

# PROFILE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ARAB THINK TANKS<sup>1</sup>

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*Arab regional think tanks are often confronted with similar issues because of their common history, languages, and races. This paper takes the Gulf countries, the Sham region, and the North African countries (Egypt and the Maghreb) as examples to analyze the characteristics of Arab regional think tanks. The Gulf think tanks enjoy a good economic environment and rich cultural background. They give priority to building bridges between knowledge and power, playing active roles in promoting regional countries' foreign policy, in state economy, in mass media, and in education. The Sham think tanks are mostly independent institutions; they make full exchanges on the key points of the reform and unify their thoughts to optimize government decision-making processes using conferences and meetings. In North African countries, Egyptian think tanks have a high degree of internationalization, having close contacts with think tanks and research institutions in other countries. The Maghreb think tanks are always concerned with the regional situation and focus on studying it. In short, the Arab think tanks serve their governments by providing intellectual support and political suggestions for the development of their countries.*

In the dynamic global structure, think tanks play an important role in global collaboration: narrowing the gap between knowledge and policymaking. Think tanks, which promote national soft power and international discourse power, are an important part of national governance. In recent years, the global think tank industry has grown in leaps. After studying the quantity, geographical distribution, and volume of these think tanks, scholars have reviewed the potential reasons:

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1 This article is financed by the National Social Science Fund of China (15BGJ057), the Shanghai International Studies University Research Team "Regional Cooperation between East Asia and Middle East in the New Era," and China's Ministry of Education Program (16JJDGW013).

- The increase in statehood formation during the period of decolonization and the subsequent increase in demand for policy advising;
- The regime changes during the post-authoritarian period, which often start from scratch;
- The increase in the number of bilateral and multilateral donors who use these think tanks to encourage better governance measures in recipient countries;
- The demand for “available knowledge” due to technological advance and social change in order to respond to new policy challenges;
- The advances in communication technologies that allow people to rapidly generate and disseminate knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

These reasons coincide with the situation in Arab countries. In the Arab world, regional think tanks are especially prominent. Because of the shared history, language, and race, they collaborate on cross-border policymaking issues.<sup>3</sup> These networks help facilitate transnational values in policy analysis as well as professional skills. Furthermore, such networks have become a type of governance model, since they promote public-private partnership.<sup>4</sup> These networks make full use of international politics, regional economics, and regional administration to advance and develop themselves, thus creating the framework of think tanks in the Gulf countries, the Sham region, and the North African countries. This essay outlines the framework of think tanks in the Arab world by analyzing the main characteristics of the three main regional think tanks, with special emphasis on the most prominent think tank in each country.

### Think Tanks in the Gulf Countries

During the Middle East’s post-decolonization period, Arab think tanks built a

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2 Alan J. Day, “Think Tanks in Western Europe,” in *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, eds. James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 112.

3 Diana Stone, “Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think-Tanks? Three Myths Regarding Policy Analysis Institutes,” *Public Administration* 85, no. 2 (2007): 266.

4 Stone, “Recycling Bins, Garbage Cans or Think-Tanks,” 266.

new communication channel with the public, keeping them informed about the new measures in policy, governance, economics, and social revolution and putting forward pertinent solutions. Think tanks in the Gulf region, in particular, have grown quickly and have had far-reaching impacts in the Arab world.

The think tanks of the eight Gulf countries can be categorized into two types. One type has developed economic power—especially those in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar—in which think tanks have a royal connection through support from the king or the emir. Therefore, they have made great progress, are impactful, and enjoy a good reputation in the region.<sup>5</sup> The other type values public opinion and academia, like those in Iraq, which emphasize research within college and university environments. Furthermore, some are established by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as those in Yemen, and combine public surveys and fundamental research.

**Table 1** Think Tanks in Gulf Countries

Country	Characteristics	Main Think Tank
Saudi Arabia	Well-funded; focused on Islamic studies and regional development.	Gulf Research Center
United Arab Emirates	Well-funded; has royal support.	The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research
Qatar	Strong economic support; government emphasizes the construction of think tanks.	Al Jazeera Centre for Studies
Kingdom of Bahrain	With a "revolving door" mechanism to ensure exchange between the royal family and academia.	Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research; Derasat
Kuwait	Focused on the study of regional economic development and the country's civilization and history.	Arab Planning Institute
Sultanate of Oman	Think tank construction only recently started; quality and quantity are relatively underdeveloped.	Tawasul

5 Yi Li, "Arab Think Tanks: Development Trends and Characteristics," *West Asia and Africa* 4 (2016): 129–45.

Iraq	Rich cultural background; think tank construction started early through many colleges and universities.	Al Furat Center for Development and Strategic Studies
Yemen	Mostly non-governmental organizations relying on public opinion surveys to carry out research.	Yemen Polling Center

### *Saudi Arabia*

The prominence of Saudi Arabian think tanks relies on the country's connections to Islamic holy sites and developed economic status. Because two of the three Islamic holy lands are in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabian think tanks can make distinct contributions to Islamic studies and Arab historical research. Due to its strong economic development, these think tanks possess a certain level of influence in the Middle East as well as across the globe. Since the country's economic status stems from oil exports, Saudi Arabian think tanks also focus on sustainable development practices to move beyond an oil-based economy.<sup>6</sup> Although they are well-funded, they need to improve upon gaining trust and appreciation in Saudi Arabian society.<sup>7</sup>

Independently founded in 2000, the Gulf Research Center is one of the world's top think tanks in the field of foreign policy and international affairs, ranking eighth in the Middle East and North Africa region.<sup>8</sup> The Gulf Research Center principally engages in research, advocacy, and translation work, in addition to providing education, training, and consultation services.<sup>9</sup> Its research covers a wide variety of topics, such as economic development, energy security, politics, international relations, national defense and security issues, environment, and technology.<sup>10</sup> Setting up branches in

6 "Gulf Energy Program," Gulf Research Center, accessed April 29, 2017, [http://www.grc.net/index.php?CAT\\_ID=11&set\\_lang=en&frm\\_module=&sec=Research+Programs&sec\\_type=h&Cat\\_Title=Gulf+Energy+Program&main\\_menu=82&override=Gulf+Energy+Program](http://www.grc.net/index.php?CAT_ID=11&set_lang=en&frm_module=&sec=Research+Programs&sec_type=h&Cat_Title=Gulf+Energy+Program&main_menu=82&override=Gulf+Energy+Program).

7 Samar Fatany, "We Need Independent Arab Think Tanks to Address our Challenges," *Saudi Gazette*, February 16, 2016, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/opinion/we-need-independent-arab-think-tanks-to-address-our-challenges/>.

8 Guang Pan, "Evolution of Qatar's Foreign Policy and the Development of China-Qatar Relations," *Arab World Studies* 2 (2015), 14–25.

9 "GCC Political Systems," Gulf Research Center, accessed April 11, 2017, [http://www.grc.net/index.php?sec=Research+Programs+Categories&sec\\_type=h&sub\\_opt=82&override=](http://www.grc.net/index.php?sec=Research+Programs+Categories&sec_type=h&sub_opt=82&override=).

10 Ibid.

Geneva and Cambridge, the Center aims to promote scholarly exchange and to disseminate information on the Gulf region.<sup>11</sup> With its high level of public participation and extensive external connection, the Center has provided intellectual support for the sustainable development and diplomatic decision making of Gulf countries through conferences and workshops.<sup>12</sup> As one of the more successful think tanks in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Research Center can be a model for improving and creating think tanks in the region.

### *United Arab Emirates*

Owing to their financial power and royal support, UAE think tanks stand out in the competitive Arab world. These think tanks focus primarily on peace and security issues in the Middle East and continuously expand their cooperation and research fields. They disseminate Arab scholars' research to the whole region through mass media, stimulating public discourse.

Established in 1994 as a semi-governmental organization and affiliated with the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs,<sup>13</sup> the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research covers research topics such as politics, strategy, foreign relationships, and security issues and provides suggestions to the Ministry.<sup>14</sup> It not only tackles the pressing challenges in the Arab region through a strategic and rational attitude but also fosters the research of political, social, and economic issues primarily in the UAE and Gulf region.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the Center fosters mutual understanding in the Gulf region to boost the political and economic strength of these countries. Its publication strategy focuses on producing original research as well as translation of materials into Arabic and English to "enrich Arabic libraries" and to "promote cultural interaction across the world."<sup>16</sup>

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11 "About GRC - Locations and Structures," Gulf Research Center, accessed April 11, 2017, [http://www.grc.net/index.php?sec\\_code=locationsstructure](http://www.grc.net/index.php?sec_code=locationsstructure).

12 Ibid.

13 "About ECSSR - Establishment," The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, accessed April 11, 2017, [http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr;ECSSR\\_COOKIE=9RS5ZGJcmB2GgQFtmKYJGvCR9bkWZxgnpZwvQ6HvX7340hG59jTl53687123!126368098?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=StaticContent&lang=en&\\_nfls=false](http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr;ECSSR_COOKIE=9RS5ZGJcmB2GgQFtmKYJGvCR9bkWZxgnpZwvQ6HvX7340hG59jTl53687123!126368098?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=StaticContent&lang=en&_nfls=false).

14 "About ECSSR - Areas of Interest," The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, accessed April 11, 2017, [http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=ECSSRPortal\\_portal\\_book\\_179&lang=en&\\_nfls=false](http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=ECSSRPortal_portal_book_179&lang=en&_nfls=false).

15 Ibid.

16 "Publications - Overview," The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, accessed April 29, 2017, [http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=PublicationsPage&\\_event=viewIntro&lang=en&\\_nfls=false](http://www.ecssr.com/ECSSR/appmanager/portal/ecssr?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=PublicationsPage&_event=viewIntro&lang=en&_nfls=false).

## *Qatar*

Qatar, ruled by the Al Thani family, enjoys the highest per capita GDP in the Middle East. Because of the country's political stability and economic strength, Qatari think tanks have developed rapidly in recent years in large part due to their durable relationship with the government. Because of this relationship, however, these think tanks have limited opportunities for critical assessment of the Qatari government itself.

Founded in 2006, the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies is an extension of the peninsula's mass media outlet and ranks fifth in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>17</sup> Its major focus areas include: Arab politics, security and development strategies of neighboring countries, emerging country studies, political thought, and social problems. As such, the Centre recruits various scholars and professionals from the Middle East to carry out research on regional and global affairs. Since its establishment, the Al Jazeera Centre has made efforts to maximize Arab social, political, and cultural structures and to explore solutions to the region's complex challenges. Cooperating with other Middle East research institutes, the Centre promotes dialogues to narrow the gap between different religious groups.<sup>18</sup> Based on its academic and strategic research approach, the Centre helps to broaden the perspectives on culture and media by holding various academic conferences and strategic forums and encouraging the publication of academic journals. In the past few years, the Centre has attracted scholars from countries all over the Middle East.

## *Bahrain*

Despite its small size, Bahrain has several think tanks because of the constant interaction between the royals and academia. The "revolving door" mechanism facilitates the transfer of personnel between these two arenas, but it also ensures royals have the final say in major decisions. Founded in 1981, the Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research (BCSR) is a government institution that focused on critical issues that affect the growth

17 James G. McGann, "2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report," *TTCSP Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports* 12 (2017): 69.

18 "Publication Archives," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/publications/archive/>.

and development of Bahrain.<sup>19</sup> At its establishment, the Centre's goal was to become a first tier think tank in Bahrain.<sup>20</sup> Its mission was to serve Bahrain's social work by using application research, to provide consultant service to contract clients, and to supply political insight to Gulf country leaders. The Centre strived to build a research team that focused on developing national, regional, and even cross-boundary relations to actively seek solutions to Bahrain's social obstacles through assessment and analysis of public opinion and policy making on racial issues.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, the board of the Centre, including its chief executive director and chief secretary, was composed of nine members from the main departments of Bahraini government, fully embodying its political background. However, the think tank was dissolved in 2010 by royal decree without any explanation.<sup>22</sup> Prior to its closure, the government established a new think tank, Centre for Strategic, International, and Energy Studies (Derasat).<sup>23</sup> Focused on the dynamic interests of Bahrain, Derasat collaborates with local organizations as well as foreign think tanks.<sup>24</sup> It publishes its own research in both Arabic and English as well as gathers other materials in an online database.<sup>25</sup> Thus, although BCSR was shutdown, the Bahraini government did not reverse its relationships with think tanks and continues to promote them.

### *Kuwait*

Think tanks in Kuwait mainly focus on regional economic development. Their primary goals are to provide statistics and intellectual support on Kuwaiti development strategy and to foster communications among Gulf countries on key issues.<sup>26</sup> As an economic think tank, the Arab Planning Institute, composed of representatives from sixteen Arab countries, sets its main goals as follows: offering essential knowledge, technology, and

19 "Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research," Devex, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.devex.com/organizations/bahrain-centre-for-studies-research-bcsr-36752>.

20 "Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research," Eldis, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.eldis.org/go/home&id=4442&type=Organisation>

21 Ibid.

22 "Bahrain Research Centre Staff Fear for Jobs," *Trade Arabia*, June 24, 2010, [https://www.tradearabia.com/index.php?/news/edu\\_181972.html](https://www.tradearabia.com/index.php?/news/edu_181972.html).

23 Ibid.

24 "About Us," Derasat, accessed May 6, 2016, <http://www.derasat.org.bh/about-us/>.

25 "Publications," Derasat, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.derasat.org.bh/publications-page/>.

26 Fei Tong, "Economic Development Strategy of the State of Kuwait and 'the Belt and Road' Initiative," *Arab World Studies* 6 (2015): 31–43.

experiences to Arab countries to maintain the region's stable development; simplifying the data matching process for political leaders and researchers; advancing economic management; cultivating talents specializing in regional economic and social development; setting up a platform for experts to discuss major economic and social issues; publishing journals on Arab economic and social development; and constructing relevant data pools.<sup>27</sup> The Institute enjoys a good reputation in the Arab world because it links its interest with Arab common culture, history, and global issues, maintains good relationships with famous historians and political analysts in Kuwait, and organizes regular panels and debates related to regional issues.<sup>28</sup>

### *Oman*

Compared to other Gulf countries, the think tanks in the Sultanate of Oman are relatively less developed due to their short history. Only founded in 2008, Tawasul is an independent and private think tank that focuses on promoting the formation and development of civil society in Oman.<sup>29</sup> The institute provides capacity building and leadership training for civil society organizations as well as guides the private sector in social responsibility and sustainable practices. It relies on its policy research papers, media outreach, seminars, and conferences to bring attention to Oman's civil society issues. Even the think tank's name conveys the message of the organization, with "Tawasul" meaning communication in Arabic and its acronym standing for (t)ransparency, (a)cceptance, (w)illingness, (a)ssertiveness, (s)ociety-based, (u)niversality, and (l)eadership. Although Oman lags in its think tank development, Tawasul's expansion, including its partnerships with twenty-one domestic units and fourteen international units, suggests a possible trend for advancement.

### *Iraq*

As an ancient cultural capital rich in academic heritage, Baghdad has benefited from early construction of think tanks. A majority of the Iraqi think

27 "API Objectives," Arab Planning Institute, accessed April 11, 2017, [http://www.arab-api.org/page-withmenuoption.aspx?page\\_id=13&option\\_id=2](http://www.arab-api.org/page-withmenuoption.aspx?page_id=13&option_id=2).

28 Ibid.

29 "What is Tawasul," Tawasul, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://tawasul.co.om/abtus.html>.



tanks have an establishment background at colleges or universities. For example, the Al Furat Center for Development and Strategic Studies, a noted university think tank, was founded with the help of the Iraqi NGO Cabinet Office.<sup>30</sup> The Center's research focuses on Iraqi political, economic, social, and legal aspects. It provides basic information and data, optimizes scientific research and development, establishes effective linkage mechanisms within and outside Iraq's academic institutions, develops training programs, and supports science and technology research and development projects.<sup>31</sup> While Iraqi think tanks research on general Middle East issues as well, they primarily focus on Iraqi political and economic stability, nation-building, and good governance. Their academic background helps them in forming relationships with international academic institutions, think tanks, and NGOs.<sup>32</sup>

### *Yemen*

Because of its slow economic and social development, Yemen suffers from a limited number of advanced think tanks. Due to inadequate government funding, Yemeni think tanks are often established by independent NGOs, several of which rely on opinion polls as the basis of their research. Yemeni think tanks focus their research on domestic economic, political, and civil rights issues. Their purpose is to serve the comprehensive development of Yemen's society, to boost economic growth, and to strengthen exchange and cooperation among different cultures.

Founded in 2004 as the first polling center in Yemen, the Yemen Polling Center has a two-pronged approach of consultancy and advocacy.<sup>33</sup> The Center assists in the research process for national and international institutions, NGOs, enterprises, public offices, academic institutions, and expert associations by providing opinion surveys, in-depth interviews, panel discussions, program evaluations, and media studies.<sup>34</sup> In addition to playing a leading role in social science research and data collection in Yemen, its

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30 "Information about the Al Furat Center," Al Furat Center for Development and Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.fcdrs.com/about.html>.

31 Ibid.

32 "Overview," Middle East Research Institute, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.meri-k.org/about-us/overview/>.

33 "About YPC," Yemen Polling Center, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.yemenpolling.org/consultancy/about1>.

34 Ibid.

advocacy wing pushes for “good governance reforms” and for the “creation of communication channels between citizens and state institutions.”<sup>35</sup>

### *Analysis*

Most Gulf countries’ think tanks have close relations with the government, are supported by national foundations or royal family members, and enjoy a well-known reputation in the Arab world and further abroad. With the exception of Yemen and Oman, these tanks have operated fairly well and continue to develop rapidly due to the region’s economic strength. Attaching great importance to policy research, they attempt to provide diplomatic strategies and policy proposals to their respective governments and for regional coalition building. Furthermore, they have played an active role in promoting the foreign policy, national economy, mass media, and education of the Gulf countries. Because of their integrated relationship with governments, however, Gulf think tanks will need to strengthen their position as a reliable source of independent and diverse thinking.

### **Think Tanks in the Sham Region**

The Sham region consists of four countries that can be separated into two categories: politically stable states and turbulent states. Politically stable countries, such as Jordan, enjoy a rich cultural background and conduct far-reaching research. They often established their think tanks earlier and focus on the study of contemporary Arab ideology, economic development, national security, and other issues. On the other hand, think tanks in turbulent states are more focused on security and political issues. For example, the think tanks in Palestine are mainly concerned about the settlement of the Palestinian question, as well as the development trends of regional peace. Some of the leaders of Syrian think tanks are important figures in the foreign opposition and focus their research on domestic political, economic, social, and security issues.

**Table 2** List of Think Tanks in the Sham Region

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35 “Vision and Mission,” Yemen Polling Center, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/about2>.

Country	Characteristics	Main Think Tank
Jordan	Focused on the dissemination of contemporary Arab thought.	Arab Thought Forum
Lebanon	Has several Arab branches of American think tanks; focused on studying the entire region.	Centre for Arab Unity Studies
Syria	Concerned about national strategies of politics, economy, and culture as well as the demands for human rights and justice.	Study Center of Syrian Strategies and Policies
Palestine	Concerned about Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with the main task of promoting peace in the Middle East.	Study Center of Palestinian International Affairs

*Jordan*

Compared with other countries in the Sham region, Jordan is relatively stable politically and economically—in which citizens are well-educated and wealthier and intellectuals and elites enjoy higher social status. Jordan began establishing think tanks early. Their major purposes are to disseminate contemporary Arab thought, promote economic development, maintain national security, and achieve personal freedom and social progress.

Founded in 1981, the Arab Thought Forum ranks thirty-first among the best think tanks in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>36</sup> His Royal Highness Prince of Jordan personally presided over the establishment of the Forum, placing more concern about the future of Arab countries. The Forum created a platform for presenting alternative political options for the government and provided analytical support for related decision-making.<sup>37</sup> The specific objectives of the Forum include: promoting the formation and development of Arab thoughts and disseminating Arab achievements; tackling domestic issues to promote the balance and connection between traditional and modern Arabian nationalism; promoting the development of Arab thought in a scientific way; striving to restructure the world order in order to realize international justice and peace; building a bridge between ideological leaders and decision makers to realize the cooperation among Arab countries; establishing a social security system; and improving public

36 McGann, “2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report,” 69.

37 “About the Forum,” Arab Thought Forum, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.atf.org.jo/?q=en/node/1409>.

participation in policy development.<sup>38</sup>

### *Lebanon*

Benefitting from its political stability, Lebanese think tanks often go beyond domestic issues and do more research on the entire Arab world. In addition to its independently established think tanks, Lebanon retains local branches of American think tanks. Founded in 1976 as an independent think tank, the Centre for Arab Unity Studies ranks twenty-seventh among think tanks in the Middle East and North Africa region.<sup>39</sup> Initially established as an official association for the goal of “Arab unity,” the Centre publishes books and journals on human science, social science, and economics, as well as other references about Arab unity and future strategies.<sup>40</sup> With the main purpose of Arab society and unification research, the Centre avoids discussion on current political issues in the Arab world and refuses to adopt any direct political position.<sup>41</sup> Its primary activities include: collecting literature, publications, writings, manuscripts, and printed copies related to Arab unification and social development; conducting academic research and publishing relevant books; and hosting academic activities under the provisions prescribed by the declaration of the Centre.<sup>42</sup> As a diverse organization, the Centre’s members come from various areas all over the Arab world and enjoy permanent tenure.

### *Syria*

Since Syria fell into a civil war in 2011, the domestic security situation has undergone considerable changes. Syrian think tanks have their own unique characteristics in which some think tank leaders are important figures within the foreign opposition. In order to avoid persecution, their headquarters are often located abroad. Besides focusing on national politics, economic

38 “Forum Objectives,” Arab Thought Forum, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.atf.org.jo/?q=en/node/1410>.

39 McGann, “2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report,” 69.

40 “Background,” Centre for Arab Unity Studies, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://caus.org.lb/Home/contents1.php?id=25>.

41 “Guiding Principles,” Centre for Arab Unity Studies, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://caus.org.lb/Home/contents1.php?id=26>.

42 Ibid.

development, social development, and other strategic issues, these think tanks strongly demand for human rights and justice. For example, the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies was an independent organization established in Washington, D.C., in 2008.<sup>43</sup> The Center guides academic and political activists to reflect on Syrian political, economic, and social strategies and conduct relevant theoretical, applied, and sociological research through academic research, meetings, publications, and sponsorship support.<sup>44</sup> As the head of the Center, Radwan Ziadeh is an important figure in the Syrian foreign opposition.<sup>45</sup> He also founded the Syrian Center for Human Rights Studies and is the executive editor of the Arab Project for Transitional Justice. As such, many of the Syrian think tanks located outside of the region focus on challenging the current Syrian regime and promoting Syrians' human rights.

### *Palestine*

Although Palestine suffers from constant political challenges and lack of funding, the Palestinian think tank community remains vibrant. These think tanks focus on solutions and prospects of resolving the Palestinian question, illustrating the Palestinians' efforts and hardships for pursuing justice and peace. For example, the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs seeks solutions to the Palestinian statehood issue through academic research, dialogues, and publications in a domestic, regional, and international scope so that more people come to understand the substance of Palestinian question.<sup>46</sup> In the spirit of harmony and cooperation, the think tank keeps an open attitude towards academic communication and participates in local and international conferences.<sup>47</sup> A series of research projects and symposiums have been organized in a professional, scientific, and objective way to discuss the strategic research, EU policy towards the region, and democratic education.<sup>48</sup> In addition to

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43 "Mission," Syrian Center for Political & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, [http://scpss.org/en/?page\\_id=11](http://scpss.org/en/?page_id=11).

44 Ibid.

45 "Dr. Radwan Ziadeh – Executive Director," Syrian Center for Political & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, [http://scpss.org/en/?page\\_id=520](http://scpss.org/en/?page_id=520).

46 "About PASSIA," Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, accessed April 11, 2017, [http://www.passia.org/about\\_us/about\\_passia.htm#about](http://www.passia.org/about_us/about_passia.htm#about).

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

disseminating information about Palestine to an international audience, it assists Palestinian scholars in gaining access to learning materials on international issues.<sup>49</sup> Constrained by the nature of turbulent states, Palestinian think tanks generally concentrate on Palestinian political and security issues.

### *Analysis*

Generally, the think tanks in the Sham region are mostly civil and independent institutions, in contrast to government-dependent think tanks in the Gulf. In politically stable countries, think tanks provide intellectual support and policy advice to governments by establishing effective communication and interaction mechanisms with government leaders. These think tanks share relevant background information for national policymaking and provide insightful advice for policy debate. For turbulent states, particularly during social transformation and political reform periods, think tanks convene symposiums, prepare working reports, and gather dissidents' opinions on key points in the reform agenda. This ensures unification of diverse opinions and presentation of a range of options to reshape policies for a rapidly changing political landscape.<sup>50</sup> The Sham think tanks promote innovative thinking and a constructive public discussion mechanism in order to optimize the government decision-making process and provide references for policymakers in the Arab world.

### **Think Tanks in Northern Africa**

Think tanks in North Africa often have an international, or non-Arab, dimension due to countries' colonial history as well as geographic location. Egyptian think tanks are the most international among the Arab think tanks, with specific intent on maintaining close contacts with think tanks and research institutions all over the world. Highlighting the regional political influence of Egypt, these think tanks play a leading role in the Arab world, both in quantity and quality of research. The Maghreb coalition is made up of five countries whose think tanks focus on regional dilemmas and

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49 "Publications," Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.passia.org/publications/publications.htm>.

50 Xiao Ren, *The Fifth Power: Think Tanks* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2015), 78–79.

solutions. These states share a history of French colonial subjugation and use more French than Arabic because of colonial policies that imposed French language and culture, even during the post-independence period. Although some think tanks' websites are in French, these think tanks are still committed to national and regional strategies and forward-looking research. They are not only concerned about the sustainable development of culture and education but also attend to social transformation, political development, and regional relations.

**Table 2** List of Think Tanks in the Sham Region

Country	Characteristics	Main Think Tank
Egypt	High degree of internationalization; provide intellectual support for government decision-making in economic, social, and political reform.	Al-Ahram Politics and Strategy Research Center
Morocco	Focused on national political and social development; researches on the multilateral relations between the Maghreb and the Mediterranean coast states.	Amadeus Institute
Tunisia	Concerned about Maghreb regional issues and multi-lateral relations of the Mediterranean coast states.	Tunis Strategic Institute
Algeria	Concerned about the political and economic relations and cultural ties between the Maghreb countries and the Mediterranean region of Europe.	Institute of Global Strategic Studies
Libya	Started late, with most established after the Gaddafi regime fell; committed to the process of social democratization of Libya.	Sadeq Institute
Mauritania	Limited in number; provide intellectual support to promote social transformation and national revitalization of Mauritania.	Mauritanian Center for Research & Strategic Studies

*Egypt*

The main task for Egyptian think tanks is to provide decision-making support on economic, social, and political reform to the government and policymakers. The Egyptian think tanks maintain close contacts with think tanks and research institutes around the world and play an important role in maintaining the leading regional status of Egypt. Established in 1968, the Al-Ahram Politics and Strategy Research Center is affiliated with the widely circulated Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, and is one of the most famous

think tanks in the Arab world.<sup>51</sup> Since 1972, the Center has moved beyond research on Zionism, Israeli society, and the Palestinian question and pays attention to comprehensive political and strategic issues, including diplomacy, security, economics, military, society, history, internet, and other fields.<sup>52</sup> The Center also focuses on regional dynamics between Egypt, the Middle East, and Africa and wants to strengthen interactions among Arab states, regional players, and international organizations. Aided by thirty-six full-time researchers, the Center maintains close relations with political leaders, policymakers, legislative institutions, political parties, government organizations, international scientific and political institutions, the media, and the public.<sup>53</sup>

### *Morocco*

Morocco's think tanks focus on both domestic political and social development as well as multilateral relations between Maghreb states and Mediterranean coastal states. On one hand, the think tanks carry out strategic research and present analyses related to country-building, providing recommendations to the Moroccan royal family and government. On the other hand, their research priorities extend from the African continent's security issues to Middle East and North Africa relations. As an independent think tank established in 2008, the Amadeus Institute (L'Institut Amadeus) was established to promote research on public issues in Morocco and the Maghreb and to improve communication of North-South and South-South cooperation.<sup>54</sup> The Institute focuses on Morocco's multiple memberships in regional groups, such as the Maghreb, the Mediterranean, the African continent, and the Arab world. In addition to regional dynamics, the Institute researches on issues related to Morocco's middle class and social transformation, economic growth, sustainable development, energy efficiency, conflict prevention, security issues, political management, and

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51 "Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)," Devex, accessed April 11, 2017, <https://www.devex.com/organizations/al-ahram-center-for-political-and-strategic-studies-acpss-47753>.

52 Ibid.

53 "Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)," Devex, accessed April 11, 2017, <https://www.devex.com/organizations/al-ahram-center-for-political-and-strategic-studies-acpss-47753>.

54 "Vision," Institute Amadeus, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.institutamadeus.com/>.



civil education.<sup>55</sup>

### *Tunisia*

Tunisia maintains a large number of think tanks, which are often extensively influenced by France. The think tanks focus on improving Maghreb regional development and also emphasize interactions with the Mediterranean European states, particularly France. The Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies, founded in 1993, ranks twenty-fourth among the best think tanks in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>56</sup> The Institute has established cooperative relations with Arab research institutions and think tanks of non-Arab countries such as France, the United States, Italy, Switzerland, and Turkey.<sup>57</sup> The research covers a wide range of fields such as politics, strategy, security, economics, society, and education, including Tunisian specific issues such as relations between Tunisian society and the Arab world, water resources, sustainable development, and trade.<sup>58</sup>

### *Algeria*

Influenced by French colonial rule, Algerian think tanks are characterized by orientalist ideology. They often pay more attention to political and economic relations and cultural ties between countries of the Maghreb and the European Mediterranean region. Algerian think tanks are more prominent in sociological research, such as social and cultural anthropology, children's and women's rights, national population, and class development.<sup>59</sup> The Institute of Global Strategic Studies founded in 1985 takes the leading position and provides recommendations to policymakers in terms of international issues and strategic research.<sup>60</sup> Its study covers political, diplomatic, defense, military, security, international relations, and other areas involving Algeria, the Maghreb region, the European Mediterranean,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> McGann, "2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report," 69.

<sup>57</sup> "Our Mission," Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.ites.tn/a-propos/>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> "Arab Think Tanks Directory," United Nations Development Programme, accessed October 13, 2016, [http://gaportal.org/sites/default/files/Directory%20of%20Arab%20Think%20Tanks%20\(draft\)16July.pdf](http://gaportal.org/sites/default/files/Directory%20of%20Arab%20Think%20Tanks%20(draft)16July.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

the Arab world, and Africa.<sup>61</sup> Periodical publications such as *International Intersection* have significant impact in the Arab world.

### *Libya*

The present number of think tanks in Libya is relatively limited because many of them were established after the downfall of the Gaddafi regime. Due to the long-term tensions in Libya, these think tanks pay more attention to domestic political, economic, social, and judicial reconstruction process, unlike the regional focus of other Maghreb think tanks. Although a relatively young think tank, the Sadeq Institute, which was established in 2011, has leapt to thirty-fifth place among the Middle East and North Africa's top think tanks.<sup>62</sup> Specializing in Libyan issues, the Sadeq Institute is committed to Libya's social democratization process. It approaches complete social transformation by using innovative ideas to achieve social pluralism through the practice of investigation and personal involvement. Its research covers economy, security, hygiene, law, education, and governance.<sup>63</sup> The Institute also regularly publishes various policy research reports and analytical commentary articles. Setting up the Sadeq Forum with five full-time researchers, the Institute has contributed to maintaining close relations with politicians, diplomats, military experts, the media, and scholars.<sup>64</sup>

### *Mauritania*

Although constructed late, think tanks in Mauritania focus on social transformation, economic development, and regional security issues. Some of these think tanks also provide teaching and personnel training programs. An independent organization founded in 2008, the Mauritanian Center for Research & Strategic Studies aims to contribute to social transformation and national rejuvenation of Mauritania through academic research under the principles of "independence, rejuvenation, and neutrality."<sup>65</sup> The Center consists of four administrative parts: the General Assembly, the Council,

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61 Ibid.

62 McGann, "2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report," 69.

63 "Who We Are," Sadeq Institute, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.sadeqinstitute.org/who-we-are/>.

64 Ibid.

65 "Vision and Mission," The Mauritanian Center for Researches & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.cmers.org/english>.

the Administrative Office and the Committee of Experts, as well as eight academic groups: the Political Security Research Group, the Economic and Social Research Group, the Scientific Environmental Research Group, the Educational Research Group, the Public Opinion Research Group, the Legal Advisory Group, the Historical Heritage Research Group, and the Training and Development Group.<sup>66</sup> Its research covers political, economic, social, educational, and linguistic fields. Project work is carried out through the annual strategic reports, academic journals, undergraduate scientific research awards, and national annual survey of public opinion.<sup>67</sup>

### *Analysis*

Since new problems and conflicts have arisen in the process of political reconstruction and economic and social development in Egypt and the Maghreb countries, think tanks play an increasingly important role in the political decision-making process. They can provide early warnings for medium and long-term social issues and offer international experience for countries to lift themselves from the economic crisis and move towards recovery. Recruiting a broad source of expertise and maintaining a long-term research structure, these think tanks can advise the government on policy solutions and strengthen public intellectuals' policy awareness and political stance through academic research.

### **Conclusion**

Since the Arab Spring in 2010, the importance of Arab think tanks in the region's development has become increasingly prominent. These institutions are becoming more and more important in narrowing cognitive differences between civil and governmental organizations, influencing public opinion, and advancing public diplomacy. As an effective communication and interaction channel between think tank experts and government leaders, think tanks can provide intellectual support for policy decisions, create safe environments for democracy and dialogue advocacy, and promote revolutionary forces

66 "The CMERS Bodies," The Mauritanian Center for Research & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.cmers.org/english>.

67 "Objectives & Methods," The Mauritanian Center for Research & Strategic Studies, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.cmers.org/english>.

of social progress. In real politics, think tanks play a significant role as cultivator, conveyor, and provider of political party modernization, serving as a decision maker to affect political parties, public policy, and philosophical ideas and as a manufacturer of various news headlines.<sup>68</sup> Although they are not the only founder of “new ideas,” the efforts made by think tanks in the process of modernizing Arab countries exert considerable influence.

Compared to European and American think tanks, think tanks in Arab countries still lag in independent research and global influence because of their recent establishment and small scale. With increasing awareness and political participation by the public, scholars, and researchers, the government relies more heavily on these think tanks. Think tanks in the Gulf region—well-financed by the government—build a sturdy bridge between knowledge and power. Think tanks in the Sham region—rich with culture heritage and innovative ideas—give strong support in decision making to governments, political parties, and large enterprises. Think tanks in North Africa focus on regional situation research and provide early warnings on mid-term and long-term Arab societal issues. Despite the different research focus, they all serve state power, in domestic strategy planning, policy formulation, promotion of public governance, and participation in international affairs.

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68 Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 3.