Since its founding in 1981, the Middle East Policy Council (MEPC) has dedicated its programs and publications to improving American understanding of the politics and societies of the Arab world and the broader Middle East, and to promote thoughtful discussion and debate about American interests and U.S. policies in the region. The Council has established a reputation for supporting fair, unbiased and intellectually rigorous discussion and analysis of the Middle East and of U.S. national interests there, and for promoting mutual understanding and partnership to strengthen U.S. relations with the countries in the region. In 2020 MEPC continued its efforts of almost four decades with its core programs and outreach efforts, despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our quarterly Capitol Hill Conferences, quarterly journal Middle East Policy, TeachMideast program for educators and students, media engagement, and digital platforms all enjoyed continued impact and success in 2020. As 2020 drew to a close, we also bade a fond farewell to retiring Executive Director Dr. Tom Mattair, with gratitude for his 11 years of leadership of the Council, and extended a warm welcome to Ms. Bassima Alghussein as she assumed her duties as the new MEPC Executive Director.

Capitol Hill Conferences

The Council is unique in having a several decades-long history of convening conferences dealing with the Middle East on Capitol Hill. These programs foster engagement with members of Congress and their staffs, as well as executive branch officials, opinion-leaders, journalists, academics, diplomats, and members of the business community. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, three of our four 2020 Capitol Hill Conferences were held virtually. These, our 99th, 100th, 101st, and 102nd such events, took place on January 16th, April 12th, July 19th, and October 25th. The 16 panelists participated from around the U.S. and the Middle East. They included former senior U.S. diplomats, prominent journalists, leading academics, and analysts from think tanks and other organizations with a focus on the political, economic and security challenges facing the U.S. in the Middle East. Hundreds – including many from Congressional offices – participated in these conferences in person and online, while many thousands accessed the conference summaries and transcripts on our website. The transcripts were also published in our journal, Middle East Policy. Following are the conference topics and panelists, along with links to these four events.
January 17, 2020: **U.S.-Iranian Confrontation: Domestic, Regional and Global Implications**, featuring Dr. Suzanne Maloney, Deputy Director for Foreign Policy and Senior Fellow, Center for Middle East Policy, Energy Security and Climate Initiative, The Brookings Institution; Amb. (ret.) Douglas A. Silliman, President, Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington and former Ambassador to Kuwait and Iraq; Ms. Joyce Karam, Washington Correspondent, The National (UAE), and Adjunct Professor, George Washington University; and Amb. (ret.) John Limbert, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iran and former Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

April 17, 2020: **The Middle East in 2020**, featuring Mr. Roger Cohen, Columnist, New York Times and International New York Times and Former Foreign Editor, New York Times; Ms. Mona Yacoubian, Senior Advisor on the Middle East and North Africa, United States Institute of Peace and former Deputy Assistant Administrator, Middle East Bureau, USAID; Ms. Kirsten Fontenrose, Director, Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative, Atlantic Council and former Senior Director of the Gulf, National Security Council; and Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer, President and Chairman of the Board, Middle East Policy Council and former Ambassador to Oman

July 17, 2020: **Progress or Conflict? What to Expect for U.S. Policy in the Middle East**, featuring Amb. (ret.) Anne Patterson, former Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs and former Ambassador to Egypt and Pakistan; Ms. Mara Rudman, Executive Vice President for Policy, Center for American Progress, former Deputy Assistant to the President for Policy, Center for American Progress, former Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and former Assistant Administrator for the Middle East, USAID; and Dr. Sanam Vakil, Deputy Director and Senior Research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, and James Anderson Professorial Lecturer in Middle Eastern Studies, John Hopkins SAIS in Bologna, Italy; and Dr. F. Gregory Gause, III, Head, Department of International Affairs and Professor, Bush School of Government & Public Service, Texas A&M University

October 23, 2020: **Arab-Israeli Relations on the Eve of the U.S. Election**, featuring Ms. Lucy Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, Director, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Program, U.S. Institute of Peace; Mr. Bashar Azzeh, Founding Board Member, Tatweer Investment Group and Member, PLO Palestine National Council; Dr. Shira Efron, Senior Fellow, Institute for National Security Studies and Special Advisor on Israel, RAND Corporation; Mr. Brian Katulis Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress
Partnerships and Cooperative Programming

During 2020, Council leaders and board members participated in dozens of programs with think tanks, educational institutions and other influential organizations that deal with foreign affairs, diplomacy and the Middle East, including:

**Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security (WCAPS):** In 2020, the Middle East Policy Council joined the WCAPS racial justice initiative “Standing together against Racism and Discrimination.” In endorsing the WCAPS initiative, MEPC provided the following statement of its commitment:

“Just as the Council promotes U.S. values in the Middle East, we also share WCAPS' commitment to confronting injustice and inequality at home, and to promoting increased opportunity and support for the less privileged, especially persons and communities of color.”

**National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) January 9, 2020:** MEPC Executive Director Dr. Tom Mattair (seated, far left) participated in a NCUSAR-hosted briefing on Capitol Hill on the topic “Strategic Dynamics of Iran’s Continuing Asymmetric Warfare.”

**Chatham House:** January 23, 2020: MEPC Executive Director Dr. Tom Mattair and the UK’s Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) scholar Sanam Vakil met with senior Democratic and Republican staffers on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to share views on U.S. relations with Iran.

**Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center (SQCC):** February 5, 2020: MEPC President and Chairman of the Board Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer spoke at a memorial event to commemorate the life and reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said at the SQCC in Washington, DC.

**Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs:** February 20, 2020: MEPC President Emeritus and Board member Amb. (ret.) Chas Freeman addressed “America in Distress: the Challenges of Disadvantageous Change” at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University.

**National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC):** February 24, 2020: MEPC President and Chairman of the Board Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer participated in a NUSACC briefing for the newly-appointed U.S. ambassadors to Oman and Kuwait.
**Center for American Progress** (CAP): April 27, 2020: MEPC Board member Brian Katulis moderated a panel discussion hosted by CAP on “What’s Next for U.S. Policy in the Middle East?”

**House Foreign Affairs Committee**: June 17, 2020: MEPC Vice Chair Amb. (ret.) Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley briefed the House Foreign Affairs Committee on “Diversity and Diplomacy: Why an Inclusive State Department Would Strengthen U.S. Diplomacy.”

**CARE**: November 18, 2020: MEPC Board member former Congressman Jim Moran and MEPC President and Chair Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer participated in the Virtual 2020 CARE Impact Awards Gala.

**Arab America**: November 19, 2020: MEPC President and Chairman Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer and Vice Chair Amb. (ret.) Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley joined fellow former U.S. ambassadors in the Arab America-hosted event “Experiences of Former U.S. Ambassadors to the Arab World.”


**Truman Center for National Policy**: December 15, 2020: MEPC Vice Chair Ambassador (ret.) Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley (left) joined co-chairs Congressman Joaquin Castro (center) and Senator Chris Murphy (right) to launch the Truman Center for National Policy task force to develop recommendations for the U.S. State Department.

**Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy**: December 30, 2020: MEPC Board member Amb. (ret.) Ron Neumann participated in a panel discussion hosted by the Weiser Diplomacy Center at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan on “What’s next for U.S. Foreign Policy.”

Other organizations with which MEPC cooperated in 2020 include:

Middle East Policy enjoys a top ranking among journals on the Middle East on Google Scholar’s ranking of journals in the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. The Institute for Scientific Information, the principal citation index in the world, has identified Middle East Policy as “the most frequently cited journal on the Middle East region in the field of international affairs.” In 2020 the journal once again saw its influence increase, as its “impact factor,” determined through citations of journal material, increased by an impressive 28%.

In 2020 the journal’s circulation stood at more than 16,000. Importantly, the journal’s circulation is largely to libraries and other institutions that make the journal available digitally to thousands of patrons. During 2020 downloads of journal articles through the Wiley publisher’s platform amounted to approximately 70,000 and traffic to essays and other journal materials on the Council’s website surpassed 200,000 page views.

As a result of our journal digitization process, a total of 146 issues of the journal are now available online through the Wiley-Blackwell website. The journal’s impact also continues to benefit from the publisher’s marketing of thematic packages of articles and back issues of the journal to institutions around the world, including national library systems. Middle East Policy’s impact has been enhanced as well by the migration of the Wiley Online Library to a publishing platform hosted by the leading scientific and scholarly digital platform provider.

In 2020 Middle East Policy featured 36 full-length articles as well as reviews of 18 books and the transcripts of our four Capitol Hill conferences. The appeal and impact of the journal is reflected in the prominence and diversity of its contributors. In 2020, journal articles were authored by scholars from, or with affiliations in, the following countries:

- Australia, Azerbaijan, Colombia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, France, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States.
In 2020 MEPC’s educational outreach program, TeachMideast, continued to expand and diversify its engagement with educators and students and to augment its educational resources through a variety of different platforms: its website, social media, direct community engagement, collaborative programming with partners, and student mentorship. Our TeachMideast website (www.TeachMideast.org) received a record 296,214 hits during 2020, representing an increase of 60% over 2019; the number of educators in our educational outreach database along with social media account subscribers increased to 1,850.

Our educational outreach efforts involved cooperation with several partners, including: the Close-Up Foundation, the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, the Middle East Outreach Council, and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. The Covid-19 pandemic required adapting TeachMideast programming by transitioning to virtual engagement. Collaboration with the civic education organization Close-Up continued through an online platform, with briefings involving over 100 educators from across the country.

The educational materials on the TeachMideast website grew to 385 pages and included comprehensive country profiles, lesson plans and teaching guides, resource guides, thematic articles on current issues, chronologies and a compendium of teacher and student opportunities and events. In 2020, TeachMideast featured new materials on grassroots social and cultural movements to give voice and perspective to the people in the region beyond the news headlines. The goal was to increase understanding and awareness of everyday, lived experiences through arts and activism.

In 2020, MEPC hosted eight student interns who contributed to the TeachMideast program by generating and updating website content, undertaking special projects, and expanding the program’s capacity and network. These students were from the following institutions: Boston University, Williams College, Brigham Young University, St. Olaf College, The George Washington University, American University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. From the start of the pandemic, the internships were undertaken remotely.
Digital Platforms

Website: www.mepc.org

Digital Outreach:

Given in-person restrictions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020 MEPC accelerated its digital outreach to maximize program impact. Increased traffic to our website was driven by new journal content each quarter, archived journal material relevant to current policy debates, video and other content from our Capitol Hill conferences, frequent media appearances, and more than four dozen Middle East In Focus items, thematic collections of commentary on current regional events and issues drawn from regional media. Coordinating this content with tactical Google Search Optimization attracted some 635,000 total visitors to the website, a 20% increase over 2019. Our recent investment in optimizing the website for mobile visitors continues to drive much of this growth, with 2020 mobile visitors increasing by 50% compared to 2019. MEPC continues to have a global reach, with the MENA region (35%) and the United States and United Kingdom (30%) representing the majority of visitors.

Email Communication:

MEPC’s email communication continued to expand in 2020, featuring monthly content linked to the organization’s core programs. In 2020, the MEPC email list grew to over 12,000 subscribers, including Middle East policy staffers in the U.S. Congress, Executive Branch officials, staff from think tanks Middle East embassies, journalists, academics and others from the U.S. and internationally. This monthly outreach garnered over 25,000 views during 2020. As the new U.S. administration takes shape in 2021, MEPC will continue to update and target its outreach to ensure that MEPC materials reach the most important policy influencers in Washington.

Social Media:

MEPC’s social media engagement also grew in 2020, through our channels on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, with nearly 10,000 total followers. On Twitter, all new MEPC content, as well as relevant archived material, is “tweeted” and/or “sub-tweeted”; featured articles and Capitol Hill conference invitations are sent directly to over 250 “Twitterati” journalists and thought leaders in Washington DC. MEPC also posts all new video and interactive content on Facebook. The MEPC YouTube channel, with over 800 subscribers, receives thousands of views of recent and archived Capitol Hill conferences, all amplifying the impact of MEPC’s materials and programs.
In 2020 MEPC leadership played an active role in engaging with a broad array of media outlets and prominent public fora in discussing issues and policies related to the Middle East. MEPC Board members and staff are sought-after interlocutors on Middle East issues by broadcast and print media outlets. The full list of the more than 80 such media engagements during 2020 is available here. The list of major speeches can be found here. Interviews, commentary, quotes and other input by MEPC Board members and staff were carried in the following media outlets during 2020:


**Middle East Policy Council Leadership**

*President and Chairman of the Board*

**Hon. Richard J. Schmierer**  
Fmr. Ambassador, Oman

**Vice Chair**

**Hon. Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley**  
Fmr. Ambassador, Malta

**Executive Director (outgoing)**

**Dr. Thomas R. Mattair**

**Executive Director (incoming)**

**Ms. Bassima Alghussein**

**Vice-President**

**Ms. Anne Joyce**

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Fmr. Dep. Asst. Sec. of Defense

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Fmr. CEO, ExxonMobil Saudi Arabia

*President Emeritus:*

**Hon. Chas W. Freeman, Jr.**  
Fmr. Ambassador, Saudi Arabia

*Chairman Emeritus:*

**Dr. Omar M. Kader**  
Chairman and CEO, Paltech

*In Memoriam*

**Hon. Ford M. Fraker, President**  
Fmr. Ambassador, Saudi Arabia

**Dr. Fuad Rihani**  
R & D, Saudi Binladin Group