

# MEI Weekly.



A police officer stands guard near the entrance of the Grand Hotel in Vienna, where Iranian negotiators are holding nuclear talks with international delegates. Both US and Iranian officials have expressed optimism regarding the negotiations, although significant hurdles remain. Joe Klamar / AFP

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

**LISTEN & READ:** In the 14th episode of MEI's "Boots Off the Ground" series, Dr Joshua Reno discusses how the pressure of constant war-readiness produces military waste which in turn animates places and people far from the battlegrounds. He argues that rejected designs, outdated planes, scrapped ships and space debris should be central to calculations of social, political and economic costs of war. Listen to the podcast or read the full transcript [here](#).

**READ:** Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's comments on desiring closer relations between his country and Iran has prompted speculation on a possible rapprochement between the two traditional rivals. In an article by China Daily regarding it, MEI Senior Research Fellow Asif Shuja said US interlinked policies towards the Middle East could be one of the reasons for this. Read the full article [here](#).

**READ:** Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's six-country tour of the Middle East has put the spotlight on China's approach to the Middle East. In his paper for Al Sharq Strategic Research, MEI Principal Research Fellow Alessandro Arduino provides his insights on Beijing's foreign strategy in the region. Read his article [here](#).

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

### US-Iran Nuclear Talks See Progress

A revived nuclear deal between Iran and the US could be reached within reach, with a senior US State Department official saying that the likelihood of an agreement before Iran's presidential elections in mid-June was possible. Nevertheless, both US and Iranian delegates have acknowledged significant remaining challenges, with both parties continuing to diverge on the extent to which each side needed to comply with the terms of the original 2015 deal. A central issue involved Iran's recent installation of advanced centrifuges — while Tehran is willing to subject the centrifuges to UN oversight, the US wants them destroyed completely.

### Israeli Opposition Leader Asked to Form Government

Israel's embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's failure to put together a new government by the 5 May deadline has cast a bleak shadow over his political future as he stands trial on corruption charges. President Reuven Rivlin has tasked Mr Netanyahu's strongest rival, Yair Lapid of the centrist Yesh Atid Party, to form a new government. If successful, this would lead to Mr Netanyahu's ouster after consecutive 12 years in office, although he would still remain in power as caretaker prime minister until a new government is formed. If no government is formed in four weeks' time, Israel will be heading to another general election - its fifth since 2019.



Yair Lapid, leader of the Yesh Atid party, arrives at the Israeli president's residence in Jerusalem on 5 May 2021. Mr Lapid has been given 28 days to form a government. If unsuccessful, Israel will head to its fifth elections since 2019. Oren Ben Hakoon / AFP

### Senior US Officials Tour Middle East to Allay Arab Concerns

Several senior officials in the Biden administration are touring the Middle East as the US seeks to allay Arab concerns over various policy shifts in the region, particularly Washington's re-engagement with Iran. The US and Iran are in negotiations in Vienna over the possibility of reviving the nuclear deal abandoned by the previous Trump administration. Gulf officials have called for any revived deal to address Iran's ballistic missile programme and support for regional proxies.

## CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

### Revisiting The Northern-Tier: Syrian Reconstruction Inside-Out

MEI's Arabia-Asia cluster has been working on the concept of the loose two-tiered geopolitical order emerging within the Middle East - 'Southern Tier' (involving the maritime Gulf states, Israel, India and the US) and the 'Northern Tier' (Russia, Iran and Turkey).

This talk will revisit the concept of the 'Northern Tier' through an inside-out view from Syria, a country where one can observe the dynamics between the three key Northern Tier states. Transnational historians and anthropologists will ground the ongoing involvement of these players in a range of border-traversing networks of merchants, tribal diasporas and paramilitary groups. What will these bring? Collaborations or conflicting rivalries?

The event will be held online via Zoom on **Wednesday, 12 May 2021 from 5.00pm to 6.30pm (SGT)**. For more details, click [here](#).

### [Book Talk] Making It Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China

One of the biggest challenges facing leaders of the new People's Republic of China back in 1949 was how much they did not know. The government of one of the world's largest nations was committed to fundamentally re-engineering its society and economy via socialist planning while having almost no reliable statistical data of the country. Making It Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China is the history of efforts to resolve this "crisis in counting". Listen to author and historian Arunabh Ghosh, as he takes us through his book.

The event will be held online via Zoom on **Wednesday, 19 May 2021, at 7.30pm (SGT)**. For more details, click [here](#).

### Iran-GCC Dynamics and Regional Security

As new dynamics in the Middle East emerge, including increasing Arab-Israeli reconciliation and the looming possibility of a revived US-Iran nuclear deal, what are the implications for regional security? The current nature and future dynamics of the relationship between Iran and the GCC states under the paradigm of regional security will be explored during this session. Our panelists are set to provide insights on the respective countries' security concerns and the possibility of common grounds for co-operation between them.

This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Tuesday, 1 June 2021, from 4.00pm to 5.30pm (SGT)**. To register, click [here](#).

## LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### Iranian Foreign Minister to Visit Abu Dhabi

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will visit the UAE coming Wednesday, as part of his tour of the Gulf countries - an attempt by Tehran to convince the Gulf states that a revived nuclear deal between Iran and the US will contribute to regional stability. Mr Zarif's decision suggests the possibility of warming ties between the two states which cut diplomatic ties five years ago.



### Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Saudi Arabia Will Meet

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will visit Saudi Arabia for talks with his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud on 11 May. This represents the first high-level visit between the two countries since the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. The incident strained ties between both states, with Saudi imposing an unofficial boycott of Turkish goods and closing eight Turkish schools in the kingdom. Ankara is now seeking a positive shift in relations with Saudi and the talks are expected to focus on trade, bilateral ties and regional issues.

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