

# MEI Weekly.



A portrait of Lebanese Information Minister George Kordahi is displayed in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. Yemen's Houthi rebels have put up posters in support of Mr Kordahi, whose recent criticism of the Saudi-led war in Yemen sparked a diplomatic row between Lebanon and Gulf states. Photo: Mohammed Huwais / AFP.

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

**READ:** In the latest *Heard @ The Song* article, MEI Visiting Research Professor Gyorgy Busztin draws parallels between the military coups in Myanmar and Sudan, and how the global community should react to them. Read his full article [here](#).

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

### Gulf States Pull Lebanon Envoys Over Yemen

A diplomatic crisis between several wealthy Persian Gulf states and their tiny, cash-strapped Arab neighbour, Lebanon, expanded as the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait pulled their ambassadors from Beirut after Saudi Arabia and Bahrain did the same. The Gulf nations said they were taking the action in response to comments made by Lebanon's Information Minister, George Kordahi, who called the war in Yemen a Saudi and Emirati "aggression" in a recent television interview. In addition to recalling their envoys, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain also expelled Lebanon's ambassadors from their countries. Although Saudi Arabia's military campaign to oust the Iran-backed Houthi rebels from Yemen has been widely condemned in the West and by its arch-enemy, Iran, its Arab neighbours have avoided antagonising the Kingdom, given its role as regional heavyweight and banker. The backlash underscores just how vulnerable Lebanon is to the whims of its more powerful neighbours.

### US Urges Sudan to Restore Civilian Govt

A senior US diplomat has urged Sudan's top general to restore the country's civilian-led government as mediation efforts pressed on to resolve the dispute that was capped by last week's coup. US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffery Feltman said General Abdel-Fattah Burhan should allow Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and his Cabinet to resume their work and release government officials and politicians detained in connection with the takeover. Mr Hamdok has been under house arrest since the military takeover, though he has been allowed to meet visiting foreign mediators.



Sudanese anti-coup protesters gather in a street in the capital Khartoum on 30 October to express their support for the country's civilian-led government. Photo: AFP.

### Israel, France to Handle NSO Spyware Case 'Discreetly'

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett agreed with French President Emmanuel Macron that the alleged misuse of spyware developed by an Israeli company would be handled "discreetly". The leaders met in Glasgow this week during the UN climate conference. Israel has been investigating whether tech firm NSO Group's Pegasus software, which can be used to hack phones, has been abused on a global scale.

## CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

### The Evolution of IS-KP

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 (ISKP) 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 cooperation 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](#).

### ME 101 Lecture Series 2021: Session 12

Throughout history, the Middle East has been locked in engagements with the West through the Crusades, 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 11th lecture in the series, which will examine the role of fake news in creating and spreading disinformation from the Middle East to the rest of the world. This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Thursday, 11 November 2021**, at **5.00pm** (SGT). For more details and to register, click [here](#).

### Socio-cultural and Religious Reforms in KSA

Five years since then-Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) unveiled Vision 2030, reforms continue to be rolled out in Saudi Arabia. Early this year, for example, it announced new judicial reforms that set it on a course towards codified law – a major step for a country whose legal system is based on Islamic law. This follows his championing of "moderate Islam" by reining in the clerical class and resetting the role of religion in the state. While such reforms are aimed at boosting the liberalisation drive by softening the nation's austere image, jarring contradictions remain.

To understand these phenomena and more, join us for this public talk, which will be conducted online via Zoom on **Wednesday, 17 November 2021**, at **5.00pm** (SGT). For more details and to register, click [here](#).

## LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### Iran N-Deal: Experts Warn 'There is No Plan B'

Revising the Iran nuclear deal was a top foreign policy goal for President Joe Biden when he entered office. But the landmark agreement appears to be on the verge of collapse, as Western leaders grow increasingly impatient with Tehran over the stalled Vienna talks to restore the pact. If negotiators are not able to pump life back into the deal, experts warn there is no feasible "Plan B" for Mr Biden, and the prospect of conflict in the Middle East could increase. Iran hawks have warned that the breakout time to a nuclear weapon is getting shorter.



### Mid-East Climate Plan Set for Green Light in '22

As world leaders wrapped up the first part of the UN climate conference in Glasgow this week, the focus in one well-attended side session shifted to regional cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, a part of the planet recognised as a climate hotspot. Cypriot Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment Costas Kadis announced that ministers from throughout the area, including Israel, are set to meet in February to green-light a 10-year action plan for regional climate collaboration. State leaders will then assemble in early autumn to ratify the plan for implementation, capping a period of intensive work by the Eastern Mediterranean & Middle East Climate Change Initiative (EMME-CI), launched in 2019 by the Cypriot government.

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