

MEI Weekly.



A public event calling for justice for murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the first anniversary of his death was organised by Project on Middle East Democracy and 12 other human rights and press freedom organisations on 26 September 2019. Recently, the Saudi government's verdict on the matter garnered criticisms that the state is "shielding Mr Khashoggi's killers from accountability". Photo: April Brady as shared on Wikimedia Commons.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

WATCH, READ & LISTEN: Can China truly avoid getting entangled in the Middle East quagmire? In last week's ME101 lecture, MEI Principal Fellow Alessandro Arduino examined China's geopolitical interests and influence in the Middle East, and evaluated the sustainability of its cautious non-interference approach in the region. Missed the discussion? Catch up [here](#).

LISTEN & READ: In the sixth episode of Boots Off the Ground: Security in Transition in the Middle East and Beyond, MEI Principal Fellow Alessandro Arduino and Research Fellow Ameer Lutfi interviewed Dr Francesco Milan and Dr Aniseh Bassiri about the prevalence of drone usage in contemporary warfare and the political risks and implications of using drones as opposed to human soldiers. Tune in to the podcast or read the full transcript [here](#).

READ: Writing for All India Radio on Thursday (10 September), Research Fellow Dr Asif Shuja examined the future of Iran–India bilateral relations following back-to-back visits by two senior Indian Cabinet ministers to Iran, which took place soon after America's failed attempt to extend the arms embargo on Iran. Read the full commentary [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Khashoggi's Killers 'Escape Accountability'

The Saudi court has issued the final verdict regarding the death of Jamal Khashoggi, which many believe to have been a result of the Saudi government's actions. Despite contradictory evidence, the sentences that were issued in December last year reflects the Saudi narrative that the killing had not been ordered by the royal court. Rights experts and associates of Jamal Khashoggi are accusing Saudi Arabia of shielding the main culprits of Khashoggi's killing from accountability.

Iranian Wrestler's Execution Imminent

Accused of stabbing a water utility worker amid the turmoil in the streets of Shiraz in 2018 during an anti-government protest, Iranian wrestler Navid Afkari was arrested and given two death sentences. An audiotape smuggled from prison suggested that Afkari, who was one of the anti-government protesters in 2018, was tortured until he confessed to the crime. The Iranian government has recently shown signs that it is planning to carry out the death sentence, causing a stir among sports groups and human rights movements who charged that the government is attempting to use him as an example to silence dissent.



Iranian students setting an Israeli and a US flag on fire in front of the UAE embassy in Tehran during a protest against a US-brokered deal between Israel and the UAE on 15 August 2020. The Iranian government has been accused of using the execution of a wrestler to silence dissent. Photo: AFP.

Mecca Imam Accused of Justifying Normalisation of Ties with Israel

In the wake of the recent UAE–Israel deal, a recent sermon by Imam Abdulrahman al-Sudais, the imam of the Grand Mosque of Mecca, has caused a stir after it was seen by some as a prelude to the normalisation of ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel. His sermon spoke about kindness to non-Muslims, most notably the Jews, and stressed the importance of remaining obedient towards leaders and authorities. Social media users have jumped on his remarks and accused him of misusing the platform of Islam's holiest mosque. His prayer at the end of his sermon to "rescue Al-Aqsa mosque from the clutches of the aggressors" was also criticised as betraying the Palestinian cause.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

ME101 Lecture 5: Geopolitical Competition in the Middle East | Israel

In the fifth lecture of this year's ME101 Lecture Series, Mr Kevyn Lim will break down Israel's regional geopolitical position, which has evolved dramatically over the decades. A key Israeli focus over much of the past decade has been in the context of the civil war across the northeastern border in Syria, where Iran seeks to entrench itself and Russia continues to acquire influence. How has Israel's military and security doctrine changed to reflect its current kinetic engagement in Syria or against Lebanese Hizballah in Iraq? Join us for this week's lecture conducted via Zoom on **17 September** from **5pm to 6.30pm**. Registration is free and all are welcome. Click [here](#) for more details now!



Privatising the State Monopoly of Violence from the Middle East and Beyond

In this MEI public talk, Dr Sean McFate, Mr Jamie Williamson and Mr Doug Brooks will discuss how mercenaries and private military companies are changing the rules of war and peacebuilding. Since the second Iraq conflict, the growing presence of private military contractors has generated the need for effective public and private participation, and the re-statement of existing international law regarding the contractors' oversight, enforcement and accountability, specifically in armed conflict environments. This talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **21 September**, from **7.30pm to 9pm**. All are welcome to participate. Click [here](#) for more details now!

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Israel to Re-impose Covid-19 Restrictions

Israel may be heading towards a full lockdown by the end of September, said Israeli military analyst Amos Harel. According to him, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is doing so to limit demonstrations calling for him to resign. From Tuesday (8 September), Israel reinstated week-long lockdown measures to combat a spike in Covid-19 cases due to protests and gatherings. According to Mr Harel, Mr Netanyahu might be delaying the full closure until after his trip to Washington, DC, to attend the ceremonial signing of the UAE–Israel deal. The Israeli Covid-19 Cabinet is also considering imposing restrictions during next weekend's

Israel & UAE to Sign Deal at White House

Next Tuesday (15 September), US President Donald Trump will hold a signing ceremony for the normalisation of ties between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. As part of the deal, the Gulf state agreed to normal relations with Israel, while Israel agreed to continue with plans to "temporarily" suspend its annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank. This contentious deal is seen by some as a victimisation of Palestine while others, like the Trump administration, has showcased the agreement as a major achievement in diplomatic affairs.



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