

# MEI Weekly.



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, right, welcoming Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani upon his arrival to attend the Gulf Cooperation Council's 41st Summit in Al-Ula on Tuesday, 5 January 2021. On Monday night, Saudi Arabia announced that it would open up its airspace and borders to Qatar, reversing a decision taken in 2017. Photo: Bandar Al-Jaloud / Saudi Royal Palace / AP.

## WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

**LISTEN & READ:** In the tenth 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 Candace Rondeaux, an expert on international security apparatuses, on the purpose, demographic and long-term implications of Russian private military companies in the international and domestic arena. Listen to the podcast and read the transcript [here](#).



## WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

### Saudi Arabia and Allies Ease Rift with Qatar

Saudi Arabia and several of its allies signed a declaration on Tuesday (5 January) to ease a rift with Qatar. The decision followed the Kingdom's move to end a 3 1/2-year embargo of the tiny energy-rich country that deeply divided regional US security allies and frayed social ties across the Arabian Peninsula. On Monday night, the eve of the Gulf Arab leaders' summit in the ancient desert city of Al-Ula, the Saudis announced they would open their airspace and borders to Qatar, the first major step towards ending the diplomatic crisis that began in 2017.

### Iran Increases Uranium Enrichment at Key Facility

Iran announced on Monday (4 January) that it had increased its uranium enrichment levels, bringing it closer to developing the capacity to produce a nuclear weapon within six months. The resumption of enrichment to 20 per cent was the latest in a series of escalations that have followed President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from a 2015 nuclear agreement. As tensions grew, Iran seized a South Korean chemical tanker, citing "environmental and chemical pollution concerns," the Tasnim News Agency reported. Analysts, however, said Tehran seized the vessel in order to pressure Seoul to release US\$7 billion in funds that had been frozen because of US sanctions.

### Sudan Quietly Signs on to Abraham Accords

Sudan on Wednesday (6 January) quietly signed on to the Abraham Accords, the US-brokered agreements which have ushered in public rapprochements between Israel and several Arab states. While Sudan and Israel announced they would normalise ties in October, Khartoum's government had said a final decision would rest with a transitional parliament, which is yet to be formed. The UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco have already signed the accords, and all eyes are now on whether bigger Arab players will follow.



Palestinians shouting slogans during a protest in Gaza City against the United Arab Emirates' deal with Israel to normalise relations on 19 August 2020. Photo: Mohammed Abed / AFP.

## CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

### MEI Salon Series: Resistance, Rebellion & Revolution: A Libyan Artist in Exile – Hasan 'Alsatoor' Dhaimish (1955–2016)

Coinciding with the Libyan revolution's 10th anniversary, this event is a reflection on the life and works of a Libyan satirist in exile in the UK, Hasan 'Alsatoor' (The Cleaver) Dhaimish (1955–2016), and an exploration of contemporary Libyan culture and history. Through satire and art spanning from the 1980s to 2016, attendees will experience Libya's transition from autocracy to liberation and civil war through Alastoor's work. Hosted by the artist's son, Mr Sherif Dhaimish, the talk will be aired from the London exhibition, "Resistance, Rebellion & Revolution — A Libyan Artist in Exile", at P21 Gallery, and will feature some of the show's video installations and artworks. Mr Dhaimish will delve into his father's life in exile and his eclectic body of work — from depictions of pre-Qaddafi Libya to satirical cartoons, and paintings inspired by blues and jazz — while offering an insight into Libya's modern history.



This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **19 February**, from **6.00pm to 7.30pm**. All are welcome to participate. Click [here](#) for more details now!

## LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### Koreans Head to Iran Over Seized Tanker

A South Korean delegation is heading to Iran on Wednesday (6 January) to seek the release of a chemical tanker and its 20-member crew, which were seized in Gulf waters by Iranian forces, Yonhap news agency reported. Iran denied it was using the ship and its crew as hostages, but pressed a demand for Seoul to release US\$7 billion in funds frozen under US sanctions. Iran had said the ship was held over environmental violations. South Korea's Vice-Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun is scheduled to visit Tehran on Sunday, a trip that was previously scheduled and during which a range of bilateral issues will be discussed.



### Riyadh Speeds Up Trials as Biden Era Looms

The Kingdom is pushing ahead with the trial in an anti-terrorism court of Salman al-Awdah, a prominent cleric who was detained in 2017 after he urged reconciliation in a tweet. Saudi Arabia is also pursuing corruption charges against deposed former Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, a longtime CIA ally who has been held since March. Authorities have threatened to send him back into solitary confinement despite his frail health if he does not "release funds" — a tactic which a British parliamentary fact-finding panel described as "extortion".

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