

MEI Weekly.



US Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz (second from left) taking a walking tour of the Israeli Sorek Desalination Plant as part of a visit in April 2016 to enhance co-operation between the two nations. The plant was built by Israeli firm IDE Technologies, which was awarded the recent contract to build Sorek 2. Photo: Matty Stern / US embassy / shared on Flickr.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING INSTITUTE EVENTS

Dissecting UAE's Foreign Policy

In the past decade or so, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become an active and assertive power on political, economic, military and diplomatic fronts. In this event, a seven-member panel will discuss the evolution and dynamics of the UAE's foreign policy and this seven-member federation's growing regional and global roles.



Join us for this virtual public talk conducted on Zoom on **2 June from 4 pm to 6 pm**. Registration is free and all are welcome. Check out <https://mei.nus.edu.sg/event> for more details now!

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

China Loses Contract for Israeli Water Plant

Ten days after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Israel where he warned its leaders about the security risk of a Chinese firm winning infrastructure contracts, the Israeli government awarded the contract for constructing the world's largest desalination plant, Sorek 2, to a local operator. IDE Technologies was picked over rival Hutchinson Water, whose main investor is Hong Kong's CK Hutchison Holdings. US President Donald Trump has put pressure on its allies, including Israel, to limit Chinese investment as part of the ongoing trade war between the US and China.



US Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo meeting Israeli Speaker of the Knesset Benjamin Gantz during his visit to Israel on 13 May 2020. Photo: Ron Przysucha / US Department of State / shared on Flickr.

US Accuses Russia of Sending Jets to Libya

The US military has accused Russia of sending at least 14 fighter jets to support Russian mercenaries fighting alongside a beleaguered commander's campaign to oust the Libyan government from its capital Tripoli. The warplanes were repainted at a base in Syria, en route to Libya, to camouflage their Russian origin, the United States Africa Command said in a statement. This appears to confirm the Kremlin's deepening role in the proxy war and underscores the Pentagon's fears of Moscow's growing influence in Libya. Recently, Turkey has also entered the complex proxy war to project its economic and strategic interest in Libya. This reflects the growing complexity of the conflict in Libya as more powers vie for control, oil and geostrategic edge.

Iran Sends 2nd Fuel Tanker to Venezuela

The *Fortune*, a tanker carrying 1.5 million barrels of gasoline, arrived at El Palito, Venezuela on Monday (25 May). The second of five such vessels dispatched by Iran, these "famous little ships" delivering much-needed gasoline are part of the joint effort by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and Iranian leaders to counter sanctions levied on the country by the Trump administration. Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel thanked Iran for "breaking the unacceptable and criminal blockade", referring to the US sanctions, while Mr Maduro declared that the "two rebel revolutionary peoples" would never "kneel before North American imperialism".

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Saudi Mosques to Reopen for Prayers

From Sunday (31 May), prayers will be allowed to resume in all mosques outside Mecca, after mosques in Mecca were reopened on Friday (29 May) for Friday prayers. These are part of a series of three-phase measures to reopen the nation laid out by Saudi Arabia's interior ministry on Monday (15 May). Additionally, from Sunday, free movement will be allowed between 6 am and 8 pm as the Kingdom eases its 24-hour curfews in many places. The *haji* and *umrah* pilgrimages, however, will remain suspended until further notice.



Conference for Covid-19 Aid for Yemen

The United Nations (UN) and Saudi Arabia will be hosting a donor conference next Tuesday (2 June) to raise funds for Yemen, the poorest country in the world. The coronavirus is spreading rapidly through war-ravaged Yemen, where the healthcare system "has in effect collapsed" and aid workers must regularly turn people away due to insufficient supplies. The UN estimates US\$2 billion will be needed to maintain aid programmes there for the year and has appealed for urgent funding.

#MUSTREAD: WHAT'S POPULAR ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK: The controversial £300m Saudi Arabia-funded takeover of Newcastle United appears to be in serious doubt after the World Trade Organization ruled that the country is behind a pirate satellite TV and streaming service that offers illegal access to sporting events.
<https://bit.ly/3daLr7c>



In Libya, war is becoming less of a political activity and more of a commercial one. "You have these for-profit warriors of every stripe going in there, waging the kind of wars that Machiavelli discussed in the 16th century." The United Nations (UN) has uncovered one such mission, offering a glimpse into the world of those who have thrived off Libya's chaos.
<https://nyti.ms/3gerzC9>

TWITTER: After losing a family member to the coronavirus, two filmmakers the camera on themselves to document their lives in quarantine in Tehran, Iran. As the Persian new year approaches, they consider how to celebrate an occasion that typically marks rebirth from their apartment in the wake of such a devastating tragedy.
<https://bit.ly/2T14JUK>

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