

MEI Weekly.



Iranian personnel pray around the coffin of slain nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh during his burial ceremony at Imamzadeh Saleh shrine in northern Tehran, on Monday (30 November). The leading Iranian nuclear scientist was killed last Friday (November 27) after gunmen opened fire on his car as it was travelling on a road outside the capital. Photo: Hamed Malekpour/ Tasnim News/AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: In the latest MEI Insight, MEI Principal Research Fellow Alessandro Arduino examines the proliferation of private security companies and how they are increasingly being used to pursue their respective governments' geopolitical agendas in the MENA region. Read the full article [here](#).

READ: Writing for the *South China Morning Post*, MEI Principal Research Fellow Alessandro Arduino argues that Iran will likely respond in "moderate" fashion to the killing of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, given its need for relief and a fresh start with the new US government after the Trump administration's devastating "maximum pressure" campaign. Read the full article [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Hit Teams, Robot Guns – Iran Agencies Play Blame Game

Iranian security agencies have given differing accounts of how Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was killed. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has said the hit was carried out by a remotely-controlled machine gun. Eyewitnesses and others have said, however, that a wild shootout occurred between the hit team and the scientist's guard, while the Interior Ministry has claimed that it had raised warnings about an attack. The various accounts are an attempt by security agencies to deflect blame for a serious security lapse, revealing tensions within the country.

Bid to Ease Qatar Blockade Aimed at Iran

Reports have emerged that Saudi Arabia will move soon to lift a ban on Qatar Airways flights traversing its airspace. But rather than a step towards the easing of the blockade, analysts say the move, if it happens, is aimed at further squeezing Iran's economy. Currently, Qatar Airways pays an estimated US\$100 million annually in fees to Iran for the right to overfly its airspace. If Saudi Arabia eases its restrictions, Tehran's ailing economy will be deprived of a critical lifeline, ratcheting up the "maximum pressure" campaign in the Trump Administration's waning days.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, emboldened by the weakness of his political opponents, is pushing for an early election to maintain his political power so he can better challenge the corruption charges levelled against him. Photo: Gali Tibbon / AFP

Is Israel Heading for a Fourth Election?

After a preliminary proposal to dissolve Parliament was passed by Israeli legislators, it may get final approval as soon as next week. If it goes through, Israelis will go to the polls for the fourth time in less than two years next March. Critics of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have charged that this was his plan all along, and that he never intended to honour a deal with his rival, Benny Gantz. If a new election is called, Mr Netanyahu will have a decided advantage over his rivals, and may have enough support to form a coalition government with his party's right-wing allies.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

[Prelude] Middle East Film Festival

The Middle East Institute and Singapore Film Society have partnered with The Projector to screen two titles as part of a prelude to the Middle East Film Festival, which will be held early next year. The two movies, Saudi Arabian film "The Perfect Candidate" and the Lebanese film "The Insult", will be screened till the end of the month. Enjoy \$2 off each rental [Promo Code: MEFF2off] when you watch the films on The Projector's online platform.



Haven't gotten your tickets yet? They are available now at The Projector for viewing in Singapore only. Check out <https://nus.edu/36yAmw1> for more details now!

Changing Security Architecture in the Middle East: A Role for China?

The King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies and the Middle East Institute have partnered to organise a panel discussion on China's security challenges and expanding footprint in the Middle East. The discussion will focus on China-Middle East relations, US-China ties, and the hurdles facing the construction of a region-wide security architecture.

Join us for this public talk conducted via Zoom on 15 December from 5 pm to 6.30 pm. Registration is free and all are welcome. Check out <https://nus.edu/2JsJWaH> for more details now!

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Erdogan to Visit Azerbaijan After Ceasefire

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will visit Azerbaijan next Wednesday and Thursday (9-10 December) after a ceasefire was struck between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. The truce established last month saw the ethnic Armenians agreeing to withdraw from the contested region of Azerbaijan. President Erdogan is expected to meet Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev after Ankara made an announcement on Tuesday (1 December) that both Turkey and Russia have agreed to monitor the truce.



Lebanon: Hariri's Killer to be Sentenced

The man who murdered former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri will be sentenced next Friday (11 December). Salim Jamil Ayyash is likely to face life imprisonment after a Netherlands-based Special Tribunal for Lebanon found him guilty of five charges, including the premeditated killing of the former Prime Minister and 21 other persons using explosive materials. Mr Hariri served as Lebanon's prime minister twice before resigning in 2004 in protest against Syrian influence in Lebanese politics, and was killed in 2005 when 1,800 kg of TNT hidden in a van was detonated beside his motorcade.

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