakers

Mr. Sergiu DUR

PhD Candidate and Researcher, "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

The EU foreign policy regarding Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the need for a new approach.

The main idea of my presentation is that in the last couple of years, the EU failed in contributing to the revival of the Middle East peace process because of its strategic paralysis regarding the Israeli- Palestinian conflict and the out-of-date Oslo Paradigm.

A) The root causes of the EU's strategic passivity /paralysis:

1.Lack of unity

- EU states hardly talk on a single voice when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel benefits from its close relationship with the four Central European states of the Visegrad Group.
- Because of the above, the EU is unable to use the sanctions-leverage leverage against Israel for violating the international law and lacks political will to constrain Palestinian leaders to act in accordance with democracy and the rule of law.



"The EU is more comfortable with allowing the US to lead the diplomatic initiative."

2. Self-imposed secondary role on the international scene

- The EU is more comfortable with allowing the US to lead the diplomatic initiative.
- The EU has little to say in other international formats such as Middle East Quartet or Ad-Hoc Liaison committee.

Message From Our Speakers

Mr. Sergiu DUR

PhD Candidate and Researcher, "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Because of the above, the EU is unable to use sanctions as leverage against Israel for violating international law, while also lacking political will to constrain Palestinian leaders to act in accordance with democracy and the rule of law.

B) The out-of-date Oslo Paradigm

- The EU is stuck in the logic of the Oslo Agreement. The reality on the ground shows that action in agreement with the Oslo Agreement paradigm is out of date because it failed to freeze the status-quo; led to an absolute Israeli control over Palestinian life; Hamas – Fatah rivalry is a serious obstacle for a united Palestine.
- The EU should realize that its three main objectives: the two-state solution, peacemaking, and peaceful state-building are hard to reach in the near future. The EU should rethink its approach in accordance with the current realities on the ground. The approach proposed by policy-makers and various scholars is based on the following 5 points:

- Discouraging Israel from building new settlements in West Bank by using economic and political tools;
- Insisting for direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for a two-state solution, thus giving Israel a choice: to commit to negotiations for a two-state solution or to give the Palestinian people equal rights in one democratic state;
- Demanding real reforms from the Palestinian leadership;
- The EU should become an equal partner with the USA on this matter;
- Engaging with the Arab world with realistic expectations.

"The EU should rethink its approach in accordance with the current realities on the ground."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Marius NEACȘU

University of Economic Studies (ASE), Bucharest, Romania

How the world has been changing in the thirty years since the end of the Cold War. Instruments used and the context.

- Everything that is happening in the region is the consequence of the dynamic of the geopolitical frontier between the Western world (the EU and NATO) and Russia. We have new and strange actors and we are on the cusp of a new space race. Who would have believed a few years ago that Arab states would become space actors? Or that Cyberspace would become a geopolitical weapon? For these reasons, we need new instruments to understand this changing world.
- From my point of view, there are at least three instruments that have been used especially by Russia for solving these dynamics of geopolitical frontier between the Western world and Russia. 1.Frozen conflict – Russia knows how to export the model of Transnistrian conflict as a frozen conflict; 2.Hard Energy – Natural gas vs. geopolitical concessions; 3.Eurointifada – human bombs at the Polish-Belarus border as a sort of European Intifada – refugees and migrants are used as a geopolitical tool.



"Everything that is happening in this region is the consequence of the dynamic of the geopolitical frontier between the Western world (the EU and NATO) and Russia."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Marius NEACȘU

University of Economic Studies (ASE), Bucharest, Romania

- Frozen conflict – Russia used these frozen conflicts first to break the march of NATO and EU towards the East and then to create artificial geopolitical tensions along the geopolitical frontier. Transnistria has a strategic significance and is used by Russia for establishing the geopolitical frontier on Baltic – Black Sea alignment where, centuries ago, a Romanian scholar tried to demonstrate that the geographical border between Asia and Europe should be.
 - Hard Energy – locking the gas supply. First it was a gas war between Ukraine and Russia that generated another conflict related to pipelines. Russia used what it can be called a preemptive gas pipeline (South Stream vs Nabucco). Looking at the map we can see four gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea and under the Black Sea – an energy pincer in which Europe is caught.
 - Use of refugees and migrants – hot spots along the European frontier between Western World (NATO & EU) and Russia.
 - After 30 years it seems that Europe returns to the fences and walls between the West and Russia.
 - Most of the immigrants are from Iraq and Afghanistan crossing illegal the EU eastern borders from Belarus (a country that has eased visa process for ME citizens) to which they were brought by national airlines to put pressure on EU border. It is not about a simple migration route but a geopolitical instrument.
4. Belt and road initiative – another pincer?
5. Is there any synchronization between Russia and China ? Between Russia's pressure on the European geopolitical frontier and China's pressure on Taiwan?

After 30 years it seems that Europe returns to the fences and walls between the Western world and Russia.

SESSION 7

The Assessment of the Economic Sanctions on MENA Countries and Innovative Instruments for Trading

The panel sums up crucial aspects regarding economic sanctions in the MENA region, with a focus on those applied to Iran. Negotiations to restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) are expected to resume in order to get the United States to re- enter the deal. As the diplomatic activities could resume, officials across European capitals are examining how to revive EU-Iran trade following the lifting of US secondary sanctions. How can the EU interact in a beneficial way with Iran leading to a win-win strategy? There is a lot of potential underways to be unlocked.

**Chair: Mr. Iulian MAREȘ, Strategic Analyst,
MEPEI, Bucharest, Romania**

Prof. Foad IZADI, Expert on JCPOA issue, Tehran University, the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Prof. Mohsen ABDOLLAHI, Expert on International and Environmental Law, Shahid Beheshti University, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Prof. Pouria ASKARY, Expert on Public International Law/Investment Arbitration, Allameh Tabatabaei University, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Foad IZADI

Expert on JCPOA issue, Tehran University, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- Under international law, the sanctions against Iran are illegal, because they are in breach of the principle of sovereignty and are dictated by the US Congress.
- While we disagree with the sanctions, Iran has learnt to live with them over the past 40 years, and this has led to independence in the area of science and technology, for example.
- The new Raisi administration has diversified its talks, instead of putting all of Iran's assets in nuclear talks. The focus of Iran's engagement is now the neighbouring countries, as well as Russia, China and the recent joining of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The deputy foreign minister has also recently visited France, Germany, the UK and Spain, in a bid to deepen bilateral ties with European nations.
- The administration has crafted its development program on the assumption that the sanctions will remain in place. Iran is willing to return to the JCPOA as it was before Trump's unilateral withdrawal, but it wants to make sure that past mistakes are not repeated, especially now with Trump polling higher than President Biden in some polls. On their part, the Biden administration is not so keen to return to the JCPOA; instead, they want to move beyond it and reach an agreement that is longer-lasting and stronger.



"The administration is trying to work in a way that does not depend on oil sales, and currently the budget includes the work on an infrastructure allowing for development under a sanctions regime, starting from the premise that they will remain in place."

- All of this comes in the context in which the US is trying to extract concessions from Iran, which is not willing to make any unless previous matters are resolved. The price is going to be paid by the Raisi administration in the context of internal politics because it is political suicide for a politician to follow the existent rhetoric.

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Mohsen ABDOLLAHI

Expert on International and Environmental Law, Shahid Beheshti University,
the Islamic Republic of Iran

- Economic sanctions not only reduce the participation of targeted countries in the international environmental instruments and undermine the capacity for compliance with commitments, but also lead targeted countries to unsustainable survivalist policy.
- While Iran signed Paris Agreement, the re-imposition of the very harsh and unjust US suspended sanctions has put Iran's economy in the worst economic situation and suspended the process of ratification.
- Iran's participation in CDM Projects was affected by economic sanctions; while Iran has actively registered 22 CDM projects, only one project has been certified.



"Iran does not have doubtful activity and needs a green energy supply, including electricity from its peaceful nuclear program."

Message From Our Speakers

Prof. Pouria ASKARY

Expert on Public International Law/Investment Arbitration, Allameh Tabatabaie University, the Islamic Republic of Iran

- US unilateral coercive sanctions: these sanctions that the US imposed on US people and companies that we call primary sanctions. Secondary sanctions are the problem which not against the target, but against all the partners of the target including European companies and people.
- These sanctions are illegal because of 22 resolutions and severely against human rights. Iran like other countries is fighting with coronaviruses and it's very difficult to fulfill international human rights for medicine and so on. These sanctions heavily affected people not the politicians.
- If we are talking of dependent of Europe from U.S these countries should not allow U.S to impose them and obliges European people and companies to trade with whom and in future impose about other countries and then at least choose between China and U.S.



"These sanctions heavily affected people not the politicians."

Concluding remarks



Dr. Corneliu PIVARIU,
Security and
International Relations
Senior Expert,
Romania

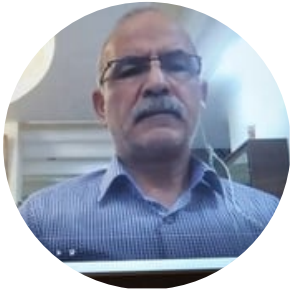
"The MENA region remains an extremely complex area, which will go on playing an important role in the coming geopolitical developments (...) I suggest that the papers presented today be included in the next issue of MENA in Focus by MEPEI."



Prof. Adrian SEVERIN,
Former Minister
of Foreign Affairs,
Romania

"I was impressed by the convergence of our opinions: all interventions converged towards the same conclusions. This is a remarkable feat, given that we had people from various countries and continents, with various backgrounds and personal experience. (...) We have to go back to the multilateral debate of all willing actors and try to establish a consensual set of rules which would allow us to live peacefully together in security and stability."

Concluding remarks



HE Dr. Alibeman Eghbali ZARCH,
Former Ambassador
to Albania, the Islamic
Republic of Iran

"I would like to mention four relevant points that were discussed today: the importance of deepening cooperation in delicate crises like Afghanistan; the importance of cognition and knowledge; the fact that the EU's political and economic autonomy depend on energy, which the MENA region is ready to provide, and the importance of having more EU voices on MENA debates, not just the EU-3."



Gen. Carlos BRANCO,
Former Director of
the War College
and Defense
Research Center,
the Portuguese
Institute of
International
Relations, Portugal

"I was impressed by the wide variety of participants, perceptions and explanations of current events. This is the kind of debate we need, one that goes beyond certain narratives that are repeated ad nauseam. Therefore, this conference was really refreshing, as we had the opportunity to listen to things we are not used to. I fully subscribe to Mr. Adrian Severin's intervention: the world needs multilateralism, multilateralism, and multilateralism. Any alternatives are doomed to fail."

The Eighth Forum on the Middle East and North Africa issues will take place on Thursday, 07 July 2022, in Bucharest, in a hybrid format. We are looking forward to seeing you there!

Thank you!