

MEIWeekly.



A view of Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, taken in November 2017. In recent months, Abu Dhabi has seen a surge in interest from start-up firms locally and abroad despite the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo: Ludovic Marin / AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

LISTEN: In the 19th episode of our *Boots Off the Ground: Security in Transition in the Middle East and Beyond* podcast series, hear all about how privatisation of the monopoly of violence evolved from the two conflicts in Iraq up till the fall of Kabul. Listen to the podcast [here](#).

READ: In the latest *MEI Perspectives* piece, MEI Visiting Research Professor Gyorgy Busztin writes that though Iraq's recent election does not bring wholesale change to the country, the process is something its neighbours can take inspiration from. Read his full article [here](#).

REGISTER: In his book *Letters to a Young Muslim*, the UAE's Assistant Minister for Cultural Affairs, His Excellency Omar Saif Ghobash, wrote about the battle within Islam and how it is not the exclusive property of the Arab world. At the upcoming S R Nathan Lecture on **Wednesday, 27 October 2021**, he will share more about issues surrounding religion. To hear more from him, sign up for the event [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Abu Dhabi's Tech Hub Sees High Interest from Start-ups

Abu Dhabi's new technology hub says it has seen a surge in interest from start-up firms in the country and abroad despite the economic impact of Covid-19 and that there is increased optimism from the sector. Hub71, backed by Abu Dhabi state fund Mubadala Investment Co, the SoftBank Vision Fund and Microsoft, has accepted 100 start-up firms since its inception in 2019 after a selection process that drew about 3,500 applications. Start-ups have become encouraged to base themselves in the UAE following a handful of successes by local tech companies, as investors search for potential tech unicorns – privately held start-ups with a valuation of more than US\$1 billion – in the Middle East.

KSA-Israel Normalisation: A Possibility?

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan raised the topic of normalisation with Israel during his recent meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, three US and Arab sources tell Axios. During the meeting on 27 September 2021 in Neom, Mr Sullivan raised the issue and the crown prince did not reject it out of hand, the sources say. Instead, Saudi Arabian officials said that it would take time and gave Mr Sullivan a list of steps that would have to be taken first. If this breakthrough happens, Saudi Arabia will be the biggest regional player to sign the Abraham Accords peace agreement with Israel and it would likely convince other Arab and Muslim countries to follow suit.



An image of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is displayed on the opening night of the Riyadh Season festivities in the capital city of KSA late on 20 October 2021. This week, a news scoop published by Axios revealed that the crown prince did not rule out normalising ties with Israel. Photo: Fayez Nureldine / AFP.

Iran to Pilot 'National Cryptocurrency'

The "national cryptocurrency" of Iran will enter its pilot stage soon, the recently appointed Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Ali Salehabadi has unveiled. Speaking to reporters after his first meeting with lawmakers, the high-ranking official said the regulator is now studying potential risks and benefits associated with the initiative. Three years ago, the Informatics Services Corporation, CBI's subsidiary operating the country's banking automation and payment services network, was tasked to develop a sovereign digital currency. Unlike cryptocurrencies based on public blockchains such as Bitcoin, the Iranian state-issued coin is not going to be mined.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

ME 101 Lecture Series 2021: Session 10

Throughout history, the Middle East has been locked in engagements with the West through crusades, wars, colonialism and terrorism. However, there are many lesser-known facets too. This series of lectures will give you a more comprehensive overview of the region and its inevitable impacts locally and worldwide.



Join us for the 9th lecture which aims to examine the power of women and youth as a force for change in the Middle East. This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Thursday, 28 October 2021, at 5.00pm (SGT)**. For more details and to register, click [here](#).

MEI's Bridging the Gulf Series: Session 11

We all know Newcastle United has Saudi Arabian owners now, making KSA the third Gulf country to own a major football team after Qatar and the UAE, which own PSG and Manchester City, respectively. Will football be the new frontier for regional competition?

Join us, as we host Professor Simon Chadwick, who will examine the politics of sport among the Gulf states. This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Wednesday, 3 November 2021, at 5.00pm (SGT)**. For more details and to register, click [here](#).

From the Middle East to Afghanistan: The Evolution of the Islamic State in Khorasan Province

Keen to know about the evolution of the Islamic State's footprint from Syria to Afghanistan and its current relationship with the Taliban? Will the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKAP) launch an assassination campaign to eliminate high-level Taliban cadres with the same tactics previously used by the Taliban themselves when they attacked Afghan government officials? Will the Taliban seek greater co-operation with the West and/or other external powers to target ISKP?

To know all these and more, join us for this public talk which will be conducted online via Zoom on **Tuesday, 9 November 2021, at 4.00pm (SGT)**. For more details and to register, click [here](#).

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Iran to Host Multilateral Conference on Afghanistan

Tehran will host a meeting of Afghanistan's neighbours as well as Russia next week, the country's foreign ministry has confirmed and the 27 October event will witness the presence of all six foreign ministers. Saeed Khatibzadeh, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, announced that in addition to Iran and Russia, the meeting will be attended by China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, as they all have land borders with Afghanistan. According to Mr Khatibzadeh, the meeting will continue the discussions they had during a virtual meeting held in early September.



New Pipeline to Boost Gas Exports from Israel to Egypt

Israel is constructing a new onshore pipeline to Egypt to quickly boost natural gas exports to its neighbour in the wake of the recent tightening of global supplies, the Israeli energy ministry said. The pipeline, which will connect the Israeli and Egyptian natural gas grids through the north of the Sinai Peninsula, could be operational within 24 months, industry sources who are close to the discussions said. A new onshore pipeline, coupled with plans to construct a second subsea pipeline to Egypt within a few years, will further cement Israel's position as a key energy hub in the eastern Mediterranean.

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