2019 Overview

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 promoting thoughtful discussion and debate about American interests and U.S. policies in the region. The Council has a strong reputation for supporting balanced, 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 peoples and countries in the region. Due to the wide distribution of our educational materials, and the broad media coverage of our programs, the Council’s impact is particularly strong beyond the Washington, DC, community and in the region. In 2019 MEPC achieved several new milestones in its core programs, special events, and outreach efforts. The Council’s quarterly Capitol Hill Conferences, quarterly journal Middle East Policy, TeachMideast program for students and educators, media engagement, and digital platforms all reached new heights in 2019. Following is an overview of MEPC’s 2019 activities and achievements.

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. Our four 2019 Capitol Hill Conferences – our 95th, 96th, 97th, and 98th such events – took place in the Russell Senate Office Building on January 16th, April 12th, July 19th, and October 25th. The 13 panelists involved were all former or current U.S. government officials, members of leading DC-based think tanks, or other organizations with a focus on the political, economic and security challenges facing the U.S. in the Middle East. In addition to hundreds of attendees – including many from Congressional offices – total viewership was in the hundreds of thousands, bolstered by C-SPAN coverage of our April and July conferences. Many thousands also accessed the conference summaries and transcripts on our website. The transcripts were also published in our journal, Middle East Policy. Following are brief overviews of and links to these four events.
January 16, 2019: **The Trump Administration’s Middle East Policy: A Mid-Term Assessment**, featuring Philip Gordon, Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations, and former White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf Region; Michael Doran, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute, and former Senior Director, National Security Council; and Jon B. Alterman, Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and Director, Middle East Program, CSIS, and former member, Policy Planning Staff, Department of State.

April 12, 2019: **The Future of U.S. Engagement in the Middle East**, featuring Joan Polaschik, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs and former Ambassador to Algeria; Geoffrey Kemp, Senior Director of Regional Security Studies, Center for the National Interest, and former Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council; and Daniel Benaim, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress, and former Middle East Adviser at the White House, the State Department and the U.S. Senate. [https://www.c-span.org/video/?459775-1/middle-east-policy](https://www.c-span.org/video/?459775-1/middle-east-policy)

July 19, 2019: **The U.S.- Saudi Arabian Relationship**, featuring Thomas Lippman, Adjunct Scholar, Middle East Institute, and former Middle East Bureau Chief for the Washington Post; Dana Stroul, Senior Fellow, Washington Institute of Near East Policy, and former Senior Professional Staff Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and Gerald Feierstein, Senior Vice-President and Director of the Gulf Affairs Program, Middle East Institute, former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East, and former Ambassador to Yemen. [https://www.c-span.org/video/?462812-1/us-saudi-arabia-relations](https://www.c-span.org/video/?462812-1/us-saudi-arabia-relations)

October 25, 2019: **The United States, Israel and Palestine: An Assessment**, featuring James Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute; Lara Friedman, President of the Foundation for Middle East Peace; Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Professor, University of Maryland; and Jake Walles, Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, former U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, and former U.S. Consul General in Jerusalem.
Partnerships and Engagement

February 11, 2019: President and Chairman of the Board Amb. (ret.) Richard Schmierer, Board member Amb. (ret.) Ron Neumann, and Executive Director Dr. Tom Mattair meet with leaders at the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (DERASAT) in Manama.

February 12-13, 2019: Amb. (ret.) Richard Schmierer, Amb. (ret.) Ron Neumann, and Dr. Tom Mattair meet with Bahraini leaders: His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, and His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa in Manama.

February 18, 2019: Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer and Dr. Tom Mattair meet with Senior Advisor to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs HE Abdul Aziz Al Rowas in Muscat.

April 30, 2019: Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer and Dr. Tom Mattair meet with His Highness UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi.

May 1, 2019: Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer and Dr. Tom Mattair meet with Emirates Policy Center Director Dr. Ebtesam al-Ketbi in Abu Dhabi.

October 8, 2019: Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer, Vice-Chair Amb. (ret.) Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, and Dr. Tom Mattair participate in a symposium at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

October 10, 2019: Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer, Amb. (ret.) Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, and Dr. Tom Mattair participate in a symposium at the Prince Saud al-Faisal Institute for Diplomatic Studies in Riyadh.
Cooperative Programming

April 9, 2019: Council Board Vice Chair Amb. (ret.) Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley (pictured far left) participates in a panel discussion at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC.

October 23, 2019: Council Vice President and Board member Anne Joyce (right) chairs a session on “Future Prospects for Palestinians” at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations’ annual policy conference in Washington, DC.

October 29, 2019: Council Board member Brian Katulis (pictured far right) moderates a session on “Exploring Pathways to De-Escalating Middle East Tensions” at the Center for American Progress in Washington, DC.

During 2019, Council leaders and board members participated in dozens of programs with think tanks, educational institutions and other influential organizations that deal with the Middle East, including:

- American Academy of Diplomacy
- Atlantic Council
- Brookings Institution
- Brown University’s Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs
- Center for American Progress
- Center for the Study of Statesmanship at the Catholic University of America
- Churches for Middle East Peace
- Council on Foreign Relations
- Diplomatic and Consular Officers Retired (DACOR)
- Foreign Policy Association
- Harvard University’s Weatherhead Center for International Affairs
- Hudson Institute
- Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies
- National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce
- Potomac Institute
- Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
- Springfield College
- Stanford University’s Freeman Spogli Institute
- the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute
- Texas A&M’s Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs
- University of Michigan’s Ford School of Public Policy
- World Affairs Council of Western Massachusetts

The Council continued its close programming partnerships with the five other members of the North American Bridge consortium:

- National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations
- Arab-American Institute
- Bridges of Understanding
- Institute for Social Policy and Understanding
- Search for Common Ground
Middle East Policy

Middle East Policy is ranked number one on Google Scholar in the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. The Institute for Scientific Information, the principal citation index in the world, identifies Middle East Policy as “the most frequently cited journal on the Middle East region in the field of international affairs.” Journal citations have continued to increase; the journal’s “impact factor” – based on citations – went up by 5.9%. The Institute for Scientific Information citation index ranked Middle East Policy in the top 10% in its “International Relations” category, with a ranking of 80 out of 910 journals.

At the start of 2019 subscriptions to Middle East Policy exceeded 16,000, the journal’s largest circulation ever. A large majority of those were online subscriptions with libraries and other institutions that, collectively, make the journal available digitally to tens of thousands of patrons. Online access to journal materials also continued to expand in 2019; during the year downloads of journal articles through the Wiley publisher platform exceeded 110,000.

As a result of our journal digitization process, a total of 143 issues of the journal are now available online through the MEPC 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 2019 Middle East Policy featured 38 full-length articles as well as reviews of 22 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. Middle East Policy is truly an international publication; in 2019, journal articles were authored by scholars from or with affiliations in the following countries:

- Australia, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, France, Iran, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States.
In 2019 the MEPC’s educational outreach program – TeachMideast – continued to expand its engagement with educators and students and to augment its educational resources through a variety of different platforms: the TeachMideast website, social media, community engagement, collaborative programming, virtual exchanges, and student mentorship. Our educational outreach efforts involved cooperation with the following partners:

- the Middle East Studies Association, the Close-Up Foundation, Soliya Connect, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, Middle East Outreach Council, Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center, Georgetown University’s Al Waleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Arab American Institute, Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, National Council for the Social Studies, and National Student Leadership Conference.

Our TeachMideast website (www.TeachMideast.org) attracted more than 144,198 visitors during 2019; the number of educators in our educational outreach database together with social media account subscribers increased to 1,800.

In 2019 we were again engaged in virtual exchange programming between Arab and American students in collaboration with Soliya Connect, and continued our collaboration of many years with the teacher education organization Close-Up and the student leadership group National Student Leadership Conference, with briefings for 15 teacher and student groups reaching some 450 participants.

The educational materials on the TeachMideast website grew to more than 350 pages, comprising comprehensive country profiles, lesson plans with teaching guides, thematic articles on current issues, weekly news digests, chronologies, and a compendium of Middle East-related teacher and student funding, enrichment, travel and study opportunities and events. In 2019 our TeachMideast program published new, comprehensive educational packets on the following: The Basics of Islam; The Syrian Conflict; Muslim and Arab Americans; Women in Islam; The Middle East in the World Wars; The Arab Spring; and, Yemen.

The TeachMideast program hosted eight university-level student interns who contributed to the program by generating and updating website content, undertaking special outreach projects, and expanding the program’s capacity and network.
Our updated website operating system delivered MEPC content to our largest digital audiences ever. Building on strong gains in 2018, total visits to the site again surpassed 500,000 in 2019, with over 150,000 visits from users in the United States and growing audiences from the Arab world, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. MEPC content continues to feature prominently in Google search results, with Google referrals responsible for more than 50% of the total visits to the site. Mobile traffic in 2019 remained at its increased 2018 level, when it had more than doubled due to the new website operating system generating a “mobile-optimized” version of the MEPC website. A unique element of the MEPC website is our *Middle East in Focus* (MEIF) feature. MEIF postings contain collections of commentary from the region on current events and issues, drawn from media published in the region. The website published over 40 editions of MEIF items in 2019.

**Digital Outreach:**

E-mail outreach further supports MEPC content distribution. Our e-mail list of over 12,000 subscribers receives periodic updates from the Council. In 2019, these recipients received four previews of new journal essays, four event recaps from our Capitol Hill Conferences, and many other communications concerning MEPC events and publications. Our outreach lists are updated regularly with foreign policy staffers from Capitol Hill and throughout the U.S. government executive branch to ensure that MEPC content is reaching these decision makers.

**Social Media:**

MEPC utilizes social media to engage users with our content and to reach “influencers” vital to advancing our mission, including policy makers, journalists and academics. MEPC has some 4,829 followers on Twitter, and another 4,416 on Facebook. Our tweets and Facebook posts receive thousands of weekly impressions and are often shared or “retweeted” so that this content reaches other feeds of individuals and institutions beyond our direct network. MEPC also has almost 1,000 subscribers on its YouTube channel. Video from our Capitol Hill conferences and other events is posted on this channel and distributed through Facebook and Twitter. In 2019, MEPC also posted podcasts from our Capitol Hill Conferences and other events, and live-streamed these conferences on Facebook.
In addition to the media coverage of our programs, the Council plays 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, print, and online media outlets. The full list of the more than 70 MEPC media engagements during 2019 is available here. The list of major speeches can be found here. Interviews, commentary, quotes and other input by MEPC Board members were carried in the following media outlets during 2019:


**Middle East Policy Council Leadership**

**President and Chairman of the Board**
Hon. Richard J. Schmierer  
Fmr. Amb. Lebanon, Israel, Kuwait

**Vice Chair**
Hon. Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley  
Fmr. Amb. Malta

**Executive Director**
Dr. Thomas R. Mattair

**Vice President**
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Hon. Mark Hambley  
Fmr. Amb. Lebanon, Qatar

Hon. Richard Jones  
Fmr. Amb. Lebanon, Israel, Kuwait

Mr. Brian Katulis  
Sr. Fellow, Cent. for Amer. Progress

Dr. Philip Mattar  
President, Rittenhouse Investments

Hon. James P. “Jim” Moran  
Fmr. Member of Congress

Hon. Ronald Neumann  
Fmr. Amb. Afg., Bahrain, Algeria

Hon. William A. Rugh  
Fmr. Ambassador, UAE, Yemen

Hon. James B. Smith  
Fmr. Amb. Saudi Arabia

Dr. Janet Breslin-Smith  
President, Crosswinds International

Hon. Richard Jones  
Fmr. Amb. Lebanon, Israel, Kuwait

Mr. Brian Katulis  
Sr. Fellow, Cent. for Amer. Progress

Dr. Philip Mattar  
President, Rittenhouse Investments

Hon. James P. “Jim” Moran  
Fmr. Member of Congress

Hon. Ronald Neumann  
Fmr. Amb. Afg., Bahrain, Algeria

Hon. William A. Rugh  
Fmr. Amb. UAE, Yemen

Hon. James B. Smith  
Fmr. Amb. Saudi Arabia

Dr. Janet Breslin-Smith  
President, Crosswinds International

Hon. Patrick Theros  
Fmr. Amb. Qatar

Mr. Thomas Walter  
Fmr. CEO, ExxonMobil Saudi Arabia

President Emeritus:
Hon. Chas W. Freeman, Jr.  
Fmr. Amb. Saudi Arabia

Chairman Emeritus:
Dr. Omar M. Kader  
Chairman and CEO, Paltech

Board Member Emeritus
Fuad Ruhani  
R & D, Saudi Binladin Group

In Memoriam
Hon. Ford M. Fraker, President  
Fmr. Amb. Saudi Arabia