

# MEI Weekly.



A visitor takes a selfie with an Israeli pavilion official in front of a sign reading “to the future” in words written in ancient characters that can be read by both Hebrew and Arabic speakers during a media preview at the Dubai Expo 2020 on 27 September 2021. On Tuesday, Israel signed a free trade agreement with the UAE – its first big trade accord with an Arab state. Photo: AFP

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

**LISTEN & READ:** In the latest episode of our Boots Off the Ground podcast series, find out about the role of artificial intelligence in cyber operations and the future of cyber security management in a complex environment. Listen to it or read the transcript [here](#).

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

### Israel Signs Major Trade Deal with UAE

Israel signed a free trade agreement with the UAE on Tuesday, 31 May, its first big trade accord with an Arab state and a move aimed at boosting trade between the two Middle Eastern nations. The pact was signed in Dubai after months of negotiations. The UAE-Israel Business Council predicts there will be almost 1,000 Israeli companies working in or through the UAE by the end of the year doing business with South Asia, the Far East and Middle East.

### Green Energy Complicates Taliban’s New Battle

For years, opium has been the monster too big to slay. Now, with the Taliban back in power, the insurgents turned politicians are again struggling to eradicate opium cultivation and the rampant addiction problem that has come with it but stamping out opium will be more difficult than ever because of a shift by poppy farmers to green energy. The solar panels have helped generate bumper opium harvests year after year since farmers in southern Afghanistan’s poppy-growing belt began installing them around 2014.



Farmers work at a poppy plantation in a field in Kandahar on 3 April 2022. The Taliban’s supreme leader on 3 April ordered a ban on poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Photo: JAVED TANVEER / AFP

### For NATO, Turkey is a Disruptive Ally

When President Erdogan threatened this month to block NATO membership for Finland and Sweden, Western officials were exasperated but not shocked. President Erdogan is back in the role of obstructionist and is once again invoking the Kurds, as he charges that Sweden and Finland sympathise with the Kurdish militants he has made his main enemy. His objections to the membership of the two Nordic countries have renewed questions about whether NATO might be better off without Turkey.

## CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

### China’s Digital Currency Ripple Effects from the Gulf to Singapore

Private companies Alibaba and Tencent spearheaded the introduction of e-payments within China but are now subject to increasing regulation. Three experts will explore the potential economic and geopolitical impact of China’s initiatives in digital finance and the opportunities, risks and choices for countries in the Middle East.



This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Tuesday, 7 June 2022, at 5pm (SGT)**. For more details and to register, click [here](#).

### [Book Launch] Governance and Domestic Policymaking in Saudi Arabia

Understanding Saudi Arabia’s contemporary processes of domestic policymaking and governance is pertinent given the importance of the government’s economic diversification plans: Saudi Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Programme (NTP) 2020 and revised NTP 2.0.



This discussion examines the progress made in the kingdom’s economic transformation efforts, their implications for state-society relations and the economics of the rentier social contract, among other issues.

This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Wednesday, 8 June 2022, at 4pm (SGT)**. For more details and to register, click [here](#).

### Innovation and Collaboration. 25th Anniversary of the Singapore-Israel Industrial Research and Development Foundation

In the first session of a double webinar series, the active collaboration between the two innovative countries – Singapore and Israel – which has continued to strengthen over the past five decades, will be discussed in detail.



This online talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Wednesday, 15 June 2022, at 4pm (SGT)**. For more details and to register, click [here](#).

## LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### Extra-Regional Tour by Crown Prince MBS

Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince MBS is set to embark on his first major extra-regional tour since 2018. He will reportedly travel to Egypt, Algeria, Cyprus and Greece this month. As part of the tour, he will also travel to Turkey in a sign of warming relations between the two regional powerhouses. A Saudi official said that the purpose of the crown prince’s tour is for the kingdom to enhance relations with its EU partners and end its dispute with Turkey.



### President Biden to Visit Saudi Arabia

President Biden is planning to visit Saudi Arabia later this month, a remarkable departure from his vow as a presidential candidate to treat the country as a “pariah” state. The president’s trip to Riyadh follows broader US efforts to build ties with the oil-rich nation to reduce the price of gas in America, which has skyrocketed in recent months.

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