



Second Annual MENA Forum Focused on Sustainable Solutions to Regional and Global Challenges

New York, NY – The Middle East Institute (MEI) and SRMG's THINK Research and Advisory were pleased to host MENA Forum 2023 on September 22 in New York City. The event, held for a second year concurrently with the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), assembled senior officials from the United States and the Middle East, along with private sector experts and leaders.

The forum centered on the exploration of collaborative strategies between the Middle East and the international community to address regional challenges. Discussions covered regional responses to global geopolitical shifts, economic resilience and diversification, sustainable energy system development, and the Middle East's climate objectives and priorities ahead of COP28. Speakers included regional government leaders, private sector representatives, and U.S. administration officials.

Event Highlights

Fireside chat with H.E. Dr. Rania Al Mashat, Minister of International Cooperation, Egypt's Governor for the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the African Development Bank, and other international institutions, Arab Republic of Egypt

Moderated by Paul Salem, President and CEO, Middle East Institute

H.E. examined the MENA region's poor progress in meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, as well as financing tools needed to fund projects which address climate change and sustainability.

"The link between the Sustainable Development Goals and climate came in very forcefully. When we talk about climate one of the key items is: how can we build resilient systems? How can we ensure that in meeting these goals, financing is 'just financing?'" - Rania Al Mashat

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The Future of Energy: Security and Sustainability for MENA and Beyond

Featured panelists:

Mr. Francesco La Camera, Director General, International Renewable Energy Agency

Dr. Helima Croft, Head of Commodity Strategy and MENA Research, RBC Capital Markets

Dr. Sara Vakhshouri, Founder and President, SVB Energy International

Moderated by Dr. Karen Young, Senior Research Scholar, Columbia University Center on Global Energy Policy

The panel examined opportunities and challenges for sustainable energy in the region. "We have some unexpected demand coming up: AI. No one knows how it will grow... and the clouds and languages are evolving. No one knows how much energy AI is going to need in the future." -Dr. Sara Vakhshouri

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Fireside Chat with H.E. Dr. Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Moderated by Rana Abtar, Talk Show Anchor, Ashraq News "The Washington Report" and Senior Washington Correspondent, Asharq AlAwsat.

H.E. spoke about Jordan's geopolitical and socioeconomic priorities. "We need to engage in a meaningful, impactful, and serious effort to address all of the consequences [of war in Syria] to move toward a path to peace." - H.E. Ayman Safadi

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Fireside Chat with Ahmet Yıldız, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Türkiye

Moderated by Brian Katulis, Vice President of Policy, Middle East Institute.

Yildiz discussed Türkiye's unique position in MENA and European diplomacy. "The Turkish position on Ukraine has been very clear. Since 2014, we've declared we would not recognize any annexation of territory by Russia, especially Crimea. This is [still] the position." -Ahmet Yıldız

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Fireside Chat with H.E. Mariam Almheiri, Minister of Climate Change and Environment, United Arab Emirates

Moderated by Jessica Obeid, Head of Energy Transition, THINK Research and Advisory

H.E. spoke about MENA's role in combating climate change and the UAE's hopes for COP28. "You are going to see the [largest] number of NGOs at COP28. We have the green zone and the blue zone next to each other which has never happened at a COP before." -H.E. Mariam Almheiri

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Fireside Chat with Dr. Amer Bisat, Managing Director and Head of Emerging Markets Fixed Income, BlackRock

Moderated by Hazar Caracalla, Senior Advisor, THINK Research and Advisory.

Dr. Bisat spoke about the role of the private sector in fostering economic resilience in the Middle East and North Africa. "The work has to be done by countries themselves. The Idea that we can support them financially to deal with short-term liquidity needs in the hopes that one day they can support themselves does not work." - Dr. Amer Bisat

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Fireside Chat with H.E. Dr. Majed Al Ansari, Advisor to the Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs and Spokesperson, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar

Moderated by Firas Maksad, Director of Strategic Outreach and Senior Fellow, Middle East Institute

Dr. Al Ansari discussed Qatar's diplomatic role in the region as well as the recent Iran-US deal. As a result of this deal, Iran released five US hostages in exchange for the transfer of 6 billion dollars of Iranian money to Qatar. "The money that is going to Iran is not going as cash for the government or support for the military, it will be for buying food and medicine for the Iranian people." -H.E. Dr. Majed Al Ansari

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Fireside chat with Timothy Lenderking, U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen, United States Department of State

Moderated by Brian Katulis, Vice President of Policy, Middle East Institute

Lenderking discussed continued US efforts to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. "The fact that these two conflict parties — the Houthis and Saudi Arabia — are talking is significant. It gives us hope that we can someday get to Yemeni-Yemeni talks in the future." -Timothy Lenderking

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Learn more

To watch videos of the event and access more information about speakers and moderators please visit the official MENA Forum webpage [here](#).