

MEI Weekly.



MEI Weekly
MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MEETING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC AND THE MIDDLE EAST

23 – 25 February 2021 | 4pm

The staggering growth in trade between Asia and the Middle East offers both new opportunities and challenges that Singapore may contribute to and benefit from. Technology, human capital development, people-to-people ties and sustainable city development are just some of the opportunities at hand. The Middle East Institute's Annual Conference 2021, happening virtually and spanning across three days, will present panel discussions with experts and policymakers on trade, technology and education. Click [here](#) to sign up for free.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: Writing for the United States Association for Energy Economics, MEI's Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Tilak Doshi, considers the economic and geopolitical outlook of Arab Gulf countries in a post-Covid era. Read the full article [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Biden Re-Assesses US Weapon Sales to Saudi Arabia

The new Biden administration has imposed a temporary freeze on US arm sales to Saudi Arabia and is reviewing its deals with both the Kingdom and the UAE. While it is normal for a new administration to make such reviews and that usually most of the transactions will ultimately go through, US President Biden has made it clear repeatedly that he intends to end US support for Saudi's military campaign in Yemen, where a humanitarian crisis has gripped the country for years.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews Protest Covid-19 Restrictions

Violent protests erupted in several of Israel's ultra-orthodox neighbourhoods on Sunday (24 December) as police officers attempted to clear out religious classes and gatherings that were being held in violation of lockdown restrictions. Some ultra-orthodox government officials have argued that enforcing such restrictions amount to discrimination against the country's most religious community, angering other Israelis who increasingly blame the community for hindering the fight against the pandemic. According to health data, a third of Israel's infections comes from the ultra-orthodox community though they make up only 10 percent of the population.



Israeli police officers detaining an ultra-Orthodox Jew as demonstrators block a highway in the city Bnei Brak to protest against the detention of a member of their community who refused to perform the military service on December 27 2020. Photo: Jack Guez, via AFP.

UAE Approves Establishment of Embassy in Tel Aviv

The United Arab Emirate cabinet approved on Sunday (24 January) to establish its embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel, a step further in the controversial normalization of relations between the two countries that started in August 2020. This comes around the same time that Israel sets up its embassy in Abu Dhabi. No further details have been released on the UAE embassy to Israel.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

Annual Conference 2021

This year's conference is centred around the theme 'Meeting the Future Together: Opportunities and Challenges for the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East'. Day one's topic (Tuesday, 23 February 2021) will be on trade between the two regions, day two's topic (Wednesday, 24 February 2021) will on the role of technology and building resilience between smart cities and cybersecurity, and day three's topic (Thursday, 25 February 2021) will be on developing human capital through education and training. Keynote speakers include Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister-in-charge of Smart Nation Initiative, Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Finance, and Dr Tan See Leng, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry. Click [here](#) to sign up!

Middle Eastern 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!

[MEI Salon Series] Resistance, Rebellion & Revolution | A Libyan Artist in Exil: Hasan 'Alstoor' Dhaimish (1955-2016)

Coinciding with the Libyan revolution's 10th anniversary, this event features the life and works of Hasan 'Alstoor' Dhaimish (1955-2016), a Libyan artist who lived in exile in the UK. Presented by his son, Mr Sherif Dhaimish, attendees will experience Libya's transition from autocracy to liberation and civil war through Alastoor's work spanning from the 1980s to 2016. 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 to Libya's modern history. He will also discuss the artist's legacy, and introduce a new wave of Libyan art that celebrates and preserves culture.

This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on 17 February (Friday), from 6.00pm to 7.30pm (SGT). All are welcome to participate. This event is free, however, registration is compulsory.

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Arab Uprisings Not A Thing of the Past

In this write-up, Marc Lynch presents the present-day Middle East as one that is cracking under the pressure of political instability, low oil-prices and harsh autocratic rule; all of which are compounded by the current Covid-19 crisis. With all these issues and more, mass protests, reminiscent of the 2011 Arab uprisings, seem inevitable.



That said, protests which are bound to occur in the near future is unlikely to resemble the protests of 2011 as the Middle East has drastically changed. There are stronger challenges to popular protests, yet recent events have demonstrated protesters' discipline and commitment.

Iraq Issues More Than 340 Execution Orders

Rights groups fear that the Iraqi government may carry on with executing more than 340 people they claim were involved in "terrorist or criminal acts", days after a deadly suicide attack in Baghdad claimed by ISIS killed 32 people. These rights groups claim that the government uses capital punishment as a political tool and suffers from corrupt practices and inadequate judicial processes. However, most execution orders since the Iraq's official declaration of victory over ISIS were not carried out as they had to be approved by the president, Barham Saleh, who is known to be personally against capital punishment.

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