

# MEIWeekly.



On Wednesday (1 January), Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (above) submitted an immunity request from prosecution in three graft cases to the Knesset. Photo: Kremlin.

## 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. This year's 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

### Netanyahu Seeks Immunity from Charges

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked the Knesset on Wednesday, 1 January, to grant him immunity from prosecution in three graft cases. If granted immunity, Mr Netanyahu will be kept out of court for as long as he remains a member of parliament. Under Israel's immunity law, Mr Netanyahu would require a parliamentary majority to grant him immunity, although it remains unclear if he would be able to secure a majority. Constitutional lawyers have argued that granting Mr Netanyahu immunity would be a "fatal blow to the rule of law and equality before the law".



Thousands of Iraqi protesters and militia fighters attempted to storm the US embassy in Baghdad (above) on Tuesday, 31 December 2019, in response to airstrikes that killed two dozen fighters and wounded dozens of others. Photo: United States Department of State, shared on Wikimedia Commons.

### Protesters Withdraw from US Embassy in Iraq

The attempt by supporters of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to storm the US embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, ended on Wednesday, 1 January, after a withdrawal call by the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an umbrella body for dozens of militia groups. This comes days after airstrikes by the United States killed more than two dozen Iraqi militia fighters and wounded dozens of others. The protest also revealed the increasing influence of Tehran in Iraqi internal affairs, when protesters disregarded orders from caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi to withdraw from the embassy but almost immediately began dispersing in response to the PMF request.

### UN No-Strike List Ignored by Russia and Syria

An investigation by *The New York Times* in insurgent-held areas of Syria has revealed that Russian and Syrian forces have ignored the United Nations humanitarian deconfliction mechanism meant to prevent attacks on hospitals and other humanitarian sites. Since April 2019, of the 182 no-strike sites, 27 were reported to have been damaged by Russian or Syrian attacks. Under international law, the intentional or reckless bombing of hospitals or clinics is considered a war crime.

## LOOKAHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### Putin to Visit Turkey

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Turkey next Wednesday, 8 January, to attend the inauguration of the TurkStream gas pipeline. The pipeline will stretch across the Black Sea from Russia to Turkey into Europe and is expected to facilitate further interconnectivity for the European gas market. He is also expected to have talks with Turkish President Recep Erdogan on the current situation in Syria.

### Abu Dhabi to host Global Energy Forum

As part of the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Forum will be held from next Friday, 10 January 10, to next Sunday, 12 January. This year's forum will focus on the themes of the role of the oil and gas industry in the energy transition, financing the future of energy, and interconnections in a new era of geopolitics. For the first time, the forum will emphasise on the increasing energy demand in South and South-east Asia.

## #MUSTREAD: WHAT'S POPULAR ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

**FACEBOOK:** Protesters stormed the US embassy in Baghdad, chanting "Death to America" and demanding the United States withdraw its forces from Iraq. The ability of the protestors to storm the Green Zone suggested that they have received at least tacit permission from Iraqi security officials sympathetic to their demands. <https://bit.ly/35eROS7>

In newly disclosed documents from the offices of former Chase Chairman David Rockefeller, details emerged on how Rockefeller worked behind the scenes to persuade the Carter administration to admit deposed shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1979. <https://bit.ly/2QjOQrv>



**TWITTER:** War monitors claim that 300 pro-Turkey Syrian fighters have been sent to Libya as part of Turkey's military support for the embattled government in Tripoli. Turkish officials have rejected the claim but revealed a "tendency to go in this direction". <https://bit.ly/2QB1Fwp>

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