

MEIWeekly.



A 48-year old Singaporean was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) last March for his involvement in the Yemeni Civil War. Photo: Sana'a, Yemen, by Rod Waddington via Flickr.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ & LISTEN: In the ninth episode of “Boots off the Ground: Security in Transition in the Middle East and Beyond”, MEI Principal Fellow Alessandro Arduino and Research Fellow Ameen Lutfi interviewed Gene Yu, the CEO of cybersecurity firm Blackpanda, on the similarities between physical and digital security services. Listen to the podcast and read the edited transcript [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Singaporean Involved in Yemeni War Detained

In a statement released on Wednesday (9 December), Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) said it had detained 48-year-old Sheik Heikel Khalid Bafana last March for taking part in the Yemeni Civil War. Among the detainee's activities after he migrated to Yemen with his family around 2008 included running a consultancy that advised foreign companies on security risks and business opportunities, taking up arms to fight alongside an unnamed faction, and providing intelligence for a foreign power in exchange for “substantial amounts” of money. The statement comes less than a month after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) announced an ongoing investigation of 37 people by the ISD and police following terror attacks in France after the republishing of the Charlie Hebdo cartoons.

UAE Set to Use Chinese Vaccine, Despite Doubts

The UAE's approval of a Chinese Covid-19 vaccine on Wednesday (9 December) was met with silence from Chinese officials and Sinopharm, its state-owned maker. Despite promising preliminary data showing 86 per cent effectiveness, above the 50 per cent threshold set by many governments, the lack of transparency surrounding the initial results has left some observers worried. The Chinese vaccine may be appealing to more developing countries, since it can be stored without the same cold chain capability needed for the Pfizer and Moderna variants.



Clinical trials of the Chinese vaccine in the UAE has yielded a preliminary result of an 86 per cent effectiveness thus far, but with limited details of the study released, observers not yet convinced of its efficacy. Photo: Christian Emmer.

Iran Moving Key Nuclear Facility Underground

Satellite images revealed that Iran has been building a facility under the mountains just south of Natanz, where the country's main nuclear fuel enrichment facility sits, after authorities vowed to replace the centrifuge assembly hall destroyed in a mysterious explosion last July. Such a facility, protected by the mountain's ridges, would be significantly shielded from air attacks. The July explosion was part of a series of attacks aimed at derailing Iran's nuclear programme, and culminated in the assassination of the country's top nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. Iran has been enriching its uranium stockpiles ever since the Trump administration pulled out of the nuclear deal.

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

Qatar Blockade Could Be Eased

The Trump administration has made last-ditch efforts to resolve the three-year-long Gulf crisis, with Special Adviser Jared Kushner meeting both the Saudi Crown Prince in Riyadh and the Emir of Qatar in Doha earlier this month. An agreement over the use of Saudi airspace for Qatar Airways could be imminent, though the other blockading nations, particularly the UAE, have shown no indications that they are prepared to make peace.

Lebanese Workers to Strike Next Week

Thousands of public and private-sector Lebanese workers are expected to stage a national strike next Wednesday over the government's decision to reduce subsidies for fuel, flour, and medicine. With inflation at an all-time high, coupled with an economy crippled by Covid-19 and the recent explosion in the port area of Beirut, the inefficient and fragmented sectarian government continues to frustrate the local population, of which 40 per cent are reportedly living in extreme poverty. Members of the country's General Labor Union will participate in the protest against the austerity measures.



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