

MEI Weekly.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan deliver remarks to reporters before meeting at the State Department in Washington DC on 14 October 2021. Of late, the US-Saudi Arabia alliance has hit its lowest points in decades as it is at risk over disagreements regarding oil production levels, security concerns and the Ukraine war. Photo: Jonathan Ernst / POOL / AFP.

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

READ: In our latest *Insight* piece, MEI Research Fellow Clemens Chay says that the US sidelining its Gulf partners could complicate its ability to manage crises with regional and global implications. Read his views [here](#).

READ: MEI Senior Research Fellow Jean-Loup Samaan writes about how Israel's reaction to recent terror attacks will likely show its tendency to choose short term solutions. Read it [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

US-Saudi Arabia Relations Reach Tipping Point

The alliance has hit its lowest point in decades with the war in Ukraine deepening political fissures. Saudi Arabia's decision to not pump more crude oil has allowed Russia to continue funding its war efforts, directly opposing US interests. This is just one example of how the America-Saudi Arabia partnership has diverged from its original premise of the American military defending the kingdom from hostile powers and in return, securing the uninterrupted flow of oil to world markets, a transactional agreement which no longer exists. Furthermore, the two countries' relationship used to hinge on close personal ties between leaders such as President George W. Bush and the late King Abdullah. Now, the brittle relationship between President Biden and Crown Prince MBS – who both refuse to allow any concessions to each other – is pushing relations to their brink.

From Ragtag Militia to Threat to Gulf Powers

Previously they were dismissed as unsophisticated rebel fighters, but now the Houthis movement is armed with a vast arsenal of ballistic missiles, kamikaze boats and long-range drones. Thanks to Iran's backing they have extended their reach far beyond Yemen's borders and become part of the Iranian proxy network. The self-proclaimed Axis of Resistance also includes the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad; its purpose is to fight Israeli and American influence in the region. This has left Arab countries scrambling to counter Iran and the Houthis, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE looking to Israel as a possible defence partner.



A picture showing Yemeni fighters, loyal to the Shi'i Houthi movement, secure a rally marking the birth anniversary of Islam's Prophet Mohammad in the capital Sanaa, on 20 November 2018. Photo: Mohammed HUWAIS / AFP.

Temple Mount Tensions: Jordan, Israel Rift

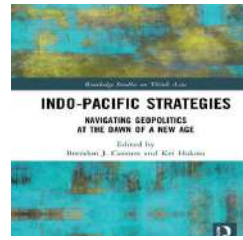
Addressing a session of parliament, the Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher al-Khasawneh voiced support for Palestinians who hurled stones in the holy Temple Mount compound and condemned Israel for allowing Jewish pilgrims at the site. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and other senior officials denounced Mr Khasawneh's comments and what they deemed as support for violence rioters while Israel's Foreign Minister Yair Lapid called for dialogue to de-escalate the tensions. Bilateral relations between Israel and Jordan have improved significantly under the Bennett-Lapid government but regional tensions continue to simmer.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

The Middle East & The Indo-Pacific: The New Geopolitics

The Indo-Pacific region has gained prominence as the world's major powers gravitated towards this space to expand their influence.

To understand the implications of this new nexus between the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific, this webinar will discuss with the authors of a book dedicated to the Indo-Pacific strategies, as they unpack the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific and talk about the place of Middle Eastern powers in that environment.



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

Socio-cultural Developments in the UAE – Trailblazer in a Shifting Landscape

The UAE has been the most widely publicised of all the GCC countries in recent years. Join us to discuss the nature, pace, and direction of the socio-cultural developments there.

This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on Thursday, 5 May 2022, at 8pm (SGT). For more details and to register, click [here](#).



LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Iran Vows Vengeance for Soleimani

Iran will continue to pursue those involved in the US assassination of Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani—regardless of the outcome of efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear deal. This comes as the Biden administration is expected to soon decide on whether to remove the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from the US list of Foreign Terrorist Organisations.



Saudi Arabia Rebuilds its Stake in Lebanon

Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati is due to visit Saudi Arabia in the next two weeks, a first trip by a Lebanese premier to the kingdom in almost four years following an unprecedented rupture in relations. Saudi Arabia's ties with Beirut have been progressively deteriorating over the past decade, a split fuelled by Iran-backed Hizballah's growing influence in the country and the tensions culminated in a break in relations last October, following Lebanese Information Minister George Kordahi's open criticism of the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen.

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