Heads of the US intelligence agencies, including CIA Director Mike Pompeo (C), is likely to reduce friction between the White House and the State Department. Conflicting messages by Trump and Tillerson, is expected to be replaced by Mike Pompeo, the current CIA director and a supporter of tough measures against Iran. He was also a key supporter of the Trump administration.

Pompeo and Haspel could face opposition during confirmation hearings in the US Senate. At least one Republican senator, Rand Paul, said he would vote against both candidates, a worrying sign for the administration because Trump's party has a narrow 51-49 majority in the Senate.

Human rights groups said they would call on senators to sink Haspel's nomination. She is accused of having run a secret CIA prison in Thailand in 2002, where torture was allegedly practised against detainees.

Given the record of the secretary of state nominee, Iran is preparing for a possible US exit from the JCPOA.

If confirmed, Pompeo, a former conservative member of Congress from Kansas who is very close to Trump as the official delivering the daily intelligence reports to the president, is likely to reduce friction between the White House and the State Department. As a politician, Pompeo has a reputation for confronting China and eroding trust in US policies in the Middle East and the Far East under Tillerson's tenure.

Pompeo was also a strong critic of the US Cuban policy, which was abandoned by Trump's administration. He has been a vocal supporter of a tougher stance on Iran, and his influence on Washington's foreign policy is expected to be significant.

Allies and adversaries of the US in the region can expect a change in tone after the departure of the low-key Tillerson. "Pompeo's style, like Trump's, is based on confrontation rather than dialogue," the New Yorker magazine said in a profile of the designated diplomat.

Trump praised the "very good chemistry" between Pompeo and him and pointed out major differences with Tillerson. "When you look at the American deal, it's terrible. I guess he thought it was OK," Trump said. "I wanted to either break it or do something and he felt a little bit differently.

The president is unlikely to face any problem that would prevent him from confirmation. However, the Senate could reject Pompeo's nomination, which could be a setback for the administration's efforts to implement the JCPOA.

Pompeo will have to decide by May whether to take the US out of the international agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or not.

Given the record of the secretary of state nominee, Iran is preparing for a possible US exit from the JCPOA.

In 2018, Egyptians living outside the country, the majority of them, are preparing to vote in the upcoming presidential election. The General Union of Egyptians Abroad, a guild of Egyptians living outside the country, is expected to play a significant role in influencing the outcome of the election.

"The United States is determined to leave the nuclear deal and changes at the State Department were made with that goal in mind — or at least it was one of the reasons," Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said.

"Partially streaming positions between the president and the secretary of state could clarify the US stance on the row between Qatar and a Saudi-led bloc of Arab countries. While Trump took Saudi Arabia's side, Tillerson sought to accommodate the Taliban and tried his hand at mediation in the Gulf region. As Pompeo takes over, Washington could move clearly into the Saudi corner and unseat Seula's US strategy.

Pompeo's nomination was pre- dictably welcomed news for US allies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz is expected in Washington for talks in the coming days. Turkey has formally expressed its wish to work with Pompeo but Turkish newspaper noted that Pompeo had called their country a "threatening Islamic dictatorship" after a failed coup in 2016.

A push for a more robust position would also be imminent in US policies towards Syria. "Pompeo's appointment as secretary of state is likely to embolden those within the Trump administration who seek to further amplify a more assertive posture within the Syrian crisis," Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, wrote in an analysis.

Pompeo has called Saudi President Bashar Assad a "puppet of the Iranians." The same view could apply to Iran's involvement in Iraq.

Pompeo's influence on Washington's role in the peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians is unclear because that issue has been the realm of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner. However, some observers expect the State Department to play a more active role under Pompeo because he is a member of Trump's inner circle, which Tillerson never was.

"No one has a stronger relationship with President Trump than Mike Pompeo," Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said in a statement.

Thomas Seibert is a Washington correspondent for The Arab Weekly.
Why Pompeo may not be good news for Ankara

Yavuz Baydar

The diplomatic reshuffle in Washington may be the harbinger of a new era of further confrontation with Ankara.

gardless of the rosy expectations of some, US-Turkey relations may enter a critical phase if CIA Director Mike Pompeo takes over from Rex Tillerson.

Pompeo and Tillerson have very little in common. Tillerson represented a “softer” American approach to issues and the notion that Washington needs to take its allies into account. Pompeo stands for a much tougher line, based on his loyalty to US President Donald Trump.

US foreign policy is about to take a sharp turn, onto a more assertive path.

US diplomacy reset

US administration faces immediate challenges on key Middle East issues

Washington

ought in an interview between two secretaries of the United States is facing immediate challenges in the Middle East that will test the Trump administration on key issues in the region.

Mike Pompeo, nominated to be the United States’ top diplomat, will have privileged access to a stream of visitors arriving in Washington in the coming weeks but he will not take over the State Department from Rex Tillerson until clearing US Senate confirmation hearings next month.

Tillerson, who was ousted by US President Donald Trump on March 13, is leaving his post March 31 and has handed the day-to-day running of US diplomacy to Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, a key Trump ally in the region, is to become the nation’s foreign minister and is expected to meet with the Trump administration on March 20 in the White House.

Indeed, regional ambitions, the conflict in Yemen, the row between Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as the appointment of the crown prince, are likely to be on the table.

“The US administration [under President Donald Jonhson] certainly expects a lot from the US on Yemen and on the broader issue of Iran’s influence in the region,” Elie Abousamra, the director of the Middle East and North Africa Programmes at the US Institute of Peace, a bipartisan organisation founded by the US Congress, said via e-mail.

The crown prince, in his capacity as the defence minister, recently fired his country’s top military leader, Maj Gen Ahmed Asiri, over a report of fruseation with the stalemate in the war against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

“Given the constraints to mobilise more US military resources and the realities of the ground in Yemen, I don’t see how the US can play a more determining role in the Yemen war and in countering Iran’s expansion,” she said.

Before travelling to Washington, Crown Prince Mohammed raised the spectre of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East by declaring that Saudi Arabia would develop nuclear weapons if Iran acquired the bomb.

“Saudi Arabia does not want to acquire any nuclear bomb but, without a doubt, if Iran develops a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible,” the crown prince told the US television network CBS.

He compared Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to Adolf Hitler.

In the meeting with the crown prince, Trump is expected to ask Saudi backing for his plan to solve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Another focus is the Qatar crisis that is pitting several US allies against each other. The administration is trying to put together a summit of leaders of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council at the presidential retreat at Camp David in May to end the dispute.

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan is to visit the White House this month with Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani due in April.

As it struggles to find a solution to the Qatar crisis, the Trump administration is also trying to ease tensions with NATO ally Turkey.

The Turkish government said the US administration faces immediate challenges on key Middle East issues that will test the Trump administration on key issues in the region.

Pompeo’s appointment, with Foreign Minister Mr Cavusoglu calling for “respect,” Pompeo reportedly called Turkey a “collaborator, Islamist dictator ship” after a failed coup attempt against Erdogan two years ago. The secretary of state nominee carried “prejudgments against Turkey,” Murat Yetkin, a respected Turkish columnist, wrote in the newspaper Hurriyet Daily News.

Pompeo may weaken American support for and cooperation with the Kurdish militia but that’s as far as he’s likely to go. Even though Iran will be Pompeo’s red line, Russia’s anti-US policies will most likely be of concern.

Erdogan will play his trump card, which is mostly Russia and Putin’s anti-Erdogan sentiment in the US Congress. Russia will be an important factor as Turkey’s president gambles by turning the Akm incursion into a “sustainable conflict.”

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President Donald Trump on March 13.

For this reason, the US administration faces immediate challenges on key Middle East issues that will test the Trump administration on key issues in the region.

Senators Bob Corker and John McCain are expected to stay in place but much depends on and, if he doesn’t, certainly cannot ignore.

The diplomatic reshuffle in Washington may be the harbinger of a new era of further confrontation with Ankara.

Viewpoint

Cover Story

US Senate lawmakers arrive for a press conference following a luncheon at the US Capitol, on March 13.
Saudia Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salma in Abdulaziz al Saud, who is also his trip to the United States.

London

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salma in Abdulaziz, his army is not among the top five armies in the Muslim world.

The interview was in advance of the crown prince’s trip to the United States, which will include stops in Washington, New York and Boston. Crown Prince Mohammed is on his first global tour as heir to the throne and visited allies Egypt and Jordan, before arriving in Japan ahead of his visit to the United States. During the “60 Minutes” interview, the first with a Saudi leader on American programming since 2005, Crown Prince Mohammed dismissed the notion of a Saudi Arabia-US rivalry.

"Iran is not a rival to Saudi Arabia. Its army is not among the top five armies in the Muslim world," Prince Mohammed, who is also the Saudi defence minister, told CBS News’ “60 Minutes.”

US defence secretary presses Oman on Iran weapons smuggling

The Pentagon statement did not mention weapons smuggling but US officials said that due to the sensitive nature of the matter.

"The US defense department said Mattis met with Oman’s foreign minister, but they did not discuss sponsorship of terrorism or weapons smuggling," US diplomat

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US congressional group asks Justice Department to investigate Al Jazeera

Mark Habeeb

Washington

A bipartisan group of US congressmen has written to Attorney General Jeff Sessions asking the US Justice Department to investigate the Qatar-funded television network Al Jazeera to determine whether it should be required to register as a “foreign agent.”

The US Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), enacted in 1938, is a disclosure statute that requires “persons acting as agents of foreign principals in a political or quasi-political capacity to make periodic public disclosure of their relationship with the foreign principal.” FARA does not cover official diplomatic actions by foreign nations or their embassies but does cover foreign-directed propaganda or public relations efforts as well as US lobbyists who represent foreign entities, public or private. The purpose of FARA is to ensure that the American people know which foreign entities are trying to influence the US government.

Entities covered by FARA must file quarterly reports to the Justice Department detailing their activities in the United States as well as expenses incurred.

The congressional letter was signed by 18 members of the House of Representatives – 15 Republicans and three Democrats – and Republican Senator Ted Cruz of Texas. It asks the attorney general to investigate whether “Qatar’s Al Jazeera, which the US State Department has indicated is state-controlled, should be required to register as a foreign agent.”

The US Attorney General Jeff Sessions speaks at a hearing on the Justice Department on Capital Hill in Washington, last October.

The Justice Department has not officially commented on the letter or on whether Al Jazeera is being investigated for possible inclusion under FARA.

The next step would be for Sessions to order a Justice Department investigation, which could take months to conclude. Al Jazeera, which has claimed to be an impartial news source that is not influenced by Doha, would arguably challenge the letter’s accusations but would have no ability to appeal the Justice Department’s final decision.

Denouncing Al Jazeera’s pro-motion of extremist agendas was among the grievances of a Saudi-led quartet of Arab countries that cut ties with Doha in June 2017.

Stephen Starr

is the author of “Revolt in Syria: Eye-Witness to the Uprising” and has lived in Syria and Turkey since 2009.

Qatar’s isolation is approaching its 1-year mark and its economy is reeling.

Doha’s isolation rings loud, fewer options available

mong the gleaming skyscrapers that make up Doha’s skyline, one building stands out. It is the darkened Shadow of Dubai Towers, which would, at its sto- ries, be the city’s tallest building when completed. Except that the rift between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bah-rain and Egypt worsens that may never happen.

Doha is quieter than it’s been in decades. Driving through Doha’s streets to reach the Al Jazeera Media Cafe in the city’s northern suburbs, there are few signs of life. Just a single table at the television network-affiliated eatery is occupied. At the dozens of surrounding cafes, the only people visible are valet attend- ees and golf cart drivers awaiting customers who may not appear.

Qatar’s isolation is approaching the 1-year mark and its economy is reeling. The ruling al-Thani family has fewer options than before to successfully navigate a positive end to the Gulf crisis.

Qatar’s problems are rooted in the Syrian conflict. Jabhat al-Nusra, the armed opposition force that Qatar initially supported, morphed into an al-Qaeda affiliate. That was when Doha’s backing of the rebel group became anathema for Saudi Arabia and its Gulf neighbours.

If Qatar’s support for al-Nusra triggered the crisis, it is not the chief bone of contention between the gas-rich pet-rostate and its neighbours. The Gulf countries’ main problem with Qatar is its backing of the Muslim Brotherhood, the roots of which go back decades. When survivors of the failed 1982 Brotherhood uprising in Hama fled Syria, many headed for Qatar. There they found jobs as teachers and in the civil service. A lasting relationship was forged and, as has, led to this point today.

For Syrians, the Muslim Brotherhood is a bit like maqopus, either dearly loved or vehemently loathed. During the early stages of the Syrian war, Qatar opened the door to the Muslim Brotherhood to enable it to establish a foothold in Syrian opposition politics.

“The Brotherhood,” Foreign Policy magazine reported in 2012, “has successfully opposed attempts to outline how the transitional period will be managed – an ambiguity the group no doubt hopes it will be able to exploit to seize a leader- ship role after Assad’s fall.”

The magazine further noted that “Al Jazeera, the Qatar-owned satellite behemoth, has polished the image of [Brotherhood- affiliated] anti-regime Islamists in its coverage.”

The tide of the war has, of course, turned in favour of the Assad regime but the Brotherhood endures with the help of Qatar and Turkey and awaits another chance.

Analysts say the Qatar crisis could end just as abruptly as it started, but given that relations have fallen into a deep-rooted stasis, that’s an unlikely sce-nario.

On the home front, Qatar’s economy is in the doldrums and, despite huge injections of capital, in need of attention.

The options available to the leaders sitting in the quietest city in the Gulf are few. Qatar and its neighbours could be in for a long winter yet.

Mark Habeeb is East-West Editor of The Arab Weekly and adjunct professor of Global Politics and Security at Georgetown University in Washington.
Egypt's Salafists wary as Saudi Arabia treads path of reform

Hisham al-Najjar

Cairo

following a pledge by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz that Saudi Arabia would return to “moderate Is-

lam,” Egypt’s Salafists — major recipients of financial assistance from the kingdom — expressed con-

cern about what the future holds for them.

Amid a crackdown on Islamicists in Egypt, Salafists have avoided the fate of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, largely by backing Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-

Sisi. Nonetheless, Egypt’s Salafists have suffered a major reversal of fortunes, particularly in the politi-

cal arena.

Wael Magdi Abdel Moneim, a member of the Salafist Call organ-

isation in Mansoura in northern Egypt, blamed the Brotherhood for that. “What is happening in Saudi Arabia is similar to what happened in Egypt and this is all due to the

ruinlessness and recklessness of the Muslim Brotherhood,” he said.

And while the Brotherhood sought to amass too much power too fast following the 2011 revolution, leading to the group’s downfall, a wider back-

lash against all Islamist parties.

At the time, the Muslim Broth-

erhood in Saudi Arabia as it was

allowed an opening to secularists and liberals in the country,” Abdel Moneim said.

Surur, who died in 2016 in Doha, was an expert on the rise of Salafist jhadism and is widely quoted by radical Islamist terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

This process of opening in Saudi Arabia includes the social reforms championed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, not least calls to fight radical Islam and promote “moderate” Islam. This is not to mention Surur’s calls to “reform” religious dialogue and other state-

ments promoting “moderate” Is-

lam.

It is these same calls that have raised fears among Egypt’s belea-

tured Salafists.

Ahmed Nader al-Amin, a member of the Salafist Call in Cairo, agreed it was the move by Islamists, particu-

larly the Muslim Brotherhood, to box powerful that led to a popular counter-movement against Islam-

ism in general.

“Based on their [the Muslim

Brotherhood’s] desire to monopolize power, we have seen increased gaps between scholars and those in power and greater suspicion to-

wards Islamicists,” he said.

There is a division within Egypt’s Salafists over how to adapt to the

changing times.

Despite the reversal of political fortunes for Egypt’s Salafists, there have notably been no calls for pro-

test or violence.

“Delegitimizing with those in pow-

er... does not mean clashing. If not, Salafists would be no different from the Muslim Brotherhood and other similar groups,” said Salaf Abu Ab-

bas, a Salaf preacher in Alexan-

dria.

The Muslim Brotherhood was of-

cially designated as a terrorist organisation in Egypt in Decem-

ber 2013, with Cairo accusing the Brotherhood of being behind the Hamas militant group that attacked Egyptian police and politicians in Egypt.

“The solution is to adopt a re-

formist approach that allows, in the long-term, for a stronger [Salafist] presence in society. This is based

on using peaceful means and popu-

lar influence to repair an image that otherwise has gone off the rails,” he said.

Egypt’s Salafist Council issued a statement in February announcing its support for the Egyptian Army in the major military operation target-

ing ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula and across the country.

“The Salafist Call, like all the Egyptian people, stands behind its army in its war on terrorism, and prays to God to help it [the military] prevent [terrorists] from corrupting the land,” the statement said, using clear religious imagery.

There is a division within Egypt’s Salafists over how to adapt to the changing times, with some sup-

porting the establishment of politi-

cal parties like Al-Nour and others preferring that Salafists adhere to a tradition of non-political involve-

ment.

For the latter, it is far more im-

portant that the Salafists use their influence to promote charitable works and proselytisation, rather than be emboldened in politics.

Many Egyptian Salafists have re-

acted with concern to changes in Saudi Arabia and its reform move-

ments, which included the estab-

lishment of cinemas and theatres and the development of a local en-

tertainment industry.

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body or anything,” he said.

Hisham al-Najjar is an Egyptian writer in Cairo.

Egypt’s Sudan but challenge, suspicion remains

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Egypt is intensifying ef-

forts to mend ties with Sisi’s and curb Turkish and Qatar of-

ficials accused of seeking to undermine its national security and supporting the out-

laws to join Khatron tonight. Sisi’s Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Sudan in Decem-

ber, signing several investment and cooperation deals, including an agreement to take over admin-

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Among major

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Opinion

Significance of US diplomacy reset

February 11 saw the US-Tehran talks successfully resume but the chances of a tangible result seem remote. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is expected to announce a new strategy for the Middle East on March 13, would be hoping for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

It is to be hoped there will finally be clarity.

Tillerson's position on Iran was closer to their thinking the same. "So we were not really break it or do something, and he felt a little bit explained, had a different view. "I wanted to either things. When you look at the Iran deal, I think it accomplishes much more than the president. Trump said. Not just on Iran policy, it was becoming increas-

militias in the region.

The inadequate system is straining under limited reactions. Such a strategy rather than quick and long-term and comprehensive ist plan in the region.

The Houthis had to spread their campaigning to offer the Yemenis. political, economic or cultural targets country. Iranian officials overtly speak of four targeted country. Iranian officials were hoping to add Arab capitals — Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and Sana’a — being directed from Iran. Those officials were hoping to add Sana’a to their list. Such brash talk appeared after September 21, 2014, when the Houthis laid their hands on Sana’a and started talking about the “revolutionary legitimacy” in Yemen. Taking Sana’a was the first step in the Iranian project in Yemen. The Houthis had to spread their control towards the centre and the south to include Aden and Mocha. From there, Iran would control Bab el Mandeb Strait and all navigation through the Red Sea and Suez Canals. By taking control of two major maritime gateways — the Hormuz Strait and Bab el Mandeb — Iran could pretend to be a regional power.

The second was Houthi military exercises close to the Saudi-Yemeni border. Those operations were clear Iranian provocations towards Saudi Arabia. Iran had bases right across the Saudi border. There was no escaping a military solution like Operation Decisive Storm. The Houthis were kicked out of Aden and Mocha and the pressure is on Sana’a. On the fronts near Taiz, a status quo is in place. Operation Decisive Storm has lifted the veil on the Houthis’ objectives in Yemen. They have no intention of sharing power or listening to a different viewpoint. Without hesitation, the Houthis assassinated their former ally, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Operation Decisive Storm is but one component of a well-thought-out strategy to contain Iran. In addition to military actions, political solutions must be pursued. The “legitimate” front in Yemen needs to be restructured taking into consideration the new realities on the terrain.

Given that the war in Yemen risks becoming protracted, life needs to be reorganised in areas of the country. The Houthis use a well-thought-out strategy to contain Iran. In addition to military actions, political solutions must be pursued. The “legitimate” front in Yemen needs to be restructured taking into consideration the new realities on the terrain.

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In three years, the campaign has achieved a good portion of its goals, the first of which was restricting Iranian influence to Yemen. }

Editorial

Significance of US diplomacy reset

“Easing of US-Tehran tension may not come as a surprise to anyone. Ramsey omitted. This dismissal was info from late last year. It was considered unlikely that the US Secretary of State was named “Ramsey,” a note up to describe Britain’s exit from the European Union. It has long been obvious US President Donald Trump and his Chancellor did not see eye to eye over Iran. The US President, including Iran and the 2015 nuclear deal.”

Trump maintained that the day Tillerson was dismissed: “We disagreed on things. When you disagree with the US Election, I think it was terrible.” His Secretary of State, he complained, had a tendency either to do or something, and he felt a little bit differently.” Trump said. “So we were not really thinking the same thing.”

Many in European capitals, however, said that Tillerson’s replacement was closer to their own, rather accommodating stand than Trump’s. Just four days earlier, it was becoming increasing：“I have a great deal of respect for the US president in the Middle East. The Middle East, the US position on the nuclear and conventional threat posed by Iran, especially as the May 12 deadline for Iran to change its behaviour is approaching. Tillerson was known for his openness and readiness to engage with Iran’s leaders. This was reflected in the recent visit to Washington of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. It has much going for him, not least a personal connection to the president. Trump has said of Pompeo: “We’ve always done the same things.”

It is to be hoped there will finally be clarity.

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In three years, the campaign has achieved a good portion of its goals, the first of which was restricting Iranian influence to Yemen.
The Kurds’ struggle is part of all of Iraq’s battle against forces of darkness

Ibrahim Zobeidi

It is time for the wise among the Kurdish populations to realise that their so-called leaders are corrupt opportunists. Not only did they join the political, economical and cultural lives in Kurdistan, they contributed to the same disaster in all of Iraq. They have traded the dream of a democratic, nationalist and civic Iraq for a fake, corrupt and murderous one. When will Kurdish leaders join hands with their other angry brothers in Iraq and start the struggle against the forces of darkness that robbed them of their dignity and rights? Kurds and Iraqis alike need to realise that the destruction of Iraq and Kurdistan by of the Islamic State will be followed by the destruction of Iran and its Kurdish political allies will pale by comparison to the coming destruction by people like Amir, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Qas Ghazali. None of this would have happened if Kurdish leaders had chosen a united, strong and credible alternative. That will give him authority and the powers that be in Iran.

The US president said so at an event on March 18, 2018.
London

Iraq

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (C) meets with Kurdistan Regional Government authorities retake control of the two Baghdad.

c

passports would be entrusted to with a Kurdish delegation, which Minister Haider al-Abadi said. He met from the office of Iraqi Prime Min-

ister Haider al-Abadi, a statement rerouted to Baghdad.

ered three months. Only domestic flights were bound international flights were in February for another possi-

ber for two months and renewed independence referendum, which was passed the budget, in protest over the region's diminished allo-

ations to the Kurdish peshmerga. Baghdad said there are thousands of non-existent peshmerga fight-

ers whose salaries were being col-

lected by corrupt figures. It prom-

ised to pay them once the central government has a verified list of the names.

Top Iraqi government financial officials met with Kurdish regional officials to settle differences over regional bank operations and civil servant salaries. Officials in Bagh-

dad said paying KRG civil servants was expensive and nontransparent.

“We are committed to pay-

ing those workers in the region. We are committed. This is not a false promise,” Abadi said.

The Arab Weekly staff and news agencies.

As proxy warfare in region continues, calls echo for pragmatet
Seven years of conflict in Syria... and more to come?

Four years of conflict in Syria, the country's fragile economy, and the recession are truly staggering. Approximately 47,000 people have been killed. At least 100,000 civilians and up to a million people remain trapped under the regime and receive no aid. This is the day in 2017 that major unrest began in Damascus and Aleppo. Seven years later, it's hard to see how the fighting will end, when it will end, or if it will end. World leaders promote peace treaties that don't bring peace; truces have only seemed to intensify the fighting and sidehoused such as Turkey versus the Kurds and the United States versus the Islamic State (ISIS) have complicated the situation.

It is the West's abandonment of the idea of interventionism. We saw the notice of work in NATO's operations in the former Yugoslavia in 1991 and 1995, as well as in the no-fly zones established in 1999 to protect Kurdish refugees in Iraq from reprisals by Saddam Hussein. However, no one in Syria believes the West is coming to help. Talk of no-fly zones or creating safe areas for refugees has been ignored by Putin and Assad. They are aware that, in the words of one pundit, the West is basically a group of “paper tigers.”

Western impotence and unwillingness to act can be traced to Obama’s failure to fulfill his promise that the use of chemical weapons by Assad was a “red line” and would provoke a response. Nothing happened and that was the beginning of the end. Internationally, the rejection of Syrian refugees by the United States and by many European countries drove another nail in the coffin that holds the remains of that positive idea – liberal interventionism.

While photographs of the drowned bodies of young children on Mediterranean beaches moved many around the world, it provided a short-lived sentiment. Instead of offering a helping hand, most Western countries withdrew sharply and blamed the victims. Right-wing Western ideologues sensed the fear of the “Other” among predominantly white populations and invoked images of “cultural genocide.” Far too many in the West have been willing to accept that narrative without a second thought.

Perhaps it is time, as one expert recently suggested, that the West stop pretending it cares and just let Assad win. It may be the only way that the mass murder and displacement of the Syrian people can be stopped.

Abdulrahman al-Masri

Ottawa

T alk about military action against the Syrian regime of President Bashar Asad has been heard in Western capitals for the last couple of weeks. The contours of what any Western military action against Assad might assume are not clear but, whatever the Trump administration or the British government is considering, it would be limited in scope and will not produce any immediate outcomes. It suggests, however, long-term planning for Western investment in Syria, which it had largely lacked in previous years and could mean increasing joint efforts to counter Iranian expansion and Russian dominance.

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson told the Arabic daily Asaqa Al-Awsat that his country may carry out “limited strikes” against positions of the Assad regime, similar to what the United States conducted in April 2017 with cruise missiles against Shayrat Airbase, from which chemical strikes were initiated against Khan Sheikhoun.

White House officials told the Washington Post that US President Donald Trump requested options for military action against Assad in light of renewed use of chemical weapons on civilian targets. Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the United Nations, stated American willingness and preparedness to conduct an operation against the regime. However, given the danger of military confrontation with Russia, any action against the United States against Syria would be limited in latitude and carefully executed.

What seems to be the case here is that the United States and beard Western powers are likely looking to draw a new “red line” for the Assad regime in the hope of curbing Iranian expansion and challenging Russian dominance.

The attempt is a result of increasing concern that the West is losing its remaining leverage in the Syrian war to Russia and its allies, Iran, and most recently Trump. This unease about the role of the United States in the world is blantly indicated in its grand strategy, revealed in December, which puts great power competition as the primary focus of its national security.

The concern is further exacerbated by the recent claim of Russian Foreign Minister Putin’s claim that his country is defending its nuclear weapons and compounded still further by the loss of US influence in Syria, expanding its reach and influence across the country in a provocative manner, which was recently demonstrated in the February announcement of US military engagement with Israel.

Beyond words: A Syrian man carries a child after evacuating from the Eastern Ghouta enclave, on March 14.

Whatever is being considered in Washington on the matter of striking Assad has to be executed carefully.

The geography of the conflict suggests that the United States may strike positions in southern Syria, for example, where Iran-backed militias are spreading their reach. This is something from which the United States could gain leverage as southern Syria could be used by Iranian forces to launch attacks on Israel and to supply arms for the spread of Iranian reach in the country. Russia is more hostile than ever to any Western power military engagement to gain influence.

Further US military engagement in Syria could get additional support in Washington with the appointment of Mike Pompeo as the secretary of state. He is reportedly in favour of blocking further gains by Assad and Russia and of instituting a hawkish posture against Iran in the region.

Whatever is being considered in Washington on the matter of striking Assad must be executed carefully. The dynamics of the conflict are not entirely different from 2017, when the regime carried out its first chemical attack, but also different from 2017. Last year witnessed unprecedented advances made by the regime and the spread of Iranian reach in the country. Russia is more hostile than ever to any Western power military engagement to gain influence.

US and Western military strikes against the Assad regime are perhaps needed but would not stop the fighting nor soon bring relief to the trapped under the regime and saw Russian bombardment.

Abdulrahman al-Masri reports on politics and news in the Middle East and Syria in particular. He can be followed on Twitter: @AbdulrahmanMasri.
For Misratans, politics are divisive but Misrata comes first

**Lamine Ghanmi**

Tunis

Libyan military strongman Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, vying for control of southern Libya, ordered transnational African fighters to leave the region or face air strikes and shelling by tank.

Fighters and migrants from Chad, Nigeria, and Senegal, among others, have been drawn into the fighting in southern Libya between real Libyan military factions and tribes. Lead- ers in southern Libya and Libya analysts said the vacuum caused by lack of central authority allowed the area to evolve from a nexus of smuggling, lawlessness and crime into much bigger conflicts that make the conflict even more intractable.

Fears of an escalation of violence in the area prompted the United Nations to send a UN envoy to the Libyan National Army (LNA) and its rival, the internationally recog- nized government in Tripoli, to push for a cease- fire in the region. The LNA has clashed with tribal militias and groups aligned with the Tripoli government over dominance in the south.

Cycles of violence have repeated in the region since the ouster of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi by NATO-backed Islamist rebels in 2011, an uprising that left Libya still a threat. A security member of Misrata counterterrorism force removes explosives from a car driven by a suspected ISIS militant in Misrata, on January 11.

Despite the business boom, there are problems. There are complaints about the difficulties of obtaining letters of credit for payment of goods. The use of foreign currency as a result of booming trade in the south and oil prices has brought in foreign fighters to strengthen their positions in the south.

Still a threat. A security member of Misrata counterterrorism force removes explosives from a car driven by a suspected ISIS militant in Misrata, on January 11.

Libya: a nursery from the south-

Foreign fighters add to threats in southern Libya, faced with power vacuum, rivalries

Lamine Ghanmi is an Arwa Weekly correspondent in Tunis.

**At breaking point. A Tebu man stands alongside a pickup truck in the southern Libyan city of Sebha.**

Tribal leaders said that the presence of “foreign fighters” fuelled the violence and threatened Libyan territory.

“Nothing is happening in Sabha and those fighters are there in an attempt to truncate part of the homeland and put it under the control of foreigners coming from across the border,” said Abdulhafid Youssouf, a leader of the Awdal Subiham tribe.

Libya’s Saharan south has traditionally been inhabited by two main non-Arab ethnic groups: the Tuareg and the Tebu. They had been outnumbered and dominated politically by a patchwork of Arab tribes, including the Gadhadhfa, Warfalla, Merghara, Awdal Sidi- man, Fazzans, Hassawna and Zu- wayjah.

Analysis said the leaders of the various groups vying for control of Sabha were continuing a Qaddafi policy of manipulating tribal and ethnic divisions to reinforce their influence. They said statements by Haftar and other leaders would make no difference because there is no central government to create a sense of Libyan nationality and to force out foreign fighters.

“Foreign fighters have been used by Gaddafi to destabilize govern- ment authority and advance the goals of his policy in Sabha,” said Teb activist Ismail Bazarak.

Political analyst Ahmed Fitouri said: “The fighting and other vio- lent outbreaks on the border between Sabha and Tawergha”.

The United Nations warned last year against the role of foreign fighters, including increased involvement of Chadian and Sudan- nese mercenaries, in the Libyan conflict.

“In addition, repeated attacks against individuals and property by foreign armed groups in the south of Libya have encouraged Libyan citizens’ sense of vulnerability and dis- trust towards LNA and the Misrata Third Force,” the UN report stated.

Abdelhamid Zawi, a writer from southern Libya, said the main con- cern in the area is the “civil status register.”

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As Western influence wanes, Russia looks to Lebanon's power vacuum

Nicholas Blanford

Beirut

Russia has offered Lebanon a $1 billion line of credit to purchase armament for the Lebanese Army with favourable repayment terms. While the Lebanese are interpreting as a push by Moscow to expand its influence from neighboring Syria into Lebanon at the expense of the United States. The Russian offer, which Moscow reportedly seeks a military cooperation deal with Beirut that would allow Russian naval vessels and aircraft access to Lebanese sea ports and airports. The $1 billion deal has triggered alarms in Washington and London. The United States and the United Kingdom have signaled to Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri that, if the Russian arms deal is accepted, it could jeopardize existing military assistance agreements provided by both countries to the Lebanese military, diplomatic and political sources in Lebanon said. “If Lebanon accepts or even inquires about the possibility to accept a Russian aid line for the purchase of Russian defense articles, it will have significant — and potentially irreversible — geopolitical consequences on Lebanon’s existing bilateral and multilateral commitments and partnerships, especially ties to the United States,” said Aram Nerguizian,CEO of the Mornings Group, a strategy consultancy in Washington. Lebanese government sources denied that any warnings had been received regarding the Russian offer adding that the line of credit existed since the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 2010. The sources said the Lebanese government in such cases asks the Lebanese Army to assess if the supplied equipment is compatible with the military’s needs.

“This has not been answered yet. In all cases, the government of Lebanon will not end up accepting strategic relationships. They are both absurd and don’t need warnings,” the source said on condition of anonymity. The offer, which has yet to be formally announced, was raised in Rome at four countries assembled for a conference to support the Lebanese Army and police. On the side lines of the conference, Hariri met with Mikhail Bogdanov, deputy Russian foreign minister with responsibilities for the Middle East. “We have a fruitful cooperation with Lebanon since a long time in various fields, including enhancing the combat capabilities of the army so that it can fight against the Islamic State and Hezbollah,” Bogdanov said after the meeting.

The United States has delivered more than $2.6 billion in weapons, training and equipment since 2005. Although the Lebanese Army does have some Soviet-era equipment, most of its modern weaponry is American and compatible with NATO. The United Kingdom has a training programme for the Lebanese Army and has established four land border regiments guarding Lebanon’s porous border with Syria.

Although the Lebanese Army does have some Soviet-era equipment, most of its modern weaponry is American and compatible with NATO. US influence in Lebanon has diminished since October 2016 when a decade-long political confrontation between rival Western-backed and Iran-sponsored parliamentary blocs ended with the latter victorious, leaving Hezbollah as the undisputed domestic power. However, it is unclear whether the Lebanese government will accept the Russian offer, given the potential ramifications.

“If we go with the Russians, the United States and the United Kingdom will walk away from Lebanon and their friends in the West and open to possibly see Iran with the Lebanese parliamentarian on condition of armament for the Russian equipment when we have been receiving American weaponry for free in the past ten years,” he said.

The line of credit offer is not the only sign of growing Russian interest in Lebanon. Russian and Lebanese companies are bidding for rights to explore for gas and oil off the Lebanese coast. Russia and Lebanon have strengthened educational and cultural contacts. Hariri has called on Russian companies to invest in Lebanon in infrastructure projects.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev recently instructed the Russian Defence Ministry to negotiate with Lebanon to purchase Russian equipment to install a missile defense system with the Almaz-Antey company. Moscow may view Lebanon as a potential ally in its struggle to reduce US influence in Lebanon has de-

Lebanon’s civil society no better than the coyote hopelessly chasing the road runner

Makram Rabab

Lebanon’s civil society no better than the coyote hopelessly chasing the road runner

When Election Day comes, the voters will regrettably stick by what they see as more reliable traditional politicians.

nynoe who grow up watching cartoons is familiar with Wile E. Coyote and his endless pursuit of the Road Runner.

As ingenious — and often convoluted — as his schemes were, he never succeeded in his pursuit of the elusive bird. It’s entertaining, often hilarious and shows how opposing and different characters can find purpose and even define each other in what appears an absurd and vicious cycle of chase.

This cartoon analogy serves as a good prism through which to view the uphill battle of Lebanese civil society, as it tries to replace the country’s political elite and steer Lebanon toward a more just and peaceful governance.

Yet, many members of this loosely defined “civil society” gear up for nationwide elections May 6, an examination of the group’s role in the election season that lies ahead gives little cause for optimism.

Now is a good time to consider the many factions among these independent actors, who may or perhaps coincidentally, have assumed the mantle of the modern civil society. Many of the groups and individual activists running for office belong to one of three broad categories. First, there is an assortment of shady and legitimate millionaires and entrepreneurs who wish to replicate the example of the late Rafik Hariri in parlaying business into a political success. However, lacking Hariri’s vision (and the crucial support of Saudi Arabia), the public is left with nothing but knock-off versions of candidates, who, by setting up charitable organizations and university scholarships, buying prime time airwaves and endorsing TV celebrities to run for office, will have done the work to proclaim themselves statesmen.

The second group is a hodgepodge of former party activists and political figures who have fallen apart of their previous party’s lead-

ership, either due to ideological awakening or because they were passed over for government office. Viewed from a distance, it’s hard to see the group as little more than disinterested political figures with again opportunities looking for a share of the government’s spoils. Which brings us to the final category: These are the most independent activists. It includes young men and women who have made a name for themselves through working and leading NGOs, human rights organizations and cooperatives. Supported by international and local funds, these activists work through interaction with the different branches of government, have become aware of the structural obstacles to reform and have decided to act.

Despite their widely varying motivations and backgrounds, the ambitions of all three factions are predicated on two fundamental miscalculations: that they can easily dissolve the ruling hegemonic political class, and that the independent electrode will do the right thing and vote for change.

As outwardly sound as these assumptions may appear, they neglect essential facts. Principally, that, despite the many problems and seemingly outdated appearance of Lebanon’s ruling establishment, the established groups have the legitimate and wide power base, which none of the independents can match. More importantly, contrary to the lines these civil society activists are peddling, the current electoral law, which was tailored to fit the ruling establishment, works against these diverse political voices. It will lead to a repeat of the old system.

As it stands, Lebanese law only allows voters to cast ballots for closed lists based on proportional sectarian voting, with the option of giving their preferential vote to the smallest district and one candidate on the list. The threshold percentage required to earn a seat was increased to ensure that only established political parties with their vast financial and human resources can amass them. Yet, what truly stands in the way of these independent candidates winning parliament, other than their propensity for division, seems to be their grave misunderstanding of the voting mindset and behavior of their constituencies, a mistake that will prove catastrophic.

Many of these advocates of change have little understanding of the certainty that, when the time comes, the voters will do the right thing and vote for change. This assumption presents them in past elections the political conditions and the electoral law (prohibited voters from voting against the wishes of the political elite. They didn’t.

Once the voters decide who they will vote, they will look at the ballot and see how they have voted and not take into privileges for them, the election is over. They work around these franchises, which none of these independent politicians can match.

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When Election Day comes, the voters will regrettably stick by what they see as more reliable traditional politicians.
**Despite recent unrest hardliners maintain sharp edge in Iran**

### Ed Blanche

**Beirut**

The Islamic Revolution in Iran was a pivotal event that enabled the hardline faction to consolidate its power and maintain a sharp edge against moderate forces. This has been evident in their recent actions, particularly in the context of the economic and political turmoil in the region.

These hardliners, led by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, have demonstrated their commitment to the Islamic Revolution's ideals and policies. They have consistently rejected any form of external interference and have been steadfast in their support for the regime's policies.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been a key component of Iran's hardline strategy. The IRGC has been involved in a range of activities, from domestic security to proxy warfare in the Middle East, and has played a significant role in maintaining Iran's influence in the region.

**The regime's commitment to the Islamic Revolution seems to outweigh all other issues so the economy continues to decline.**

Indeed, there are plans to increase the budget, while back-pedalling is not possible.

**The regime's commitment to the Islamic Revolution seems to outweigh all other issues so the economy continues to decline.**

The next confrontations will trigger a whole new level of events, pushing some parties to the wall. Iran needs to find a way to coexist with its neighbors and the international community. Failure to do so will only strengthen the hands of its opponents.

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**Ed Blanche**

**Special Focus**

**Iran**

**Saiedi goes out to challenge Tehran**

Ed Blanche

**Beirut**

**Why Shia clerics challenge Iran's clerical regime**

Ali Alfoneh

A non-resident senior fellow at the Henry Kissinger Centre for Strategic and Transnational Studies in Washington, D.C.

**Saiedi says the current political unrest is an internal pressure on the regime.**

Iran's reliance on sanction killings seems to have been pulled out of the playbook of macabre and brutal killings by its own revolutionaries. Iran's clerical regime is facing increasing pressure from its own people and the international community. Iran's leaders need to address these challenges if they wish to maintain their grip on power.

**Ali Alfoneh**
Despite recent unrest, hardliners maintain sharp edge in Iran

Ed Blanche

Beirut

The Islamic Revolution in Iran has been described as a "watershed" moment, yet the country remains divided and distrustful. One of the most pressing issues facing Tehran today is the country's commitment to the 2015 nuclear deal.

Iran已在中东地区扮演重要角色，但其内部纷争仍未平息。近来，由于经济困难和政治压力，伊朗局势动荡不安。2015年核协议谈崩后，伊朗政府面临内外交困，尤其是经济危机导致国内民众不满情绪日益高涨。文章指出，尽管协议未完全恢复，但伊朗方面仍试图通过谈判解决分歧。未来形势如何发展，仍待观察。

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As Palestinians mark Land Day, confiscation of their lands continues

The inability to prove ownership has made those lands vulnerable to confiscation by Israel because the Palestinian owners do not have official proof of ownership.

"This land gives us all that makes life worth living," said Mahmoud Darwish in his famous poem "Palestine." The phrase is an accurate representation of the role land plays in the collective Palestinian mindset, where it is understood, not in terms of property, but existentially.

The protracted loss of land by Palestinians is seen as the loss of homeland, the loss of Palestine, something very connected to their very existence as a people.

Even though the process of dispossession started during the first decades of the 20th century, it was the 1948 war that set in motion a systematic process of Zionist land acquisition. Following the establishment of Israel in 1948, 76% of Mandate Palestine, the newly formed government immediately introduced emergency regulations to re-arrange land plots in the Palestinian land under its control. As a result of the war, known as the Nakba (Arabic for "catastro- pha"), 710,000-900,000 Palestinians — 53%-66% of the Palestinian population — were displaced from their homes and became refugees. More than 500 Palestinian localities were destroyed or cleansed during the war, leaving 20,530 sq km of land vacant.

The acquisition of control over the territory coupled with the dramatic decrease in the Palestinian population established prime conditions for widespread land confiscation by Israel. This policy was implemented through an elaborate administrative mechanism to transfer ownership of the lands to the Israeli government.

Following the Nakba, Israel, as the successor state, inherited all the lands registered with the British High Commissioner for Palestine. Once those lands were secured, Israeli officials developed mechanisms to acquire privately owned properties.

In 1950, Israel passed the Absentee Property Law, which declared all lands owned by the recently expelled refugees "ab- sentee property" and transferred them to a custodian. The 1951 Land Acquisition Law transferred all land under the control of the Development Authority to be used for the development of Israel. This law allowed for the legal registration of those lands as belonging to Israel. As a result, the Development Authority illegally appropriated 1,200 sq km of land, 704 sq km of absentee land owned by refugees who were expelled or whose land was 54 sq km of land privately owned by Palestinians.

It is worth noting that, following the 1948 war, Israel imposed a military government on Palestinian areas. Many Palestinians were expelled during this military rule in operations aimed to strengthen Israel's dominance in the territory and its control of the newly established borders. Palestinian towns and villages were cleansed and the lands left behind by those who fled were considered under the Absentee Property Law. Through these strategies, 95% of the land in Israel came under the control of the Israeli government. These areas are categorised as Israeli lands under Israeli law, meaning they cannot be sold and can only be designated for the exclusive use of the Jewish people.

The Israeli government not only managed to confiscate the properties of Palestinian refugees, it also prevented Palestinian citizens of Israel from accessing them from selling.

Following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel, implemented a process that lands in the West Bank and Gaza after 1967. All land registered as state land — 13% of the West Bank — was automatically under Israeli control. Several military orders also effectively acting as the Absentee Property Law. This facilitated the illegal confiscation of the properties of the 1967 Palestinian refugees, nearby 300,000, left that were hostile to power outside the West Bank.

In 1968, Israel introduced a military order freezing in land registration processes, impeding the formal recognition of ownership of that land. The inability to prove owner- ship has made those lands vulnerable to confiscation by Israel because the Palestinian owners do not have official proof of ownership.

In 1995, the Oslo Accords divided the West Bank into Areas A, B and C, leaving more than 66% of this territory, Area C, under full Israeli control. While control did not translate into ownership, Israel systematically abusively this author- ity to deny use and access of the lands to the Palestinian owners, resulting in the de facto confiscation of those lands.

The grabbing of Palestinian lands continues relentlessly on both sides of the Green Line. In February 2017, for example, the Knesset passed the Regularisation Law legalising about 4,600 housing units in 55 illegal outposts built on private Palestinian land in the West Bank. In 2018, the Israeli government announced it will build 2,900 more homes there.

These developments constitute the latest expression of a 70-year-old policy that is pushing Pales- tinians into shrinking pieces of their homeland. As long as illegal confiscation of land continues unchecked and without legal con- sequences for Israel, Palestinian land will continue being confis- cated under the Israeli premise of acquiring the maximum acreage of land with the minimum number of Palestinians.
The suspension of Turkish soaps is how to erodong and his neo Ottomanism

Tom Regan

A lifetime in Istanbul. It was all about the food. Delicious. To this day I tell one of my favorite meals and I still have goose, feta and pastrami for breakfast. It was impossible to ignore the history of Turkey because it was everywhere you looked. The first time I felt like a Syrian historian and author of Turkish drama and thinking about the United States are Erdogan and his team. For Erdogan, however, and was particularly upset with one show called “Ukhwet al-Turab, ” which shed light on the torture of Syrian conflict seven years ago. The Turkish government also invested money and effort into producing a mega-drama in Arabic about the life of former Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II, also in 2018 starring Syrian actor Abbas al-Nouri. After nine decades of non-stop indoctrination against the Ottomans in mainstream Arab media and government curriculum, it was very difficult for the Turks to see the word “Ottoman” in Arab circles, so he suggested the Turkish national anthem be played on drums and the other instruments were pulled off the airwaves. He was particularly upset with one show called “Ottoman’ s Tom Regan

The suspension of Turkish drama from Arabic television networks is no minor thing for Erdogan and his team.

Sami Moubayed

is a Syrian historian and author of "Under the Black Flag" (IB Tauris, 2015).

Erdogan’s rightward turn on domestic policies and his rants against the United States are unsevering to those thinking about visiting Turkey.

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Gasimov does not believe Russia's role in Syria has jeopardised wider relations with the Arabs nor that Moscow is now too wedded to Tehran.

However, as Gasimov explained in his talk, interest in vostokvende ("knowledge of the East") and specifically Shamil Yustuk (the "Near East") goes back to transit times. While much of Russia is geographically east of the Middle East, and many Russians see this area as a critique of the "decadent West," Gasimov argues that studying Russian orientalist common in English. Under the tsars, orientalists poured over medieval texts and the Qur’an. In the 19th century, Russian orientalists wanted to understand modern Arabic. In 1941, Kharlampii Baranov produced the first comprehensive Arabic-Russian dictionary. For this he drew on work done by Mikhail Osipovich Attya, a Damascene Christian. Taufik Almaszadeh, a ballerina and Soviet translator at the Nuremberg Councils and paramilitary units of the KGB officer in Central Asia. Gasimov does not believe Russia’s role in Syria has jeopardised wider relations with the Arabs nor that Moscow is now too wedded to Tehran.

The photograph illustrates two officers, one Russian and one Arab side, looking at maps. The Russian officer is wearing a military uniform and the Arab officer is wearing traditional attire. The photograph was taken in the 1980s. Area studies are much more than just looking at the personnel are reduced, " he said. While Moscow restricted its military intervention as a success, he argued. Syria would be Moscow's "the only one that matters, because he "knows more than the generals" of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Trump is to blame for much of the impasse, especially because of his decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv, leading the Palestinians to charge that the US is biased in favor of Israel.

For political reasons, Trump might not make such a shift in policy. The danger is that Pompeo may encourage Trump's impulses on Iran, which case the region could be in a war, as the plan. While Pompeo's recent move to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv, leading the Palestinians to charge that the US is biased in favor of Israel.

Indeed, the prospects for peace may be worse now than before Trump became president.
London

The integration of Muslims into the UK is a hot-button issue in the Middle East, and the recent visit of Prince William to Israel and the Palestinian territories has sparked a significant debate. The visit was announced March 1, barely a week after the US take the lead but this is not the case. The visit was seen as a symbol of Britain’s commitment to protect Muslims from discrimination, and called for the establishment of a “Punish a Muslim Day” across the country, called on the government to do more.

There is a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment and its increase over the last five years. "It cannot be overstated how much of an effect Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discrimination has had on Muslims being able to access different sectors, professions and services," Samayya Afzal, a Bradford-based activist, said in the report. The report was released the same day as the government’s Integrated Communities Strategy green paper, which placed English language learning at the heart of integration. "Integration is a plausible policy option. Yet too often we see the conception of a ‘top-down, mono-nationalist and establishment ‘British values’ approach,’ which assumes the ‘other’s needs to be civilised into our way of thinking," MCB Assistant Secretary-General Naqid Versi said in a release.

Writing in the MCB report, he highlighted the statement from former British Prime Minister Tony Blair that integration is a "one-way street" and explicitly rejected the view that there should be any "moral obligation" on Muslims or ethnic minorities. "Integration for us means integration for everyone," he added.

The report said questions over Muslim integration were overblown. It said that out of nearly 3 million Muslims in Britain, 33% were under 18. Of those, 27% were born in the United Kingdom and 6% struggled to speak English.

The 150-page report, published a few days after letters calling for the London in the Middle East and writes on political and social issues in the region.

Sharmila Devi is a former British correspondent in the Middle East and writes on political and social issues in the region.

London is seeking a post-Brexit niche and the royal trip to Israel and the Palestinian territories may be part of that attempt.

What is the significance of Prince William’s announced visit to Israel?

The report called on social media outlets to clamp down on Islamophobia and so-called fake news. One day before the report’s release, Facebook announced it would remove the page of anti-Islamic group Britain First. Facebook said Britain First’s posts, which had garnered more than 2 million likes, had broken the company’s community standards.

"Our report brings together some important perspectives we hope will help inform the government thinking on integration," MCB Secretary-General Hanif Khan said in the report. "We believe a positive collaborative approach is what is needed to create a vision for a united nation that will shape the future for us and the generations to come." Madeeh el-Shafey is an Arab Weekly correspondent in London.
Egypt looking to Red Sea energy exploration

Anm Emam

Cairo

Egypt will invite international companies to explore for petroleum wealth in the Red Sea by the end of the year, officials said.

The announcement from Egypt’s Petroleum Ministry comes after news that an international alliance has nearly completed collecting geophysical and acoustic data in a 10,000 sq.km area of the Red Sea off the Egyptian coast.

“The work of the alliance is more than 95% complete,” said Hamdi Abdel Aziz, Petroleum Ministry spokesman. “It will soon turn the data it has collected into a comprehensive geophysical study about the area.”

An international alliance that includes British geophysical services company WesternGeco-Schlumberger and the Norwegian geoscience data company TGS-NOPEC has been collecting data on Egypt’s Red Sea coast since December to determine oil and gas concentrations.

The alliance is investing $750 million in the studies, using equipment to create images of the seabed dozens of kilometres underwater.

The alliance, the Egyptian Petroleum Ministry said, expected to finalize its data collection process by the end of March and to publish a study outlining hydrocarbon concentrations in the area by September. The Petroleum Ministry would then issue a global tender to explore for hydrocarbons in the region.

Officials challenged the agreement in court because two Red Sea islands — Tiran and Sanafir — would then be open to exploration.

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Jordan suspends free trade agreement with Turkey over unfair competition

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunis

Tunisia's Central Bank targets inflation but may hurt growth prospects

The Central Bank of Tunisia said the country's foreign currency reserves sailed by the country's main trade partner in 2017.

The Central Bank said the infla-
tion rate was 7.1% year-on-year in Febru-
ary, compared to 6.6% in February 2017 and 6.4% in Decem-
ber 2016.

"This soaring inflation has had a direct consequence on the deterio-
ration of the purchasing power of con-
sumers," the Central Bank said in a statement.

It cited increased prices in food and en-
ergy imports, trade deficit, wage in-
creases and the repercussions of the added tax and hikes in customs duties in January as rea-
sons for rising inflation.

The Central Bank also noted the likelihood of a tangible decline in the demand for goods and services as a result of the effects of an adjustment in in-
ternal policies and a tightening of monetary policy in eight quarters to materialise.

The Central Bank cited its benchmark interest rate 7.5 ba-
si points to 5.7% on March 5 "to tackle the risk of the continu-
ing inflation." Economists said the Central Bank under Governor Maroouane El Abassi, who took over the position in February, was returning to mon-
tary policy in an attempt to curb inflation after failed attempts by his pre-
decessor to stem inflation mainly through the value of the dinar.

"It is a true warning launched by the Central Bank to the banks and the governments," said econo-
ist Ezzeddine Saidane. "For the banks, the Central Bank is telling them that the time-consuming pru-

In any case, by raising the benchmark interest rate, the Cen-
tral Bank decided to play its role in fighting inflation that stems from monetary causes," Ben Achour said. "It (the Central Bank) shows the path for the government to fight inflation from a non-mone-
yary cause. It is the only way for the economic salvation of the country!"

The Jordanian government made its decision due to challenges facing Jordan's in-
dustrial sector and in support of its com-
petitiveness locally and glob-
ally.

The decision, which was hailed by industrialists but condemned by traders, cited unfair competition and that the agreement favoured the Turkish side more than the Jor-
danian, which was shown in trade exchange volumes between the two coun-
tries.

In 2017, trade exchange between the two countries reached its peak at $132 million, of which $664 mil-
lion (95% + 85% - 15%) was Turkish exports to Jordan.

The suspension of the agreement was based on a comprehensive study, supervised by the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

The Jordanian government made its decision due to challenges fac-
ing the industrial sector, which was affected by a closure of several bor-
der crossings with neighbouring countries and a huge drop in its impor-
tational exports market.

"The government comes in an unsuitable political and eco-
nomic period and does not reflect the kingdom's effort and direction in attracting foreign investors," said Omar Smadi, editor-in-chief of Investors Today magazine. "The bi-

lateral relations between Jordan and Turkey have always been excellent in various fields especially in the im-
port and export field."

"There will be negative effects in which Jordanian consumers will be deprived of buying Turkish products, which are well-known for their good international quality and affordable prices compared to other products," he added.

Smadi said Jordanian consumers would be forced to offer other sources to consumers.

"Consumers will be forced to seek products they cannot afford if they are looking for quality or select low quality products that they can af-
ford," he said.

The price increases are expected to hit the clothing sector where the Jordanian market is inundated by Turkish clothes, which are known for their quality and affordable price.

"We expect an increase in the clothing sector originated from Tur-
key and there are many shops that import clothes from Turkey. The government's decision to import customs from 0% to 20%, in addi-
tion to the 5% for customs services fee will add around 25% on each Turkish piece of clothing which the customer will have to bear and this is unacceptable," said economist Mohamad Chahwi, who owns a jewellery shop in Amman.

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Interview

Libya’s education minister decays war-wracked devastation on students

Hassan Abdel Zahir

Cairo

Security unrest, a lack of funding and the absence of opportu-
nities for teacher training hinder the progress of education in Libya, Education Minister Osman Abdel Jalil said.

“Some schools have stopped operating and others are in a very bad condition,” Abdel Jalil said. “In some areas, the teachers are incapable of maintaining their work because of the violence.”

Libya has faced a seemingly endless cycle of violence and infighting following a popular uprising against autocratic ruler Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

Since then, rival governments have been vying for control of the country. Abdel Jalil is a member of the UN-backed Government of National Accord, which is led by Fayez al-Sarraj and which is trying to unite the country for peace and political stability.

Abdel Jalil took office in April 2017, a time when conditions in Libya’s schools and universities were at their worst following years of infighting.

Abdel Jalil said that, while conditions were still far from good, the ministry had been able to take positive measures, including unifying the curricula in eastern, western and southern Libya.

“This will ensure the cohesion of the educational process and facilitate the mission of upgrading the curricula,” Abdel Jalil said.

“The schools and the universities everywhere in Libya need to operate as parts of the same state, not different states.”

Abdel Jalil said that ensuring a cohesive curriculum was one issue among many that need to be resolved to improve Libya’s educational process. For example, violence forced approximately 12% of school-age children to stay home, the Education Ministry said, although unofficial figures are much higher.

The Education Ministry’s $5.6 billion budget is a fraction of the amount needed to upgrade the country’s system. The ministry is also incapable of raising the pay of thousands of teachers who have gone on strike numerous times to protest low salaries and the ministry’s inability to pay salaries on time.

“We need, at least, three times as much to keep the schools functioning,” Abdel Jalil said.

“The teachers are also badly in need of training.”

The psychological effects the war in Libya is having on the students far outweighs the effects the same war is having on school facilities, he said.

“The schools can be easily rebuilt or new ones can be constructed if we get the needed funding,” Abdel Jalil said.

“Nonetheless, the psychological effects the war is leaving on students and the next generation of Libyans will linger and shape the future of the people of this country for many years to come.”

Many students, especially those in areas where violence continues to rage, suffer psychological disorders and traumas.

Some of the disorders will shape the way the students see the world.

The Education Ministry established an administration within the ministry for guidance and psychological support. The administration has an office in each municipality to help students overcome psychological war-related issues.

That administration also faces many challenges, not least a lack of funding and qualified staff.

“The current generation of Libyans is far less lucky than those who were born and lived in Libya years ago,” Abdel Jalil said.

“Our country cannot have a good future without education but, sorry to say, the war makes this good future something that is difficult to have.”

Education

Forum in Jordan explores new teaching techniques

Roufah Nahhas

Swimeeh

The fourth Teacher Skills Forum in Jordan updated educators on tools and techniques to improve teaching and learning, other than grading, to improve the quality of learning and prepare the next generation for a better future.

An estimated 1,300 teachers and education experts representing 210 public and private schools and education establishments from 23 countries participated in the 2-day forum organised by the Queen Rania Academy for Education, the Inter-national Baccalaureate under the theme of “Growth beyond Grades.”

Alan Novemson, an expert in educa-
tion technology and co-founder of the Stanford Institute for Edu-
cational Leadership through Tech-
ology, stressed the importance of sharing ideas from around the world.

“We need to be global and, as I can see, there is a lot of interaction here in this friendly event. The work-
shops are excellent but you can get them online. What you don’t get in the human interaction and this is im-
mportant in some events,” he said.

“The level of education here is high and I have met students who are as good as any students I met in the world, as such I have asked them to come to my workshop and share their ideas.

“Developing an effective learning, the role of pedagogical leadership team in supporting learning and prioritizing disciplines in addition to mathematics and the sciences from an early age were some of the subjects addressed at the forum.

Yousef al-Rawas, representing Talal Abu-Ghaizeh Academy, said the forum created excellent opportunities for people in the educa-
tional sector.

“It is a most convenient plat-
form to develop and experience new ways to handle what is needed in a classroom. This year’s theme explored a better future for both students and teachers as it asked educators to look beyond grading and prepare students for the 21st century,” Rawas said.

“At the Talal Abu-Ghaizeh Acad-
emy, we have been focusing on en-
riching and strengthening the skills of the youth and professionals in various fields through p恽ing the way for many to acquire the needed certifications because we strongly believe that not just education but our schools need support.

“Also, times are changing and technology is taking over so teach-
ers need to focus more on using technology in the classroom. We need our schools to adapt to the high-tech generation and provide the space for their innovative mind to flourish and this can only be done if we engage,” he said.

He said teachers should help stu-
dents “find their natural language,” which they can develop through various ways such as watching movies or learning in whichever language comes to them naturally.

“Teacher should help students find the gaps in their language learning,” he said. “A teacher reads a text and gives key words asking students to reconstruct the text from memory and to agree on the correct answer. The teacher is noticing the gap in which students discover the gaps in their own ver-
ison compared to the original,” he said.

Tina Bithre, a lecturer on educa-
tion and project director at Harvard Project Zero, focused on guided conversa-
tion as a tool to enhance learning in class.

Jordan had nearly 3,800 public schools with 79,079 teachers and 3,053 private establishments with 75,495 teachers in the 2015-16 aca-
demic year, the Ministry of Educa-
tion said.

This compared to 3,776 public schools with 79,729 teach-

Educators from international and regional establishments, in-
cluding the University of Connecti-
cuti, University of Bath, Education Development Institute, Media Institute, British Council, Insight Education Group and the National Centre for Culture and Arts-Jordan, participated in the event’s 128 workshops.

“It was actually a great and suc-
cessful event. The sessions were vari-
ed. New ideas were put on the table and teachers from different regions to meet and share the ideas,” Shaaban, a teacher at Egypt’s El Nasr Girls’ College, said on social media.

Roufah Nahhas is a journalist based in Jordan.

Excellent opportunities. Yousef al-Rawas from Talal Abu-Ghaizeh Academy (L) and education expert Alan November at the Teacher Skills Forum.
Samar Kadi
Beirut

Mosul

Most of Mosul’s residents must start from scratch to rebuild their livelihood and homes shattered by the Islamic State’s conquest of the subsequent battle to retake the city. Thousands of families have returned to Mosul, which had seen half of its population of 2 million displaced, since it was liberated from the Islamic State (ISIS) in July but with little in the way of basic services, “When I speak to the... boys and girls and hear their dreams and aspirations and what they want to become in life and when I hear their resilience and their determination to fight for a better, brighter future I do very much believe that Syria has a future ahead,” Cappellaere said. Mosul should be rebuilt and restored to life. The jihadists put up a brutal, gruelling struggle to keep the city under their control, paying a heavy price in human life and property. Nineveh Province Council estimated the cost of removing the rubble at $3.5 billion and reconstruction of the old city at $34 billion. "We have a special budget to remove the rubble and the corpses underneath, in addition to the thousands of unexploded bombs and booby traps that require specialised demining teams to dismantle them,” Waka’a said. Reconstruction efforts are very slow, unorganised and arbitrary and the 47 billion dinars ($39.5 billion) allocated in the state budget for the development of the province are totally inadequate. Mosul has had a brutal and unprecedented effect on children amid the indiscriminate attacks by various warring parties and international players, Waka’a said. "We call for that senseless war in Syria to stop for the sake of children,” Geert Cappellaere, UNICEF’s regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, pleaded. "None of the parties have ever respected the simplest sacred principles of protection of children that are universally embraced. Today, more than ever before, the children of need." Children have lost limbs and are paralyzed. Life expectancy continues to stagnate and is still single every day with 3.5 million children inside Syria and displaced children, said a daily basis to unexploded ordnance and ammunitions, which killed and schoolboys and playgrounds,” Cappellaere said at a conference in Beirut. The conflict killed 910 children in 2017, the highest number recorded since the war began and 50% more than in 2016. In the first nine months of 2018, more than 12,000 children were killed or injured and 40% of those killed by landmines and illegal left Hasan Sham refugee camp in the old city but have been unable to return to what is left of their homes and are busy again, "she said. Mosul and seeing my parents for the first time in 9 months. Luckily, they live in the east part, which is coming back to life slowly. Shops and restaurants have reopened and even cafes and bars are busy again,” she said. Despite the shocking destruction, Sinan Hamid, who now lives in Baghdad, said she was thrilled to visit her native city after liberation. "I have been deprived of visiting Mosul and seeing my parents for five years. Luckily, they live in the eastern part, which is coming back to life slowly. Shops and restaurants have reopened and even cafes and bars are busy again,” she said. "However, a lot of things have changed in Mosul. There is some- thing missing. ISIS has destroyed the hero of the city, which was the heritage of the city, which goes back to hundreds of years," Hamid added. Syria children: the scarred victims of seven years of war

Mosul's return to normal life remains a distant dream

Oumayma Omar

Mosul

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Slow recovery. A view of shops that have reopened in East Mosul. (Oumayma Omar)

Mosul

When Ahmad Serhan’s coffee shop on the Westside was destroyed in the fighting, he opened a new one on the East side. Like other shopkeepers, he paid for repairs himself. "Mosul should be rebuilt and revived by its people. We should not depend on the (central) government or the local authorities because they neither have the money nor the cadres to equip and restore the buildings and restore services," Serhan said. “Hundreds of families who returned to East Mosul have restored their homes and businesses at their own expenses.” Despite the shocking destruction, Sinan Hamid, who now lives in Baghdad, said she was thrilled to visit her native city after liberation. "I have been deprived of visiting Mosul and seeing my parents for five years. Luckily, they live in the eastern part, which is coming back to life slowly. Shops and restaurants have reopened and even cafes and bars are busy again,” she said. "However, a lot of things have changed in Mosul. There is some- thing missing. ISIS has destroyed the hero of the city, which was the heritage of the city, which goes back to hundreds of years," Hamid added. Oumayma Omar, based in Baghdad, is a contributor to the Culture and Society section of The Arab Weekly.
Women in Arts

Arab women artists in diaspora focus on identity and loss

Karen Batabrewski

London

Reoccupation with identity and loss of it are pivotal in the works of seven emerg- ing Arab women artists liv- ing in Europe, North Amer- ica and the Middle East, on show at East London's Rich Mix Gallery.

"Passport Photos: Do's and Don'ts," features 25 passport- sized photos modeled on what one must present for a visa and ex- poses the human cost of such travel.

Farra pointed out that there are "crimes on display but not the past and bring it into a modern con- text."

"Yumna al-Arashi's portraits of the last tattooed women from North Africa celebrate a tradition that is be- ing lost. Similarly, Shaikha al-Ketbi's photograph of 'Ghaya,' diving for a pearl in a traditional bridal costume brings poignancy and marriage tra- ditions into a modern context," she said.

Her work explores themes of permanence, growth, fertility and the natural phenomena of sun and moon and meditative moods.

This inspiration, she said, must have come at an early age, when she grew up in her Amman home near to the ancient Roman site of Sabaa Am Horyat (Nymphaeum), where she took up drawing, paint- ing and poetry-writing while at school. Her drawings tended to be sculptural, she said. Ultimate- ly, she opted for the permanence of stone and directly carving on stone, which she studied at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

She had her first exhibition in Beirut when she was only 17.

The year she spent in Beirut at a boarding school before she went to Paris proved highly influential and helped her to break into the vibrant artistic life of the city, re- sulting in close friendships and interactions with Adonis and Dar- wish.

At the Sharjah show, Saudi's finely realised sculptures made of a variety of stones from all over the world, but mainly from the Middle East, are complemented by her drawings, paintings and collages based on the poems of Darwish. Her collection in ink, ti- tled "The Passenger," was inspired by Ardon's poetry.

In Paris, Saudi was part of the student exchange program, which inspired her to return to Amman. There she worked with children in a Palestinian refugee camp, which resulted in a path-breaking public art project, called from her childhood Texts by Pal- estinian Children.

The exhibition curator and President of Sharjah Art Foun- dation Hoor al-Qasimi said: "Hers has almost been a soli- tary endeavour. She trained in Paris and you will see a lot of the influences from there but the stones she has worked on are from near her hometown."

"For us at the Sharjah Art Foun- dation, it is important to showcase artists from the region who have made an impact and to give them a platform to exhibit their work," Qasimi added.

Noora al-Mualla, co-curator of the exhibition, said in a news release: "The exhibition 'Mona Saudi: Poetry and Form' is an important opportunity to get to know Saudi's rich and unique expe- rience in its various stylistic and expressive components. We hope that this exhibition will be an enjoy- able and thought-provoking expe- rience for the local art audience."

Saudi has championed the Pal- estinian cause from her early years, working with many paint- ers from the Palestinian territories on exhibitions and publications about Palestine.

Critics have noted the serene na- ture of her works despite the polit- ical turmoil that often surrounds her: from the Palestinian territor- ies to the Lebanese civil war and the later war.

The exhibition curator Lizzy Vartani- an Collier explained that the works were selected to reflect the concept of movement and memory. "I chose to work with artists who each com- mented on something different, shed light on individual viewpoints and I wanted to reflect my own experience as well," said Collier, a Lebanese-Syr- ian born and brought up in London.

Farra's black-and-white photo- graphic print raising images showing the agony of migration and exile. The three photo series have a woman's face titled "Invisible" suggest a loss of identity. "Life on Hold," pictures a woman sitting furtively on a bed gaz- ing out of the window and a man looking out of a window in a bare con- crete building, perhaps a prison.

A small document titled "The Passport" in a maroon cover is also on display inside are the photos and stories of people who have issues with movement. An outline of the countries they came from on transparent tracing paper accompa- nies each story.

"The project explores the experi- ences of people who travel by their passports," Farra said. "It is about those who are banned from entering countries, the asylum seek- ers and refugees whose personal stories of war, loss, diaspora, cross oceans and lands to obtain a passport that will guarantee them a higher value in life. There are reflec- tions on personal moments, hand- written testimonies that capture the hopes, dreams and struggles that are fostered by the restrictions of movement."

Gohar also explores the restric- tions imposed by passports in her work "Passport: Do's and Don'ts.

"She features 25 passport- sized photos modeled on what one must present for a visa and ex- poses the human cost of such travel."

Farra's short film combines surreal images with the voice of an Ar- banian who has lived in Aleppo all his life. "Which culture do I belong to?" he asks eager to portray the city he loves in a positive light. "Despite the hunger and the destruction the people of Aleppo still welcome foreign- ers," he says.

Shukasawy narrates the story of liv- ing between two cultures, Egyptian and British. Shukasawy's acrylic "December Child" features an oyster and, old and new family photos and an embroidered table mat from the Middle East.

There is a sense of melancholy in the work of Arab women artists in the diaspora. "It is natural to ad- dress what we know and being in the diaspora is a difficult posi- tion," Collier said. "Gohar's "Mobile" passport photos present haunting images showing the agony of migration and exile. The three photo series have a woman's face titled "Invisible" suggest a loss of identity. "Life on Hold," pictures a woman sitting furtively on a bed gaz- ing out of the window and a man looking out of a window in a bare con- crete building, perhaps a prison.

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Challenging mix of modern art, politics and history in Bardo museum exhibition

Roua Khlifi

While the Bardo National Museum usually greets visitors with a huge white statue on the walls of white-clad rooms, today the museum greets by a giant white statue with a muzzle strategically placed where the muse should be, lit with blue light focusing the attention on the attack.

Instead of the iconic mosaics, it is the “Barker of Bardo,” a fictional persona created by Tunisian artist Faten Rouissi that welcomes visitors to an exhibition of contemporary art alongside historical artefacts of the museum. Rouissi’s exhibition invites viewers to revisit the history and heritage of the museum.

“The Barker of Bardo,” running through April 12, showcases multidisciplinary installations ranging from paintings to sound featuring the muzzle as a motif. For Rouissi, the character of the Barker is inevitable in the context of new democracies in which debates and arguments are often heated.

“The fictional character of the Barker of Bardo came as a reaction to the cacophony of sounds and the noise in the media and in the streets after the revolution,” Rouissi said. “It was hard to listen to what we are saying and that resulted in miscommunication. This new democracy, all the rising voices were speaking together in the media and in the daily discourse, resulting in chaos and dissonance. No one could understand what the other was saying.”

The exhibition features installations in the main rooms of the museum with reference to historical figures, such as the painting that features a meeting between the Barker and the poet Virgil. Each work in the exhibition explores the aspect of the value of dialogue and Rouissi’s use of muzzles in each piece sparked debates.

Despite the fact that the muzzle looks like a tool of oppression, it becomes an image and an metaphor on the artistic level. I focus on the symbolic value of this instrument which is used in my work as a tool of modernization. It becomes like the thread weaving all these pieces together,” Rouissi explained.

“Muzzles usually instil fear and evoke violence but here it is the right balance. The muzzle can be considered as a measuring tool to reduce the intensity of communication so that we hear each other. It becomes an instrument of equilibrium to appease the cacophony and acquire a symbolic value to explore.”

As museum visitors discover the rooms, exhibiting Ro- man, Punic and other artefacts, they also explore the evolution of the Barker through the installations. This emphasis dialogue and encourage the viewer to rediscover the historical heritage of Tunisian culture confronted with contemporary art.

The muse併 metamorphoses the artist’s call to cherish communication and dialogue; the setting of the exhibition highlights the need for dialogue between historical pieces and the art exhibition.

“It is an invitation to突出 contemporary art in relation to history, it also seeks to send a message of hope in a country where religious extremism has targeted culture and art. The exhibition opened the week before the anniversary of the terrorist at- tack on the museum on March 18, 2015, in which 21 people, mostly foreign tourists, were killed. Rouis- si said she chose the date to honor the memory of those killed in the attack.

We used light, mapping to emphasize the history of the place,” Rouissi also said art and history should be explored together – not separately – because art brings new perspective to reading history.

“Museums should be alive and vibrant with art and colours to showcase our heritage. The point is that the heritage should be explored through contemporary art and to highlight the site that is at the heart of history,” Rouissi said.

“We definitely need to explore these multidisciplinary art techniques to create a bridge between youth who use a lot of digital techniques and historical heritage of our country.”

Rouissi draws attention to the urgent need for change in Tunisia’s cultural policy as the exhibition will draw younger generations to revisit their historical heritage.

“Economy cannot happen until there is a strong link established between art and culture and economy. Culture can have a solid effect that can be as strong as politics and economy. However, to be influential, the cultural industry needs to have a strong mecha- nism and have strong struc- tures,” Rouissi said.

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For Rouissi, the character of the Barker is inevitable in the context of new democracies where debates are often heated.

“I wanted to have my exhibition in March because this month marks a painful memory for Tunisians and the family of the victims,” she said. “It is an invitation to people to reflect on the role of art in fighting extremism and it is to send a message to the world. We cannot make progress and fight the darkness of fundamentalism without art and without beauty. People need to learn to realize the importance of dialogue with each other.”

Roua Khlifi is a regular Travel and Culture contributor to The Arab Weekly.
Sharjah’s multibillion dollar waterfront project will offer boost to family tourism

N.P. Krishna Kumar

Sharjah

W ho would not like to stroll down to the beach every day from home as well as live and work in a sustainable, mixed-use modern city that offers security and connectivity, all in a pollution-free environment that is away from the hustle and bustle? This is exactly what developers of the $6.8 billion Sharjah Waterfront City (SWFC), the 5.6 million-square-metre, mixed-use waterfront development in the United Arab Emirates’ Northern Emirates are promising to deliver.

Conceived by Sharjah Oasis Real Estate Company, the project between Umm Al Quwain emirate and Emirates’ Northern Emirates is expected to be handed over by the end of 2021.

The design and the structuring of man-made canals and eight islands that make up SWFC are ready with 321 villas on the Sun Island from three-bedroom to six-bedroom units costing $680,000-$2.2 million – to be handed over by the end of 2019.

Sheikh Abdullah al-Shakrah, chairman of Sharjah Oasis Real Estate, said 20% of the works at SWFC had been completed before the commercial launch of the project. These include the construction of canals, physical infrastructure, power infrastructure, internal roadways, bridges, breakwater barriers for water circulation, installation of geo-textiles for environmental protection, detailed design and piling and shoring works of the villas.

“Developer can undertake to develop such a city on [its] own. We expect other private entities to partner with us and launch their projects as per our masterplan... Market conditions will dictate the progress of the project, comprising six phases, which I expect to take over eight to ten years,” Sheikh Ab- dullah said.

Another highlight of the project is the Crystal Lagoon Water Theme Park, featuring more than 26 unique rides to be designed by Jack Rouse Associates, a US company considered to be the world’s leading destination experience specialist.

The Crystal Lagoon Water Theme Park will occupy one of the islands and the plan is to attract investors to construct villas in a resort-style setting on an adjacent island to accommodate visitors to the water theme park.

SWFC, when completed in six phases, is expected to have 60,000 residents.

Ease of connectivity to the other emirates is another attraction of SWFC. Officials at Sharjah Oasis Real Estate said they will link with Dubai’s Road and Transport Authority for a water taxi service that could take passengers from the SWFC marina to Dubai Marina in 20 minutes.

A tram network planned inside SWFC can join the planned Federal Railway line, which will reach the adjoining Hamriyah port.

SWFC is close to three of the UAE’s major highways – Jumeirah Road, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Road and Emirates Road – and will connect to the highways via bridges. At SWFC, residents will have a sustainable lifestyle and a pollution-free environment with moderate weather throughout the year. Structures will occupy 40% of the project area and the other areas would comprise landscape features. The canals have been designed to seawater effluents and flow through the natural movement of ocean tides.