Egypt’s al-Hezb al-Comedy spreads laughter

Mamoon Alabbasi

London

Iraq’s Iran-backed Hezbollah Brigades in Syria is likely to undermine Iraqi and international efforts against ISIS.

The dual role that the Hezbollah Brigades plays in Syria is likely to undermine Iraqi and international efforts against ISIS.

New spiral. Members of Iraq’s Hezbollah Brigades militia carry flags in front of portraits of fellow members who were killed in air raids 4 days earlier, on June 21.

(Reuters)

Impact of US sanctions on Iran’s economy

P17

Arab teams after the World Cup

P2

Britain’s Coventry opens its doors to Iraqi refugees

Nazli Tarazi

London

Coventry, the city that gave the undraped Lady Godiva her name and legacy, is a far cry from the pockmarked skylines from which the city’s newest inhabitants escaped. In cooperation with Westminster, local faith groups and the West Midlands city has resettled the largest number of refugees crossing to Europe by sea.

The accommodation and hospitality the refugees have been shown is only a rerun of Coventry’s centuries, where my family and I settled, escaping sanctioned-hit Iraq.

Decades later, Iraqi victims of war, sectarian demolition and cleansing, are flocking to the city. History, it seems, has come full circle.

"Just like Coventry rebuilt itself after the second world war, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre continues to help those fleeing war rebuild their lives,” Coventry Bishop Christopher Cocksworth said in March as he and community leaders celebrated the opening of the centre, which helps refugees who fled war rebuild their lives.

Welcoming “in our very bones,” Coventry Councillor Linda Bigham said.

The Atallah family, Iraqi Christians from Qaraqosh, was the first Iraqi family to be resettled under the government’s Vulnerable Chil-
dren’s resettlement scheme, bringing an end to years of uncertainty and bureaucratic limbo.

Inside their modest home, Khalil and Lara Atallah spoke about their journey’s twists and turns.

“We never imagined to leave Iraq,” said Lara Atallah, a mother of three, “but we defied the odds even when humanitarian professionals doubted our resettlement chances.

Their village of al-Qosh, home to 500 people, was destroyed by the Islamic State.

They left nothing. The fires consumed our homes, agricultural land and rearing farms,” Khalil Atallah said.

While the Atallahs children more easily adapt to drastic changes, adjustment has been more difficult for the parents. Both take English language courses, which they hope will boost their chances of employ-
ment. Lara Atallah arrived in the United Kingdom with limited Eng-
lis language skills; her husband is learning from scratch.

Abu Salim is a father of three whose Muslim family was violently expelled from Dhi Qar by sectarian Forces. While optimistic for the fu-
ture his family can cultivate in Cov-
enty, his delight was masked by a shadow of fear. They fled Dhi Qar to Tikrit but were again back under threat from paramilitary groups.

“Eventually we fled to Sulymandan [the Kirkuk region of Iraq], then to Jordan and to Coventry,” he said.

Despite having arrived a little over two months ago, Abu Salim used the words “homenum” to describe his stay.

Since January 2012, 5,500 Syrians and 2,800 Iraqis have crossed into Europe and more than 500, UNHCR figures indicate, died crossing during the last four months, a slight in-
crease over a similar period in 2017.

Coventry’s vibrant civic society has been key to the social integra-
tion of both families and mindful of their religious backgrounds. Care and empathy have gone a long way, in the case of these families, who, as Barnett explained, “will be part of the new Coventry mosaic.”

Iraqis, no different from the Syr-
ian, Somali, Afghan, Kurdish and Iranian refugees Coventry hosts, add new layers of culture to a city that was bombarded during the blitz of the second world war. Their presence was both visible and audible walking around the city, where very few refugee families lived during the years I lived there.

Nazli Tarazi is an independent journalist, whose writings and films focus on Iraq’s ancient history and contemporary political scene.

(Reuters)
A unclaimed air strike on a Syrian town near the Iraqi border opened a new chapter in the country’s intractable civil war.

Syrian state news on June 18 cited a military source as saying that an Israeli drone had attacked one of its positions in al-Harra, a settlement 3km from Abu Kamal and close to the Iraqi border.

The US-based Syrian Observatory of Human Rights said the attack killed about 22 pro-regime fighters, including an estimated 26 members of the Iraq’s Al-Hashed al-Shaabi, a paramilitary alliance, a paramilitary force understood to be aligned with Iran.

Emboldened by the seemingly unflagging support of the Trump administration and possibly Russia, Israel’s confidence to strike in Syria seems to be increasing.

Damascus and Baghdad accused the US-led coalition of having carried out the strike but Washington denied responsibility. Speaking on condition of anonymity, one US official told Agence France-Presse: “We have no reason to believe it was an Israeli strike.”

In keeping with its standing policies, Israel neither confirmed nor denied that it undertook the action. If correct, however, an Israeli strike so far from its border would send a clear message to Beirut, Damascus and Tehran that whenever similar forces of Iran and its auxiliaries operate in Syria, they could be attacked.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu indicated as much 24 hours before the strike, telling a cabinet meeting: “Iran needs to withdraw from all of Syria.”

“We will take action – and are already taking action – against efforts to establish a military presence by Iran and its proxies in Syria both close to the border and deep inside,” he said.

Israel’s confidence in carrying through on that threat appears high. “To date, Israel has largely concentrated on Iran’s presence in the Syria’s southern region,” said Dalia Dassa Kaye, the director of the Centre For Middle East Public Policy and a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation, “but if reports are accurate that Iran is responsible for this recent attack on the Iraqi border, that would be a significant escalation and a signal from [the Israelis] that they consider all of Syria fair game.”

With Hezbollah and Iran having invested heavily in Syria, Tel Aviv’s unstoppable force appears destined to meet Tehran’s immovable object in Syria. “Iran views its presence in Syria as a critical deterrent and would be unlikely to give up its position there without a fight,” Kaye said. “Hezbollah also sees value in a Syrian presence that serves as a second front against Israel but has to balance that with its political goals in Lebanon.”

Emboldened by the seemingly unflagging support of the Trump administration and possibly Russia, Israel’s confidence to strike in Syria seems to be increasing.

“Israel has presented a price tag to Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran’s al-Quds forces, which is responsible for the country’s external operations,” Nicholas Hare, a Middle East security fellow at the Centre for a New American Security, said by phone. “They have his network in their crosshairs and they’ve shown themselves ready to strike whenever and wherever they like.”

“We don’t know exactly what the death toll at al-Harra was but it’s pretty clear that this was a mass casualty event. Similar strikes are eventually going to degrade Iran and Hezbollah’s network pretty significantly. The message from Netanyahu is clear: We are going to counter you and we are going to do so by massacre.”

Israel’s willingness to strike at any perceived threat in Syria appears to be a fact. While the strike at al-Harra may have occurred far from Israel’s border with Syria, the Anadolu regime’s long-anticipated advance into Daraa and south-western Syria would see its military resources and overstretched forces almost directly at Israel’s door. Whether, after the Abu Kamal strike, Damascus is willing to gamble on doing so with the covert support of its allies, as has been speculated, is likely to be a subject of debate.

Simon Speakman Cordall is Syria/Lebanon section editor with The Arab Weekly.

Viewpoint

Unclaimed strike brings further complexity to Syria’s intractable war

Kata’ib Hezbollah’s and the Fatemiyoun Division’s latest losses attest to the IRGC’s approach in Syria.

By Simon Speakman Cordall

A Yellowstone of fire exploded at the morning break near the peak of Mount St. Helens on May 19, 1980. Volcanic ash...
Lebanese and Syrian media outlets are reporting about a Russian offer to mediate between Lebanon’s Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Syrian President Bashar Assad, supposedly made by Russian President Vladimir Putin during Hariri’s recent visit to Moscow.

The story is half true. Senior Lebanese sources, who spoke to The Arab Weekly on condition of anonymity, said Putin “strongly advised” Hariri, whom they consider a “personal friend,” to “seriously start considering” dialogue with the Syrians.

The Assad regime was nowhere, however, and it was in Lebanon’s best interest to turn a page with Damascus, tackle the chronic refugee problem and join the reconstruction process in Syria, which could have enormous rewards for the Lebanese economy.

Joining the reconstruction process could be a gold mine for Lebanon, with ten Lebanese companies already registered in Syria, via Syrian partners.

The issue of refugees remains high on the Lebanese agenda. Approximately 1.5 million Syrians have been living in Lebanon since 2011, drawing the already struggling Lebanese economy, especially when it came to schooling, electricity and other basic services.

The Lebanese government has missed the refugee cycle to death, however, using it to attract external aid from donors across the world. Few, if any, have actually existed and the country and no new investments from the Gulf, do not only mean growing cracks in Lebanon’s economy.

For that reason, the Hariri team is not very enthusiastic about the refugee speedy return to Syria, unlike Hezbollah and its allies, which are pushing Lebanese officials to send them back, claiming that the fighting has stopped in their cities and towns. They fear if the refugees stay, they might marry into Lebanon society and tip the sectarian balance in favor of Muslim Sunnis.

Hezbollah’s internal gains and external operations place all of Lebanon at risk.

Hezbollah has past form here. That clearly has not happened with Hamas, Iranian forces withdraw from Syria, unlike the Hariri firm also constructed the presidential palace in Damascus but that was a very long ago.

Since the rise in Lebanon’s politics after the assassination of his father in 2005, Hariri has had a troubled relationship with Damascus. His contracts have been terminated and his home in Damascus was confiscated after Hariri accused Syria of being behind his father’s death.

In 2009, however, he visited Damascus, setting aside political differences with the Syrians – at the urging of Saudi Arabia and – and har- rying, from the Lebanese Embassy in Damascus, that “the skies are blue” in bilateral relations.

That visit was the brainchild of Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who visited Beirut with Assad in May, and calmed tensions in Syrian-Lebanese relations until the Syrian conflict breaks out eight months later. Hariri embraced the Syrian opposition, saying he would return to Damascus after the fall of the regime.

That clearly has not happened but Hariri cannot admit it so bluntly. He has taken baby steps that are almost invisible towards reconciliation, such as signing off on the naming of a new ambassador to Damascus in 2017 and approving the naturalisation of hundreds of Syrians, many who are accused of being close to Syrian officials.

Making a bolder move, such as making a surprise visit to Moscow, especially if offered a share of the reconstruction cake. They have started courting Putin, with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud paying the Russian president an official visit last year, promising to work together on Syria.

Of course, if that happens, the question would be: Would Hezbollah, Iran and the Syrians be willing to turn a page with Hariri? It hasn’t worked with Hamas, whose leaders jumped into the anti-regime camp in 2012. When re- alising that the regime was not falling after the Russian military intervention three years later, they tried to turn a page with the Syrians, first via illegality and then through the Iranians.

In both cases, they didn’t get very far.

Local Lebanese dynamics would certainly influence Hezbollah’s position on such a move – if it ever happens. Hariri and Hezbollah are in a truce, with their government running smoothly, they would have little reason to object to this offer.

Can Putin take Hariri down a thorny ride to Damascus, just like King Abdullah did nine years ago? The Russian president is obviously not somebody who makes offers he cannot meet or says things he does not mean. A rapprochement is difficult – to say the least – but not impossible.

Sami Moubayed is a Syrian historian and author of “Under the Black Flag” (ib Tauris, 2015).
After securing Hodeidah airport, anti-Houthi coalition sets sights on port

Saleh Baidhani

Sana’a

A fter ejecting the Iran-al lied Houthi militia from the west ern Yemeni port city of Hodeidah, the Saudi-led coalition has made a move proposed by the Saudi-led coalition numerous times since a move proposed by the Saudi-led coalition was first proposed by the US and the UN. The new move is aimed at compelling the Houthis to withdraw from all areas they have occupied since the beginning of operations in 2015.

On June 13, Yemeni pro-govern ment officials of the Houthis’ political wing warned that the Houthis are being provided with “a wide range of military aids” by Iran, including “remote-controlled vessels loaded with explosives”—a claim that the Houthis have denied.

The Houthis have “no other choice but to accept the Hodeidah initiative, a full withdrawal with all militias leaving the city, its port and airport,” he added.

Securing the port means cutting off Iranian support, of which “bore distinctive links to Iran,” provided physical evidence of Iranian support for the Houthi militias.”

The ministry noted that the Saudi-led coalition had dismantled more than 50,000 landmines since the beginning of operations in 2015.

Senior members of the militia accused Griffiths of pursuing the agenda of the Saudi-led coalition, adding more doubt to the seriousness of the talks.

Egypt monitoring battle for Hodeidah amid Red Sea concerns

Hassan Abdel Zaher

Cairo

Efforts to liberate the west ern Yemeni port city of Hodeidah from control of the Iran-backed Houthi militia are being closely watched in Egypt, with the expectation that international maritime movement in the area will undergo a huge boom after the city’s liberation.

“The Houthis have been pos ing a threat to the international maritime movement in the southern part of the Red Sea since they took control of the city,” said Akram Badreddine, a political science professor at Cairo University. “This is very dangerous, which is why there is an urgent need for support to ongoing efforts for the liberation of the city and its port from Houthi control.”

Troops affiliated with the international recognised Yemeni government have been carrying out all-out offensive to regain control of Hodeidah from the Houthis, scoring major successes, including liberating the Hodeidah airport.

The Houthis have become a major security threat to Saudi Arabia since they overran most of Yemen in 2014. Most of southern Saudi Arabia is within range of the Houthis ballistic missiles, which Riyadh alleges are being provided to the Houthis by Iran and smuggled in via the port of Hodeidah.

The Houthi have used the port to threaten navigations in the Red Sea, including damaging a UAE naval vessel.

That was not the first Houthi at tack on vessels in the region. The Shia militia reportedly intercepted a UN vessel on June 4 that was be ing used by the World Food Pro gramme to deliver humanitarian aid to the port.

In January, the Saudi-led coa lition warned that the Houthis were using so-called “boat bombs” — remote-controlled ves sels loaded with explosives — against shipping in the Red Sea. Egypt’s interest in developments in Hodeidah lies in its re liance on trade through the Red Sea, via the Suez Canal. Although Egypt has not officially comment ed on the dangers posed to Red Sea navigation by the Houthis, Cairo has demonstrated that it is acutely aware of possible perils and has contributed naval units to the Arab coalition.

In January 2017, Egypt opened a major naval base near the southern entrance to the Red Sea, ap parently to be prepared for threats from the Yemen coast.

“Egypt cannot stay silent while all these dangers are looming and in close proximity to its Red Sea coast,” said political analyst Abdel Monem Halawa.

Egypt’s concerns are based on a commitment to secure navigation in the Red Sea and to the Suez Canal. In 2016, Egypt spent billions of dollars revamping the canal with a parallel channel allowing for two-way traffic through the canal. Revenues from the Suez Canal are up — thanks to two-way ship ping. There is a belief they would rise even higher once the situation in the southern Red Sea is secured.

Egypt is also preparing to ex ploit oil and gas off its Red Sea coast, with seismic studies by an international coalition to investi gate whether there are oil and gas reserves in the area.

“Egypt’s interest in developments in Hodeidah lies in its reliance on trade through the Red Sea, via the Suez Canal. “The port is the main point of contact between Tehran and the Houthis,” Badreddine said. “By controlling it, the Arab coalition will put an end to the delivery of Iranian arms to the Shia militia and consequently make the Arab Gulf and the Red sea more secure.”

Hassan Abdel Zaher is a Cairo-based contributing editor to The Arab Weekly.
Angry reactions in the Arab Gulf region as Qatari-Iranian alliance comes into the open

Mohammed Alkhereijji
London

In what is likely to further derail Doha’s efforts to mend ties, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, in a phone conversation with his Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, praised Iran for its support and called for an end to reconciliation efforts with Tehran, which is considered by Doha’s Gulf Arab neighbours to be the main cause of instability in the region.

During the June 18 exchange between Sheikh Tamim and Rouhani, which was described by Iran’s state-backed Arabic Quartet as 13 demands of Qatar in June 2017 over what they described as Iran-backed terror groups and its relations with Iran. The so-called Arab Quartet made 13 demands of Qatar, including shutting down Al Jazeera media network, severing links to radical groups and downgrading ties with Iran.

“I think that the Qatari government has accidentally assessed the potential damage caused by the inability of Qatar’s communication with the Iranian presidency in terms of regional and Gulf public opinion,” UAE’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash wrote on Twitter.

Gargash ratted out Qatar’s comments on the war in Yemen and said: “A confounded opportunistic approach to support (leader Abdulrahman) al-Houthi.”

Gargash pointed out that Qatari Iranian relations were at their highest level and have shifted “from hidden to the exposed.” He also said that stance probably does not reflect Qatar public opinion, however.

Criticism of the leaders’ conversation showed up on traditional and social media. “Tamim and Rouhani affirm their conspiratorial alliance against the Arab coalition,” a headline in the UAE’s Al Bayyan newspaper said. Saudi Arabia’s Okaz newspaper ran the headline “Emir of Qatar thanks the Muftahs of Iran!”

**During the June 18 exchange between Sheikh Tamim and Rouhani, the Qatari-Iranian alliance could reinforce the Saudi-led military operation in Yemen.**

“Qatar was with us in the coalition while it is consorting with al-Houthi against us and against the people of Yemen,” wrote Saudi literary critic Abdullah Al-Ghamadi on Twitter.

“Watch out for the literal execution of democracy and revolution,” is unmasking the true political pretened movements at home. Doha apparently believes political instability, violent religious extremism and economic collapse are only for others, especially Arab countries that it wishes to exert control over.

That said, no one is interested in the keys to Qatari. What Arab countries and peoples really expect from Doha is a reversal of its policies, particularly limiting its ties with regional arch-enemy Iran and ending its support for Islamist groups, which pose a serious threat to Arab stability.

Qatar to understand the wishes of Arab peoples, it only needs to look at the disastrous repercussions of its involvement in Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen and Egypt. Beyond supporting the Muslim Brotherhood financially and logistically, Iran has disseminated fake news and propaganda material, fueling the flames of social and political discord.

Doha has been involved in recruiting mercenaries and arming militias to fight in the region. Leaked documents in April painted a chilling picture of Qatar’s murky dealings, which potentially sent $275 million in direct aid to Sunni terrorist groups in the region.

Now why is Doha so obsessed with discarding the Salwa Canal project? Why not simply craft a blow to the part of the Saudis? If implemented, the canal would alleviate end land trade with Qatar and allow shipping routes to bypass the emirate, making it even more isolated than it already is.

Arab countries during the “Arab spring.” It is clearer than ever that Doha, the self-proclaimed preacher of democracy and revolution, is unmasking the true political pretense movements at home. Doha apparently believes political instability, violent religious extremism and economic collapse are only for others, especially Arab countries that it wishes to exert control over.

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Jordanians are waking up to the open following Tehran’s pledge to stand beside Doha, its implementation should be a serious source of concern for Qatar.

If the canal plans materialise, they would highlight three significant points:

First, that Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Manama, which have been boycottting the Qatari regime since June 2017, are more concerned than ever that Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and his government do not have the courage to revise their political choices.

Second, that Saudi Arabia does not see relations between itself and Doha thawing anytime soon.

Third, that Qatar will eventually be forced into the realisation that, more than one year after the worsening crisis, it cannot remain in a state of denial and expect its situation to improve.

Qataris have labelled the Salwa Canal project “a propaganda tool” but statements by high-ranking Saudi officials indicate they could follow through with it. Indeed, there are significant benefits of such a project for the Saudis. Not only would it serve as a reprisal for Doha’s detrimental politics, it would be an economic project to generate jobs, stimulate tourism and revitalise trade.

The Qatar media, however, have deceptively claimed that Riyadh’s announcement regarding the project is an attempt to scare Doha into giving away the keys to the Qatari investors. What Qataris should realise is that their regime is trying to keep the keys for as long as it wants and for as long as they wish for such a regime to keep them. In fact, no one in the Arab region expects Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani to abandon the project.

The Qatari media has run the headline “Emir of Qatar thanks the Muftahs of Iran!”

Out of the fold. A file picture shows Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (R) meeting with Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Doha, last October.

If irreversibly cut from its only land border, Qatar would be faced with a new conundrum in hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

If conversely cut from its only land border, Qatar would be faced with a new conundrum in hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Viewpoint

Why the Salwa Canal project would constitute a severe blow to Qatar

Inzam Zayat

Then Saudi Arabia announced plans to dig a 60km canal from Salwa to Khor al Adaid, which would effectively cut Qatar into an island, Doha did not take the threat seriously. Saudi Arabia, however, advanced with the project, with a deadline coming up for tenders to dig the waterway.

Tuesday morning Makkaiah reported that five international companies with expertise in digging canals have submitted tenders for the project. The winning bidder is to be announced within 90 days after the project, with a deadline coming up for tenders to dig the waterway.

The Qatari regime since June 2017, which has been boycottting the Qatari regime since June 2017, is considering the project, telling its people it is simply “aggravating” the dispute.

The project was to be implement- ed? Maybe it is time for Qataris to “vitalize World Cup broadcasting rights law.”

Qatar is to host the 2022 World Cup. As that event approaches, analysts said the tiny Gulf country was likely to be more congenial towards its neighbours to help the World Cup be considered a success.

Mohammed Alkhereijji is the Gulf section editor of The Arab Weekly.

SAUDI ARABIA

QATAR

SAUDI QATAR border

Qatar Canal (Project)

saudi military base and nuclear waste dump

Gulf

News & Analysis

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Battle of Hodeidah is crucial for regional security

The campaign in Yemen has shown there are Arab forces ready to fight — however long it takes — Iran’s expansionist project.

Khairallah Khairallah

"The campion in Yemen has shown there are Arab forces ready to fight — however long it takes — Iran’s expansionist project.

The campaign in Yemen has shown there are Arab forces ready to fight — however long it takes — Iran’s expansionist project.

Opinion

Editorial

The Middle East’s refugee burden

The annual global migration trends report published by the United Nations, the United Nations’ refugee agency, shows the number of displaced persons is growing rather than falling. At nearly 60 million, the 2017 figure is nearly 3 million more than the year before. Every 2 seconds, there is one person more displaced, mostly because of wars and conflicts, many of which rage in the Middle East.

Unsurprisingly then, Syria, in its eighth year of war, accounts for the single largest group of displaced people (12.6 million). Neighboring Iraq accounts for 3.5 million and Yemen for 2.1 million.

Despite the ugly rhetoric in Europe and the United States over refugees and their rights, the truth is most displaced people stay fairly close to home. As the UNHCR report tells: “Over four out of every five refugees were located in a neighboring country to the one from which they fled.”

This means most displaced Syrians, Iraqis and Yemenis remain in the region and not the West that shoulders most of the refugee burden. Two Middle Eastern countries — Lebanon and Jordan — are under considerable socioeconomic strain from the responsibility of housing millions of displaced people.

The recent unrest in Jordan pointed to the enormous pressure of supporting refugees even as it struggles to provide public services to its own citizens. In 2017, Jordan hosted 653,000 Syrian refugees. Lebanon had 1.2 million. Compared to that of the 496,700 Syrian refugees in Germany and it is clear the region is being strained by the crisis.

The number of refugees housed by a country also must be seen in the context of its own population. In Lebanon, there are 16,456 refugees per 1,000 locals; in Jordan, it is 77,117 refugees per 1,000 Jordanians and in Turkey, 17,100. Add in Palestinian refugees, long-displaced and scattered around the region, and the figure is as high as 270 refugees per 1,000 Lebanese (one-in-four), and 310 per 1,000 Jordanians (one-in-three).

Other countries in the Arab world are assuming their share of this. Thus far, the United Arab Emirates has adopted a resolution granting foreign nationalities the right to return home “affected by wars and disasters a one-year residency visa, under certain conditions.”

The EAE pointed out this is “part of the country’s principles and responsibility to support the most vulnerable people of the world as an active supporter of international peace and stability, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council region.”

Perhaps this is greater regional contribution could be part of the solution but for that to happen, those who have that responsibility would have to see past the numbers and avoid “affected by wars and disasters a one-year residency visa, under certain conditions.”

The campaign in Yemen has shown there are Arab forces ready to fight — however long it takes — Iran’s expansionist project.
Despair prevails in Iraq

Bahrain Al-Shiekhly

I consider the boycott of the elections a wise decision. It laid bare the whole dirty trick.

The ceaseless influx, the West is no longer able to control. Every month since June 2015, the number of forcibly displaced people has increased by almost 3 million — a report by the UN shows that most Iraqis have lost all hope that any good will come out of their bitter experiences with the political process is based on a sectarian system, there will be no room for the national space that all Iraqis was talking about.

The Iraqis got confirmation of their fears when al-Sadr announced the alliance of his Sairoun list with Al-Fatih, a list with strong ties to Iran. They must have been sure that it would have to happen because of the bitter experiences with al-Sadr and the current powerless political class of militias rule their country. Those fears are becoming reality. Al-Sadr commands the Saraya militia. He allied himself with Hadi al- Amiri commander of the Badr militia. Amiri’s election list included Qais al-Khazali, commander of Asa’ib Ahl Haq militia. Surely these bedfellows will be joined by other Shia lists and revitalise the Shia house on new foundations. With the ceaseless influx, the Shia had boasted about: It never ceased in any mind. It was just an election trick that fooled some, but not all Iraqis. I consider the boycott of the elections a wise decision. It laid bare the whole dirty trick. The vast boycott movement, however, harbour strong popular demands. People will no longer stand by silently as their country is being looted and destroyed.

Already, angry opposition voices are being heard among anti-Iranian sentiments are being expressed openly on the streets. There is a strong awareness among the Iraqi people that the war is over aired its impending confrontation with the United States and is operating to fix things to its advantage inside Iraq so that Iraq becomes the front line in its war with the United States.

Strangely enough, the Iraqi political class is feeling the heat from the streets and some have begun to play it to their advantage. Right in the middle of the zone destroyed by the recent explosion inside Sadri City district in Baghdad, ex- participação Fatih Shwik stood and shouted: “You’re going to scare Saddam and the Ba’athists!”

I stop to say that al-Sadr can never stray from the line fixed by Iran. He had, during the previous elections, shielded that political process from popular anger and placed it at Iran’s service. Right now, it is very likely he will place the coming government, a government supported by only 20% of voters, at Iran’s service. The only difference between the occasions is that this time the other 80% will have the last word.

Bahrain Al-Shiekhly is an Iraqi writer.

Global migration, from American dream to nightmare

Rashmee Roshan Lall

Zero tolerance of migrants has become a moral crisis for the US but it is providing a template for a different, darker, new American dream.

Italy, Salvos vows his country will not become “Europe’s refugee camp.”

Words paint a picture of what’s really happening. Migrants are being processed as vermin, a fateful return to an earlier dark age of demonisation of “the other.” It is clear that the world’s richest, most powerful country is willing to demonise and dehumanise a whole people.

“When Trump became President and accusations were levelled against his fascist tendencies, it seemed too soon to make so extreme a judgement. But in the new world he has created, the Trump administration is barrrelling down a well-worn route, one we have seen before with the demonisation of Jews by Nazi Germany. They were defined as the enemy, carriers of disease and parasites. Italians were not able to get to an international border. If the US does not act swiftly, the world could be witness to another dark chapter in human history. When Trump became President and accusations were levelled against his fascist tendencies, it seemed too soon to make so extreme a judgement. But in the new world he has created, the Trump administration is barrrelling down a well-worn route, one we have seen before with the demonisation of Jews by Nazi Germany. They were defined as the enemy, carriers of disease and parasites. Italians were not able to get to an international border. If the US does not act swiftly, the world could be witness to another dark chapter in human history.

Global migration, from American dream to nightmare.
The Iraq Communist Party is likely to enter into the political process but its ability to effect change remains in doubt.

By default, al-Sadr’s communist alliance, which endorsed manual recounts of all election ballots, is absorbed into Iran’s hegemonic embrace as Iran tactfully uses, to pressure moderate versus hardline, which, much to the chagrin of moderate versus hardline, which, much to the chagrin of sectoral entrepreneurs, present-

The Hezbollah Brigades are part of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF); the umbrella for militias that was formed to fight the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014. Outside its PMF uniform and against government orders, however, Hezbollah Brigades militiamen are fighting in Syria in support of the Assad regime. The government has passed a law to integrate the PMF into the formal Iraqi security apparatus to control the militias but clashes and activities outside Iraqi borders seem to demonstrate how difficult that task is. "Al-Sadr’s unhesitant alignment with actors whose policies it promises to challenge"...
Rivalries between Middle East powers are the brightenings in the Red Sea, an area where power struggles between the US and China are also taking place. The Red Sea is a strategic waterway that links the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea, and its security is of great importance to the economies of the countries bordering it. The Red Sea is also significant for religious reasons, as it is the route taken by the pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca.

In February 2017, the UAE opened a military base in Somalia’s beleaguered central government. The UAE has been increasing its military presence in the region, particularly in the Horn of Africa, to secure its maritime trade routes and to prevent what they see as Iranian encroachment in their back yard. The UAE’s hard-power policies, especially in the Horn of Africa, have been a source of tension with its Gulf neighbours, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

In August 2017, the UAE established its largest overseas military base in Mogadishu, Somalia. The UAE’s presence in Somalia is part of a wider geopolitical objective to secure its maritime trade routes and to prevent what they see as Iranian encroachment in the region.

The UAE’s military presence in Somalia has raised concerns about its motives and objectives. Some analysts believe that the UAE is trying to secure its maritime trade routes and to prevent what they see as Iranian encroachment in the region. Others believe that the UAE is trying to secure its strategic position in the Horn of Africa and to prevent what they see as Iranian encroachment in the region.

The UAE’s military presence in Somalia has also raised concerns about its motives and objectives. Some analysts believe that the UAE is trying to secure its maritime trade routes and to prevent what they see as Iranian encroachment in the region. Others believe that the UAE is trying to secure its strategic position in the Horn of Africa and to prevent what they see as Iranian encroachment in the region.

In conclusion, the UAE’s military presence in Somalia is part of a wider geopolitical objective to secure its maritime trade routes and to prevent what they see as Iranian encroachment in the region. The UAE’s motives and objectives in the Horn of Africa are complex and multifaceted, and it is difficult to know exactly what they are trying to achieve. However, it is clear that the UAE’s military presence in Somalia is part of a broader strategy to secure its strategic position in the region and to prevent what they see as Iranian encroachment in the region.
T here are fears the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood's new, formal, and legal political party will use public anger over subsidies to destabilise President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government.

“The Muslim Brotherhood has already started working on this by forming a parallel campaign to encourage the people to protest against the cuts and spend $1.7 billion annually on private lessons,” said Ibrahim Shahin, a senior official of the Educational Council.

Although the Brotherhood, which is not expected to be formally designated as a terrorist organisation before Morsi's ouster, is almost politically dead in terms of a presence on Egyptian streets, it has a strong media presence because of its ability to operate from abroad, particularly via Qatar and Turkish media.

There are fears that Brotherhood members, hidden their affiliation, are using social media to call for protests. Egyptians often share videos on social media of people calling for protests or addressing Sisi directly about the austerity measures.

There is a good chance that Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated media could incite unrest or protest, analysts said, particularly given that many poor Egyptians are having a hard time dealing with the austerity measures.

“These calls are coming at a time most Egyptians are very angry at the economic reforms, even as they do not want to destabilise their country or agree with the Brother- hood,” Adib said.

“There is in politics the theory of unintended consequences, which is why authorities need to work to prevent the opposition from using public anger to destabilise this country and return to the political scene.”

Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.

Egypt's new education e focus on technology, research

Egypt hopes it can revive its moribund education sector by applying the new system quickly and equipping a new generation of students with much-needed skills. Egypt's education system is suffering from a poverty of resources, deteriorating and Egypt's schools falling to keep pace with advances around the world. Egypt's expat workers are more likely to be drivers or construction workers.

The new education system aims to change that. Education Minister Tarek Shawqi said the new system would make education fun, eradicate suffering of pupils, especially those in the final year of secondary school education and give the schools and pupils autonomy in deciding exam questions.

“This is how we will end exam question leaks and cheating,” Shawqi told the private Sada al-Balad TV. “The system will also end private tuition.”

Leakage of exams questions is the last three years was a headache for the Education Ministry. Questions that appeared on the Thanaweya Amma exams – the standardised tests that lead to the General Secondary Certificate and serve as entrance exams for Egypt's public universities – were published on social media before the exams.

To preserve the security of the exams, the new system also asked the army to deliver examination papers to schools nationwide.

The new system will seek to address the issue of private lessons, something that has become commonplace for almost all Egyptian secondary school students. Independent estimates say Egyptians spend $1.7 billion annually on private lessons.

It took Education Ministry experts years to formulate the new system, making use of aspects of education systems in use in Japan, Singapore and elsewhere.

Shawqi said there would be no standardised secondary school graduation (Thanawya Amma) exams this year but a different exam for each school. Exam ques- tions for each school, he said, would not be decided by teachers but by universities and the ministry.

School pupils will be allowed to take print materials to the examination with them. The new exams will not be focused on role learning but in demonstrating an understanding of topics covered during the school year. Khairy said.

“This is how we will end cheating and the leaking of examination questions,” he said.

Khairy said teachers would be unable to coerce students to take private lessons, given that they would have no influence over examination questions.

The new education system has been a subject of debate in Egypt where approximately 12 million pupils are enrolled in the country’s 45,000 state-owned schools and 7,000 private ones.

By abolishing textbooks, the new education system will equip Egypt the huge amounts of money spent on them. In 2017-18 academic year, the government spent 168 million in print 400 million textbooks.

“The new system will also put an end to what is called the traditional suffering, that is the Thanawya Amma examinations,” said Ibrahim Shalh, a senior official of the Educational Syndicate, the independent union of Egypt’s teachers.

Students preparing for the Thanawya Amma examinations are known to have to deal with a large amount of stress, given what the standardised tests determine what universities can offer and what students can take. The new system will also allow pupils assessments and put an end to the Thanawya Amma.

Secondary school pupils will have to sit for 12 exams during the three years of the secondary stage. The pupils’ final grade will be based on the highest marks they score in six of the 12 tests.

The new system hopes, the Educa- tion Ministry said, to improve Egypt’s educational rating and bring international recognition to its school certificates. However, the plan faces several hurdles, including financing. It will cost Egypt $2 billion to implement the new system. The World Bank has agreed to provide $500 million for the project over the next five years but it is unclear where the rest of the money will come from.

The Education Ministry will dis- tribute computer tablets to pupils for free in September. The ministry will have to overhaul technological infrastructure at Egypt’s schools to provide internet access.

Education experts also refer to the need for training the country’s more than 1 million schoolteachers in the use of educational technologies and the new system.

“The teachers need to adapt to the new system, or its implemen- tation will stumble,” said education expatriate Bahat Abu Oma.

“There is also a need for ensuring that the technological tools will be used in the new system will work or a minor glitch can discon- nect hundreds of thousands of pu- pils and teachers from the whole process.”

Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.

Challenging phase. A man carries bread along a busy street near a poster of Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo.

The pupils’ final grade will be based on the highest marks they score in six of the 12 tests.
The majority — both Turkish and foreign — have been detained at residential addresses. This shows that they, or their contacts, are registered with and integrated into the Turkish infrastructure that requires identity checks for exchange for services. That raises worrying questions: If Turkish intelligence can track extremists, is it complicat or is it ignoring the threat? If the number of arrests is so high, are there thousands more slipping through the net?

Turkey says it has detained more than 5,000 suspects and deported 3,000 foreign extremists. Its military has engaged in operations to oust ISIS from border regions in Syria, Ankara, however, has also tried to deflect blame. In December, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan claimed, without evidence, that many ISIS members Red Syria, not to Turkey but to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. In February, Mehdi Elma, a deputy chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party, accused the Kurdistan People’s Protection Units (YPG) and the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) of releasing ISIS jihadists to attack Turkish soldiers.

“If you listen to Erdogan’s spin you will quickly realise that the real enemy he wants to fight is still the PKK,” wrote the Brookings Institution’s Ozan Toprak. “He tries hard after each ISIS attack to create a ‘generic’ threat of terrorism in which all groups are bundled up together without any clear reference to ISIS.”

The internal workings of Turkey’s security apparatus have never been clear and it’s hard to say exactly how Ankara perceives ISIS. The majority at both the West and foreign intelligence agencies is that Turkish intelligence has kept pace with major threats. Questions persist, however, for example, did the perpetrators of the Ankara Airport attack, which killed 45 people on June 24, 2016, slip their hands on military-grade explosives?

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Steve Habeck is a senior correspondent for The Arab Weekly and adjunct professor of Global Politics and Development at the Interdisciplinary Center. He is the author of The Arab Weekly and adjunct professor of Global Politics and Development at the Interdisciplinary Center. He is the author of Revolution Muslim: Extreme Islam in the United States, its roots and implications. What solutions can Turkey muster against this threat? Successful attacks have, thankfully, been infrequent, which suggests that Turkish intelligence has kept pace with major threats. Questions persist, however, for example, did the perpetrators of the Ankara Airport attack, which killed 45 people on June 24, 2016, slip their hands on military-grade explosives? But the arrests — as well as the threat posed by ISIS — will continue.

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Challenging traditions. President of the Committee on Human Rights and Individual Freedoms Bochra Belhaj Hinida (R) speaks with jurist Saloua Hamrouni, on June 20. (AFP)

**The unexpected happens in Libya again**

**Michel Cousins**

Tunis

One of the standard responses by officials, diplomats and human rights activists in Libya to events in the country is “never be surprised by the unexpected.”

Through June, the unexpected happened again. While eyes were focused on the chaos in the south and, in the east, the offensive by the Libyan National Army (LNA) against the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, the battle for the port terminals but when. It is far better for the LNA to see itself as a step forward in the Tunisian people's rights and freedoms. Now we turn to the rights of individuals and equality.

**Tunisia today living a water crisis:**

The 200-page document recommends changing all laws that do not protect citizens equally, regardless of religion, social status, gender or sexual orientation. Among the proposed reforms are equal inheritance rights for women, decriminalising homosexuality and abolishing the death penalty.

**The 200-page document recommends changing all laws that do not protect citizens equally, regardless of religion, social status, gender or sexual orientation.**

Those are the new milestones to complete the Tunisian national project. The report will be the subject of a broad debate in the society without Takfir [charges of apostasy and anarchy].

“The commission’s proposals are predicated on the belief that individual rights and freedoms should be absolute. “The individual freedom is a right of the individual per se,” said the commissioner’s report. “That means the right enjoyed by the individual to express his singularity without thereby restoring to another person.”

However, this goes against conservative norms, including the view that religious precepts should help inform the law. The committee, mindful of such views, cited Quranic verses to support its positions but said the constitution and international human rights laws were the basis for its recommendations.

The report focused on portions of the constitution, including Article 2, which states: “Tunisia is a state of a civil character based on citizenship, the will of the people and the rule of law.” However, the panel appeared to shy away from an article that affirms “the state is the guardian of the religion.”

That article says: “The state commits itself to the dissemination of the values of moderation and tolerance and to the protection of the sacred and the prohibition of any offense thereto. It commits itself, equally, to the prohibition of, and the fight against, appeals to Takfir and to the spread of Takfirism and any other.”

Abdelmajid Chafri, an expert in Islamic studies who was a member of the committee, said: “We are inspired by the Islamic reformation in Tunisia that goes back to 19th century. We want to pursue such a reformist path.”

“Islamic societies do not need religious intermediaries to tell them what to do. We are of the view that a society has to continually re-assess to adapt to the needs of change in the framework of Maqbul al Islam (the underlying purposes of Islamic laws and tenets).”

“Our approach was progressive,” said committee member Slahiyya Joufi, a noted liberal Islamic intellectual. “We went step-by-step, stage-by-stage out of respect for the Tunisian society.”

The commission met with Islamic scholars to ensure there was “respect for the principle of dialogue” and that more than 80 rounds of discussions and workshops took place with civil society representatives, experts and government officials.

Despite its reform-minded vision, the committee appeared open to compromising with more conservative factions. For example, the report’s authors proposed a law that would ensure equality in inheritance between men and women but left room for a provision that would allow those who oppose the rule to divide their wealth as they see fit.

Lamine Ghanmi is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Tunisia.

**Risky misadventure. A general view of the Zawiya oil installation in Libya.** (AFP)
The risks in US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Golan

Kaja Bouman

Israel’s Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu wants to see US President Donald Trump to recognise Jewish sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights. That would be an acknowledgement that has never been considered by previous American administrations and that runs counter to international law, which views the Golan as an occupied territory that belongs to Syria. In an interview with Reuters, Israeli Minister of Intelligence Yuval Katz claimed that a formal US recognition of the Golan Heights could be a red line and one that requires action. Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria during the Six Day War in 1967.

In the past, Israel claimed it was willing to consider returning the Golan to Syria to establish peace with its Arab neighbour. In more recent years, Israel has argued that there is no side to return the area to. The civil war in Syria and Iran’s presence in the region is seen as the main reason for this. However, in recent years, both Iran and Hezbollah have been active in the area, and both have been accused of human rights violations, torture, and even the killing of children.

The issue of recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights is important to Israel, as it would be a significant step towards normalisation with the US. However, many in the region, including the Palestinians, see this as a threat to their rights and their future. The international community has been divided on this issue, with some countries supporting Israel and others supporting the Palestinians.

American recognition, however, could result in more military action in the region, not to mention compromise future peace arrangements.

The incoming Trump administration

The sentiments of the international community are keenly watched by the incoming Trump administration, which has been known for its pro-Israel stance. The administration has been seen as reluctant to recognise the Golan Heights as Israeli territory, and has been working to reach an agreement with the United States.

Kaja Bouman is a Dutch journalist in Jerusalem.
German row over Turkish-born football players could deal setback for integration of Muslims

**News & Analysis**

**Turkey**

**Viewpoint**

Yavuz Baydar

**Turkey after the elections: Many problems, whoever wins**

Turkey is once again at the crossroads, as it has been many times in the past two decades. This time is different. It is marked by an early – or rather, hasty – elections. Never mind the intensity of the opposition effort to dislodge the Justice and Development Party (AKP) from power. Ignore the self-confidence projected during the election campaign by Erdogan's strongman, President Reccep Tayyip Erdogan. The winner of the elections faces enormous problems. A series of acrimonious political battles through the years means that Turkey has exhausted politically Erdogan's highly personal quest for absolute power has taken its toll in terms of rule of law and, more recently, of economic slowdown. The outcome is thus not well, pushing the AKP and its far-right nationalist ally, the Nationalist Movement Party, to a minority position in parliament, with only 300 seats. The AKP will really be set to win, although to have a decisive victory. First, it would have to lift the state of emergency, which has been in force in Turkey for more than two years. Under the state of emergency, the ability to print new currency and the state of national sovereignty have been suspended. More than 100,000 people have been purged by way of detentions. Some 50,000 people, including thousands of judges, lawyers and more than 100 army generals, NGO activists and Kurdish MPs and local politicians, remain in jail. Many are in pre-trial detention.

A fierce crackdown on the media led to the imprisonment of 270 journalists and the closing or takeover of more than 200 independent outlets. Mainly Kurdish towns and cities have suffered under the AKP. Galen- sist businesses have had assets worth more than €12 billion confiscated, which is reminiscent of the looting of Acemist enterprises during the 1975 genocides. Ending emergency rule may be the easy part, however. What follows might be worse. In the absence of a narrative, it could be the start of a new era of acrimony and vengefulness. Victory for Erdogan and his party, on the other hand, would be perceived as carte blanche.

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**Spotlight**

Worse than a sore loser, chief commander of Iran’s al-Quds Force is a bad winner

**Add fueling to the flames. A file picture shows Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, chief commander of the extraterritorial al-Quds Force, in Tehran. (AFP)**

**Iran**

**Providing a ‘Who’s Who’ for Iran’s last four decades**

**Book Review**

By Gareth Smyth

“Postrevolutionary Iran: A Political Handbook” is easily the most extensive “Who’s Who” and political anatomy of Iran’s 39-year-old Islamic republic.

**Iran**

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**Gareth Smyth** is a regular contributor to The Arab Weekly. He has reported from the Middle East since 1992.
US Congress sounds alarm over unclear Syria policy

Thomas Frank
Washington

While President Donald Trump and Defence Secretary James Mattis contrast each other about a Syria strategy, members of the US Congress are growing impatient and are demanding answers from the Trump administration.

Frustration among Democrats and Republicans has been swelling since April when Trump said: “I want to bring our troops back home” from Syria but was contradicted three weeks later by Mattis, who said: “We are not withdrawing,” and “vowed increased operations” in Syria.

Trump’s comments sparked concern in Congress and prompted a committee to demand that the administration describe its intentions and submit an undue report on US strategy in Syria. Lawmakers are creating a Syria Study Group that would recommend military and diplomatic strategy.

“We’re very concerned that we don’t have a strategy,” US Senator Ben Cardin, a Democrat from Maryland, told The Arab Weekly. “We’ve ceded a lot of ground to Russia and Iran [in Syria] and that’s a major concern.”

At a hearing June 13 in the US House of Representatives, US Representative Bob Schriver, a Democratic member of the US Congress, asked the US State Department whether it had imposed a withdrawal from Syria would empower Iran.

“I do worry very much about Iran’s presence in the region but in particular in Syria as they are increasingly developing a permanent presence of their forces and indigenous missile manufacturing capability,” Schriver said. “If we were withdrawing from Syria, it is harder for us to have influence in the outcome in the long term.”

Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs David Satterfield provided little clarity when asked about the Trump administration’s Syria policy. He said Trump wanted “to continue the NSS’s [Islamic State] campaign and continue to solicit the greatest US possible support from regional, local and international allies to continue, enduring, ongoing mission.”

Cardin, a senior Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said lawmakers were pushing Trump to request congressional authorisation to use force following the US-led missile strikes in April against suspected Syrian chemical weapons facilities. The strikes came one year after a US-led missile attack on another Syrian chemical weapons facility.

The limited nature of the strikes reflects Trump’s reluctance to intervene in the major crises of the world. At a news conference April 3, Trump indicated he thought the United States had failed to prevent a战役 in Syria.

“As far as Syria is concerned, our primary mission in terms of that was getting rid of the chemical weapons. We’ve almost completed that task, and we’ll be making that mission very quickly in coordination with others in the area as to what we’ll do,” Trump said.

Asked if he was inclined to bring the approximately 2,500 US troops home from Syria, Trump said: “I want to get out. I want to bring our troops back home. I want to start rebuilding our nation.” Adding that the United States had spent $7 trillion in the Middle East since 2001, Trump said: “We get nothing – nothing – out of it. So it’s time. It’s time.”

At a Senate hearing April 26, Mattis said: “You’ll see a re-energised effort against the Middle Euphrates River Valley in the days ahead. … We’re going to expand it and bring in a regional support.”

The US Senate Armed Services Committee lashed out at the apparent contradictions and went in a defence-spending bill for 2018-19. “The committee is deeply concerned by the lack of clarity and conflicting statements from administration officials related to the Middle East and, specifically, Syria,” Senator Jeanne Shaheen, a Democrat from Maine, said in the committee.

Former President Jimmy Carter pledged to make human rights the cornerstone of his administration’s foreign policy but he supported the shah of Iran and other authoritarian rulers to foster US foreign policy.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, human rights re-emerged as an important foreign policy in the form of democracy promotion.

Starting with Moscow’s former allies and republics, Washington envisioned a global democratic free and “always winning” human rights advocacy has little use.

Trump’s foreign policy has little use for human rights advocacy

Mark Habeel

For the Trump administration’s zero-sum foreign policy goals of “America first” and “always winning,” human rights advocacy has little use.

In case there was any doubt, it is official: Human rights play no role in US President Donald Trump’s foreign policy.

On June 13, US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley announced that the United States would withdraw from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) because of “its disproportionate focus and undue hostility towards Israel.”

Although Haley did not say so, another factor may have been the fact that, during the 2016 US presidential campaign, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein accused Trump’s “favourable views on torture as ‘deeply unsettling and disturbing.”

“One Donald Trump is elected on the basis of what he has said, I think it is without any doubt that he would be dangerous from an international point of view,” he said on October 16, 2016. More recently, Zeid critiqued the Trump administration’s policy of separating and detaining children of asylum-seeking parents at the US border. Trump is known to hold personal grudges.

The US withdrawal from UNHRC came one week after Trump’s friendly tete-a-tete with North Korea’s brutish dictator Kim Jong-un, after which Trump publicly expressed admiration for, and even envy over, Kim’s total control over his country. “He loves his people,” Trump said of a man who allegedly ordered the assassination of his own half-brother.

Human rights NGOs and most European powers condemned the US move but Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu applauded it, calling the UNHRC “a biased, hostile, anti-Israel organisation.”

Haley and Netanyahu make an legitimate point: Israel has been the target of far more UNHRC condemnations than any other country. As egregious as Israel’s daily human rights abuses against Palestinians are — living under forced occupation is itself an abuse of human rights — it is hardly the only country in the world, or even in the MENA region, with an uncivil record. Many Rohingyas would gladly trade places with a Palestinian.

One can argue that the UNHRC’s anti-Israel tilt simply makes up for the fact that the world’s greatest power — the United States — has historically done little more than slap Israel’s wrist in the face of its abuses and, under Trump, even wrist slaps have ceased. However, UNHRC is an institutional organisation and, in theory at least, should aim for objectivity.

Even those who share Haley’s argument and her pro-Israel stance, such as Washington Post columnist Jennifer Rubin, were critical of the administration’s decision to withdraw from UNHRC. “Trump has — by his racist rhetoric, treat- ment of immigrants, contempt for democracy and infatuation with dictatorship — robbed the United States of the stature needed to be the world’s greatest power — the world’s greatest power — the world’s greatest power — the world’s greatest power — the world’s greatest power — the world’s greatest power — the world’s greatest power — the world’s...
Migration issues take centre stage ahead of EU emergency summit

Mahmud el-Shafey

London

Migration has become a divisive and thorny issue in many European countries ahead of an EU summit, with hawks leaders can agree on a comprehensive policy to deal with the problem when many countries are threatening to act unilaterally. European leaders agreed to attend an informal “mini-summit” on migration and asylum on June 24, ahead of the main summit June 28-29. Leaders from Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Austria and Bulgaria were expected to attend the crunch meeting.

The migration issue is not just threatening to divide the EU but could potentially lead to the downfall of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government.

Despite a sharp decrease in the number of refugees and migrants travelling to Europe this year, migration and asylum returned to the top of the political agenda after far-right, anti-migrant parties entered coalition governments in Austria and Italy.

The Italian government threatened to close its ports to migrant ships after refusing to allow the French NGO-operated vessel Aquarius to dock in Sicily. The ship, carrying more than 600 irregular migrants, was eventually granted permission to dock in Spain.

Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, leader of the far-right, anti-immigration League political party, indicated the country intended to take a radical new tack in accepting migrants and refugees, including pulling back the country’s navy and coastguard from patrolling the southern Mediterranean.

“We will always save human lives but we will order our ships to remain clear of any danger,” Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini said on June 18. “In the Mediterranean there are other countries that can intervene. We cannot allow half of Africa to be brought to Italian soil.”

However, just days later, an Italian Coast Guard ship carrying more than 500 migrants docked in Sicily. Italy said it intended to decide on a case-by-case basis which ships to allow to dock.

Italy and other so-called front-line countries complained about the Dublin Regulations, which state that an asylum seeker’s claims should be handled by the country where the person first arrives. The regulations — currently under review — enable an EU member to deport an asylum seeker to another country. Many people warned of the dangerous precedent that could set.

The hard-line interior ministers of Austria, Germany and Italy announced the formation of an “axis of the willing” to combat illegal migration to Europe and the issue is expected to be a main issue at the summit.

“I think it marks very sensible cooperation that will contribute to reducing illegal migration to Europe,” Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said following a meeting with German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer in Berlin on June 15. “We believe an axis of the willing is needed to fight illegal migration.”

The migration issue is not just threatening to divide the European Union but could potentially lead to the downfall of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government.

Merkel, who leads a government coalition of her own Christian Democratic Union and its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU), is under pressure from her coalition partners, who are demanding that the government take a much stronger line on migration.

Seehofer — an immigration hardliner and leader of the CSU — declared Merkel needs to announce a tough new immigration policies that would see asylum seekers turned away at the border, even suggesting that Germany would implement the proposal unilaterally in defiance of EU regulations.

Merkel and Seehofer ultimately agreed to postpone the immigration showdown until after the EU summit, which would allow her a chance to reach agreements with European leaders regarding whether Germany could turn back asylum seekers who had already registered elsewhere.

Participants at the EU summit in Brussels will try to reach a definitive multilateral solution to the issue of migration and asylum. Merkel is set to attend the summit after visits to Lebanon and Jordan, countries that are also the world’s highest number of refugees per capita.

Economic Minister Steven Le Maire warned that Europe was “in a process of dismantling” over the issue. “We see states that are turning inward, trying to find solutions in their own sovereign territories that require European solutions,” he said.

Mahmud el-Shafey is an Arab Weekly correspondent in London.

Unhappy days for the EU, the Mediterranean and Africa

Francis Giblin

When EU leaders meet in Brussels, the reality of the Italian government stance will hit home.

The UNHCR said Italy has seen 35,000 irregular migrants this year, Spain 12,000 and Greece 12,000. However, “the underlying factors that have led to more than 1.5 million migrants coming to Europe since 2014 have not gone away,” wrote Jon Henley for the Guardian, with many observers saying “it is only a matter of time before the number of arrivals picks up again.”

“Everyone agrees Europe needs to urgently overcome its asylum and immigration crises. At present Italy and Greece take most of the strain because of their geographical position and the fact that, under EU law, asylum seekers must lodge their applications in the first EU country they enter,” wrote Henley.

No one in Europe has been able to agree on how to do it and the wider problem of a lack of international, EU and Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, who heads the League political party, wants to carry out a census of Roma in Italy and expel those who hold foreign nationalities — an openly fascist discourse.

He campaigned on a pledge to send 500,000 irregular migrants home.

Marc Dumond, editor of the Italian weekly Fkepsos, noted that Salvini is “an agent of the crisis that follows (US President Donald) Trump’s view of questioning the international order... Migration is perfect from his point of view; it’s where Europe is fragile.”

Salvini is all the more formidable because he is far more powerful than his nominal boss, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, the leader of his Five Star Movement coalition partner, Luigi Di Maio. It is he who gave the order to block Italy’s ports to the Aquarius. Conte was belatedly “informed” of the government’s decision before it was announced and simply went to Mar-a-Lago to赣州 in the USA.

If Rome puts forward a proposal to reinforce external border controls, along with Vienna and possibly Berlin, which might include a suggestion to open centres in Africa for asylum seekers, those who know their history will be reminded of the alliance those capital forged in the late 19th century.

These are very unhappy days for Europe, for the Mediterranean and Africa as the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, will find it almost impossible to find a compromise ahead of the EU summit.

When EU leaders meet in Brussels, the reality of the Italian government stance will hit home.

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Economy

US sanctions expected to cut Iran's growth, weaken foreign investment

Thomas Frank
Washington

The reinstatement of US sanctions against Iran would severely weaken Tehran's economy and political power while benefiting major players in the Middle East and energy producers.

The sanctions would reverse several years of strong growth in Iran's production of oil and natural gas that restored the country's position as one of the world's leading fuel producers.

A report stated that Iran's production of oil and natural gas soared since sanctions were lifted under the 2015 Iran nuclear deal to the point that the country is the world's fourth-largest oil-producing country and third-largest producer of gas.

With increasing sales boosting its economy, Iran became the largest energy consumer in the Middle East in 2017, edging ahead of Saudi Arabia, a report by Britain's oil and gas company BP stated.

That growth would be jeopardised when US sanctions resume between August and November, forcing many countries to scale back imports of Iranian oil and natural gas and turn to other exporters, such as Iran's chief rival Saudi Arabia.

Trump's decision will weaken Iran both economically and politically by deterring foreign investment.

"Iran is under a perfect storm today," BP's chief economist, said. "It will go under very strict US sanctions. It's happening just as Russia and Saudi Arabia are deciding to stop their [oil] production cuts," he added. "What we have expected the sanctions will be really tough." The austerity plan that is in place is that Iran's oil production will fall 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) within six months, Spencer Dole, group chief economist at BP, said.

Much of Iran's increased production has gone to European countries, particularly the UK, where Iran's biggest oil customer in Europe is now located, said Iran's Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh.

"For him Europe is still the big hope. The big test is: What will the Europeans do? Can they do anything to overcome American objections and the new Trump policy?" asked Alex Vatanka, a Middle East expert who advises the US Air Force.

US President Donald Trump announced in May that he was withdrawing from the agreement signed by his predecessor, President Barack Obama, and European leaders during the nuclear programme in exchange for easing economic sanctions.

Trump's decision will weaken Iran both economically and politically by deterring foreign investment. "If I get more investment, I produce more and that means we have more political capital on the world stage," Vatanka said. Expectations are that Iran will scale back imports of Iranian oil and investment in Iran to avoid sanctions that could restrict access to the lucrative US consumer market and to US financial institutions.

The French oil company Total stated, in response to the US sanctions, that it was pulling out of a $2 billion deal to develop the Iran's South Pars gas field.

"Russia and China seem like the only options for the Iranian Energy Ministry for investment and oil imports," said Reza Mammadov, a former top official at the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic.

"Russia, however, might not be so eager to invest in Iran because it is a competitor as the world's third-largest oil producer and second-largest natural gas producer," Mammadov said. The China National Petroleum Corporation lacks the technical expertise to cultivate Iran's substantial oil and gas reserves.

"They certainly don't have the technology to produce liquid natural gas, which Iran needs from being the largest reserves of gas in the world," said European energy analyst Russell Seznec. Russia wants to increase its oil and gas production to make money as its economy suffers under increasingly tight economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union, he added.

Seznec, Mammadov and Vatanka spoke at a panel discussion at the Middle East Institute in Washington on the future of Iran's energy sector.

Another Middle East Institute panelist said US sanctions would benefit many countries by compelling them to increase oil and gas production. "Having sanctions on Iran is not really hurting anyone. Solar can create market share for oil producers," said Sara Vakhshouri, president of SVB Energy International who worked for the National Iranian Oil Company from 2009-09. "Having sanctions on Iran will profit many countries and doesn't bother the rest."
Algeria renews major gas deal with Spain

Lamine Ghanmi

Algeria’s state-owned energy company Sonatrach agreed to an extended 12-year gas deal with Spain’s Gas Natural Fenosa firm for $34.8 billion.

"Moreover, it undoubtedly constitutes a significant milestone in the relationship with Algeria as this renewal guarantees the stability of gas supplies to Spain," said Fennos’s locked a network of pipelines to supply gas to Europe via Italy through the Trans-Mediterranean Pipeline, which has hit a 5-year high this year, with deliveries to the two countries averaging 120 million cubic metres per day, official figures state.

Algeria’s pipeline gas exports have expanded since 2015 due to a significant jump in supplies to Italy via Tunisia.

Algeria’s major advantages as a gas supplier to Europe include its abundance of hydrocarbons, as well as a 4.5 trillion cubic metres of gas reserves, giving it the 10th-largest natural gas reserves in the world and the second-largest in Africa, behind Nigeria.

Algeria is estimated to hold the third largest amount of shale gas resources in the world – more than 20 trillion cubic feet – and 5.7 billion barrels of recoverable shale gas and oil resources.

Algeria has the sixth-largest gas exporter in the world, sending more than 90% of its pipeline exports to Spain, Italy and other European countries, with the remainder going to Morocco and Tunisia, which is payment for transit fees.

Spain is increasingly transforming itself into a gas hub for Europe thanks to its position near Northern Africa that allows it to be a springboard for gas entering the continent via the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic, energy experts said.

Spain, through Fennos, Endesa and Union Fenosa Gas, has invested about $1.16 billion since 2000 to improve its regasification capacity and construct specialised ports.

Seven of Europe’s 22 regasification plants are in Spain.

Despite Algeria’s success with the European market, it is aiming to export half of its gas output to new territories, mostly in Asia.

"The 50% autonomy by Sonatrach is a target. It is also a message to its traditional European clients who are negotiating the extension of old deals," said former Sonatrach CEO Abdelmajed Attar.

"These clients are all asking for cuts in price and terms and other concessions. It is obvious that the European market is the most important to the Algerian gas and it must continue to be so but not at the expense of our country.

"The announcement of the 50% autonomy is a message to say that the Algerian gas can find other markets elsewhere, mainly in Asia, which is becoming the main market for oil and gas... The competition in Asia is certainly tough but it is only fierce in Europe where the competition is weakening and the price declining compared to Asia," he added.

Soaring fuel prices anger Moroccans as government mulls return to old cap system

Saad Guerraoui

Fuel costs in Morocco have increased 9.1% on average since price liberalisation at the end of 2015, a statement from Morocco’s High Planning Commission (HCP) said, and Moroccans are venting their anger against the government for failing to slow the rise.

The HCP said that the increase was primarily related to the international markets.

Diesel prices have soared 42% from the beginning of 2016 to the end of May 2018 and now costs about $1.8 a litre.

"Increases and decreases in prices (and not only increases, contrary to the suspicion that continues to weigh on distributors) of imported refined crude are reflected in international prices at the pump, with a lag of 15 days, but not with the same magnitude," the HCP said. "This offset takes into account the time required for transport, storage and distribution. Declines and increases in the prices of refined products do not have an exact impact on pump prices."

MF Abdellah Bouanou from the Federation of Democratic Unions, which owns the hand of the Competition Commission on its president, Abdelali Benamour, to whom he had asked to resume service until the appointment of a successor, said Khalife.

Benamour, however, blamed unnamed business lobbies for being behind the situation.

"When a Competition Council emerges and wants to do its job, interests emerge and lobbies get to work. I cannot tell you what lobbying, since their own is to work softly," Benamour told TelQuel.ma. Opposition MP Omar Balaou, from the Federation of Democratic Left, called on distribution firms to repay of what he called "unethical" profits totalling $1.7 billion to Moroccans.

The government is weighing the option of price caps for diesel and petrol to control fuel prices.

Minister of General Affairs and Governance Lahcen Daoudi, whose surprise resignation has not been accepted by Moroccan King Mohamed VI, was dealing with the thorny issue of capping fuel prices, including the return of the price structure abandoned the liberalisation took place in December 2015.

The government is weighing the option of price caps for diesel and petrol to control fuel prices.

Saad Eddine El Othmani was working to "instruct" the Competition Council, government spokesman Mustapha El Khalifi said.

"In my intellectual honesty, the head of government came to the obvious and admitted his mistake since he had blamed the freezing of the activity of the Competition Council on its president, Abdelali Benamour, to whom he had asked to resume service until the appointment of a successor," said Khalifi.

Saad Guerraoui is a contributor to The Arab Weekly on Maghreb issues.

Tunis

A

Ligia’s state-owned energy company Sonatrach agreed to an extended 12-year gas deal with Spain’s Gas Natural Fenosa firm for $34.8 billion, solidifying its role as Europe’s main natural gas supplier.

The agreement is seen as a big win for Algeria, which had expressed concern that European firms could shift to supplies from the United States or Qatar. However, it is the only country to Europe and reputation as a stable, reliable supplier gives it an edge over other international providers.

Despite a brutal civil war from 1992-2005 and repeated attempts by Islamist rebels to sabotage supply pipelines, Algeria has honoured all its gas contracts and saw no major interruptions in its pipeline exports.

"This agreement is a major step forward to strengthen our historical strategic alliance with Sonatrach," said Fennos’s locked a network of pipelines to supply gas to Europe via Italy through the Trans-Mediterranean Pipeline, which has hit a 5-year high this year, with deliveries to the two countries averaging 120 million cubic metres per day, official figures state.

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Saad Guerraoui is a contributor to The Arab Weekly on Maghreb issues.
Blockchain: A revolution waiting to happen

Khadija Hamouchi

lockchain is the new black in the start-up world but its influence goes beyond the high-tech fashions of the day. As an open, distributed ledger, blockchain ensures information is not controlled by any one entity, is public, and can be easily checked - a gift, one might have thought, for people in the Arab world, who yearn for transparency, access and accountability.

“It is fair to say that some Arab countries are keeping an eye on the technology,” said Mohammed Mnif, co-founder of Tunisia-based Dar Blockchain, an incubator for start-ups wishing to broaden use of blockchain. “Some are more into it. Dubai announced earlier this year that it wants to become the world’s first blockchain-powered city by 2020.” In the UAE, the exception, rather than the rule? Yes, said Nassim Laroqui, co-founder of AXON, a virtual bank with its own cryptocurrency and app. “I think some MENA governments don’t understand blockchain or digital currencies,” he said.

Blockchain has more advantages than disadvantages, provided attention is paid to network architecture.

New opportunities. Young Tunisians at the Blockchain Enthusiast Meet Up at Dar Blockchain in Arama.

Several Arab governments seem increasingly aware of blockchain’s potential to transform different business sectors.

The virtual political realities that digital technologies and social media platforms have created are far removed from reality.

Citizens can’t distinguish between religious and political tweets

Taher Alwan

everyone is tweeting these days. The new technology seems to have become the other two groups that we media people would have never expected to find together: politicians and religious figures. Separated by years of special fatwas and political upheavals, we find them united through tweeting. Together, they keep public opinion occupied and entertained.

Tweeting has made the politicians give up their speeches and long articles and take up the concise digital format. However, they still tell their story in 280-30 words. For example, he can simply write: “I announce that I’m pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal,” end with a hashtag and go home. It’s that easy. With new technology, the politicians don’t have to worry about the burdensome tasks of consulting advisors and writing an elaborate speech.

Twitter was not around when former US President Donald Bush declared his war on Iraq. He did it the old-fashioned way. He was sitting in the White House with pictures of his wife and daughters behind him as he, with a serious and measured voice, unleashed a war that refuses to die. Had Twitter been around then, he and his father, George H.W. Bush, would have probably tweeted their wars into existence. Not to worry. America today has a Twitter aficionado for president. Donald Trump is so fond of tweeting that his political rivals never miss an opportunity to poke fun at his nasty habit. Russian President Vladimir Putin, for example, joked about Trump’s Twitter wars. Not to be outdone, people of religion too quickly adopted tweeting to spread fatwas left and right. Rain or shine, there is a Twitter用户 who, for the sake of fortune and power, were willing to overlook that aspect. Taking intellectual and doctrinal shortcuts for the purpose of mixing religion and politics has become so banal on social media platforms that we seem to be living in a surrealist world.

Things are no better on the receiving end. Public opinion in the Arab world is divided. The fact remains, however, that the general public has given up on both politicians and political Islamists. People no longer trust that magical recipe of pragmatic and not necessarily interested in the truth. That did not seem to interest religious scholars who, for the sake of fortune and power, were willing to overlook that aspect. Taking intellectual and doctrinal shortcuts for the purpose of mixing religion and politics has become so banal on social media platforms that we seem to be living in a surrealist world.

Unfortunately, citizens in the Arab world lost in an ocean of tweets that sound more like religious fatwas than political views.

Lost in tweets. Kuwait men check a Twitter feed on a phone in Kuwait City. (Bloomberg)

The virtual political realities that digital technologies and social media platforms have created are far removed from reality.

between these two roles continues. Religious scholars have left their very tweeters and are mingling with politicians. Politics is based on pragmatism and not necessarily interested in the truth. That did not seem to interest religious scholars who, for the sake of fortune and power, were willing to overlook that aspect. Taking intellectual and doctrinal shortcuts for the purpose of mixing religion and politics has become so banal on social media platforms that we seem to be living in a surrealist world.

Unfortunately, citizens in the Arab world lost in an ocean of political tweets or, let us say, tweets that sound more like religious fatwas than political views. There is nothing in such tweets that can reassure citizens about their future and that of their country.

Digital technologies and social media platforms have facilitated instant communication with the public. The virtual political realities that they have created, however, have far exceeded free from reality. It is ironic that this phenomenon has made it possible for politics and religion to mingle and create what was once known as political Islam.

Taher Alwan is an Iraqi writer.
Teams are out but World Cup consolidates bonds between the Maghreb and its diasporas

Oussama Romdhanli

Through Morocco and Tunisia have already been eliminated from the World Cup in Russia, both their national teams’ participation in the prestigious tournament had more than a silver lining. Among others, it will probably have a lasting effect on the two North African countries’ ties to their diasporas in Europe. When the Moroccan and Tunisian football federations started scouting for talented footballers eligible to play in their national teams by virtue of their origin, there was scepticism about their success. However, they did not necessarily peak at the comenz of the Maghreb’s long road to the finals of the World Cup. Many doubted they could integrate into the complex relationship between the Maghreb and its diasporas in Europe. Like Tunisia, Morocco did not necessarily succeed in their quest to re-establish the Maghreb’s long-failed ideals that were “Maghreb migrant,” just like their parents but were different.

In a stark illustration of that misunderstanding, most Tunisian post-independence governments invested in wooing the children of first-generation immigrants. In many ways, these governments did not seem to accept that these young people were now French, Belgian and German, albeit of Tunisian origin. They were not “Tunisians living abroad” as the Tunisian authorities liked to label them. Meanwhile, they saw economic benefits for the state from remittances’ remittances and investment in Tunisia. Unlike Arab-Americans, whose hyphenated identity was quickly recognised for what it is, young Europeans of North African descent were not always expected to behave like Maghrebis, as did their parents. The problem was, they weren’t Maghrebis natives.

Even so, second-generation young Moroccans and Tunisians cut the umbilical cord that bound them to their country of origin. Geographic proximity and modern communications technology allowed for continued contact between the second generation and their parents’ hometowns. In fact, it was the parents who often worked to preserve this connection even when their children were relatively young.

Now, playing for the country of their ethnicity is seen to consolidate Europe-born Maghrebis’ ties to their parents’ generation. Ironically, the impediments to full integration in Europe might have further encouraged second-generation Maghrebis to identify with their North African countries of origin. Maurice Crul, a professor at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, told the New York Times: “It’s a big issue that this generation felt excluded from the very start of their lives.” There has been, for instance, a blustery nationalistic rhetoric and legacy of populist politicians, such as Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom, who once slandered Moroccans as “scum.”

In some instances, however, the conflict between the country of origin and the country of birth was problematic. Players approached by the Moroccan and Tunisian football federations had legitimate considerations about the effects of their choice. In some instances, their preferences were not compatible with the wishes of football bodies in the Maghreb. The Tunisian football federation, like its Moroccan counterpart, devoted time and effort to convince the players to join the Maghreb squad. “By enlarging its horizons, the technical staff hoped to create an awareness between players chosen from the Tunisian championship and those originating from the second generation established in Europe,” the Tunisian federation noted on its website.

In some cases, the players preferred not to jeopardise their chances of playing someday for the national team of their country of birth. In most other cases, however, they were eager to join the Moroccan or Tunisian team. Eventually, there was a clear sense of solidarity and even compromise between the players regardless of their place of birth. Playing Football during Ramadan, the Tunisian team seemed to count on its French-born goalkeeper Mourad Hassen to provoke a playing pause that allowed them to break their fast. Asked by reporters if his complaint about injuries was contrived, Hassen replied: “What can I tell you? I am Muslim.” Language was never a real hurdle. French is a common second language in North Africa. Foreign tongues are not an insurmountable problem in modern football where players often hail from many different backgrounds. Beyond cultural differences, most players rallied around the flag. And Tunisian player Ellyes Skhiri reflected that spirit: “I was totally welcomed by everyone. There are no concerns. It is true that I do not speak the language but I hope to be able to learn it soonest. That will facilitate my integration.”

Whether he ends up speaking the Arabic language or not, the integration of Skhiri and other foreign-born Maghrebis in their countries of origin is much less in doubt after the FIFA World Cup.

Early Arab departures leave sour taste in football fans’ mouths

The 2018 FIFA World Cup has been a disappointment for the four Arab teams taking part, with all four teams bowing out in the first round.

The region’s poor performance, which included last-minute defensive blunders, frustrated fans who had high hopes for the tournament. Many questions about the region’s ability to have its “teams’” performance and their growing presence in world football.

Egypt was the first to crash out of the tournament, losing 3-1 to an underperformed Russia on June 19. Saudi Arabia and Morocco followed the next day, with losses to Uruguay and Morocco respectively. Tunis hung on until June 23 before being defeated by one World Cup favourite Belgium.

One fan dryly commented: “Arab countries always eat every- thing but say agree to leave the World Cup.”

For many teams, fitness and concentration proved to be key factors, with both appearing to flag at the 90-minute mark. In an apparent dismissal of the team’s staff, Egypt fired all its trainers.

The Tunisian team were neck and neck with their English rivals until the last minute, but a goal that dashed hopes. The Moroccos and Egyptians shared the dubious distinction of conceding goals in the 99th minute.

Some Arab coaches bemoaned their players’ loss of concentration under pressure. Others saw a deeper problem. The 99-minute hurdle proved a key talking point. “What’s the story of Arab teams with the 90-minute mark?” Tunisian columnist and逻辑 icon said Arab teams have the means of standing up to the best of world football but they didn’t.

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Cairo

Eid provides a valuable perspective absent from much of what has already been written on Syria — it is an epic view of what Syria was and has become.

This memoir provides the human story necessary for understanding Syrians’ struggle for freedom. Through the eyes of a young man, “My Country” takes the reader along a path from an intense oppression to fervent human rights activism.

Throughout the memoir, Eid documents key events of his life that relate to Syria’s tragedy. He details his experience of Ba’athist indoctrination in schools, his family and their view of the state, the people’s fear of authorities and the state-engineered sectarian divide, the 2011 protests and life as a rebel and of survival. Above all, Eid creates a portrait of the Syrian people’s unshakable hope for freedom and humanity’s indulgence in abandoning a tormented country.

At the heart of his memories, Eid recalls August 21, 2013, the horrific day he was brought back from the dead. Although he had no external signs of injury, Eid recalls: “My eyes were burning, my head was throbbing and my throat was rasping for air. I was suffocating” — a result of the first chemical weapons attack in Syria. Regime rockets filled with sarin gas landed in rebel-held towns in the Ghouta agricultural belt around Damascus. Eid’s town, Moaddamiya, was among the targeted suburbs. “Suddenly my windpipe opened again. The air ripped through my throat and pierced my lungs. Invis-ible needles stabbed my eyes,” he writes. “A tearing pain closed on my stomach. I doubled over and admitted to my nocturnes, ‘Wake up! It’s a chemical attack!’”

Eid survived that day but more than 1,300 people did not.

“My Country” is a personal journey of survival. Many more hardships followed the chemical attack but Eid managed to flee the country. He went to the United States and testified before the UN Security Council. Today, he lives in Germany as a refugee.

Eid provides a reminder that what is happening in Syria should continue to get attention, Eid said. “I know there are millions of Syrians who didn’t get the chance to tell their story.” Now that his memoir is published, Eid said he feels that he will be able to take time to look after himself and try to move on.

“My Country” is not just a story of the pain of the Syrian revolution. It is a remarkable story of resilience as well. It is a gripping combination of fear and bravery, a heartfelt account of one’s life in dictatorship, revolution and war. Eid provides a valuable perspective absent from much of what has already been written on Syria — it is an epic view of what Syria was and has become.

This book does not attempt to explain the dynamics and politics of Syria and the war. However, Eid’s memoir should serve as a first reference on Syria’s conflict, is comprehended the backstory of life in the country before and after 2011. This memoir is one man’s story and thus is not comprehensive. Nevertheless, it contains an identity and experience with which many Syrians can identify.

Abdulfarhan al-Marri reports on politics and news in the Middle East and Syria in particular. He can be followed on Twitter: @AbdulfarhanMarri.
Dubai

Dubai has been selected the first city in the Middle East and 24th in the world to be a part of the UNESCO Creative City of Design. Activities across the emirate will focus on design, beginning with the opening of the Dubai Institute of Design and Innovation (DIDI) in September, the first of its kind in the United Arab Emirates.

“It came to be part of this announcement and plan,” DIDI President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, has said. “It is a priority of the Government and private entities that are taking that whole creativity thinking (to the next level).”

The UNESCO announcement places Dubai within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, which has 180 members from 72 countries.

Students out of high school will have design thinking instilled in them in terms of how to identify problems and come up with solutions.

“In four years, the first batch will graduate and they will find room within that concept that the city is a ‘design area,’” Abdul said.

“The way we look at it is that design involves all aspects of life. If you have trouble problems related to transport, students can think of a design and come up with a solution, to better improve society as a whole.”

The UNESCO announcement places Dubai within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, which has 180 members from 72 countries covering arts and crafts, design, film, literature and media arts. The network is aimed at promoting cooperation among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.

“Design is beyond the product, rather it is the framework by which problems are solved,” said Dawood AlHajiri, director-general of Dubai Municipality. “It puts people and their needs first to convert trash into energy, improve quality of life, increase sustainability and promote happiness.”

Citizens will be invited to participate in the creative process. “More activities will take place to cement this, going forward,” said Abdullah Al Basti, secretary-general of Dubai Executive Council. “We also expect people from society to come forward with their ideas to contrib-

The municipality has had a long history with UNESCO to recognise Dubai Creek as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Some areas across the Middle East, including Al Zaharah Archaeological Site in Qatar, the cultural sites of Al Ain in the UAE, such as Al Ain Bani Yas and Al Ain Oasis areas, have achieved that designation.

Saudi Arabia has its share of protected sites, including Al Hijj Archaeological Site, also known as Madain Salih, Al Puraf District in Al-Dirayyat, the Historic Jeddah site — the Gate to Mecca — and other heritage sites of the Hall region. Such sites represent commitment to culture and heritage across the region and the Gulf countries’ vision to position themselves on the global map.

“The announcement of the Creative City of Design in the Middle East for Dubai marks the culmination of the vision of Sheikh Moham-

The 37 beautifully made images of architectural landmarks throughout Latin America, where the Arab influence on institution-

“Alhambras: Neo-Arabic Architecture in Latin America,” the show at the Jordan Museum highlighted a period in architecture’s history marked by the construction of Alhambras, the famous palace and fortress complex in Granada, Spain. The palace was built in the mid-13th century by the Nasrid Emir Muhammad ben Al-Nasir of Granada.

The exhibition was preceded by a seminar on “Arab and Latin American Cultures,” which covered the influence of the Arab world in Latin America in relation to the ingesting power of Al-Andalus experienced and offered a detailed view of Arab cultural influence in the Americas since its colonisation by Spain to modern times.

Lecturers said the Mudejar style, which is centred in the Aragon region of north-eastern Spain, has been recognised by UNESCO for representative buildings as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, in recognition of “Arab” art.

Mudejar style is a technique of creating architecture influenced by Muslim and Christian cultures that emerged as an architectural style in the 12th century on the Iberian Peninsula.

Roufan Nashah, a fan of history of architecture, said the exhibition depicts the special relation between the two cultures.

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Lebanon’s Hardine: A treasure trove off the beaten track

Samar Kadi

Hardine

With more than 30 monasteries, churches and hermitages, the ancient village of Hardine is known as the “Lourdes of Lebanon” and is visited by Christian pilgrims as well as seculars seeking tranquility and a peaceful retreat for contemplation. Perched on rocky mountains and sheer cliffs rising 1,400 metres above sea level, Hardine is where one can hear the “voice of silence, meditate, pray and feel close to the creator,” says the village Bishop Youssef Salieh.

“Hardine, which was a centre of paganism and home for many pagan temples in the ancient times, was the first town to become Christian in Mount Lebanon,” Salieh said. “Its name is derived from the Syriac language meaning ‘pious’ but some argue that the name stems from the words ‘hassel’ (home) and ‘dames’ (religious), owing to the numerous places of worship in the village.”

Known as the “Rock of Faith and Religion,” Hardine is a historically significant site for Lebanon’s Christian Maronites. Pilgrims from across the country visit Hardine’s many ancient churches and monasteries on weekends, while hermits of all faiths spend days in the secluded hermitages in the rocks and on cliff tops.

“The places of worship and seclusion were built in the rock and inside caves starting from the sixth century AD. Some date back to the seventh century, others to the ninth century and the eighth century and some were built in the Middle Ages in the 12th and 11th centuries and later,” Salieh said.

“For instance, Mar Tadros Church dates to the tenth century. Mar Challita, Mar Nohra and Mar Elias Churches, which are all in mountain caves, are much older and Mar Yo- nna Chkkel Cell dates to the Crusaders’ period.”

Hardine is the hometown of one of Lebanon’s four saints, Saint Nimatullah Hardini (1808-58) who was canonised by Roman Catholic Pope John Paul II in 2004.

The cells inside the rocks are equipped with basics and can be used by anyone seeking isolation from the outside world.

“Hermits are not only members of the clergy,” Salieh said. “We often receive secular people who spend days in the hermitages meditating and engaging in spiritual exercises and yoga.”

Hardine Mayor Ramza Assaf said she hopes to place the village on the religious tourism map as the “treasure trove of Lebanon” and on the regular pilgrim. “Our main project is to connect all the monasteries for the pilgrims to visit through a footpath that goes on the side of the rock. We want them to be able to access all the caves monasteries, because at present none can be accessible for the regular pilgrims.”

“Hardine’s wealth consists of its natural beauty, clean environment and religion which we are keen on preserving as well as its character as a sanctified village. We have strict construction rules, allowing only two-storey stone buildings with red-tiled roofs,” Assaf added.

She explained that the village’s importance dates to before Christianity reached the area, as evidenced by its archaeological vestiges, including a 1,900-year-old temple built for the Roman god Mercury under Emperor Hadrian Augustus (117-138).

The hilltop temple with 10 enormous pillars was severely damaged in an earthquake and only a few columns remain standing. “The Directorate of Antiquities began restoration of the temple before the beginning of the civil war in 1975. It stopped during the war and now we are seeking to relaunch the restoration,” Assaf said.

Hardine is not the place to be for partygoers but rather for people seeking solitaire peace and tranquility in the many hermitages and monasteries that were used by early Christians. “Christians used to hide in the caves while fleeing persecution at the hands of the Manichaeans and the Ottomans in the 12th century and then the 17th and 18th centuries. We even have 12 martyr nuns from Hardine who jumped over the cliffs to escape invaders,” Salieh said.

“The village is naturally protected by the valleys and the rocky mountains around it making it an ideal place for the then new religion (Christianity) to flourish.”

Legend has it that in 270AD, a Roman official imprisoned his daughter in Hardine for converting to Christianity. She converted many others in Hardine to the Christian faith.

“Hardine was at one point the seat of the Maronite patriarch before it was moved to Wadi Qannoubine. It is a town of sanctity and holiness, that is full of monasteries, hermitages and churches, which you can find everywhere — in the valleys, on the cliffs and in the rocks,” Salieh said.

For Assaf, Hardine is a “treasure that is not really recognised… It has a long history that we are determined to make it better known.”

Samar Kadi is The Arab Weekly Travel and Society section editor.