



ANALYSIS PAPER

SUMMARY

The time is ripe for supporting a more robust public policy environment in the Middle East. The Arab Spring revealed a drive among populations to address public policy problems and a need by governments to devise better solutions to those problems than they have in the past. Yet developing human capital and strengthening public policy environments require long-term, sustained investment. They also require donor restraint: areas of seemingly peripheral concern (i.e., health and education) will be more likely to garner Arab leaders’ buy-in than hot-button issues of greatest interest to Western donors. The right kind of support can help enhance receptivity to public policy discussions, foster sustainable business models for civil society organizations, and create a supply of policy entrepreneurs in the region. *This report was made possible through the generous support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.* ■

# Investing in a More Robust Public Policy Environment in the Middle East

by Jon B. Alterman

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The Arab Spring revealed the talent and potential of Arab youth long undermined by inhospitable political environments. It revealed the perils of the status quo. It also exposed one of the most tragic byproducts of authoritarianism: wasted talent.

The organizers of the recent protests in Egypt and elsewhere displayed the skills and savvy of U.S. politicians running for office. They used the Internet to advertise their agenda, rally the masses, and build solidarity. To reach the disconnected, they provided fodder for television stations and paraded through poor neighborhoods, strategically adjusting their emphasis from “better politics” to “better paychecks.”

Yet for all their creativity and dynamism, in the months following the protests they have struggled to make the leap from advocacy to policymaking. The odds were stacked against them from the start. Bureaucratic repression meant that these activists spent more of their lives blogging about political iniquities than they did engaging with political systems. Indeed, the corruption of the old system led many to conclude that all politics were corrupt, and they wanted no part of politics. Lifetimes of exclusion from political processes prevented them from learning how to develop coherent platforms, extract concessions from the powerful, and negotiate with other stakeholders. The so-called Facebook kids spurred “faceless revolutions”<sup>1</sup> with no clear leaders or platforms to fill the void.

The short term is unlikely to be kind to them. As realism eclipses idealism and the political landscape becomes increasingly fragmented and complex, more conventional and seasoned political actors are likely to sideline the Facebook kids.

CSIS Middle East Program

The CSIS Middle East Program covers all aspects of U.S. policy toward the region, concentrating especially on identifying new voices, framing emerging challenges, and developing opportunities for positive change in the Middle East. To the greatest degree possible, we seek to be “opportunity driven” rather than “threat driven.” Our work has three major goals. The first is to identify and understand the drivers of social and political change in the Middle East, concentrating on relatively poorly understood issues such as information and communications technologies, demographics, and the regional media. The second is to create partnerships between academics and policy professionals in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East to frame and address questions in such a way as to promote the creation of new, constructive, and innovative solutions to problems. The third is to focus on activities that add value, follow from CSIS’s regional and functional strengths, build on its comparative advantages over other think tanks and government efforts, and extend CSIS’s core competencies. For more information on the program’s work, visit [www.csis.org/mideast](http://www.csis.org/mideast). ■

The long term holds out greater prospects for this group. The activists' most enduring achievement was not implementing radical change above, but helping transform attitudes and expectations below. More than ever, young people feel a stake in their country's future and a desire to address public policy problems standing in its way. Governments, by turn, face a need to devise better solutions to these problems than they have been able to in the past.

With the winds of change blowing through the Arab world, the time is ripe for supporting a more robust policy environment in the region. Over time, a disciplined and coor-

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ordinated effort can help nurture an environment in which younger generations are more intimately connected with policymaking and where political debate occurs outside the blogosphere, among individuals and civil society organizations and their governments. Such an environment will contribute to enhancing the peace and security of the region and of the United States as well. The gains will not be immediate, but the impact will be enduring.

This paper explores ways in which external actors can target support for a more robust public policy environment in the Middle East. Drawing on interviews in the region and original research, it will identify common threads in terms of government receptivity to outside input and suggest ways in which that input can be targeted to have optimal effect. It will also offer examples in which external actors have been able to nurture durable relationships that build and sustain policy communities in other parts of the world.

These recommendations are not intended to be accomplished in the short term. The revolts in Egypt and Tunisia revealed the relative swiftness of removing the old as compared to the arduous process of creating the new. Developing human capital and strengthening public policy environments require long-term investment and sustained commitment. On the human capital side, time and energy

must be invested in creating the kinds of scholars who can write accessibly and practically, and who are willing to sacrifice the freedom of academic endeavors in exchange for greater policy influence. Such an investment must be sustained over years, helping to support the development of younger scholars as they establish their careers. For some, an important component of this process will be related to language. The ability to communicate effectively and persuasively in English not only remains a necessity for policy effectiveness, it is becoming more critical than ever. Investing in such capability among up-and-coming scholars will be an important component for expanding the pool of people who can operate effectively in the policy field.

Nor are these recommendations necessarily intuitive. On the question of environment, it is necessary to examine the kinds of policy issues on which Middle Eastern governments are most receptive to outside advice, considering the entire ecosystem in which public policy institutions exist and helping to construct a business model under which such institutions could thrive. To do so, it will be necessary to invest in areas that may seem peripheral to the key interests of donor groups. It will also require donor restraint, not short-circuiting the process of indigenous growth that is necessary for Middle Eastern public policy organizations to emerge as strong and relatively independent organizations.

## POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The weakness of public policy discourse in the Middle East is both a cause and an effect of a weak policymaking environment. Authoritarian governments, allocative politics, and weak civil society institutions all militate against the sorts of exchanges between nongovernmental institutions and government decisionmakers that help leaven and improve governmental decisions.

The relative isolation of policy processes from public scrutiny not only weakens governments' ability to shape robust policies in response to a variety of internal and external challenges. It also disaffects experts who could be playing a constructive role now and in the future, undermines public support for government decisionmaking, and makes any sort of innovation or entrepreneurship difficult if not impossible.

## DIVERSITY

Despite certain commonalities, there is also considerable diversity in the Middle East. Some Middle Eastern coun-

tries are wealthy while others are poor. In some, political debate is carried out through shouts and threats, while in others it is carried out in little more than a whisper. Some have a large pool of educated graduates from which to draw, and others seize on every young person showing promise. In addition, each country is facing different problems, and many concentrate on problems that they see as domestic rather than regional. Planning for growth in water and electricity demand, revising education curricula, and thinking about women's entry into the workforce are common issues around the region, but conditions are sufficiently different in each country and the politics around them are sufficiently delicate that governments treat them as internal issues. As such, ways to support a more robust internal decisionmaking environment will vary by country, condition, and issue. Nevertheless, some regional trends are clear.

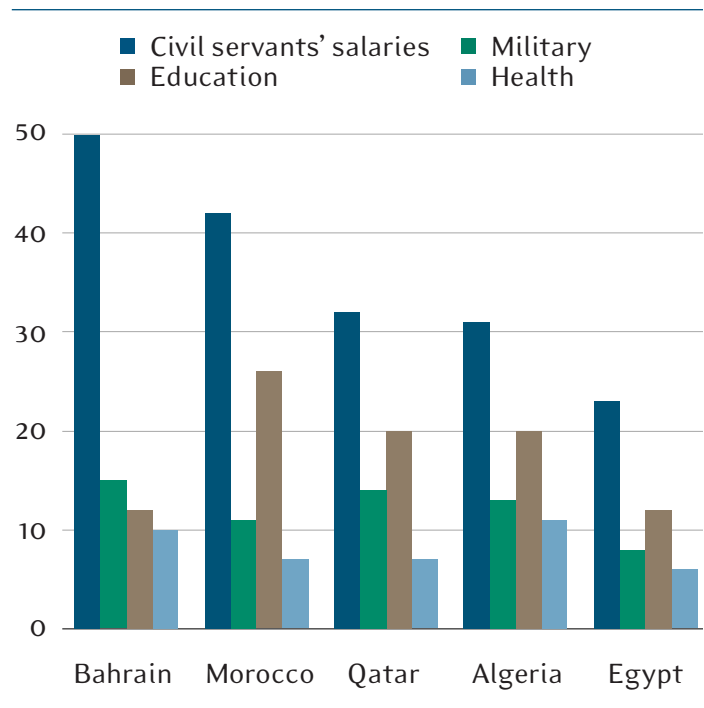
### RECEPTIVITY TO INPUT

There is no question that there is a tremendous appetite for public policy expertise in the Middle East, and there has been for a long time. In the post-colonial period, European- and U.S.-educated elites were essential to the operations of newly independent governments. With the departure of colonial officials, young Arab graduates of Western universities provided vital technical and managerial talent to governments starving for it. In the middle of the last century, Levantine technocrats helped build the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states up from Bedouin encampments.

Today, more than ever, governments across the region increasingly see the need to improve the quality of what they do. In earlier decades, guaranteed government employment was an incentive for young people to complete their educations, and their continued employment was both an important part of the social safety net and an important way to generate loyalty for the government. Many Middle Eastern governments continue to spend upwards of 20 percent of their yearly expenditures on civil servant salaries (see figure 1). However, as populations have grown and the tasks of governance have become more complicated, the government's role as employer of last resort—and, sometimes, of first resort—has come under strain. Increasingly, the organizations and personnel of the past are inadequate to meet current, let alone future, needs.

The growth of international financial institutions requires national capacity to interact with those organizations; the rise of international trade requires more people comfortable

**Figure 1. Shares of Government Expense in the Middle East (percent)**



Source: World Bank Development Indicators. Most data are from 2008, with occasional figures from 2005-2007 due to lack of more recent data.

with international business. Equally importantly, the international scrutiny applied to local conditions, populations' awareness of conditions outside their own countries, the diffusion of technology, and the high velocity of change affecting the Middle East all push toward governments with a high degree of competence and adaptability. The tasks of government itself have become more complex, requiring an ability to estimate future demand rather than merely meet that of the present.

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In response, governments have taken limited steps to reinvent themselves. One manifestation of this has been the way in which governments have become avid consumers of executive education programs for their employees, whether at the American University in Cairo, the Dubai School of Government, or other institutions around the region. Such training programs focus for the most part on teaching people

how to do things better rather than on telling them what to do. That is to say, they tend to feature coursework on strategic planning, performance management, human resources, and budgeting rather than evolving trends in telecommunications regulation, for example. Nevertheless, they clearly seek to introduce new processes into government operations, rethinking the role of employees and empowering them to take bolder steps within their competencies.

A second trend has been to turn to international consulting firms to provide advice. Several international consulting firms, from McKinsey to Booz & Company to the Monitor Group, have robust public sector practices in the Middle East. They tend to recruit a mix of Western-educated Arabs as well as expatriates who work in a wide variety of areas. In some cases, the firms provide technical information, such as the work outside consulting firms did to help build Plan Abu Dhabi 2030. A distinguished group of international advisers counseled the Abu Dhabi government on such issues as environmental considerations, land use, transportation, and open space for an Abu Dhabi of the future.<sup>2</sup> In other cases, consultants have become adjuncts of the government itself. When the Ministry of Health in Egypt was working with the World Bank to establish a health insurance project in Egypt in 2009, for example, it was McKinsey consultants rather than employees of the Ministry of Health who represented the ministry.<sup>3</sup> Although the consultants themselves were Egyptian nationals, the ministry leadership perceived these individuals to be of sufficient international exposure and caliber as to be unwilling to work directly for the Egyptian government.<sup>4</sup>

Governments have also demonstrated an interest in enhancing their technical expertise to help them deal with specialized international institutions (such as international financial institutions). In several cases, governments have adopted higher, non-civil-service pay scales to attract highly qualified nationals to these jobs, but they remain relatively isolated from the ministry as a whole and do not foresee long-term civil service employment as their career goal.

In Lebanon, for example, the government has established a unit within the Ministry of Finance to provide macro-economic policy advice and help develop and implement economic reform strategies. The ministry uses UN Development Program (UNDP) funds to hire approximately 40 Lebanese at non-civil-service pay scales (and without civil service benefits) to work on technical issues such as

customs reform, taxation, and debt strategies. Specialists in this program also provide legal assistance on issues related to tax conventions and agreements.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in Egypt, the Mubarak government brought approximately 100 young Egyptians into the Finance Ministry on a sort of “fast track” that included augmented salaries and extensive training, including training in teamwork skills. Because of a seven-year freeze in government hiring and the increasing unattractiveness of government employment in Egypt, the ministry was reportedly top-heavy with expertise and felt an urgent need to nurture its rising talent. Virtually all of the participants in the fast-track program in Egypt were graduates of the American University in Cairo, and many had been classmates there.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in many GCC countries, demographic challenges weigh heavily on leaders’ minds, and governments have sought to identify and cultivate all the young native talent they can get their hands on. In the United Arab Emirates, for instance, the government gives promising young Emiratis training and exposure by setting up pockets of true excellence in the government. One such institution is the Executive Affairs Authority (EAA), which is closely connected to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Muhammad bin Zayed. Comprising approximately 30 Emiratis and 20 expatriates, the EAA exists as an incubator for local talent, providing talented young Emiratis with training, international exposure, and a string of challenging assignments. Clearly seen as a select institution within the government because of its close association with the crown prince and the visible strategic efforts that he supports, the EAA is an elite group of government employees in an environment in which most people in the workforce expect a guarantee of government employment.

## OBSTACLES TO INPUT

Yet, despite the need for an increase in getting outside help to boost governmental capacity, the appetite for public policy advice has significant limits. On the whole, governments have shown more interest in getting advice on public administration than on public policy. That is to say, they have shown more receptivity to improving their tactics of policy implementation than to obtaining advice on the strategies of governance.

More importantly, many of the issues of most concern to international audiences—peace and security, counter-radi-

calization, religious tolerance, democratization, and human rights—are reserved as prerogatives of the rulers. It is not a coincidence that among GCC members, every minister of defense, foreign affairs, and interior is a member of the royal family, and many are siblings or other close relatives of the ruler.<sup>7</sup> The region’s republics maintain looser control over the ministers, but the ruler’s personal and unchallenged control over issues of peace and security is a constant.<sup>8</sup>

While political contexts differ from country to country, there is little tradition of openly weighing alternatives supported by different interest groups. Instead, lobbying is done in private, with an expectation of personal relief from a ruler rather than a holistic approach that serves the common interest. Even rarer is a desire to mobilize a coalition of interest groups to seek change, perhaps out of fear that mobilizing a coalition would send a signal that the public should be active rather than passive in seeking policy change.

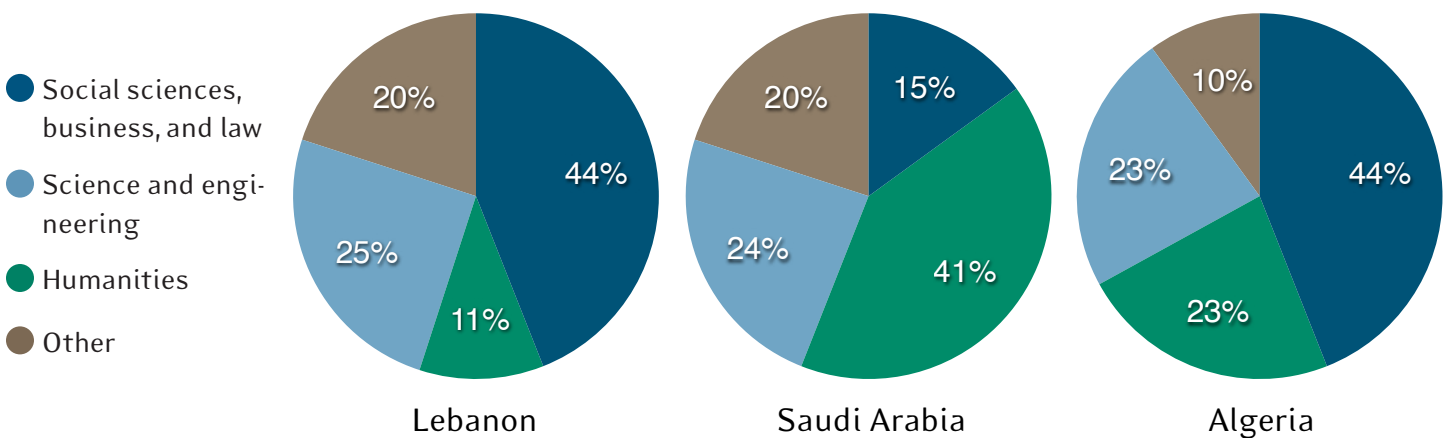
Rulers do not insist on making all the decisions themselves. Issues such as macroeconomic policy, mineral extraction, and arms control, for example, all require deeply specialized knowledge, and rulers are content to leave the details to experts as long as they can set the broad agenda. Education, infrastructure, and health care economics are examples of wholly domestic issues where outside advice is also accepted. Increasingly, outside advice is also needed. Throughout the Middle East, educational systems tend to emphasize rote memorization over critical thinking, even at the most specialized levels. Moreover, university graduates

often hold degrees in social sciences and humanities rather than in more marketable fields such as science and engineering (see figure 2).<sup>9</sup> Without the right balance of skills and expertise, graduates end up with few job prospects. In wealthier states, they can generally gain government employment, with the government hiring foreign technocrats to do what their domestic workforce cannot. In poorer countries, the prospects are even dimmer, and many graduates spend years between completing their education and starting their first job.

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There is also room for greater consultation when the rulers feel confident that consultation is private and they themselves can take credit for initiatives that may have originated elsewhere. There is no expectation, however, that the press should play a role in airing a range of alternative arguments, nor is there a press prepared to play that role any-

**Figure 2. Higher Education Graduates in Select Middle Eastern Countries, 2009**



Source: World Bank Development Indicators.

where in the region. Further, there is a sense in some of the GCC states especially that the most dangerous thing to do would be to contradict government policy, thereby inhibiting any kind of open debate on policy issues.<sup>10</sup>

## ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

The difficulty of targeting support for public policy environments in the Middle East is made more difficult by the scarcity of successful models for that type of support around the world. There are few international philanthropic efforts that seek to enhance the policymaking environment in a country or region and even fewer that have successfully built and sustained partnerships with policy communities abroad. That said, a few instances of sustained U.S. institutional partnerships exist and are worth mentioning for the lessons they convey.

Perhaps the quintessential example of early U.S. foundation support was the Rockefeller Foundation's support for the China Medical Board (CMB). Originally, the board established Peking Union Medical College, a state-of-the-art medical school and teaching hospital. When the Chinese Revolution forced the board to abandon the institution in 1950, the CMB became a health-oriented foundation operating throughout Asia. In its current incarnation, the CMB has regained its China focus but concentrates on a broader selection of institutions. It supports both medical and public health research as well as policy-related workshops and studies.<sup>11</sup> Operating off a \$200 million endowment, the CMB gives grants of \$7 million–\$10 million per year. Until recently, it used to fund a core of 13 medical institutions in China; it has now shifted to emphasize an application process intended to broaden the reach of the program into rural areas with greater unmet health care needs.<sup>12</sup>

While seemingly unrelated to the public policy efforts at the heart of this paper, the CMB holds many lessons for an effort to boost the public policy environment. It operates in a world of public policy and has established a positive relationship with health care professionals in the areas it serves. In addition, in its current incarnation, it bolsters rather than directs the efforts and business models of the institutions it supports. In this way, it seeks to enhance capacity development, supporting efforts to improve training curricula and textbooks, adapting existing models to local conditions, and convening stakeholders.

Another interesting institution, also funded principally through an endowment, is the Central European University (CEU). Chartered 20 years ago with the explicit mandate to help the countries of Central and Eastern Europe transition to the post-communist era, proceeds from the university's endowment cover 80 percent of operating expenses.<sup>13</sup> Although the university was founded with a regional focus, in recent years it has sought to become more global. Now, almost 20 percent of its students are non-European,<sup>14</sup> and the percentage is growing. Although the most popular course of study is business administration, which attracts almost a third of all students, the university has substantial enrollments in law, environmental studies and policy, political science, economics, and public policy.<sup>15</sup>

CEU is both an institute of higher education and an incubator for policy-relevant thinking. Although still under formation, a school of public and international affairs intends to enroll up to 200 students, which would rival the largest program at the university.<sup>16</sup> The university as a whole actively looks to recruit students who have a commitment to democratic reform efforts and who want to make a difference in their own countries.<sup>17</sup> In addition, a number of joint academic initiatives focus on policy-related areas, such as PUBPOLTRANS (which examines the economic issues involved in the transition to market economies), AQUA-TRAIN (which looks at soil and groundwater protection), and ELECDEM (which trains election researchers). Finally, because so much of the university's funding is derived from a gift from George Soros, there is a special connection to the Open Society Institute, Soros' nongovernmental organization.

CEU appears to benefit from the fact that the political environment in Central Europe is more permissive of foreign engagement than is the political environment in the Middle East. The region having recently thrown off the yoke of communism, there does not appear to be an undercurrent of resentment that the university's programs—and especially its commitment to engagement in the policy process—represent efforts to manipulate local politics for foreign ends. Such claims would likely resonate far more in a Middle Eastern context. At least part of CEU's acceptance comes from a broad sense that political change is both inevitable and desirable, a premise that is more contested in a Middle East context.

A well-established though less applicable model is the longstanding effort at the University of Nebraska-Omaha (UNO) to help support the people of Afghanistan. The Center for Afghanistan Studies (CAS) was the initial unit of UNO's international studies program, founded in 1973. Relying on external funding rather than on university support, the center has obtained more than \$80 million in grants over its lifetime. Principally oriented around strengthening the Afghan education sector, the center has produced textbooks and instructional kits and has helped train more than 8,500 educators, 80 percent of whom are female.<sup>18</sup>

The center has managed to brave shifting politics in Afghanistan over the last four decades in part because of its uncontroversial mission, but also because it seeks to be wholly Afghan and wholly neutral. With contacts in 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, it has had no full-time expatriate staff in Afghanistan for the last seven years.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the center has never been able to establish a business model that has made its activities sustainable in the Afghan context, nor has it been able to expand its purview much beyond education work. In addition, the center has relied largely on U.S. government funding and thus must be responsive to the U.S. funding environment rather than Afghans' needs. The center is a resource for Afghans seeking to come to the United States and a resource for those in the international community in Afghanistan, but it has largely responded to its environment rather than sought to shape it.

## WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Given what we know about conditions in the Middle East, and what we know about efforts around the world to help shape the public policy environment, several opportunities suggest themselves.

### 1. Enhance receptivity to public policy discussions.

As suggested above, Middle Eastern governments are willing to take outside advice, but they are reluctant to take it in public and they are loath to have their primacy challenged. Forgoing some of the hot-button issues in order to invest in building receptivity among government audiences is a good short-term step. As a senior official in the United Arab Emirates observed, there is discomfort with the idea of public lobbying, and it is difficult for people to oppose the government. Creating a multitude of views around a less controversial topic can help socialize government of-

ficials to the idea that public comment and public engagement need not be threatening.

In addition, fostering a larger number of discussions that bring together government officials, academics, and outside experts for focused discussions on shared concerns can help create the informal ties that facilitate future interaction. Further, it can reinforce to officials who are unused to outside input the value of such input, and it can help experts understand the nature of the questions that government officials are considering so as to better tailor their own work for those needs.

**To date, much of the Western-supported dialogue with public policy institutions has been intended to facilitate dialogue between the West and the target states on issues of concern to the West. While this serves the interests of Western participants, it limits the impact and influence of target state participants in their own systems.**

Yet, to have maximum impact, discussions should center on issues of importance to the countries themselves. To date, much of the Western-supported dialogue with public policy institutions has been intended to facilitate dialogue between the West and the target states on issues of concern to the West. While this serves the interests of Western participants, it limits the impact and influence of target state participants in their own systems. Creating greater space for Arab participants to influence their own countries' domestic debates is important. At least initially, the requisite space is probably best created by having discussions about issues that remain policy relevant but are less sensitive to the leaderships in their countries. Education standards, while politically sensitive in some regards, are of sufficiently broad interest to play such a role, as is economics. Trying to force discussions about Arab-Israeli normalization, regional security architectures, and political participation are likely to evoke the kind of resistance that closes up space for dialogue. Even in Lebanon, which has a relatively open political system, one observer in the NGO community commented that "having an impact would lead to

conflict,”<sup>20</sup> and to risk-averse behaviors among think tanks engaged in public policy work. Having impact on less inflammatory issues would help create receptivity to broader engagement.

Training more journalists to report on public policy discussions is also important. This entails both enhancing journalists’ ability to capture all sides of a debate and creating space in newspapers for them to report on such a debate. At this point, the think tank discussions are relatively rarified. A senior journalist in Cairo suggested that think tanks in Egypt have an audience only among a “core elite” of a few thousand, rather than a broader “attentive public” of 2–3 million.<sup>21</sup> Having journalists better understand how to

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report on think tank work, and having think tanks work on issues that are of broader significance, can help address this divide.

The problem of scant press coverage of public policy issues is not merely a consequence of a lack of public policy writings on which to report. In part, it is a consequence of a press environment that tends to veer between sensationalism and the rewriting of press releases, and that does not reward careful scrutiny or long-form reporting. Journalists often lack the training for investigative reporting, and editors see scant reward in developing such stories. In addition, the dramatic shift toward television, and the rise of regional outlets over local ones, privileges simple and graphic stories that appeal to international audiences rather than stories that explore the tasks of governance. Creating a market for public policy discussion will necessarily mean working to expand the outlets in which such discussion can occur, and that will require more than working with government officials to allow such outlets to publish. In addition, it will require working with reporters and editors to further strengthen their capacity to do public policy reporting and to build a commitment to such reporting in the future.

The rise of an informal journalistic culture through blogs and websites creates additional opportunities to expand policy discussions to a public audience. As online jour-

nalism is unconstrained by both space and financial interests, there are tremendous opportunities to develop it as a supplement to traditional journalism on policy-related topics. The problems of online journalism are problems of accountability and audience. That is to say, anyone can say anything online, but no one necessarily reads it. Targeted external support can help build the skills of online content creators and can help explore ways to market those ideas to wider audiences in country.

### 2. Create a sustainable business model.

The public policy universe in the Middle East does not have a healthy business model because each institution tends to rely on a single donor. Most rely on the governments themselves, making it more difficult to gain the necessary space to take a fresh look at policies and sometimes saddling these institutions with the same government personnel practices that make it difficult to accomplish things in government. A few rely on foreign donors, either from the West (as the Carnegie Endowment’s Beirut office) or from neighboring countries (such as the Gulf Research Center, which until recently was based in Dubai and is funded principally by its chairman, a Saudi). A few, such as Beirut’s Issam Fares Institute, enjoy domestic funding, but as is the case with any organization with a single principal donor, sustaining that relationship without becoming captured by it, and sustaining it beyond the donor’s interest in the topic, can be difficult (see table 1).<sup>22</sup>

The environment would be further strengthened if each organization had multiple sources of funding to give it independence from any one funding source. Government funding is helpful in some measure because it helps ensure that government officials have a stake in the results, but wholly governmental funding tends to stifle creativity. Similarly, international support should not be the principal source of funding for any organization, not least because sustaining foreign donors distracts the organization from developing ties in its own country.

A sustainable funding model applies not just to the organization as a whole, but also to activities within the organization. Research funding is an important tool with which to incentivize researchers and reward promising avenues of research. Researchers should feel some pressure to be productive and some pressure to produce work that finds a receptive audience. Academics are not always attuned to the

**Table 1. Major Middle Eastern Think Tanks and their Funding Sources**

Faisal Center (Saudi Arabia)	Government sponsored
Center for Strategic Studies (Jordan)	Government sponsored
Al-Ahram Center (Egypt)	Government sponsored
Emirates Center for Strategic Studies (UAE)	Government sponsored
Issam Fares Institute (Lebanon)	Principal donor
Gulf Research Center (UAE)*	Principal donor
Egypt’s International Economic Forum	Principal donor
Carnegie Middle East Center (Lebanon)	Endowment
Institute for National Strategic Studies (Israel)	Endowment, with government matching; outside contributions
Economic Research Forum (Egypt)	Foundations, international and non-governmental organizations

\* Is in the process of relocating to Geneva, Switzerland; Cambridge, UK; and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.<sup>23</sup>

demand for their work, and public policy work in particular needs to be shaped with an audience and a policy outcome in mind. One way to incentivize researchers would be to have an award system whereby a combination of Arab and Western personalities would evaluate public policy research for its intellectual rigor and policy effectiveness. Such an award could highlight areas of particular accomplishment and model effective policy advocacy in the broader policy community.

Long-term institutional mentoring would contribute to the sustainability of the institution as well as the partnership. In such an environment, administrators could talk about such issues as staff recruitment and development, fundraising, policy advocacy and outreach, and a host of other concerns. Such an arrangement would also likely lead to institutional partnerships, but as there are few institutions in Western countries that have a wholly Middle Eastern focus, the par-

ticipants from the Western side would likely be generalists with a focus on institution building rather than experts with a stake in developing policy prescriptions for the target countries.

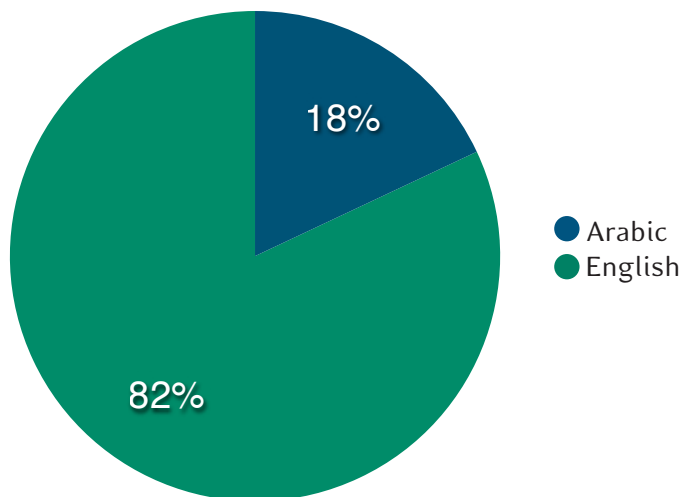
This institutional mentorship could extend to the legal domain. In many places in the Middle East, the concept of a nonprofit organization does not exist. In some countries, there are not even political parties. While much of the work that policy institutes would do is of principal interest to a single country, creating a solid legal framework for independent policy discussions is important in every country, and having a model law to establish such institutions is an important step.

**3. Create a supply of policy entrepreneurs who can enrich and enliven the policy debate.**

Such entrepreneurs need to think of themselves as neither academics nor employees, but rather as innovators, experts, cheerleaders, and advocates. In point of fact, such skills are not in wide supply in any society, much less in societies without a strong public policy tradition. Nurturing the development of such talents requires a series of investments.

Academic training is a requirement for accomplishment in this field, and there should be some support for academic work. Ideally, the level of academic accomplishment would vary within the institution. While not all researchers should have PhDs, a PhD is a marker of a scholar’s ability to work independently. At the same time, the PhD is sometimes a marker of individuals who are so self-directed that they are unaccustomed to working to sustain an audience. Even public policy degrees can raise eyebrows. One thought leader in the UAE government expressed a strong preference for MBAs over MPPs;<sup>24</sup> a young Lebanese involved in policy research suggested that academics always appear to be “in discussion mode” and have a problem moving from evaluation to implementation. In addition, consultants’ work is premised on efficiency of delivery to the client, whereas academic products tend to prioritize the intellectual rigor and disciplinary integrity of the author.<sup>25</sup> The public policy field needs to develop experts who understand and can operate in the academic universe, but who can also translate it for policymakers who often want to get right to the answers and who rarely want to read more than a page of text. Think tanks can emerge as important institutions that reward work that draws on academic inquiry but is more accessible than standard academic work.

**Figure 3. Gulf Research Center Original Reports, 2009–present\***



\*Defined as one-time, topic-specific pieces. Excludes periodicals like monthly newsletters.

Source: GRC website.

Supporting efforts to strengthen English language skills is also critical to increasing accessibility to the political sphere. Although English is not a universal language, it is a lingua franca in most policy discussions in the Arab world. In part, the use of English reflects the internationalization of the debate on issues such as economics and social policy. Much of the global research is published in English, and results are generally shared in English. For example, 82 percent of reports published by the Gulf Research Center since 2009 have been in English (see figure 3).<sup>26</sup>

Further, international donors sometimes fall into the trap of seeing English language fluency as a proxy for intellectual ability, drawing close to some who think sloppily and excluding many with important ideas that they have difficulty expressing in English. Put another way, a lack of English language fluency acts as an entry barrier for many aspiring policy actors, relegating them to routine bureaucratic exercises and preventing them from being entrusted with truly creative work. While the goal of an effort to invigorate the public policy universe should be neither to translate all relevant work into Arabic nor to morph merely into a language education program, at least some effort needs to be put into

the problem of language and into identifying especially promising students for whom greater English proficiency would make a significant difference.

There should also be some investment in the cross-fertilization between the government and the public policy community. It is hard for someone who has never worked in government to understand what might affect government, and it is hard for people inside government to always see the ways in which outside views can enrich their own work. In Lebanon, there is considerable enthusiasm in the NGO community around the fact that the former minister of the interior, Ziad Baroud, came out of the NGO sector, where he worked on election law. The minister's background gave him both relationships to and sympathy for the non-governmental sector, which created openings for a broader policy discussion. Exchange programs are one way to encourage cross-fertilization. The International Affairs Fellowship of the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States, which encompasses about 12 participants per year, takes highly qualified young people principally from academic backgrounds and puts them in government, and it takes their counterparts in government and places them in academic and think tank settings. The experience creates greater receptivity to outside input.

Fellowships are another option. Giving fellowships for young and mid-career professionals to work in Western think tanks would expose them to both the policy process and the policy advocacy world. The important thing here would be to give people this opportunity when they have

### **Rewarding innovation and entrepreneurship in the policy realm is especially important where traditions of such activities do not exist.**

had sufficient training and experience to produce a policy-relevant piece of scholarship without significant external support. Merely doing research for a senior scholar's report is much less rewarding, and ultimately less instructive, than the process of conceptualizing and executing a project of one's own.

#### **4. Reward success.**

Rewarding innovation and entrepreneurship in the policy realm is especially important where traditions of such ac-

tivities do not exist. This is difficult to do, because external actors may be poor judges of the utility of policy-related work, having a full appreciation of neither the problem to be solved nor the policy environment in which the work needs to be done. At the same time, superb work may not find a ready audience because of extraneous factors in the government whose policies the advocates seek to adjust. No perfect solution exists, but establishing a group composed of senior government officials from the region, a few international experts of especially high standing, and peers from the policy research community would be a good start. This group could evaluate policy-related work from throughout the Arab world and honor projects that have had significant impact as well as those that hold out great promise. Such a panel could also help bridge the gap between the policy research community and the aspects of the consulting community, highlighting the extent to which both groups are seeking to solve policy-related problems, albeit from different angles.

## CONCLUSION

As the Arab Spring demonstrated, young people sense both an opportunity and an urgency to become involved in the public policy problems their governments face, and governments face a need to devise better solutions than they have been able to up to now.

U.S. institutions and government agencies have a unique opportunity to capitalize on these gains and begin investing in a more robust public policy environment in the Middle East. These initiatives' most valuable return will not occur until years in the future. Instant experts cannot provide solutions any more than today's Arab governments can immediately provide solutions to the challenges that have bedeviled them for decades. Investing now, however, holds out the prospect for a more robust policy environment in the future and a more democratic, participatory, and peaceful Middle East.

The Arab activists and protesters who have garnered so much attention have demonstrated the difficulty of shifting from mobilization to participation in government. Similarly, Arab governments have demonstrated the difficulty they have adjusting to more open ways of thinking. The processes described here will help both groups to make that transition, and it is very much in the interests of the citizens of the United States that they make it. ■

## NOTES

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