

MEI Weekly



International Atomic Energy Agency personnel and Iranian technicians during an inspection on Iran's Natanz nuclear site in January 2014. Iran has vowed to increase nuclear enrichment in response to a recent attack on this site. Photo: Azem Ghane / IRNA / AFP

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: The disruption of traditional energy imports due to climate change policies, geopolitical instability and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in a greater need for renewable energy such as solar and wind energy. Yet, there are risks associated with the transition to renewable energy. Michael C. Lynch examines this in our latest Insight. Read the full article [here](#).

READ: In his new piece for the South China Morning Post, MEI Principal Research Fellow Alessandro Arduino discusses how the Middle East is shaping up to be the latest front in the US-China tech rivalry, as countries in the region looking to fulfil their digital infrastructure needs find themselves being forced into an increasingly exclusive choice between the two powers. Read his article [here](#).

READ: Iran and China's new \$400 billion partnership, signed last month, is poised to bring about an unprecedented level of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Ellen Laipson provides her expert take on the possible ramifications of this new deal on the already complex geopolitical landscape in the Middle East. Read her article [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Iran Not Backing Out from Nuclear Deal Revival Talks

An explosion struck Iran's Natanz nuclear site on Sunday, 11 April 2021, destroying thousands of centrifuges used to enrich uranium. Accusing Israel for it, Iran retaliated by announcing its intentions to enrich uranium to a level of 60 per cent purity - a short step from bomb fuel and also attacked an Israeli-owned cargo ship on Tuesday. While the attack on the nuclear site sparked concerns that Tehran might boycott ongoing talks in Vienna with the US over reviving the nuclear agreement from 2015, Iran's top leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday, 14 April 2021, that his country will continue participating in the negotiations.

Egypt 'Seizes' Megaship, Demands \$900 Million in Damages

Ever Given — the megaship which made headlines last month for causing a total blockage at the Suez Canal where it ran aground — has been 'seized' on Egyptian court orders. Egypt has demanded \$900 million from the vessel's owners in compensation for the losses and maintenance costs incurred due to the blockage. The Suez Canal is economically vital to Egypt, which lost between US\$12 million and US\$15 million in revenues for each day of the blockage.



Observers look on as 'Ever Given' is tugged in Egypt's Suez Canal after its dislodgement from the banks. The megaship which blocked the Suez Canal and crippled world trade for nearly a week has been 'seized' on court orders. Photo: Ahmad Hassan / AFP.

What Happened to the "Salvator Mundi"?

A New York Times report has shed light on the reasons behind a rediscovered Leonardo da Vinci painting's continued concealment from the public eye since its sale at an auction in 2017. Named "Salvator Mundi", the work was sold at more than \$450 million to an anonymous bidder — widely believed to be Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The uncertainty surrounding the painting and its absence from a Louvre exhibition had sparked intense speculation about expert evaluations casting doubts over its authenticity. However, the painting is believed to be genuine and its absence was revealed to be due to disagreements between the French exhibitors and the Saudi owners over the latter's demands to place it next to the renowned Mona Lisa.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

Hebrew Language and Culture Colloquium

Join us this weekend for our Hebrew Language and Culture Colloquium, a two-day event that aims to explore current conditions and future prospects of the Hebrew language and culture in Southeast Asia. Listen as a diverse range of experts provide their insights on subjects concerning the relevance and potential of Hebrew language and culture as part of studies in institutions and universities. The conference will be held online on **Saturday and Sunday, 17 and 18 April at 7.30pm (SGT)** on both days.



This event is free and all are welcome to participate. Registration is compulsory.

For more details and to register, click [here](#).

Singapore and Israel: Navigating the Technological Superpower Competition

Cutting-edge technologies and innovative capabilities are becoming increasingly essential in determining the superpower race and defining the future position and role of smaller states amidst a complex technological-geopolitical landscape. In this joint event by us and the Abba Eban Institute for International Diplomacy, speakers will provide their expert views regarding the different challenges and opportunities faced by Middle Eastern countries in the technological sphere. This event will be held online via Zoom on **Tuesday, 20 April from 2pm to 3.30pm (SGT)**. All are welcome to participate. This event is free but registration is compulsory.

For more details, click [here](#).

MEI's Bridging the Gulf Series

Beyond the headlines, what else do we know of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf? Are these societies as conservative as many have perceived them to be? Is Dubai just about its spectacular architecture? How does leadership transition work in these dynastic monarchies?

If you are intrigued by these questions, then we have just the programme for you. In this new webinar series by MEI, we invite experts to shed light on the history, politics and culture of the Gulf states to provide a refreshing perspective of the changes in these societies.

The series will be conducted online via Zoom **every Friday starting 23 April 2021, from 4.00pm to 5.00pm (SGT)**. All are welcome to participate. This event is free, but registration is compulsory.

Click [here](#) for full details.

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Oman to Introduce New Value-Added Tax

Oman is set to put in place a new 5 percent value-added tax (VAT) today, Friday, 16 April, as the government fervently looks for additional revenue streams to finance its budget this year, which is projected to run a deficit of \$5.7 billion. The move is in accordance with a unified VAT agreement among the Gulf Cooperation Council member states in 2016, although Oman has delayed implementation for more than three years. While many observers see the tax as long overdue, it is bound to generate some resistance from Omani citizens and residents.

Biden Announces US Withdrawal from Afghanistan

The US will begin a pullout of its troops from Afghanistan starting 1 May 2021, with the aim of a complete military withdrawal from the country by 11 September this year. The move was announced by President Joe Biden on Wednesday, 14 April 2021, who said that it was "time to end" America's longest war, which began as a response to the Sep 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. While the war has been unpopular with US voters, some observers have expressed concern that the US decision is tantamount to abandoning the Afghan government and encouraging jihadist insurgencies.



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