

MEI Weekly



Our Middle East 101 Lecture Series will give you a heads up on important issues like geopolitical competition in the region, women and youth as a force for change, social media and climate change. Join us online every Thursday, from 26 August 2021. Click [here](#) to register.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

CALL FOR PAPERS: MEI is initiating a Call For Papers for a new series in its journal *Insights*, focusing on Qatar's policy in the wake of the Al-Ula summit which signalled the end of the Gulf blockade. It aims to uncover the various pathways to diversification which Qatar has undertaken during and after the blockade imposed on it by the anti-Qatar quartet (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain) in June 2017. For more details, click [here](#).

READ: MEI Visiting Senior Research Fellow Jonah Blank, who worked with Joe Biden on Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks, tells *TODAY* that endemic corruption and Taliban deals with local leaders were the main reasons for Kabul's swift fall. Read the full article [here](#).

REGISTER: Our Middle East 101 Lecture Series 2021, which is aimed at providing a comprehensive overview of the region and its inevitable impacts locally and globally, begins on 26 August. We have 14 insightful sessions lined up for you so join us every Thursday at 5pm. For more information and to register, click [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Taliban Promises Peace for Afghanistan

For the first time since retaking control of Afghanistan, Taliban leaders on Tuesday outlined what life under the new regime could look like, presenting a restrained image that signalled the group's desire to be accepted as part of the international mainstream. Mr Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban's chief spokesman, declared a blanket amnesty for the group's former enemies and has appealed to civil servants — including women — to return to work. Many Afghans remain wary of the new regime, which has a history of imposing harsh religious rule since its initial takeover of the country in 1996, with scores of citizens attempting to leave the country through Kabul's airport.

Iran Accelerates Uranium Refinement Programme

A United Nations (UN) report warned that Iran has accelerated its uranium enrichment programme and is now refining uranium to a purity level of 60 percent, up from 20 percent in April and veering closer to the 90 percent level that is considered weapons-grade. The move by Iran is the latest breach of restrictions imposed by the 2015 nuclear deal, which set a purity limit of 3.67 percent for the refinement of uranium. While Iran has insisted that its nuclear programme is peaceful and that it has accordingly informed the International Atomic Energy Agency about its activities, the US and its European allies have said that such moves will endanger the still-ongoing negotiations about restoring the nuclear deal.



This picture depicts an Iranian flag with Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant in the background. A new UN report warns that Iran's uranium refinement is approaching weapons-grade, a development that might endanger ongoing efforts to reinstate the 2015 nuclear deal. Photo: ATTA KENARE / AFP

Egypt and Japan Declare Closer Co-operation

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi met with visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi to discuss bilateral co-operation and regional issues of common interest. The discussions also addressed the need for continued consultation regarding joint efforts to prepare for the next session of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Tunisia next year. Mr Motegi also met with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry to discuss regional issues including Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, with both ministers calling for increased co-ordination between their countries to promote stability and conflict resolution in the region.

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Israeli Prime Minister to Visit the US

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is set for a White House meeting with US President Joe Biden on 26 August – their first meeting since Mr Bennett took office. The main item on the agenda is Iran, with both leaders expected to discuss approaches to prevent Tehran from furthering its nuclear programme. A statement from the White House said that the two will also discuss other "efforts to advance peace, security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians", as well as for the wider region.



Iran's President to Decide on Talks with Saudi Arabia

The new Iranian administration of Ebrahim Raisi is set to decide on the next steps of Tehran-Riyadh talks addressing ties between the two countries. The two regional rivals have held several rounds of discussions this year in Baghdad regarding the resolution of their differences and the possibility of normalised relations. The talks also addressed other regional issues including the military conflict in Yemen. It is not known at this point whether the talks — should they resume — will be held in Baghdad again, as the venue will be chosen based on a joint decision by the two states.

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