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Dr. Paul Salem

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Dr. Paul Salem is vice president for policy and research at The Middle East Institute. He focuses on issues of political change, transition, and conflict as well as the regional and international relations of the Middle East. He has a particular emphasis on the countries of the Levant and Egypt, as well as, Syria and Lebanon. Dr. Salem previously served as the founding director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, Lebanon.

Salem writes regularly in the Arab and Western press and has been published in numerous journals and newspapers. He is the author of a number of books and reports including *Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World* (1994); *Conflict Resolution in the Arab World* (ed., 1997); *Broken Orders: The Causes and Consequences of the Arab Uprisings* (In Arabic, 2013); *"The Recurring Rise and Fall of Political Islam"* (CSIS, 2015); *"The Middle East in 2015 and Beyond: Trends and Drivers"* (MEI 2014).

Subject Area/Topic: MID-EAST PROBLEMS

Highlights: Dr. Salem began by noting that much of the Middle East began its transition from medieval life to the modern world when the Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1918. In the 1920's countries such as Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon were arbitrarily established. It was assumed that this arrangement (with western oversight) would be permanent and peaceful. This was an unreasonable expectation when one considers that it was only after centuries of wars and social/religious conflict that relatively peaceful political and social order came to Western Europe in 1945.

Key factors underlying current Middle East chaos are a youth population bulge at a time of dwindling land and water resources, risks of climate change and sluggish economic growth. Triggering events were the Iraq War of 2003 and the Arab Uprising of 2011. As a result of the Iraq War, the old Arab state regional order collapsed, Shiite groups and Iran were strengthened and Sunnis were marginalized and radicalized. Dr. Salem sees the Arab Uprising as an earthquake in Arab politics resulting in transition, counter-revolution and civil war.

In historical perspective, US interests in the Middle East are oil, Israel, geopolitics/Cold War, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the war on terror. All five are less pressing policy concerns today, although ISIS is an emerging national security threat. The US is closer to self-sufficiency in oil and Israel is more able to fend for itself.

Regarding the current and former US Administrations, Dr. Salem sees Bush guilty of over-reach and Obama of under-reach.