

MEI Weekly.



US President Joe Biden sits in the Oval Office as he signs a series of orders at the White House in Washington, DC, after being sworn in at the US Capitol on Wednesday, 20 January 2021. Photo: Jim Watson / AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: In our latest Insight, MEI Senior Research Fellow Dr James M Dorsey assesses whether China views the Middle East as a region of strategic importance for diplomacy and investments, and what the outlook for Chinese foreign policy in the region might look like. Read the full article [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Biden is Ending Trump's Travel Ban

On his first day in office, President Joe Biden began the immense task of dismantling former President Donald Trump's nativist legacy on immigration, issuing an executive order to end Trump's controversial travel ban on non-citizens from 13 countries including Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. The policy, colloquially known as the "Muslim ban," first went into effect on January 2017 and became one of Trump's signature immigration policies. The ban has slowed or altogether halted legal immigration from certain countries that the former administration deemed to be security threats, keeping families apart and even stymieing refugee resettlement. Ending the ban was one of Biden's main campaign promises on immigration policy — and he is about to deliver. But this executive order only marks the beginning of a project to erase Trump's influence on the immigration system, which was primarily concerned with keeping people out through a vast network of executive orders, policy memos, and regulatory changes.

Tunisians Revive 'Arab Spring' Chant

Violent clashes erupted for a fifth night on Tuesday (19 January) between police and protesters in several Tunisian cities, including the capital Tunis and Sidi Bouzid, the cradle of the Arab Spring uprisings, as anger and frustration mount over economic hardship. Earlier in the day, protesters rallied in Tunis, reviving the chant that rang a decade ago in a revolution that ushered in democracy: "The people want the fall of the regime." In Sidi Bouzid, where the 2011 revolution began, police fired gas to disperse protesters who were raising slogans against rulers and demanding an end to decades of marginalisation.



Tunisian protesters lift placards and chant during an anti-government demonstration in the coastal city of Sfax, on 19 January 2021. Hundreds have been arrested in four nights of street clashes between riot police and disaffected youths in cities across the North African country. Photo: Houssein Zouari / AFP.

France Will Not Apologise to Algeria

French President Emmanuel Macron has ruled out issuing an official apology for colonial abuses in Algeria, his office said on Wednesday (20 January). There will be "no repentance nor apologies" for the occupation of Algeria or the bloody eight-year war that ended French rule, Macron's office said, adding that the president would instead take part in "symbolic acts" aimed at promoting reconciliation. Macron, the first French president born after the colonial period, has gone further than any of his predecessors in recognising French crimes in Algeria. The 1954-62 Algerian war of independence continues to strain relations between the two countries nearly 60 years later.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

Middle East Film Festival 2021

For this year's Middle East Film Festival, the Middle East Institute at the National University of Singapore, in partnership with the Singapore Film Society, has curated films that may sometimes be confronting as they are set against backdrops of family and expectation, harsh landscape, or tumultuous social change. Each tell of the resilience of spirit and the unbowed soul. Unlike the grand-scale blockbuster films of Hollywood or even Bollywood, films from the Middle East focus on individual struggles and society, giving us a more intimate look into their everyday lives and how they navigate these hurdles.



The 2021 Middle East Film Festival will be run from **19 February to 3 March 2021** at Shaw KinoLounge. Tickets will be available in early February 2021. Click [here](#) for more details!

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Talks on New Syria Constitution to Resume

The UN special envoy for Syria announced Wednesday (20 January) that the next round of talks toward revising the war-battered country's constitution will start in Geneva on 25 January and urged the parties to move to actual drafting. Geir Pedersen told the UN Security Council he views the meeting of delegations from Syria's government, opposition and civil society as very important. He said many subjects have been discussed for more than a year and it is now time for the Constitutional Committee to start considering specific constitutional issues and draft provisions and agree on future meetings on specific topics.

US to Release Khashoggi Report

Joe Biden's nominee for national intelligence director, Avril Haines, has pledged to release a US report on who was responsible for the murder of Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi, a decision that could embarrass the kingdom's crown prince and strain its relationship with its key ally. Khashoggi, a Saudi-insider-turned critic who was living in the US, was killed and dismembered by Saudi agents in the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul in 2018, causing a global outcry. Saudi officials denied the prince played any role, saying the murder was carried out by rogue agents who have been prosecuted. The report, if critical of the prince, could further strain relations with the US and will be released at a time when he is facing domestic challenges including a faltering economy and discontent within the royal family.

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