

MEIWeekly.



US Army and Syrian Democratic Forces soldiers remove military fortifications as part of the implementation of security mechanisms along the Turkey–Syria border in August 2019, months before Turkey invaded northeast Syria. Photo: United States Central Command.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING INSTITUTE EVENTS

MEI Annual Conference

Hear from Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies Tharman Shanmugaratnam on economic transformation, Harvard University’s Professor Ezra F Vogel on the East Asian development model, and from other distinguished speakers at MEI’s Annual Conference. The theme is “The Middle East in Transformation: Are there Lessons from East Asia?”. Join us on 15 and 16 January 2020! Attendance is free. Register now.



WHAT’S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Turkey Plans to Resettle Syrian Refugees

In a six-page document shared with UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Turkish President Recep Erdogan planned to settle 1 million Syrians in 140 villages in territories seized by Turkey during the October invasion of northeast Syria. The project — which will require more than US\$26 billion in foreign assistance — resembles a large residential development project, promising new residents access to schools, hospitals, mosques, sporting arenas and agricultural land. This comes amid concerns that Turkey is pressuring refugees to return to an area that remains unsafe, and that the move is intended to prevent the Kurdish population from returning to their traditional lands.



Former interior and education minister, Mr Gideon Saar, launched his campaign to unseat Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (above), ahead of next Thursday’s (26 December) party vote. Photo: Kremlin.

Saar Moves to Unseat Party Rival Netanyahu

Mr Gideon Saar, a former interior and education minister, has launched his bid to unseat Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as head of Likud, ahead of a party vote next Thursday (26 December). This marks the first serious internal challenge to Mr Netanyahu’s helm of Likud over the past decade. Recent polls have indicated that with Mr Saar as leader, Likud find it easier to create a national unity government with the Blue and White party if the March 2020 elections produces a deadlock.

Trump’s Saudi Arabia Foreign Policy

In view of how the bulk of legislation vetoed by US President Donald Trump during his presidency involved congressional attempts to censure Saudi Arabia, *The Washington Post* put out an analysis on Wednesday (18 December) which argues that Mr Trump has a surprisingly consistent approach towards US–Saudi relations as he sees the kingdom as an eager customer for American arms and a useful proxy in Washington’s confrontations with Iran.

LOOKAHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Qatar to Host FIFA Club World Cup Finals

As part of preparation works for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar will host the FIFA Club World Cup Finals on 22 December (Sunday). Held for the first time in Doha, the finals will see European champions Liverpool face Copa Libertadores winner Flamengo.

Hanukkah Celebrations in Israel

Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, will begin on 22 December (Sunday) and last till 30 December (Monday). Highlights of this year’s celebrations in Israel include a daily candle-lighting ceremony outside the gates of the Old City in Jerusalem.

#MUSTREAD: WHAT’S POPULAR ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK: Turkish President Recep Erdogan said Turkey could shut down Incirlik air base, which hosts US nuclear warheads, in response to threats of sanctions and a US Senate resolution that recognised the mass killings of Armenians as a genocide. <https://bit.ly/2sKcz2Y>



Despite the light drizzle, participants at Haflah Muscia last Saturday (14 December) enjoyed the catchy melodies and mesmerising dance movies from the lands of Arabia. Missed the concert? Catch the video highlights here: <https://bit.ly/36QcJMX>

TWITTER: There are positive steps available to remove the Qatar blockade, says MEI Research Fellow Ameen Lutfi on CNBC’s *Capital Connection*. Catch the full interview at <https://bit.ly/2S6hKMQ>

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