

# MEI Weekly.



Earlier this month, the US Department of Commerce blacklisted Candiru, an Israeli spyware company, for engaging in activities that are contrary to the national security interests of America. New evidence surfaced this week, linking Candiru to attacks against high-profile websites in the Middle East and the United Kingdom. Photo: Fred Tanneau / AFP.

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

**READ:** MEI Visiting Research Professor Gyorgy Busztin says that the main question facing Iraq now is whether it can emerge from a new crisis without violence. Read his full article [here](#).

**LISTEN:** In the 20th episode of our *Boots Off the Ground: Security in Transition in the Middle East and Beyond* podcast series, hear about the evolution of Russian hybrid warfare and the role of Russian private military companies in the Middle East and Africa. Listen to the podcast [here](#).

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

### Israeli Firm's Spyware Linked to Cyberattacks

Researchers from internet security firm Eset have found new evidence that suggests the spyware made by Candiru, an Israeli company that was recently blacklisted in the US, has been used to target critics of autocratic regimes, including some high-profile websites in the Middle East and the United Kingdom. Candiru and NSO Group, another Israeli surveillance company, were both added to a US blacklist after the Biden administration took the rare step of accusing the firms of acting against America's national security interests. NSO Group's signature spyware, Pegasus, infects mobile phones whereas Candiru's malware is believed to infect computers.

### Egypt to Expand Leaders' Powers in Epidemics

Egypt is close to passing a law that will allow people to be prosecuted if they publish something deemed to be fake news during an epidemic, an ostensible attempt to control disinformation in the Covid-19 era. However, critics fear the law could be used beyond this period, to repress those who challenge government policies during public health crises. The legislation awaits ratification by President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, a mere formality given that he has overwhelming support in the parliament, which has already approved the bill earlier this week. It grants the prime minister extraordinary powers to manage epidemics and pandemics and it allows the prosecution of people who violate any regulation or mandate imposed by the government to manage such a crisis.



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi is set to ratify a bill which will grant the prime minister extraordinary powers to manage epidemics and pandemics, including the prosecution of people who violate any regulation or mandate imposed by the government to manage such a crisis. Photo: Julien De Rosa / POOL / AFP.

### Gulf-Israel Naval Exercise Signals Iran Worries

In a move almost unthinkable only three years ago, Gulf Arab navies have held their first joint military exercise with Israeli warships which was co-ordinated by the US Navy. The five-day drill in the Red Sea involved warships from the UAE, Bahrain, Israel and the US and included boarding and search and seizure tactics. The exercise follows the signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020. Since then, there has been an intense exchange of diplomatic, military and intelligence contacts between Israel and those Gulf states, as all parties share their concerns over Iran's activities. The US Naval Forces Central Command said the training would "enhance interoperability between participating forces' maritime interdiction teams".

## CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

### [Book Discussion] Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia

Following the Gulf War in 1991, political elites in Saudi Arabia pursued dual projects of historical commemoration and state formation with greater fervor to enforce their post-war vision for state, nation and economy. The discussion about the book *Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia*, aims to explore the increasing secularisation of post-war KSA and how it manifested in assembling a national archive and reordering urban spaces in Riyadh and Mecca.

Join us for this public talk conducted via Zoom on **Wednesday, 24 November 2021**, at 4.00 pm (SGT). For more details, click [here](#).

### ME 101 Lecture Series 2021: Closing Session

Throughout history, the Middle East has been locked in engagements with the West through the Crusades, wars, colonialism and terrorism. However, there are many lesser-known facets too.



Join us for the final session of the 2021 series, which offers you a chance to ask MEI Chairman Bilahari Kausikan anything you would like to know about the Middle East and he will provide honest answers to your questions. This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Thursday, 25 November 2021**, at 5.00pm (SGT). For more details and to register, click [here](#).

### Lebanon: On the Brink of a New Civil War?

Since 2019, Lebanon has faced a financial crisis that the World Bank ranks among the three worst in the last two centuries. This economic collapse was enabled and aggravated by the inability of the political elite to satisfy the demands of international organisations and governments involved in the recovery plan. The Beirut Port blast last August added on to the country's existing problems. Join us for an online discussion as our panel explores the drivers of the ongoing crisis and the consequences not just for Lebanon but for the wider Middle East too.

This public talk conducted via Zoom on **Thursday, 2 December 2021**, at 5.00 pm (SGT). For more details, click [here](#).

## LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### UAE National Security Advisor to Visit Iran

The UAE's National Security Advisor, Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, is set to travel to Iran next week on a rare visit, according to an informal source in Abu Dhabi. This comes after Anwar Gargash, former Emirati minister of state for foreign affairs stated that the UAE "has taken steps to de-escalate tensions (with Iran) as we have no interest in a confrontation." Sheikh Tahnoon was reported to have visited Tehran in October 2019 for an Emirati-Iranian security dialogue that was geared to de-escalate tensions in the aftermath of ex-US president Donald Trump's exit from the nuclear deal and re-imposition of all sanctions under a "maximum pressure" campaign.



### Singapore to start VTLs with Qatar, UAE, KSA

In a further expansion of the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) scheme, travellers from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE will be able to enter Singapore from 6 December 2021. Singapore is also in talks with India to resume scheduled commercial services between the two countries by 29 November 2021. Travellers can travel without quarantine to and from India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which earlier opened their borders for vaccinated travellers from Singapore.

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