

Levant Energy Planning Meeting (Virtual) Minutes

April 3, 2023, 8-10 AM EST

A. Welcome by Oksan Bayulgen and Dan Weiner

Origins and goals of the Levant Energy Security workshop:

The Levant region consists of a stretch of southwestern Asia that forms a natural land bridge between Asia and Africa. Three prominent components define this general area from west-to-east: the Mediterranean, the great Syro-African Rift, and the vast desert expanse to the east. Today, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, and Turkey occupy this area. The sizeable hydrocarbon discoveries and numerous pipeline projects in Eastern Mediterranean in the 2000s initially offered much-needed hope for increased cooperation and economic development to the Levant region, long afflicted with intractable conflicts, political instability, poverty, and acute environmental and climate challenges. Yet, after two decades, the jury is still out on whether these resources can be a force for regional security and prosperity.

There is an emerging consensus within both scholarly and policy circles that the third millennium has been marked by changing geopolitics and economics of hydrocarbon development and the urgent need to respond to increasing climate disasters and environmental deterioration. Thus, it is more important than ever to evaluate how regional governments are managing their fossil fuel resources and dependency as they are preparing to transition to cleaner and renewable energy fuels and technologies. To broaden out the environmental pillar of the Abrahamic Programs and cross-pollinate with our budding Levant Initiative, we are delighted to launch an initiative entitled “Where the Sun Rises: Crossroads of Energy Transition & Security in the Levant Region.”

We are especially interested in understanding the new energy strategies and dynamics that are emerging and their impact on socioeconomic development and security in this volatile region. Our goals with this initiative are two-fold: 1) to explore the best pathways and practices to produce policy-based research and work with influential policy actors, e.g., think-tanks focusing on similar research interests in the Levant region; and 2) to workshop scholarly arguments that may form the basis of an edited book on energy transition and security in the Levant region.

Questions for Group Discussion:

1. What are some key topics that are underdeveloped in this domain? What would a new collaboration on Levant energy dynamics offer to the academic literature as well as policy discussions? What might be our unique contributions?
2. What are the implications of a Levant focus? How best to articulate the need to study energy transition and regional security in this geographical space?

B. Introductions by participants

- a. Affiliation, area of expertise
- b. Reasons for joining this workshop

- c. Expectations from this meeting and future collaborations

C. Participants' responses to discussion questions (in the order they spoke):

1. Andreas Stergiou: Levant region will be a hot spot of climate change. There has not been sufficient focus on the region so far. Climate change is the common enemy/peril for all the countries in the Levant region and it will supersede inter-state rivalries. Climate change and other environmental threats are exacerbating the current political and economic troubles in the region. We need to raise awareness on this issue. Two connections play key roles in bringing about a change in the Levant region: the EuroAsia Interconnector (Greece-Cyprus-Israel) and the GREGY cable (Greece-Egypt). The orientation of Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) is causing the exclusion of Turkey and we see the ramifications of this in the region especially after the earthquakes in Turkey.

2. Tareq Abu Hamed: Agreeing with Dan, this collaboration should go beyond an academic book. We can produce policy papers to bridge the gap between academia and policy-world and provide a roadmap for government policies. In that way, the book(s) will have more impact, too.

3. Johannes Uhl: This group is a good mixture of academics and practitioners focusing on energy in the Levant and broader MENA region. Like Tareq said, we can form a bridge between academia and policy-world and produce tangible products, possibly a guide for policymakers. We can revisit geographical scope of the energy transition, such as UAE, KSA. We should consider focusing on Syria in the future. Maybe we should bring in the Union for the Mediterranean, too? Electrification will lead scholars and practitioners alike to revisit/reconsider the traditional state-centric sovereignty concepts. The question should be "how to mitigate risks in the transformation of the energy sector?"

4. Gidon Bromberg: We are missing representatives from Cyprus and Syria. We also have a European perspective in this group by having reps from the continent. Discussing the role of UAE, KSA sounds good. We can focus on renewable energy in the region. Old alliances are changing form and new ones can be more inclusive such as the one started between Iraq, Egypt and Jordan. East Mediterranean Gas forum poses a challenge and an impediment to renewable energy. We can have a policy impact there. Also, how to include Turkey in the Levant energy alliances beyond the Eastern Mediterranean Gas is an important question. Gidon agrees with Dan about the role of natural gas, being an elephant in the room, especially in the context of repowering Europe. Middle East's energy relationship with Europe which wants to wean itself from Russia will be key.

5. Sarah Hepp: We can look at broader alliances/formations revolving around energy and climate in the region and analyze their strengths and weaknesses. Focusing on the Levant and the region's relations to Europe in the context of energy and climate politics can be interesting. Intersections of gender and energy (more than environment) have been very understudied. Energy security from the human security perspective and including the role of women in such

debates can be impactful. Can we say that the exploitation of fossil fuels leads to conflict between different countries (maritime borders/ Turkey-Greece etc.) while renewable energies have more potential to lead to cooperation? We are not talking about mineral resources here, all countries have plenty of sunshine and can use it.

6. Dan Weiner: The more I learn from the experts, it becomes apparent that the transition from fossil fuels to renewables is still in its early stages. Natural gas is a transition fuel to renewable energy resources. Geo-politically, the natural gas deal between Israel and Lebanon could be a game-changer. Regionally, there has been a significant change in MENA economic geographies since the Abraham Accords were established in 2020. For example, a company born in Israel's Technion is investing in Morocco today and able now to take advantage of the latter's relatively cheap clean resource. Regarding initiative output, maybe we can produce Levant Clean Energy Transition Policy Briefs? The scholarly and policy implications of the energy transition also need more attention.

7. Oksan Bayulgen: we should be aware of the road-blocks such as the vested/entrenched interests of business groups, state/government interests and also public opinion. Tareq and Emel's works show the public apathy and/or backlash against renewable/alternative energy sources.

8. Kawa Hassan: In addition to a book, two practical suggestions/thoughts. 1) It is difficult to ignore the neighborhood of the Levant such as KSA and UAE; 2) The alliance between Iraq, Egypt and Jordan is still premature, and mostly talking rather than concrete policies on issue areas. Exploration of natural gas in the Mediterranean is a very dangerous game, has huge environmental consequences. But at the same time natural gas and renewable energy will have to coexist for a while.

9. Emel Akcali: Renewable energy can bring major changes, but we should not ignore the political economy of renewable energy. Most collaborations and initiatives still reflect the neo-liberal logic to energy development. For example, wind turbines in Greek islands and crony capitalism in Turkey. Big wind might not be very different from big oil phenomena. Eco-socialist perspective (not in a communist anti-capitalist sense) might be the way forward. We need to pay attention to the shifting relationship between the state and citizens as well. Changing concepts of sovereignty...

D. Participants' responses to the following "What's Next" Questions: What are the anticipated outputs for this collaboration? What are the different ways we can organize our collective work? As an edited volume with an academic press? And/or engaged research through policy papers, etc.? Others?

1. Dan Weiner: We need policy-based research on the Levant region to distinguish this group from others. We would like to work with think-tanks focusing on similar research interests, especially regional think-tanks in the region such as EPC in the UAE. We should not do research for its own sake. We should think about what our value proposition is.

2. Andreas Stergiou: Fossil fuel exploitation does not always lead to war. But there is also no such thing as peace pipelines. Electricity trade is different from oil pipelines. Renewable energy is more democratic than the fossil fuels.

3. Johannes Uhl: Idea for the output: Toolkit for (energy & climate & foreign) policy-makers in the Levant to yield the peace dividend of the energy transformation.

4. Tareq Abu Hamed: The region is changing, e.g., Iran-Saudi normalization, North Africa. Focusing on energy diplomacy is a promising long-term idea.

5. Gidon Bromberg: There is a lot of potential for Levant Energy studies, especially in the real policy world. I prefer in-person meetings. An in-person workshop during COP or later other conferences in the region would be great. For example, we are *organizing EcoPeace Annual Conference* between October 23 and 25 2023 in the Dead Sea, Jordan. Lastly, it would be very beneficial for this group to produce opinion pieces in order to have a dialogue with the policy-makers in the Levant region and beyond.

6. Oksan Bayulgen: I and Sercan can create a depository of previous works on the Levant energy security and transition, especially authored by the participants of this meeting. A framework for a potential book can be as follows: A table of contents outlining each research question/topic and highlighting gaps in the literature, especially policy-relevant gaps in the literature, which is analogous to Johannes' idea of an energy security/transition toolkit for policy-makers.

7. Emel Akcali: The idea of creating a toolkit/toolbox (i.e., Johannes's idea) might be limiting, the toolkit approach to the Arab Spring didn't work. Some suggestions: 1) How is the local populace affected by energy development in the Levant region is an important question. Issues of local ownership and land use in energy transition...2) Seismic activity: any discussion on energy transition/security should factor in natural disasters including earthquakes, floods, extreme weather conditions.

8. Dan Weiner, Oksan Bayulgen and Sercan Canbolat: As a follow-up, we plan to have in-person events (e.g., workshops and/or panels) during the UNFCCC COP 28 (November 30, 2023 – December 12, 2023) in the UAE and potentially organize an expert panel as part of the Emirates Policy Center's 10th Abu-Dhabi Strategic Debate in November 2023. EcoPeace Annual Conference (October 23-25, 2023) in Jordan can be another venue for this group to have an in-person meeting (e.g., a panel and/or workshop). Finally, as part of our Levant Energy Security Initiative, in partnership with the Middle East Studies Program and the Political Science Department, we plan to have the Levant Energy Security Guest Lecture Series at UConn, which will be initiated in the Fall 2023 semester. UConn's Global Affairs will be working with Dr. Jeremy Pressman and Dr. Oksan Bayulgen from the Political Science department to launch the Levant Energy Security Guest Lecture Series.

Appendix: The List of Levant Energy Planning Meeting Participants

- Emel Akcali, Associate Professor of International Relations at Kadir Has University, (<https://sgs.khas.edu.tr/en/academic/3272>)
- Oksan Bayulgen, Department Head and Professor of Political Science at University of Connecticut, (<https://polisci.uconn.edu/person/oksan-bayulgen/>)
- Gidon Bromberg, Director Israel Director for EcoPeace Middle East, (<https://ecopeaceme.org/about/>)
- Sercan Canbolat, Post-Doctoral Research Associate and Director of Abrahamic Programs, University of Connecticut, (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sercan-canbolat-62417a161/>)
- Tareq Abu Hamed, Executive Director of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, (<https://arava.org/about-our-community/faculty-staff/dr-tareq-abu-hamed/>)
- Kawa Hassan, Non-Resident Fellow, Stimson Center, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) program, (<https://www.stimson.org/ppl/kawa-hassan/>)
- Sarah Hepp, Director of the Jordan-based Regional Climate and Energy Project MENA of the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and of FES Iraq, (<https://www.menahousingforum.org/speaker/sarah-hepp>)
- Andreas Stergiou, Professor of Economics at University of Thessaly, (<https://www.econ.uth.gr/en/department/staff/faculty/50-dr-andreas-stergiou>)
- Johannes Uhl, Head of Secretariat for Jordanian-German Energy Partnership, (<https://www.energy-jordan-germany.org/home/>)
- Dr. Daniel Weiner, Vice President for Global Affairs and Professor of Geography, University of Connecticut (<https://global.uconn.edu/administration-staff/>)