

MEI Weekly



A view of a residential building damaged by a blast wave at the scene where debris from a downed rocket hit a nearby apartment block in Kyiv on 17 March 2022, as Russian forces press in on the Ukrainian capital. Russian troops trying to encircle Kyiv have launched early morning strikes on the city for several successive days, putting traumatised residents further on edge. Photo: Genya Savilov / AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: In Part III of our experts' hot take on the war in Ukraine, they answer questions about whether China will use the opportunity that the Ukraine war has presented it with and why the Russian military is stumbling. Read it [here](#).

READ: MEI Senior Research Fellow Asif Shuja told *The New Arab* that the Ukraine crisis will cause Iran to insist on retaining its right to enrich uranium at a much higher level to avoid the same fate. Read the article [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Will Putin Evade Punishment Like Assad?

As the world takes in the grim realities of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many Syrians have watched with a horrifying sense of déjà vu and a deep foreboding about what lies ahead. The Syrian war began 11 years ago this month and ever since, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, millions have fled their homes and President Al-Assad has remained in power, in large part because of the extensive support he received from the man now driving the invasion of Ukraine, Russia's President Vladimir Putin. Analysts say the same two strategies used in Syria could be employed here too – peace talks as a form of distraction from the war on the ground and intentionally creating a refugee crisis to drain Europe's resources.

UK Prime Minister Visits UAE, Saudi Arabia

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited the UAE and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday to deliver a plea from the West: pump more oil. It proved a tough sell. Mr Johnson met with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and later, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss improving stability in the energy market after oil prices rose sharply due to the Ukraine war. The West needs oil production from the Middle East to increase as it looks to wean European countries off Russian oil and gas, while avoiding soaring energy bills for voters at home. The kingdom's officials familiar with the talks said the British leader had walked away from the meeting empty handed.



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (L) meets with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the Royal Court in Riyadh on Wednesday, 16 March 2022 during a one-day visit to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Photo: Stefan Rousseau / POOL / AFP.

Iran's Strike Was Response to Israeli Attack

Iran fired a barrage of ballistic missiles into Iraq over the weekend, striking what it claimed was an Israeli target and leaving some analysts scratching their heads about what exactly precipitated the blitz and why Iraq. Now, officials say, the attack was retaliation for a previously secret Israeli airstrike on an Iranian drone factory last month and according to some of them, the Israeli intelligence operatives who launched the airstrike were based in Iraq. The tit-for-tat strikes represent an alarming escalation in the long-running shadow war between Israel and Iran, as both sides push the boundaries of a conflict that has also entangled the US and now Iraq.

CALENDAR: MEI EVENTS

Climate Commitments: Less Reason for the Arab Region to Cop Out?

Can the next two Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings – COP 27 and COP 28 – serve as outlets for the Arab region to highlight their unique climate challenges? Will there be an increase in regional climate co-operation?



In collaboration with the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), MEI (NUS) will be hosting a panel to tackle these questions and more.

This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Tuesday, 29 March 2022, at 8.00pm (SGT)**. For more details and to register, click [here](#).

#ICYMI Iran-Europe Dynamics and the JCPOA Negotiations

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. This webinar explores the EU's motivations behind its central role in the nuclear negotiations, the nature of Iran-EU relations and the organisation's foresight of Iran's role in the Middle East.



Click [here](#) to catch the informative session we had.

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Houthi Welcome Talks on Neutral Ground

Yemen's Houthi group said it would welcome talks with the Saudi-led coalition if the venue is a neutral country, including some Gulf states and that the priority is lifting "arbitrary" restrictions on Yemeni ports and Sanaa airport. The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) plans to invite Yemeni parties, including the Houthis, for consultations in Riyadh this month. GCC members Oman, where some Houthi officials are based and Kuwait, which hosted previous peace talks in 2015, would be a more neutral ground for such consultations.



UAE, Australia to Begin Bilateral Trade Talks

The UAE plans to begin talks with Australia about a trade agreement, officials from the two countries said on Thursday, as the oil-rich Gulf nation seeks to bolster its role as a Middle East business hub. A bilateral free trade agreement of this nature would be the first for Australia in the Middle East, Australia's Trade Minister Dan Tehan said, adding that the UAE is his country's largest trade and investment partner in the region. Australia considers having a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the UAE to be an important building block to possibly more deals with the wider Gulf Co-operation Council.

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