

MEIWeekly.



A large menorah is seen lit at the Israeli Pavilion of Expo 2020 in the Gulf emirate of Dubai on 28 November 2021, marking the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. The increasing openness of Jewish life in the Persian Gulf emirate of Dubai is another sign of an emerging new reality in the Middle East, where Israel's isolation by the Arab world is ebbing. Photo: Giuseppe CACACE / AFP

WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

LISTEN & READ: In the latest episode of our podcast series *Boots Off the Ground: Security in Transition in the Middle East and Beyond*, learn about how Russia's use of mercenaries exposes what may be critical vulnerabilities in the Russian will to fight and the country's state power. Listen to it or read the transcript [here](#).

READ: In our latest Insights article, find out about how Russia's preoccupation with the war against Ukraine has created a further opening for Iran to enhance its geopolitical influence in the Central Asian region, against the backdrop of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Read it [here](#).

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Baking Challah in Dubai

The UAE appears to be charting a path for a warmer peace that could herald a new era in Arab-Israeli relations. While Jews have long lived and worked comfortably in Dubai, they kept their religious expression mostly quiet but in the two years since the UAE normalised relations with Israel, the Jewish community there has grown significantly and felt freer than ever to express its traditions and religious identity. It is one of the many signs of an emerging new reality in the Middle East, where Israel's isolation in the Arab world is ebbing.

Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Cuts Royals' Funds

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has curtailed the al Sauds' lavish spending, demonstrating his intent to reshape the kingdom in the long term. Members of the ultra-wealthy ruling family are known for their extravagance and accumulating wealth through illicit means. Now, they are being forced to liquidate assets in order to deflect the attention of the crown prince, who is determined to put the family onto a disciplined, defined regimen and limit the power of potential rivals.



Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, Saudi Arabia national security council secretary general and the kingdom's former ambassador to the United States, who allegedly sold a \$155 million country estate in England in 2021. Photo: HASSAN AMMAR / AFP

Life Imprisonment for Turkish Philanthropist

Osman Kavala, a well-known activist, was convicted on charges related to popular protests in 2013 against Mr Erdogan, which the president still sees as among the most significant challenges to his power. Seven other defendants were sentenced to 18 years in prison. This is part of President Erdogan's wider crackdown on the opposition following a 2016 coup attempt and has been condemned as a travesty of justice by Amnesty International.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

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](#).

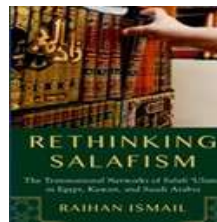


Rethinking Salafism: The Transnational Networks of Salafi 'Ulama

Despite receiving scrutiny as the one of the main ideological sources for extremist violence perpetrated by jihadi groups, Salafism is not monolithic. Learn about the different approaches to Salafism in Egypt, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and how they cooperate to foster a collective Salafi identity.

This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Thursday, 26 May 2022, at 5pm (SGT)**.

For more details and to register, click [here](#).



LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Turkey Using Airspace as Leverage

Turkey is putting pressure on Russia to restart peace negotiations with Ukraine by closing its airspace to Russian civilian and military aircraft carrying soldiers to Syria. However, this could threaten significant tourist flow and energy imports from Russia into Turkey. The move also risks compromising Turkey-Russia cooperation.



Iran-Saudi Arabia Talks Set to Accelerate

High-ranking Iranian and Saudi Arabia officials met in Baghdad for a fifth round of talks recently. The two sides agreed on a series of practical steps to improve relations, paving the way for further talks in the coming weeks—including an upcoming session in Oman.

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