

MEI Weekly.



A helicopter putting out a fire at the scene of an explosion at the port of Lebanon's capital Beirut on Tuesday (4 August). Photo: STR / AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: With the recent launch of its mission to Mars, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) joins the ranks of other major space exploration players such as the United States and European Union. In this contribution to MEI, Dr N Janardhan explores how UAE's space programme would allow it to achieve its scientific and economic aspirations as a transitioning smart power and reinforce its status as a regional power.



LISTEN: In the latest episode of "Boots Off the Ground: Security in Transition in the Middle East and Beyond", Mr Liu Qing joins our MEI researchers to discuss the role of Chinese private security companies in the industry. Tune in the podcast or read the full transcript [here](#).

WATCH, READ & LISTEN: In a post Covid-19 environment where the future of the energy landscape is filled with uncertainty, how can Asia and the Middle East, the world's fastest growing energy consumer and producer respectively, collaborate for mutual benefit? Missed this talk on Wednesday (5 Aug), catch up via our [event summary](#), [podcast](#) or [video](#) [here](#).

WATCH: In an interview with China Global TV Network on Thursday (6 August), MEI Principle Research Fellow Alessandro Arduino says Lebanon is headed towards an economic and food security crisis following Tuesday's blast at Beirut port.

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Deadly Explosions in Beirut

On Tuesday (4 August), a massive explosion occurred at a port in the Lebanese capital, resulting in more than 100 deaths and over 5,000 injured. The blast was allegedly the result of an accidental detonation of 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate that was stored onsite. The blast comes at a time when Lebanon is already suffering from multiple crises, including the decline of its currency, the influx of Syrian refugees and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.



The UAE's Barakah nuclear power plant under construction in 2017. Photo by Wikimirati via Wikimedia Commons

UAE Opens Nuclear Power Plant

The UAE has become the first Arab nation to open a nuclear power plant, launching operations at a time when concerns are being raised about the long-term consequences of introducing more nuclear programmes to the Middle East. Seeking to address regional concerns, the UAE insists that its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes, such as to provide a quarter of the country's electricity. Two other countries in the region, Israel and Iran, have nuclear capabilities and tensions are high among the Gulf countries where some analysts view the new plant as a security problem waiting to occur, especially with other Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, also starting or planning nuclear energy programmes.

Iran Cover-Up of Covid-19 Deaths

The number of coronavirus-caused deaths in Iran is nearly triple those of what the government has claimed, and the number of infected nearly double those of the officially released figures. The data leaked by an anonymous whistle-blower to the BBC to "shed light on the truth" and to end "political games" over the epidemic suggested that there was deliberate suppression by the Iranian government. Crucially, the first recorded death on the leaked list occurred on 22 January, a month before the first case of coronavirus was officially reported in Iran.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

ME 101: New Developments in the Middle East

MEI Chairman Bilahari Kausikan will kick off the 2020 ME 101 lecture series with an introduction to new developments in the Middle East and why Singapore should care about them.



Join us for this virtual public talk conducted via Zoom on 13 August from 5 pm to 6.30 pm. Registration is free and all are welcome. Check out <https://nus.edu/3gCwRXO> for more details now!

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Turkey Considers Leaving Istanbul Convention

Turkey's ruling AKP party is set to decide by the coming week whether to initiate legal steps to withdraw from a domestic violence treaty that was first initiated in Istanbul. While the move has alarmed campaigners who see the pact as key to combating domestic violence, opponents of the accord signed in 2011 say it encourages violence by undermining family structures.



Saudi Arabia to Host Health Summit

Saudi Arabia will be hosting one of the world's largest health summits next Tuesday and Wednesday (11 and 12 August) to accelerate collaborative work in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic plaguing the world. This online summit will host foreign dignitaries, including directors from the World Health Organization and the United Kingdom's National Health Service.



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