

MEI Weekly.



People lay flowers in front of the Kazakhstan embassy in Moscow on 10 January 2022. Nearly 8,000 individuals have been detained and dozens killed, after days of historic unrest in Kazakhstan. Photo: Dimitar Dilkov / AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: In a piece for the *South China Morning Post*, MEI Principal Research Fellow Alessandro Arduino analyses how Kazakhstan's unrest adds to China's growing list of woes in Central and South Asia. Read his op-ed [here](#).

READ: While Oman's strict environmental laws have protected the country's pristine ecosystems and benefited public health, they have also put off many foreign investors. MEI Research Fellow Aisha Al-Sarhi told *Al-Monitor* that the measure of air pollutants needs to be improved and one way could be to have more country-specific emission limits. Read the article [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Kazakhstan Blames Protests on Criminals

For three days early this month, protests in Kazakhstan triggered by fuel-price rises remained largely peaceful. Then, as night fell on 5 January 2022, new groups took over the streets of Almaty, with young men wielding guns, sledgehammers and makeshift weapons. They stormed official buildings, attacked police and torched cars but how did the mostly peaceful protests explode into violence? According to Mr Tokayev, the forces were armed terrorists and bandits – some of whom were trained abroad, seeking to destabilise the country and effect a coup. Some analysts say the violence was triggered by high-level infighting between the president and men close to his predecessor, Mr Nazarbayev, who served as president for nearly three decades before appointing Mr Tokayev as his successor in 2019.

Gulf Ministers in China to Discuss Energy Ties

Foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain along with the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Nayef bin Falah al-Hajraf arrived in Beijing early this week for a five-day visit. The visit follows a flurry of diplomatic activity by China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, including a tour of Africa as well as visits to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The officials are expected to discuss strengthening energy ties with Beijing.



Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud (R) and Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Nayef bin Falah Al-Hajraf, held a press conference at the end of the GCC's 41st summit in January 2021. This week, foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain along with Mr Al-Hajraf are in Beijing to discuss strengthening energy ties with China. Photo: Fayeze Nureldine / AFP.

Egypt's Bond Market Could Get Even Hotter

Egypt's red-hot bond market has made it a favourite of emerging-market investors and they are counting on another year of big gains. JPMorgan Chase & Co. will add Egypt – which has \$26 billion of eligible government bonds – to a group of indexes this month, setting the market up to receive an influx of cash from passive money managers. Investors have already been enticed by Egypt's hefty interest rates, which rank as the highest in the world after adjusting for inflation. With global bond markets reeling from losses as the Federal Reserve turns hawkish, Egypt is looking like a bright spot for investors.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

MEI's Bridging the Gulf Series: Session 13

Added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2013, the Al Zubarah Archaeological Site is Qatar's first entry in this international register. It showcases excavated findings including a city wall, ancient residential palaces and structures typical of an urban centre which provide a reimagining of a Gulf merchant town in the 18th and 19th centuries. Join us for a virtual tour of the Al Zubarah and learn more about the place.



This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Friday, 21 January 2022**, from **2.00pm to 3.00pm** (SGT). For more details and to register, click [here](#).

Iran-Europe Dynamics and the JCPOA Negotiations

It is notable that since the start of the Iranian nuclear controversy about two decades ago, the European Union (EU) has been steadfastly mediating between Iran and the US. Through this webinar, we seek to explore the EU's motivation behind its central role in the nuclear negotiations, the nature of Iran-EU relations and what does the EU foresee Iran's role in the Middle East to be, alongside its own – specifically in the wake of the gradually receding role of the US in the region.



This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Tuesday, 25 January 2022**, from **4.00pm to 5.30pm** (SGT). For more details and to register, click [here](#).

[Book Discussion] Routledge Handbook on China-Middle East Relations

This book brings together a mix of established and emerging international scholars to provide valuable analytical insights into how China's growing Middle East presence affects intraregional development, trade, security and diplomacy. As the largest extra-regional economic actor in the Middle East, China is the biggest source of foreign direct investment into the region and the largest trading partner for most Middle Eastern states. Join us, as we analyse this further and also consider the reverberations in great power politics as the US, Russia, India, Japan and the European Union also have considerable interests in the region.



This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Thursday, 27 January 2022**, from **4.00pm to 5.00pm** (SGT). For more details and to register, click [here](#).

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Iran, US Disagree Over Terms for Nuclear Deal

Iran and the US are displaying little flexibility on core issues in indirect nuclear talks, raising questions about whether a compromise can be found soon to renew a 2015 deal that could dispel fears of a wider Middle East war, diplomats say. After eight rounds of talks the thorniest points remain the speed and scope of lifting sanctions on Tehran, including Iran's demand for a US guarantee of no further punitive steps and how to restore curbs on Iran's atomic work. Western officials now say time is running out to resurrect the pact but Iranian officials deny they are under time pressure, arguing the economy can survive through oil sales to China.



Erdogan Vows to Tame Turkish Inflation

President Tayyip Erdogan promised on Wednesday to tame Turkey's surging inflation, which hit 36 per cent last month but economists predicted it could push much higher, piling further pressure on the battered lira currency. Speaking in parliament, Erdogan said Turkey was protecting its economy against what he called attacks and had taken under control "foreign financial tools that can disrupt the financial system". Under pressure from Erdogan, who seeks higher growth by boosting production and exports, the central bank has slashed its policy rate by 500 basis points to 14 per cent since September. It holds its next rate-setting meeting on 20 January 2022.

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