

MEI Weekly



An El Al airliner displaying the word “peace” written in Arabic, English and Hebrew before departing for Abu Dhabi, UAE, on Monday (31 August). This historical flight, which carried Israeli and US delegates, was the first commercial flight from Israel to the UAE following their normalisation agreement. Photo: US Embassy in Jerusalem via Flickr.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

S R Nathan Distinguished Lecture 2020

Can small states prosper while they are continuously facing threats to their existence? Hear Qatari Assistant Foreign Minister, her Excellency Lolwah R M Al-Khater, share how Qatar thrived despite being illegally blockaded by its neighbours at this year’s S R Nathan Distinguished Lecture. She will also explore the similarities between Singapore and Qatar as small states navigating their geopolitical position in this contested era.



Join us for the annual flagship lecture on **14 September** from **3pm to 4.30pm**. The event will be conducted via Zoom this year due to social distancing measures. Places are filling up fast so register now. Check out <https://nus.edu/32YO73Z> for more details now!

What Next for Israel and the Gulf States?

Will other Gulf State follow in the UAE’s footsteps following its recent normalisation of ties with Israel under the Abraham Accord? Join MEI Research Fellow Clemens Chay as he hosts a panel of experts to explore how other Arab states might respond and what solutions are left for the Palestinians.



Join us for this virtual public talk conducted via Zoom on **8 September** from **7.30pm to 9.30pm**. Registration is free and all are welcome. Check out <https://nus.edu/2QPupSy> for more details now!

ME 101: Geopolitics in the Middle East | USA

Will America’s strategic footprint in the Middle East remain or dissipate? In the next ME 101 lecture, Henry Jackson Society Associate Fellow Tommy Steiner will be exploring the changes in American interest and the balance of power in the Middle East in informing America’s future role in the region.



Join us for this virtual public talk conducted via Zoom on **10 September** from **5pm to 6.30pm**. Registration is free and all are welcome. Check out <https://nus.edu/3gCwRXO> for more details now!

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: “Be politically incorrect. Be bold. Challenge the conventional wisdom,” wrote MEI Chairman Bilahari Kausikan in his message to researchers in the latest MEI Annual Report. Revisit some of the institution’s most exciting discussions that took place between April 2019 and March 2020 as it tried to decode the change that the region is undergoing.

READ: Writing for LSE Middle East Centre Blog, Research Associate Tan Feng Qin examines Iran’s relationship with global powers, highlighting the need for the country’s decision-makers to address regional concerns about its strategic and foreign policy to provide a favourable environment for development.

READ: In his chapter for *Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics*, MEI Research Fellow Clemens Chay examines Kuwait’s parliament, a hallmark of political liberty in a region where free elections and genuine legislative powers are lacking, which is still far from perfect due to recurring legislative-executive deadlocks.

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Historical Flight from Israel to UAE

Israeli and US officials departed for Abu Dhabi on an El Al airliner on Monday (31 August) to attend a conference to finalise the normalisation agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. This trip by the Israeli flag carrier was the first direct commercial flight between the two countries. This flight, which crossed over Saudi Arabia which does not recognise Israel. During this trip, Senior US Presidential Adviser Jared Kushner revealed his hopes for Muslims and Arabs to witness this journey and reflect on how the past should not determine the future.

Macron to Lebanon: Change or Face Sanctions

French President Emmanuel Macron met with Lebanese political leaders on Tuesday (1 September) and urged them to support a reform programme to revamp their country’s political system or face the threat of personal sanctions. This reform, which includes the introduction of anticorruption measures and audits on Lebanon’s central bank, is seen as a last effort to fix Lebanon’s broken economy and political system especially after the recent chemical explosion in August. However, many opposition activists are sceptical of the dealings since it involves the same political leaders whom they alleged bankrupted the Lebanon in the first place.



A worker in Turkey’s textile industry working amid the Covid-19 crisis. Unhappiness is brewing against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as his promise to bring about economic prosperity remains unfulfilled. Photo: International Labour Organisation via Flickr.

Turkish Economy Shrinks, Posing Challenges for Erdogan

The Turkish economy has contracted severely, shrinking by 9.9 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter of this year. This has been attributed to the coronavirus pandemic, which has crippled its tourism industry and the export of its automobile and manufactured goods. Despite assurance from Turkish Finance Minister Berat Albayrak, who expects a V-shaped recovery, many analyst highlighted that foreign investors are quickly losing confidence in Turkey. As Turkey’s lira weakens and unemployment steadily increases, many are doubting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s promise to strengthen the economy.

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Jordan Reopens Main Airport

Jordanian authorities have announced that the country will reopen its main airport and resume regular flights next Tuesday (8 September) after a six-month lockdown. This is part of the Jordanian government’s attempt to revive its economy which relies heavily on its tourism industry that makes up to 14 per cent of its GDP.



Israel Considers Covid-19 Lockdown

Israel’s coronavirus Cabinet is set to meet next Thursday (10 September) to discuss the prospect of reimposing lockdowns on adversely affected areas ahead of a Jewish celebration. The move came following a record high 3,000 Covid-19 cases were confirmed in a single day after several restrictions were breached in communities such as those in Jerusalem’s Beitar Illit. Officials warn that if the infection rates continue to increase, drastic measures could be taken on a national level.



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