

MEI Weekly.



Israeli President Reuven Rivlin (third from left) meeting various parliament chairmen from Africa in December 2017. Sudan has just begun talks on the possibility of formalising ties with Israel, a move which would have significant political implications for the Arab world, and hints at the changing sentiments towards Tel Aviv in the region. Photo: Israeli Government Press Office, as shared on Wikimedia Commons.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

LISTEN: MEI Research Fellow Ameem Lutfi talks to Dr Lindsey Stephenson on the Ajam Media Collective's Indian Ocean interview series about his work on the role of the Baloch as soldiers or "mercenaries" of various rulers. He examines how the diaspora group has created a deep and rich network of links between the shores of the western Indian Ocean. Tune in to the full interview [here](#).

READ: In MEI's latest *Heard @ The Souq* publication, Mr Hussain Abdul-Hussain argues that Saudi Arabia joining the UAE in formalising ties with Israel would be beneficial for the Palestinians. Although the decision would invite condemnation, especially from Palestinian allies Iran, Turkey and other Islamist regimes, it could also give the Arab states leverage by making Israel dependent on them for investment and trade, technological exchanges and possibly even military cooperation. Read the full article [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Sudan May Formally Recognise Ties with Israel

Israeli officials predict that the deal to formalise Sudan–Israel relations will take place at the end of the year. If it does, Sudan would be the fourth Arab country to do so, joining Egypt, Jordan and the UAE. By signing a deal with Israel, a US ally, Khartoum hopes the US would reciprocate by removing Sudan from Washington's list of sponsors of terror. Apart from that, growing economic turmoil in the Middle East and shared worry over the rise of Iran have pushed several Arab countries to open up to the idea of formally establishing ties with Israel.



Israeli and United Arab Emirates flags lining a road in the Israeli coastal city of Netanya on Sunday (16 August 2020). While Israel has been quick to play up the economic benefits of the accord, the Emiratis are taking a more cautious line. Photo: Jack Guez / AFP

Emirati Businesses Wary of Israeli Investors

Israeli officials were eager to play up the benefits of economic ties with the Gulf state after the UAE announced its plan to formalise relations with Israel last Thursday (15 August). Possible avenues of development include grand transportation projects like a railway network that could open up Emirati business to the rest of the Mediterranean. Emirati businesses, however, have been more cautious in discussing investment opportunities, with many declining to comment, as they await government guidance on future policy.

US Demands Enforcement of Iran Sanctions

The Trump administration formally declared on Thursday (20 August) that it would push the United Nations to punish Iran with sanctions for violating an agreement to limit its nuclear programme, a deal from which the United States withdrew two years ago. This has raised questions from diplomats everywhere about the legality of the demand, with many of them insisting that it should not be allowed since the US no longer recognises the accord. Without European support, it remains unclear how American pressure on the UN would amount to anything substantial.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

[MEI Salon] Selling Out? Fighting Over Art in Syria (Past and Present)

In this episode of MEI Salon series, Professor Anneka Lenssen will look at art in Syria and consider how image politics play out in an activist register, with an emphasis on the emergence of important new perspectives about the right to a dignified self-image. After the regime crackdowns of 2011, younger artists from Syria, most prominently the filmmaker collective known as Abounaddara, proposed to rethink the costs of art on ethical rather than economic grounds. Join us for this virtual public talk conducted via Zoom on **26 August from 10.30am to 12pm**. Registration is free and all are welcome. [Click here for more details now!](#)



LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

UAE Islamic New Year Holiday Confirmed

The UAE government has declared this Sunday (23 August) a public holiday to mark the beginning of the new Hijri Year. The Islamic New Year marks the first day of the month of Muharram, which is one of the sacred months in the Islamic calendar. The holiday is declared for both public sector and federal government workers, both of whom will go back to work on Monday (24 August).



New Covid-19 Measures for Turkish Schools

In Turkey, medical experts are rushing to devise a new four-week strategy to curb a surge in Covid-19 cases before schools physically re-open on 21 September. On top of that, new restrictions have already been put into place in Ankara, the country's capital. Negligence of social distance warnings are most prominent during weddings, which are celebrated with the traditional halay dance, which in turn involves people holding one other's hands and shoulders and forming long lines.

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