

# MEI Weekly.



A picture taken on 3 August 2021 shows the Israeli-linked Japanese-owned tanker MT Mercer which was the subject of a drone attack for which Israel has blamed Iran. The recent hijacking of another ship in the Gulf of Oman has sparked fears of escalating tensions in Middle Eastern waters. Karim SAHIB / AFP

## 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 Qatari policy in the wake of the Al-Ula summit which signalled the end of the Gulf blockade. This series is aimed at uncovering the various pathways to diversification 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 information, click [here](#).

**READ:** In the wake of revelations regarding the use of Israel's Pegasus spyware by governments around the world, MEI Principal Research Fellow Alessandro Arduino examines trends in the growing privatisation of cyber-intelligence services. From the Middle East to China, the proliferation of hacking services has blurred the lines between cyber-defence and cyber mercenaries, presenting new challenges for regulation of private espionage. Read his piece [here](#).

**LISTEN:** In the 16th episode of MEI's podcast series *Boots Off the Ground: Security in Transition in the Middle East and Beyond*, Dr Noah Coburn discusses his latest book *Under Contract: The Invisible Work of America's Global War* and elaborates how colonial era structures for recruiting Gurkha soldiers from Nepal came to be remobilised for providing low-cost precarious labour for the American war in Afghanistan. Listen to the podcast [here](#).

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

### Oman Confirms Maritime Hijacking Incident

Oman has confirmed that a Panama-flagged tanker named *Asphalt Princess* owned by the Emirati free-zoned-based Glory International has been the target of a hijacking incident, which ended after the departure of the perpetrators on Wednesday morning. The incident was reported to have involved eight or nine armed men and some maritime security sources have pointed to Iran's involvement in backing the group. However, the identity of the hijackers remains unclear and Tehran has denounced the claims, calling them a pretext for "hostile actions" against Iran. The incident comes just after a suspected drone attack on a tanker in the Arabian sea on 29 July that resulted in the death of two crewmembers, for which Israel has blamed Iran.

### Iraq Reclaims 17,000 Looted Artifacts

Iraq has reclaimed 17,000 archeological artifacts from the US in the largest-ever repatriation of looted Iraqi antiquities. The collection includes thousands of clay tablets and seals from Meso-potamia — the site of the some of the earliest human civilisations — which were formerly held by a prominent museum and an Ivy League university. Decades of war in Iraq has resulted in a thriving black market in looted antiquities. The repatriation of so many objects rounds out a remarkable chapter in the story of a country so ravaged by decades of conflict and war that its very history was pulled out of the ground by antiquities thieves and sold abroad, ending up on display in other countries' museums.



Mesopotamian clay cones bearing cuneiform inscriptions are part of a trove of 17,000 looted archaeological artifacts that the US has returned to Iraq. Photo: SABAH ARAR / AFP

### Sheikh Jarrah: Palestinians and Israelis Baulk at Evictions Compromise

An Israeli top court's attempt at settling a years-long dispute over threatened Palestinian evictions in East Jerusalem has ended in further disagreement, with its proposal being rejected by both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. The court proposed that the Palestinian families would remain on the territory as "protected tenants" safe from eviction for the foreseeable future, provided they pay rent to the Nahalat Shimon, the Israeli company which owns land. However, the Palestinians have said that they wanted recognition of their rights to the property, while Nahalat Shimon has also disapproved of the plan.

## CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

### MEI's Bridging the Gulf Series: Session 10

Did you know that Nizwa was the former capital of Oman in the sixth and seventh centuries, well before Muscat? Our upcoming session explores this ancient city in the interior (known as the Pearl of Islam) which houses Falaj Daris, Oman's largest water source and a UNESCO site situated at the crossroads of age-old trade routes. Come join us in a discovery of Nizwa, with fascinating insights by Oman's Ministry of Tourism.



This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Thursday, 19 August 2021, from 2.00pm to 3.00pm (SGT)**. For more details and to register, click [here](#).

## LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### Egypt Backs Tunisian President Amid Suspension of Parliament

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry has pledged his country's support for Tunisian President Kais Saied, who seized executive power on 25 July, suspending parliament and sacking the country's prime minister. While Mr Saied has invoked the constitution in assuming emergency powers, the Islamist-inspired Ennahda party — his main opposition — has denounced the move as a coup. Tunisia gained attention as the birthplace of the Arab Spring in 2011. However, there has since been little improvement in living standards and the country's political issues are compounded by economic problems and an ongoing dire public health crisis caused by



### A New President Takes Office in Iran, Solidifying Hard-Line Control

Newly inaugurated Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi stated that he will submit a proposed list identifying the cabinet ministers to work in his administration, with a parliament speaker saying it would be approved early next week. While Mr Raisi has not officially announced the names of his cabinet ministers, a leaked list given to local media indicates that several vital posts including defence, intelligence, interior and foreign offices will be offered to figures associated with the Revolutionary Guard Corps who have longstanding ties with the country's intelligence and security apparatus. The new president has also promised to achieve the lifting of sanctions imposed on Iran as well as improve relations with neighbouring countries.

## FOLLOW US FOR THE LATEST UPDATES!



## CAN'T MAKE IT TO OUR EVENTS? LISTEN AT YOUR OWN TIME!

