Abadi edged out of prime minister’s race but real change in Iraq remains remote

In an apparent reversal, influential Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose bloc finished first in May’s elections, withdrew his backing for Abadi.

Mamoon Alabbasi
London

Violent protests in the southern Iraqi city of Basra are pushing the country’s biggest political blocs to agree on a deal that would prevent incumbent Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi from securing a second term in office.

In an apparent reversal, influential Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose bloc finished first in May’s elections, withdrew his backing for Abadi, whose political alliance was third in the vote. Al-Sadr agreed instead to discuss a consensus candidate with Hadi al-Amiri, an ex-backed militia leader whose bloc took the second-most votes in the election.

The move came after Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq’s highest Shia religious authority, called for the formation of a government that would be different from previous ones.

Although nothing is impossible in Iraq’s fickle politics, it is very unlikely that al-Sadr would return to supporting Abadi as prime minister, especially since he criticised the prime minister for not meeting protesters’ needs and after Abadi himself indicated that he would not be seeking a second term.

“We respect the high religious authority of Sistani and answer his call. We have not sought to cling to power or a second term,” Abadi said on September 17. “I’ve said from the start that I would surprise you and you’ll see how I don’t cling to power. I think that pledge has been fulfilled today, just as we have given a lesson in combating terror, unifying the country and fighting sectarianism, we would also give a lesson in giving up power and ensuring a peaceful transition.”

Abadi’s departure would be welcomed news for Tehran because he had pledged to abide by US sanctions against Iran.

“The Iranians do not have the ability to open a front against the Americans in Iraq, so they are satisfied with the blow that they directed to the Americans by burning Abadi,” an unidentified al-Sadr negotiator told Saudi newspaper Arab News.

The departure of Abadi would be welcome news for Tehran as the prime minister had pledged to abide by US sanctions against Iran.

Observers said Abadi’s dropping out of the race for prime minister doesn’t rule out his bloc’s participation in a coalition government.

Others said that, despite his statement, Abadi may end up returning as prime minister. “The negotiations are still ongoing,” political analyst Thamer al-Ashtali told the Associated Press.

Media circles in Iraq, however, were discussing possible candidates that al-Sadr and Amiri might agree on. One name being touted was Shia politician Adil Abdul-Mahdi, who previously served as oil minister, finance minister and vice-president.

According to Al-Sharqia news presenter Ahmed al-Mulla Talal, al-Sadr and Amiri have each suggested a list of names and Abdul-Mahdi was the only one on both lists. There has been no official confirmation on the consensus on Abdul-Mahdi from either camp. Abadi posted on Twitter that he agreed “with those who are big in Iraq” on suggesting a number of “independent technocrats” as prime minister. His suggestion faces the objection of some politicians “who want to take Iraq back to square one and bring back corrupt politicians in new garments,” al-Sadr said. “If they continue then I will announce joining the opposition.”

Critics say Abdul-Mahdi did not enjoy a shining record when he led the two ministries and thus does not offer a compelling reason that he would do better as a prime minister. Also, being a career politician who rose from the ranks of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, Abdul-Mahdi hardly fits the definition of a technocrat.

Even if a technocrat does assume power, there is no guarantee he would implement radical changes without a more encompassing political will.

“A technocratic government can be just as internally inconsistent as all of Iraq’s post-2003 governments,” wrote Zaid al-Ali in the Washington Post. “Ministers in all post-2003 governments have never agreed to a coherent strategic plan, do not accept joint liability for failure and are always prepared to undermine each other.”

Mamoon Alabbasi is Deputy Managing Editor and Online Editor of The Arab Weekly.

Tunisian government, civil society join forces to curb deadly accidents

Roua Khlif
Tunis

Facing an alarming number of traffic accidents, the Tunisian government is working with civil society organisations on awareness campaigns to promote road safety.

Tunisia records an average of 1,500 people killed in road accidents each year.

Touil said: “The behaviour of drivers is not going to change if we don’t provide the right mechanisms to implement this culture. I am happy we are signing this partnership and next year you will notice the positive impact of implementing this decision.”

Despite the country’s efforts to improve road safety, there is a long way to go in fostering respect for the rules of the road, he said.

“This issue is very alarming, especially the behaviour of the drivers on the road is dangerous. There is no respect for the laws,” Touil said.

Oussama Mabrouk, press officer of the National Road Safety Observatory at the Ministry of the Interior, said that while there were efficient laws that regulate roads in Tunisia, “the issue is that of the mentality of drivers who do not realise that these laws are there to protect them and not to penalise them, which is why we need to address the way people think.”

“This is why we resorted to increasing the awareness campaigns. We need to work on implementing a culture of respecting the laws that can be done by desensitising the efforts of the government with that of civil society,” Mabrouk added.

Roua Khlif is a regular Travel and Culture contributor to The Arab Weekly.

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Iraq in crossfire of escalating Iran-US tensions

Mamoon Alabassi

London

Iraq is finding itself in the middle of escalating tensions between Iran and the United States in which Tehran and Washington have accused each other of carrying out hostile activities in Iraqi territory.

Following comments by the Iranian Consulate in Basra by Iraqi demonstrators, who have been protesting for weeks against poor living conditions in the southern Iraqi city, Iran-backed militias stated that an “American-Saudi conspiracy” was at play to divide the country. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi said the attacks on the consulate were the result of US policies in the region.

“The recent chaos in Iraq, in which the axis attack on the building of the Iranian Consulate in Basra, is the result of their short-sighted and unwise overt and covert support for groups that have promoted violence and extremism and turned them into an ordinary and everyday occurrence,” said Ghasemi.

His comments came after the statements of supporting Kurdish separatist Iranian militias hiding in Iraqi territories.

Iran announced that the IRGC fired seven missiles at the headquarters of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PKD) in northern Iraq, Iran said the attack, in which at least 11 militants were reportedly killed, was a message to the United States.

“The attack against the terrorists in Iraq’s Kurdistan conveys a message to the enemies, particularly those superpowers who think they can impose their evil plots on Iran and bully us,” Irani Major-General Mohammad Ali Jafari told the semi-official DNA News Agency.

“All those who have forces, bases and equipment within a 2,000km radius should know that our missiles are highly precise,” he warned.

Iran stated that the strikes were in retaliation for cross-border incursions by the PDKI, which it classified as a terrorist group.

“The government of Iraq and the Kurdish authorities should not allow existence of such bases in their territories and should hand over these separatist terrorists to Iran,” Iranian Major-General Mohammad Bagheri told the semi-official Fars News Agency.

“The authorities of Iraq’s Kurdistan had repeatedly tried to stop them but… provoked by some regional countries and America… these separatist terrorists carried out some operations inside Iran,” Bagheri said.

Iran has killed PKDI leaders during special operations inside Iraqi territories, instead of firing missiles from Iran.

The Iranian missile attack drew rare criticism from the Iranian Foreign Ministry. “Iraq rejects the violation of Iraqi sovereignty by bombarding any target within Iraqi territory with the prior coordination with the Iraqi authorities to spare civilians the effects of such operations,” read a statement from the ministry.

Tensions have been mounting between Washington and Tehran since the Trump administration withdrew in May from the 2015 international nuclear accord with Iran, reimposing US sanctions on Tehran. Reuters reported in August that Iran had given its proxies in Iraq ballistic missiles, which would allow Tehran to use Iraqi territory to carry out major attacks against US interests.

“We have bases like that in many places and Iraq is one of them. If America attacks us, our friends will attack America’s interests and its allies in the region,” said a senior IRGC commander. Iran and Iraqi officials have dismissed the report.

Cover Story

Iraqis have started to again realise that their government is in thrall to foreign ayatollahs.

Basra’s fury as Reds and its croones in Iraq scared

Blowback. Protesters chant anti-government slogans while security forces prevent them from storming the governor’s building in Basra, on September 5. (AP)

Viewpoint

Blowback. Protestors chant anti-government slogans while security forces prevent them from storming the governor’s building in Basra, on September 5. (AP)

Iraqi leader from the day he began, had understood that the way to a stable Iraq was by redeveloping its airport, security forces prevent them from storming the governor’s building in Basra, on September 5. (AP)

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Iranian consulates.

Once ablaze, fire does not distinguish between the US and Iranian consulates.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi’s September 11 visit to Basra came after an increasing presence of Iranian influence in the southern Iraqi city. Violent protests claimed at least 15 lives, the airport in Basra was targeted by a rocket attack and damaged but when the patience of these peace-loving citizens, something very serious must be rotten in the state of Iraq.

Undoubtedly, millions of Iraqis in the central and southern provinces have seen the fires go to the dogs and their daily suffering rise up because of the incredible corruption of the Iraqi governments since the US invasion. Not only did these incompetent governments fail to provide Iraqis with the minimum requirements in water, electricity, air, health and food services, but they siphoned off huge fortunes in public funds.

Iraq is moving in a direction parallel to that of some countries in the region where the political authority in Baghdad is suspected of having burned the offices of the Iran-backed Badr organisation while a government minister was in charge of the Iraq port-authorities and the oil ministry.

In Iraq, Tehran plays with fire slight. Western journalists said the attackers complained that Shia militiamen were responsible for the protest and that it was a call for justice.

Cover Story

Iraq

Basra unrest points to another Iran-Iraq showdown

The plight of Basra, however, was not new as it is one of the worst cases of giving it leverage over the United States.

The group that attacked the consulate is suspected of having burned the offices of the Iran-backed Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Badr Organisation months before. Some protesters expressed frustration with the dysfunctional government in Baghdad. They demanded jobs and basic public services such as electricity and access to clean drinking water. The Iraqi Health Ministry admitted that more than 6,000 people in Basra have been sickened by contaminated water.

Tehran appears to have pushed its luck a bit too far in Iraq. As the US-Iranian tension continues to escalate, Western journalists said the attackers complained that Shia militias were responsible for the protest and that it was a call for justice.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi was among the 15 killed when it got angry. It has always been sickened by contaminated water. Its water sources have been polluted and the salty water of Shatt al-Arab has invaded its aquifers. Thousands of its inhabitants are unemployed or getting poorer by the day. Epidemic outbreaks and insecurity lurk at every corner. Yet, 85% of Iraq’s oil is from Basra but its revenues never reach the city because they are stolen by the parties in power.

Cover Story

Iraq

Basra is not only a remote city in Iraq, a city that can be ignored or not feared because they are stolen by the parties in power. Tehran appears to have pushed its luck a bit too far in Iraq. As the US-Iranian tension continues to escalate, Western journalists said the attackers complained that Shia militias were responsible for the protest and that it was a call for justice.

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Iraq

Basra is not only a remote city in Iraq, a city that can be ignored or not feared because they are stolen by the parties in power. Since we know that Iran is almost impossible for Iraq to do, the second outcome is bound to be another Iraqi-Iran war, perhaps different from the previous one but a war nonetheless. Like in the previous war, Iran is sure to have lots of hidden enemies lurking in the shadows. Just a few days ago, people in Basra were chanting “I will live and die for Basra.” When the war with Iran breaks out, they will chant again for Basra’s sake and for the sake of Iraq. Basra will continue to exist and resist and so will Iraq with it.

Ibrahim Zobedi is an Iraqi writer and US publisher of The Arab Weekly.
Russia gives Turkey more time to find a solution for Idlib

Thomas Seibert

Istanbul

Russians is giving Turkey more time to end the conflict in Idlib. The Kremlin has set a deadline of the end of October for Turkey to withdraw its forces and al-Qaeda-linked rebels, who control part of the province. But Ankara has not agreed to the terms and negotiations continue.

Turkey is preparing for a possible full-scale attack by Syrian regime forces on the last rebel-held area in the north-western province of Idlib. Aid agencies warn of a humanitarian crisis if the regime launches a military operation, as the region is home to more than 4 million people, including 3.5 million Syrian refugees. The UN has called for a ceasefire to allow aid to reach those in need.

State actors horse trade over Idlib assault as aid agencies brace for the worst

Simon Speakman Cordall

Tunis

The exodus from Idlib in north-western Syria has been ongoing since the beginning of April, with an estimated 400,000 people leaving the province to find safety elsewhere. The situation is particularly dire in Idlib, where the regime has launched a full-scale offensive, targeting civilians and aid workers. Aid agencies are warning of a humanitarian crisis, as the region is home to more than 4 million people, including 3.5 million Syrian refugees. The UN has called for a ceasefire to allow aid to reach those in need.

News & Analysis

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Preparing for the worst. Children try improvised gas masks in their home in northern Idlib province, on September 12.

(AFP)
**Special Tribunal for Lebanon to conclude with whimper rather than much-anticipated bang**

Nicholas Blanford
Beirut

The closing arguments are under way at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in The Hague in the Netherlands, signalling the beginning of the end for a protracted, controversial and costly legal process that began with the assassination of Rafik Hariri, a former Lebanese prime minister, 13 years ago.

的には、平和的手段がもとを憶えており、その目的の達成は、国際連合の使命である。ハリリ氏は、その使命に対する理解を示しており、国際連合の任務においても彼の役割が認識されている。

The tribunal was set up following the assassination of Hariri on February 14, 2005, in Beirut and is mandated to investigate and prosecute those responsible for his killing.

It is important that the mission continues its work in the way that it has been done so far, we have been able to prevent violence through the tripartite meetings and by engaging immediately when there is a problem,” he added.

This year’s vote passed more easily than that of the previous year, during which UN Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley lobbied for a change in the text of the mandate, accusing Hezbollah of stepping up its military presence in the area.

UNIFIL subsequently informed its operations, increasing its joint exercises with the LAF by more than one-third and its foot patrols by 60%.

In June this year, it initiated 36-hour patrols.

Retired Lebanese Army officer and military researcher General Hisham Jaber said UNIFIL’s importance was a sign of international commitment to Lebanon’s stability.

“Lebanon is a key country in the region. It is true that UNIFIL could not prevent Israeli attacks and invasion in the past but it offered great services within its capacities. Though it did not have a big military power, its mere presence is important because it represents many states, including permanent members of the Security Council,” Jaber said.

“UNIFIL’s reduction in manpower will not affect its operations or its effectiveness,” Tenenti said.

“Of course, the situation in southern Lebanon remains volatile and anything could potentially happen, so far, we have been able to prevent violence through the tripartite meetings and by engaging immediately when there is a problem,” he added.

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Iran might still be able to manoeuvre in Iraq but its “expansions” projects don’t work.

Khairealla Khairella
When talking about Iraq’s future, there is a nagging question: Will it be possible to put Iraq back together?

The events in Basra mark the beginning of recapturing the balance of power in Iraq or another step in confusing the situ- ation, particularly after Muqtada al-Sadr called on Iraqi Prime Min- ister Haider al-Abadi to resign. First, let's go further back in history. The borders between Iraq and Iran were not just territorial limits between two neighbour- ing countries; they were, as former French President Francois Mitterrand called them in the 1980s, ‘‘borders between two civilisations.’’ For more than 500 years, they marked the balance of power in the region between the Arab and the Persians. Mitterrand made another point when war broke out between Iraq and Iran. That war raged for eight years and France played a crucial role in preventing the Iranians from breaking the border with the Iraqi. The French Navy loaned the Iraqis six Super Etendard fighter aircraft and equipped them with Exocet missiles. Thanks to this support, the Iraqis succeeded.

The city of Basra, however, had always been Iran’s target, given that it had a majority Shia popula- tion, even though it had a strong and powerful Sunni presence. Thanks to the US-led invasion, Iran achieved in 2003 what it had failed to do from 1980-88. During the next 15 years, the Iranians and their Iraqi proxies were de facto transformed to the demographic of Basra. They locked it with drugs and turned it into something like a very poor Tehran suburb. Iran’s sectarian militias turned the city to kick the Christian minority. Events in Basra, however, indi- cate that its original inhabitants’ fighting spirit is strong. Regardless of the call by the Saairun Movement on Abadi to resign, Basra inhabitants sent a strong message by burning the Iraqi consulate and the headquarters of the pro-Iranian parties in the city. Basraans wanted to send a message that they had enough of their authorities’ negligence and enough of the corruption spread by the sectarian militias.

Since 2003, Iran has been try- ing to control Iraq by any means, directly and indirectly. Iran has been using Bretton as a prize of war. It made significant inroads in several areas but its goal of turn- ing Iraq into a satellite country is about to crash.

Iran took full advantage of its participation in the US States’ campaign against Iraq. It was an integral part of that campaign and offered the Americans full coop- eration before and after the war. Iran was interested only in taking revenge on Iraq and the Iraqis and US President George W. Bush gave it the chance to that. Immediately after entering Iraq, Iran’s militias executed most of the Iraqi officers and pilots who had participated in the 1980-88 war. It was like making up for Tec- ran’s failure in the war.

Both Saddam Hussein and Bush were blind-sided. When Saddam invaded Kuwait, he was naive about what the reaction of the rest of the world would be and Iraq paid the price of ultimately falling into Iran’s clutches. When Bush received his “divine inspira- tion” to invade Iraq, he prepared nothing for the post-invasion. That naivety handed the country to its arch-enemy, Iran. It’s too early to conclude that the biggest loser in Basra is Iran. One day after Basra’s inhabitants shouted “Iran out” in the streets, Iran’s proxy militias paraded down those same streets. This means Iran has trump cards to play.

One cannot deny that Iran deployed excellent manoeuvring skills, including masterfully play- ing the Obama administration with its nuclear programme deal. The American administration simply closed its eyes on Iran’s expan- sionist project and its divisive actions in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Unfortunately, when talking about Iraq’s future, there is a nagging question: Will it be possible to put Iraq back together? The task seems impossible but consider how things will evolve inside Iraq and how the United States will react.

The Americans remain somewhat optimistic in that Iran’s failure is internal and economic. As for the Americans, regardless of US President Donald Trump’s own troubles, there seems to be a core team seriously trying to end Iran’s expansionist project out of conviction of the dangers it represents.

The Americans seem to have realised that the purpose of the Iranian project is to spread ex- tremism, tumour, destruction and dismantlement of the societies in the region and beyond. The proof of that is the outcome of 2018’s Iran’s domination of Iraq, the country. The outcome of 2018 was the impenetrable barrier between the Gulf and the Middle East and the Iranian virus.

Khairealla Khairella is a Lebanese writer.
Sudan is quite different from Iran but it ought to have learnt a couple of lessons from Tehran's experiences.

Khartoum must learn from Tehran's mistakes

Mohamad Abou El-Fadel

The stagnant economy in Sudan led to many social ills. Al Bashir has not grasped this simple conclusion and has focused his efforts on reducing public expenditures in- side the country, a futility step under current circumstances.

To understand Sudan's predicament, look back a decade or so. In 2011, Southern Sudan was degraded by 75% of its revenues. The Sudanese government had failed to take necessary precautions to compensate for this loss with inaugurate gigantic national project.

Subsequent mismanagement and political manoeuvring deprived the country of investment opportuni- ties. Sudanese citizens should have embarked on clear policies based on political rather than political ones to send investors in the country.

Instead, Al Bashir found nothing better to do than to get entangled in economic relations based on security and political conditions with countries such as Qatar and Turkey. Obviously, the intentions behind those relations were out of sync with the regional context and the requirement of close cooperation free of ideological calculations.

In fact, tehran's, doha's and an- kara's actions in the region were driven by ideological goals rather than genuine cooperation.

A policy reversal was needed in Khartoum. So, the government should have launched and checked its enthusiasm for doha and ankara relations in the country received a "relative threat" and are willing to play the good neigh- bour role in the mechanism was eased its 20-year-old sanctions when Khartoum sided with Saudi Arabia in the crisis with Qatar.

All in all, Khartoum defused the crisis with the West but, on the other, it was multiplying its aggressive approach and now it must change if it is to fit all the terms of the state but his magic proved inefficient against the economic crisis.

Most of these crises have come from Sudanese people, the international scene rather than internal causes. Al Bashir has not grasped this simple conclusion and has focused his efforts on reducing public expenditures inside the country, a futility step under current circumstances.

To understand Sudan's predicament, look back a decade or so. In 2011, Southern Sudan was degraded by 75% of its revenues. The Sudanese government had failed to take necessary precautions to compensate for this loss with inaugurate gigantic national project.

Subsequent mismanagement and political manoeuvring deprived the country of investment opportuni- ties. Sudanese citizens should have embarked on clear policies based on political rather than political ones to send investors in the country.

Instead, Al Bashir found nothing better to do than to get entangled in economic relations based on security and political conditions with countries such as Qatar and Turkey. Obviously, the intentions behind those relations were out of sync with the regional context and the requirement of close cooperation free of ideological calculations.
Spain backtracks on Saudi arms deal as US and UK take stand with Riyadh

Mohammed Alkhereiji
London

The Spanish government has officially let slip an arms sale to Riyadh in what observers describe as an effort to avoid a diplomatic spat like the recent one between Saudi Arabia and Canada. Spain’s recently elected socialist government on September 4 cancelled the sale of 400 laser-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia, citing concerns the weapons might be used against the Houthis, an Iran-proxy rebel group in Yemen. Riyadh is leading a military coalition against the Houthis.

The government in Madrid leaked to local media that it would return $6.6 million already paid by the Saudi government, which was part of a deal signed in 2015 with the previous government.

Less than a week later, however, the Spanish government made an about-face after reports that Riyadh was considering cancelling a $2.1 billion contract with the Spanish state-owned, economically challenged shipbuilding company Navantia. The collapse of the deal, which was aggressively pursued by King Felipe VI of Spain, could have resulted in the loss of 6,000 jobs.

“Spain’s government is working to maintain good relations with Saudi Arabia and to defend the contracts for the construction of five corvettes in Navantia’s shipyards,” government spokesperson Isabel Celaa said. “That implies maintaining government’s international commitments. She added that she did not think there was a diplomatic crisis with Riyadh.”

Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Borrell said in a statement that Spain would go ahead with the delivery of the corvettes to Saudi Arabia.

King Felipe travelled to Saudi Arabia in January to finalise the Navantia deal, an agreement that had been two years in the making. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visited Madrid in April.

Spain’s about-face on the arms deal was similar to a diplomatic U-turn by the UK on September 8 when it decided to block an arms sale to Saudi Arabia, citing concern that the weapons might be used against the Houthis.

The UK’s move came after reports that Saudi Arabia was preparing to ship weapons from the UK to Riyadh.

In July, Saudi Arabia’s state-owned military industries company, reached an agreement with Navantia to set up a joint venture to design and build five Avante 2200 vessels to be delivered by 2022, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

A Saudi statement said the joint venture, to be based in Saudi Arabia, would create 6,000 jobs for five years. The contract would contribute localising Riyadh’s military spending with a target of 75% by 2030 in accordance with its Vision 2030 economic and social reform programme.

Spanish Defence Minister Maria Margarita Robles on September 10 told a parliamentary commission: “Decisions will be made according to a bilateral framework between two countries that are partners and have signed a contract and it will be resolved amicably.”

The initial decision by Spain’s government was tied to civilian casualties in the Yemen conflict. The government was pressurised to end the conflict in Yemen, allow unimpeded access for the delivery of commercial and humanitarian support through as many avenues as possible and undertake actions that mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians and civilian infrastructure, Pompeo said.

UK Minister of State for the Middle East Alistair Burt defended Britain’s support for Saudi Arabia, saying during a debate in parliament that “there is no reason to not support an ally under fire from missiles.” Burt said the UK government does not believe Saudi Arabia has breached international law.

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

As diplomacy stalls, fighting intensifies in Yemen

Saleh Baidhani
Aden

With the Geneva talks faltering, taking shape, indicators point to a spike in military engagement in Yemen in the battle between Saudi-led coalition and Iran-allied Houthis rebels, whose weapons supply chain has been cut off.

Pro-government forces said they recaptured Kilo 6, the main corridor linking the port city of Hodeidah to Sana’a, which is controlled by Houthis.

Government supporters view the liberation of Hodeidah as paramount to resolving the conflict. Intelligence reports indicate that the rebels generate up to $40 million a month from Hodeidah. It is their main point for receiving weapons and funds from benefactor Iran, in violation of a UN ban.

Coalition forces pushed to retake the port city in June but halted operations after the United Nations appealed to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to give peace efforts a chance. Fighting resumed later.

“Our argument stands that a change in the calculus is essential for a successful political solution in Yemen,” Yalta Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said on Twitter. “Hodeidah is the change needed and will ensure an end to Houthis aggression through political means,” he added.

The latest military drive came after UN-Special Envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths failed to get wording to the negotiation table, which resulted in a rift between the internationally-recognised government of Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and Griffiths.

The Yemeni government said it is concerned that Griffiths has not been transparent in public statements regarding the Houthis’ failure to show up at the Geneva talks. During a news conference September 8, Yemeni Foreign Minister Khalid al-Yamani, admonished Griffiths after the envoy stressed that the Houthis had tried to attend the Geneva talks.

“I consider that the statement given just now by the special envoy was, unfortunately, working to satify the coupist party and sought to make excuses for them,” Yamani said. “The statements of Mr Martin Griffiths (to us) and the rest of the partners had expressed a dissatisfaction with this unjustified behaviour.”

Griffiths in his statement insisted that the Houthis had wanted to attend the talks in Geneva and that he had made all efforts to make that happen. On the day talks were to begin, the Houthis delegation refused to travel to Switzerland unless the United Nations met several last-minute demands after having told Griffiths it was attending the talks.

This prompted the Yemeni government delegation, led by Yamani, to give the Houthis 24 hours to show up for talks, which they failed to do.

The Yemeni government released a statement on leaving Geneva, saying that according to the preconditions set by the militia was the insistence on guarantees from the United Nations that “planes can fly freely and to and from Sana’a without being searched.”

“Everything that we have been hearing from the special envoy is an expression of regret and frustration because their group did not join the Geneva consultations or carry out its commitments. Unfortunately, we did not see this in the news conference that Mr Martin Griffiths participated in,” Yamani said.

Saleh Baidhani is an Arab Weekly contributor in Yemen.
Qatar’s new asylum law exacerbates tensions with Egypt

Amr Emam

Cairo

Qatar’s new political asylum law will exacerbate tensions with the Arab Quartet — Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain — especially Egypt, experts said, with many in Cairo saying this proves Doha’s support for terrorism and necessitates the government taking legal action.

“The passing of such a law, Doha wants to prove that it still has cards that wants to improve labour conditions and abide by international labour rights conventions. However, political observers in Egypt reacted angrily, saying the asylum law was an attempt to use asylum seekers to terror groups to court dozens of members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, the movement of ousted Islamist President Mohammed Mursi.

Soon after Morsi’s ouster in 2013, dozens of Brotherhood senior members fled Egypt, mostly for Qatar and Turkey. Many of those figures were indicted by Egyptian courts that charged them with financial and terrorism-related crimes. Some Brotherhood members have been convicted in absentia and sentenced to death.

Most of the same people have been featured on a list of wanted figures published by the Arab Quartet, which has publicly called on Qatar to hand over the wanted figures but Doha has refused.

The new law was enacted after Egyptian Brotherhood members, including a television presenter on the Quartet news channel Al Jazeera, a former member of Morsi’s cabinet and a Muslim Brotherhood activist were arrested in Europe at the request of Interpol Egypt.

“Most of these arrests failed to lead to the handing over of these Brotherhood figures to Cairo because of Doha’s intervention,” said Kamal Amer, Head of the Defense and National Security Committee of the Egyptian parliament.

“Qatar insists to take all measures to protect Islamists, even if they are indicted in terrorism and criminal cases in their countries.”

Under the new law, the Qatari Interior Ministry will form a committee of concerned agencies to consider political asylum requests by foreign nationals. Applicants must not have been indicted in war crimes, violations of the UN Charter or non-political crimes. Those applying for asylum must also have one nationality and refrain from pursuing any political activities inside Qatar after being granted the asylum.

Those granted asylum would be given a Qatari passport, Qatar media reported. They would also be allowed to be joined by family members and enjoy healthcare services.

The law appears to be tailored to fit those who allegedly committed crimes in Arab Quartet countries and are living in Qatar, legal experts said.

“Qatar can easily claim that the cases the escaped Islamists were involved in back home were politically motivated,” said Salah Al-Taawini, a professor at Cairo University. “This makes these Islamists qualify for political asylum.”

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain seduced trade and diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017 in protest of Doha’s alleged interference in their affairs and its sponsorship of Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Qatar, the countries said, pursued policies that jeopardised their security and have serious ramifications for security in the Arab region. Apart from the list of wanted figures, the countries demanded a change of Qatari policies, including Qatar’s alliance with regional adversary Iran.

Through the past year, Doha has expressed defiance, even as the boycott caused economic damage and politically isolated it.

The new law takes the showdown between Qatar and the Arab Quartet to another level, legal experts said.

“Political asylum has clear regulations in international law,” said Tahawi. “This is why Egypt can lodge a complaint against Qatar at the United Nations if it grants this asylum to those sentenced by Egyptian courts for involvement in terrorist activities or joining out- sided movements in international law.”

Amr Emam is a Cairo-based contributor to The Arab Weekly.

Campaign to amend presidential term limits polarises Egypt

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s second career — the last term in office is to end in June 2022 — has placed a number of people, including most of the nation’s intellectuals, in a quandary on how to allow the president to stay in office for six more years.

One of the suggestions is to amend the constitution, which imposes a limit of two 4-year terms on the presidency. Face has been growing to increase the presidential term in office beyond the current length of four years.

“The president needs more time in the presidency to complete what he started: the economic development of this country,” said MP Ismail Nassef, a member of Egypt’s lower house of parliament. “Four years are far from enough for him to do this.”

Nassef and other parliamentarians want to amend Article 149 of the constitution, which reads: “The President of the Republic is elected for a period of four calendar years, commencing on the day of the term of his predecessor ends. The President may only be re-elected once.”

Nassef and some of his colleagues have been campaigning for a constitutional amendment over the presidency for years but the pace has increased since Sisi secured his second term.

The campaign to change the constitution, which has swept out of the halls of parliament and onto television screens and social media, is banking on fears that a post-Sisi Egypt could lead to the return of Islamists to power.

Sisi, who was the armed forces chief of staff before becoming president, has been at the centre of a national campaign to rid Egypt of Islamist groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. The campaign has had far-reaching repercussions on the political future of Islamists and political systems in the region, given Egypt’s central role in Arab and North Africa.

Sisi has been a painful but much-needed economic reform protagonist, the country’s main patron and guarantor Egypt’s future. Government moves include liberalization of the exchange rate of the national currency, the slashing of subsidies and the imposition of more taxes. Economists say the reforms are working with foreign currency reserves in the Central Bank rising, the tourism sector back on track, exports growing and imports falling.

“All these achievements make the majority of the people want him to have more time in the presidency until elections are safe shores,” said Tharwat Bekheit, another member of the parliament.

“This is not about Sisi but about the interests of our country,” Nasser said. “The constitutional amendment will be passed despite anti-reform protesters.”

Sisi’s supporters, including many of his critics, have clearly stated he has no plans to seek a third term in office.

Nevertheless, calls for changing the constitution to allow the president to stay to office united Egypt’s generally fractured political opposition. Opponents of the proposed constitutional amendment say they are afraid that this would go away with political gains secured since the 2011 revolution.

Egypt’s 1971 constitution set limits of two 6-year terms on the presidency. In 1980, parliament removed the limits on number of terms, allowing Hosni Mubarak to remain president from October 1981 to February 2011, when he was ousted from office.

A constitutional draft in 2013 limited the presidency to two 4-year terms.

Critics point out the issue of amending the constitution must overshadow political considerations. The 1980 constitutional amendment did not pass, losing support of then-President Anwar Sadat, who was assassinated a few months later. It was Mubarak, Sadat’s successor, who benefited from the amendment not to be made during his term in office.

Sisi has no plans to seek a third term in office. If a majority of parliament members approve an amendment to Article 149, the change would be put before the Egyptian people for a vote.

Last November, Sisi told US business news television CNBC that he would consider a constitutional amendment to not be made during his time in office. He added that he had no plans to seek a third term in office.

October. If a majority of parliament members approve an amendment to Article 149, the change would be put before the Egyptian people for a vote.

Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.
News & Analysis

Doubts swirl over twin package of security, economic reforms in Tripoli

Michel Cousins

In an effort to build on the ceasefire that was announced in the southern suburbs of Tripoli, the internationally recognised Presidential Council and its Government of National Accord, with the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), have come up with a twin package of security arrangements and economic reforms.

These, they hope, will build on the ceasefire agreed to on September 4 and that was still holding ten days later and create a stable and secure Tripoli.

The clashes were between local militias providing security for the Presidential Council (PC) and a better armed and organised force from Tarhuna, south-east of Tripoli, which accused the militias of siphoning off much of the country’s oil income. Ostensibly claiming loyalty to the PC, the battalion said Tripoli had to be cleansed.

The new security proposals were not detailed when they were announced, although both sides are said to have agreed to them. It is not known whether the Tarhuna battalion would withdraw or if rival militias would give up their positions, as was envisaged in the 2015 Skhirat agreement that established the PC.

All that has been said is that a committee to oversee compliance with the ceasefire has been established and that it would mediate in any future disputes.

The economic package consists of a levy on foreign currency purchases, yet to be decided but effective as of Saturday, as well as a range of factions as their sole way to earn money.

The aim of the currency exchange levy is to crack down on the black market, where some foreign currency trades at far higher rates than the official rate, and to raise cash for the government to pay off debt and fund public services, such as health and education.

There is a deal of scepticism among Libyans over whether this will work and whether the ceasefire will hold.

“This is not a real settlement,” a Tripoli-based leading Libyan businessman said.

On Saturday, at a second meeting with those who had agreed to the initial ceasefire, Salame reportedly said the cause of the clash was economic. The currency exchange rate had to be adjusted and stabilised and the massive spending on subsidies substantially reduced.

Many Libyan voices have said that, without economic reforms, there is no chance of political stability. Al-Sarraj pointed out that there has been no economic reform since the 2011 revolution, that the Qaddafi regime’s centralised, socialised system remains in place and that, unless there is meaningful reform and liberalisation enabling job creation, young men will stay with their militias as their sole way to earn money.

Until a few months ago, these voices were largely ignored. The recent announcement of economic reforms had been discussed by the PC and Central Bank of Libya Governor Sadiq Elbeke at the Libyan Economic Dialogue conference in June. They were formally agreed to a few days later but it has taken a crisis to have them rolled out.

There are already doubts over whether the reforms will go far enough to resolve the economic issues underpinning the crisis. They are largely about ending the disparity between the official and black market exchange rates, creating an effective devaluation of the dinar and finding more money for government spending. There is nothing on economic liberalisation policies that could lead to job creation.

In addition, while the September 12 announcement indicated the Central Bank of Libya would make foreign currency readily available, it strangely said the currency exchange allowance would be in euros from next year.

If foreign currency is readily available, there is no need for a currency allowance but if it is not readily available, individuals and businesses will need to continue to turn to the black market.

Scepticism about the announced security arrangements was fuelled by Salame’s own comments. Addressing the attack on Mitiga airport at a news conference in Tripoli on September 12, Salame said that he knew who was responsible for the attack and that if they again broke the ceasefire agreement, he would publicly name them. He was quoted on September 9 as saying that, if there were another breach, those responsible would be named and subject to sanctions.

Michel Cousins is a contributor to The Arab Weekly on Libyan issues.

Viewpoint

Finding salvation through the chaos in Libya

Karim Mezran and Federica Saini Fasanotti

The conflicting interests of foreign countries are among the main reasons Libya evolved into such a crisis.

In the night of September 2, most of the personnel from the Italian Embassy in Libya – the only operating embassy in the city – were evacuated on a ship bound for Malta. Only a handful of diplomats remained to ensure minimum efficiency.

The date was named for most of ENI’s technicians, the Italian oil giant that has been active in Libya for decades and one of the few remaining private companies in Libya after 2011.

These evacuations reflect the increased perception of danger that members of the international community felt after the clashes that occurred in Tripoli after August 21, when a militia from the city of Tarhuna attacked the airport of Tripoli, control of which Tripoli had assumed itself a couple of weeks earlier.

This transient while the attention of many observers of Libya’s unfolding situation has been fixed on the electoral saga. That is, the endless and aimless debate on the feasibility of holding elections, legislative and presidential, in December.

The announcement was made in late May in Paris after a meeting between the foreign ministers of France, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, France and Italy, as part of a dialogue of states dealing with the Libya issue.

The conflicting interests of these powers that influence the Libyan conflict by sponsoring one or the other of the militia on the ground to pursue their own interests.

Forced to contend with the chaotic situation, the UN secretary-general and his team are considering ways to get Libya out of its current crisis.

This may be true but it is more likely that Kani and his men simply had enough of being marginalised from the decision-making and seated their portion.

It is clear that Macron and those who supported setting a definitive date for elections in the meeting in June wanted to put their hands on the military confrontation that has been kept unnaturally quiet for a long time.

The theatre in the play of world power was between international and regional actors. Despite the UN ban on arms in Libya, foreign powers have armed their factions in every possible way. This is why in advance of a definitive military confrontation to overhaul the country.

The recent attack by the 7th Brigade, a militia from Tarhuna, a city 80km south of Tripoli, could well be an attempt to break the protective shield of the PC and supposed to be much less effective.

It is now possible for the PC to do so with militias dominating the country. The control belongs to the militias, their leaders and the interests they have come to hold. It is evident that the militias are the first of the many problems of Libya’s post-Qaddafi transition. Because of its complexity and sensitivity, the idea of disarming and creating a new government has proven to be much less effective. It is not possible to sit down to do so with militias dominating the security and financial resources of the country.

The peace can be achieved in a country where there are at least 20 million weapons in the hands of the militias. As the situation stands, a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme is in the making.

The conflicting interests of these powers that influence the Libyan conflict by sponsoring one or the other of the militia on the ground to pursue their own interests.

The recently announced economic reforms and security package was discussed at the Brookings Institution on Libyan issues. The Arab Weekly on Libyan issues.

The Arab Weekly on Libyan issues.

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Mauritania's ruling party leads in elections, faces stiff competition in second round

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunis

Turnout for the first round of parliamentary elections on September 16 was 73.4%, said Mohamed Vall Ould Belai, chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, in a country with 1.4 million registered voters.

"We are proud participation of the Mauritanian people in these elections, peaceful and well-disciplined manner underscored its political maturity and commitment to democracy," said Ould Belai, a former opposition figure.

"The elections faced several difficulties but were successful. The timing of the presidential elections at the same time with the municipal and parliamentary elections, voters and political groups and media faced difficulty, which added to the difficulties of transport and movement of people," he added.

The ruling Union for the Republic (UPR) of President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz won 67 parliamentary seats from the 131 seats decided in the first round of voting. Its candidates will compete for 22 seats left in the second round.

It won 17 seats in the run-off. UPR can claim a "crushing majority" in the 157-member National Assembly.

Ould Abdel Aziz urged supporters to deliver a strong UPR majority in parliament "to protect the gains of stability and commitment to democracy," in the run-off.

Mouwatana, in contrast to previous opposition movements that have been largely ineffective, has sought to take its message to the streets, warning the public of the risks Algeria faces if Bouteflika seeks to extend his 20-year stay in office.

"We, as signatories of this letter, appeal for you to embrace the sole and unique decision that will open a new era for the country where the common good will prevail above the interests of men: you reconcile a fifth mandate, " read the letter delivered to Bouteflika, 81, who has suffered two strokes since 2013 and makes few public appearances. While he has yet to announce whether he will stand for re-election, his supporters have sought to make it a political certainty.

Mouwatana has sought to take its message to the streets, warning the public of the risks Algeria faces if Bouteflika seeks to extend his 20-year stay in office.

The day after Bouteflika returned from a medical check-up in Switzerland on September 16, his supporters announced the formation of a "popular front" comprised of 16 political parties supporting his re-election.

Authorities' reaction to the recent protest shows how strictly the government intends to limit opposition ahead of presidential elections next April.

Many Algerians are wary of radical politics after a decade-long war in the 1990s that pit Islamists against the government, killing an estimated 200,000 people and setting the economy back billions.

News & Analysis

Mauritania's ruling party leads in elections, faces stiff competition in second round

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunis

Official figures indicate that Mauritania's ruling party is well ahead in parliamentary, regional and municipal elections but will face tough competition in the second round.

The complex voting process was peaceful despite intense contests involving more than 5,000 candidates from 96 political parties of various ideological and ethnic bases to confirm the stability of the country at the forefront of jihadism as well as communal and ethnic strife in the Sahel and Sahara region.

"The elections were organised in good conditions and they were held in peace," said the observer team of the African Union in statement. The United Nations praised Mauritania for having "peaceful polls."

The Muslim Brotherhood's affiliate in Mauritania came second, behind UPR with 14 seats.

Anti-slavery activist Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid, the runner-up in 2014's presidential election, became the first politician to win a seat in parliament from a prison cell.

UPR won all four of the 13 regional councils decided in the first round.

The UPR also won most of the 111 municipalities decided in the first round. There are still 106 municipalities to be contested in the second round. Nearly 500,000 ballots were declared "void," mostly in rural areas as voters struggled with long lists of candidates to distinguish between names and symbols of 98 parties and political groupings, results from the electoral commission showed.

The second round will tell whether voters heed the warning from Ould Abdel Aziz against casting ballots for Tiger wasssou, whose candidates are well-positioned to win if the leading opposition groups make good on promises to back anti-UPR candidates.

"These extremist parties are responsible for ruining Arab societies and Arab nations. We are hearing them have speaking in the name of Islam and Islam is our religion and not for them to exploit it in politics and collect money," Ould Abdel Aziz warned.

Ould Abdel Aziz shrugged off the idea that there are moderates among Islamists.

"Proponents of political Islam are all extremists," he said. "Activists of the political Islamists are extremists. They take up weapons when they fail to achieve their objectives and goals by political ways."

Mauritanian political writer Ismail Yacoub Ould al Cheikh said Tiger wasassou was taking a cue from Islamists in Morocco and Tunisia to "showcase their moderation while they organize a strong organisation that will allow them to take over in Mauritania in the near future."

"They are growing steadily in the number of members and strong organisation. Those who want to beat them must show they are building similar organisations or they have to keep silent," added Ould al Cheikh.

Lamine Ghanmi is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Tunis.

Algerian opposition changes tactics ahead of presidential elections

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunis

The Algerian government took no chances with its political opponents who attempted to march against Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's potential for re-election, deploying a heavy police presence to block the protest.

Police blocked roads and turned back people suspected of heading to the rally September 8 in Constantine. Police vans and panties police occupied residential spaces and garbage trucks were parked in areas that could be used for the demonstration.

The protest, organised by the Muslim brotherhood in the city of Constantine, was to include prominent opposition figures, including writer Yasmina Khadra and former Prime Minister Ahmed Benbitour, who have called on Bouteflika to step down when his current term ends.

Police effectively shut down the protest and detained many activists, including Mouwatana's spokeswoman Zoubida Assoula, a university teacher and columnist Soud Bouabla.

At crossroads, a man walks past posters of Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Ain Ouassara, south-west of Algiers. (Reuters)
Palestinians up the diplomatic ante against Israel, US

News & Analysis

Palestinians up the diplomatic ante against Israel, US

Mamooh Kaws

London

Palestinian officials recently increased international diplomatic efforts against Israel and the United States as they attempt to increase the pressure on Tel Aviv and Washington to alter their policies. This is also accompanied by new initiatives that seek to highlight the Israeli vandalism, which has increased in recent months, and to put a spotlight on the ever-changing political landscape. The Palestinian leadership, led by President Mahmoud Abbas, has been increasing its diplomatic efforts in recent months, particularly since the US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem.

The Palestinian Authority announced that it was opening a criminal investigation into the activities of the Israeli security forces in the West Bank. The investigation was prompted by the recent announcements of the closure of the Palestinian embassy in the United States. The Authority also called for the UN Security Council to address the Israeli violations of international law.

The Palestinian Authority is calling for an increased international presence in the region to monitor and report on Israeli violations. The Authority also called for the international community to support the Palestinian cause and to take action against the Israeli occupation.

Prior to turning to the ICC in September, Palestinian officials urged European states to pressure Israel against demolishing the Khan al-Ahmar village in the West Bank. The Palestinians have repeatedly announced the closure of the Palestinian embassy in the United States, which has repeatedly warned that this will lead to an increase in violence.

'the ICC is not linked only to Israel. Bolton also threatened to sanction officials at the Hague-based court should they investigate Israeli soldiers who served in Afghanistan over war crimes allegations. Bolton's remarks led the French and other European Union foreign ministers to express support in the ICC and to make statements against the US's decision.

A demonstrator scuffles with Israeli policemen in the Palestinian Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar.

Flashpoint. A demonstrator scuffles with Israeli policemen in the Palestinian Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar.

Abbas's manoeuvre shows that the Palestinian Authority considers the possibility of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas as a forgone conclusion. It also shows that Abbas is determined to pursue his vision of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Abbas's manoeuvre shows that the Palestinian Authority considers the possibility of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas as a forgone conclusion. It also shows that Abbas is determined to pursue his vision of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Why is the Palestinian Authority-Jordanian confederation getting a second lease on life? It becomes apparent that the idea of a confederation of events related to the Palestinian situation is too much on the so-called Arab-Israeli Peace Process.

Thus, among developments considered part of the supposed deal, there are various US President Donald Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and the subsequent moving of the US Embassy there, the suspension of US financial aid to the Palestinians, the suspension of US contributions to UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and discussions about a long-term cease-fire in Gaza. The list includes all kind of positions, statements or decisions from this or that country.

Abbas revealed that the suggestion of a confederation with Jordan was put to him during a meeting with Trump's adviser Jared Kushner in 2017 and special Envoy to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt. Abbas was open to the idea but required that Israel be included in a tripartite confederation. Why was this innovative old idea kept secret all this time in Ramal- lah, Washington, Amman and Tel Aviv?

Abbas decided to boycott Washington when the latter recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It looks like the suggestion of a confederation came incidentally during Kushner's and Greenblatt's visit to Ramallah, such that a pub- lic official Palestinian reaction was not needed. If that's the case, then circumstances must have called for reviving the confederation idea and wearing it as an option so it might restore communications between the Palestinian Authority and the US administration.

A tripartite confederation between the Palestinian, Jordanian and Israeli entities might suggest a new direction for bringing a Palestinian entity in the West Bank, which would have the same result as a probable entity in Gaza. Abbas's leanings towards a confederation with Jordan might give credence to rumours of an announcement of Gaza Strip to Egypt. The scenario implies the death of the idea of an independent Palestinian state as well as the end of the political reunification of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Abbas has cleverly put the ball in other courts' and US president's laps.

The idea of a confederation is always possible if the goals and the big deal are interested. That Abbas resorted to pulling out this rabbit now might be a sign of his concern about developments in the region.

Abbas revealed that the suggestion of a confederation with Jordan would result in increasing the political distance between Ramallah and Cairo while a confederation with the West Bank and Gaza Strip makes the Palestinian Authority as the only effective partner for a significant solution in the Palestinian territories, especially in the context in which Hamas appears extremely eager to strike historic deals with Israel.

Abbas's manoeuvre shows that the Palestinian Authority consid- ers the impossibility of reconcilia- tion between Israel and Hamas as a forgone conclusion and it takes the Palestinian question towards horizons beyond the classical familiar boundaries.

Abbas knows that the confedera- tion scheme is far from simple. His action must be considered as throwing a pebble into a still pond. When he insisted on a tripartite confederation, he refused to be the one to swallow the bitter medicine.

Jordan is in no position to embank on a big enterprise. Why? That's why Amman turned Abbas's proposal down. It wasn't, however, a definitive refusal. Jordanian Prime Minister Bani Al-Salameh and his Palestinian counterpart Saeb Erekat revealed that the process of revisiting the idea of a confederation is always possible if the goals and the big deal are interested.

A tripartite confederation between the Palestinian, Jordanian and Israeli entities might suggest a new direction for bringing a Palestinian entity in the West Bank, which would have the same result as a probable entity in Gaza. Abbas's leanings towards a confederation with Jordan might give credence to rumours of an announcement of Gaza Strip to Egypt. The scenario implies the death of the idea of an independent Palestinian state as well as the end of the political reunification of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Abbas has cleverly put the ball in other courts' and US president's laps. The Palestinians are expected to take action against the US's decision, including from Washington's allies in the region. The US announcement to cut aid to Palestinians, including funds to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), led other countries to step in to bridge the gap.

"Some Palestinians see the American actions as a window of oppor- tunity for a reconciliatory move vis- a-vis the United States and Israel, letting the Palestinians free them- selves from the economic and security reliance depicted by Washington after the Oslo Accords," wrote Jack Liddle in Haaretz.

Palestinian officials had been en- gaging in quiet diplomacy with the newly elected government of Par- aya- with the ICC to protest the activities of the Israeli security forces in the West Bank. The investigation was prompted by the recent announcements of the closure of the Palestinian embassy in the United States. The Authority also called for the UN Security Council to address the Israeli violations of international law.

The Palestinian Authority is calling for an increased international presence in the region to monitor and report on Israeli violations. The Authority also called for the international community to support the Palestinian cause and to take action against the Israeli occupation.

Prior to turning to the ICC in September, Palestinian officials urged European states to pressure Israel against demolishing the Khan al-Ahmar village in the West Bank. The Palestinians have repeatedly announced the closure of the Palestinian embassy in the United States, which has repeatedly warned that this will lead to an increase in violence.

'the ICC is not linked only to Israel. Bolton also threatened to sanction officials at the Hague-based court should they investigate Israeli soldiers who served in Afghanistan over war crimes allegations. Bolton's remarks led the French and other European Union foreign ministers to express support in the ICC and to make statements against the US's decision.

A demonstrator scuffles with Israeli policemen in the Palestinian Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar.
The United States and Israel are
The Israelis do not trust the Pales-
somewhat unbiased who under-
to unravel this Gordian knot.

Trump has owned.
it were a gambling chip in one of the
wishful thinking and a half-baked
raeli dispute requires far more than
bypassed by placing the proverbial
processes
Palestinians and Jordanians as un-

The US-Israeli strategy to end Palestinian refugee status is illegal

Let me clarify that statement: If
host countries take over
services offered by UNRWA. They expect

The United States and Israel have
denied to refugees. This is where the
regulations of territory. Recognition of the
sides there would be no encroach-
peace. This would guarantee both

the two states’ right to exist. This
been exerted more complex with the building of illegal Jewish

The basic snag remains that the most

Palestine Refugees

Palestine Refugees

The UNHCR upholds: “As a general
rule, family members/dependents
of a recognised refugee who meet
the eligibility criteria for refugee

UNRWA has been portraying the
their refugee status.

International law institutions, not

UNRWA is giving Palestinian
refugees exceptional privileges by
extending refugee status to new
Palestinian generations born in ex-
claiming that this is contrary to
international law and other refugee
cases.

The basic snag remains that the most
the Israelis can accept.

The result of decades of nego-
tions of territory. Recognition of the
If the Trump team included someone

and Somali people have been recog-
ned in places of origin, who are
refugees as established in Resolu-
tions 194 and others. Otherwise,

be integrated in their societies, ending their status as refugees.

Placing the Israeli cart before the Palestinian horse

US-Israeli strategy to end Palestinian refugee status is illegal

The United States and Israel claim

that UNRWA is giving Palestinian
refugees additional privileges by
extending refugee status to new
Palestinian generations born in ex-
claiming that this is contrary to
international law and other refugee
cases.

The US government has been
trying to challenge this practice.
At least two bills are being drafted
by the US Congress that would strip
most Palestinian refugees of refugee
status.

Aware that their chances of
obtaining a UN resolution to termi-
nate the agency are slim, the
Israelis’ strategy has focused on
crushing UNRWA financially in parallel
with a delegitimating campaign focused
on stripping Palestinian refugees of
their refugee status.

Among the states owned by
Israel and the United States to disman-
tle UNRWA has been the
United States as an acceptable
solution to the Palestinians hardly qualify

Uniting the Palestinian refugee
issue. Although
this goal was not officially stated,
every step of the US administrative
action regarding Palestinians seems to be
pointing in that direction.

We are certain that
obtaining a UN resolution to
terminate the agency is

Arab-Is-

A Palestinian woman holds the key of her family’s home as she
sits at the Balata refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, on September 2.

5 President Donald
Trump’s latest attempt
at peace cannot be
written off as unrealis-

reality. There are certain processes
that need following in any negotia-
tions if one hopes to achieve results
but Trump thinks that all the hassle
related to the crisis of the last war,
the occupation and the terrorism that
grew out of it, cannot be bypassed by
placing the proverbial Israeli-Palestinian
‘home, if they even have one.

Or is it the other way around?
Regardless, resolving the Arab-Israeli
dispute requires far more than
watching the US administration
half-baked plan thrown on the table as though it
were a gambling chip in one of the
casinos Trump has owned.

It would help if the US administra-
tion if it had someone on its team
who knew more about the recent
history of the region.

I urge the US administration to
understand what makes the 70-year-
old Arab-Israeli dispute so
intractable despite multiple attempts at
trying to resolve the conflict.

Let me clarify that statement:
if the Trump team included someone
somewhat unbiased who

weakened the Palestinian point of
view. The missing ingredient is trust.
The Israelis do not trust the Pales-
tinians and the Palestinians do not
trust the Israelis.

President Donald Trump’s latest attempt
at peace cannot be
written off as unrealis-

tions of territory. Recognition of the
borders by all sides would recogni-
the two states’ right to exist. This
has been more complex with the building of illegal Jewish
settlements on occupied lands.

2) The status of Palestinian refu-
gees must be determined.
Syria (52,000) and Jordan (9,000)
are approximately 3
million registered refugees demand-
ing “the right of return.” There are
the 1948 refugees, who fled
Palestine at the creation of the state
of Israel, and then there are the
1968 refugees, the second
wave, which left when Israel occupied
the West Bank of Jordan and Arab East
Jerusalem. This is a

3) Security for Israel is of prime
importance. Israel demands — and
needs – the right to live as any
country. This can only be achieved
by a peace treaty is entered. It needs international
sanctioning.

4) The status of Jerusalem as the
capital of Israel.

The closest the parties have come
to reaching an agreement was when,
in partcular days, US President Bill
Clinton tried to push forward an
accord but it was too little too late.

The basic snag remains that the
most the Israelis can offer the
Palestinians is less than the minimum
the Palestinians can accept and the
most the Palestinians can offer the
Israelis is less than the maximum
they can accept.

Until a minimum level of trust
can be established, there is little hope
of reaching any settlement in this
dispute.

Claude Salhani is a regular
contributor to The Arab Weekly.
Anxious not to offend China, Turkey stays mum on treatment of Uighurs

**Viewpoint**

Turkish media reach rock bottom with Cumhuriyet case

Yavuz Baydar

Turkey

Istanbul

A nxious not to offend Beijing amid a financial crisis and spat with the United States, Turkey is keeping mum on the treatment of the Uighur Muslim minority in China despite speaking out frequently against other reported cases of oppression of Muslims internationally.

A UN rights panel said in August that it had credible reports that up to one million ethnic Uighurs were being held in extra-legal detention in the Xinjiang region in western China and called for them to be freed. Human Rights Watch said the Uighurs, a Turkic minority, faced arbitrary detention, daily curbs on religious practice and “forced political indoctrination” in a massive security crackdown. The UN administration is considering sanctions against China over the issue, news reports said.

Beijing said the United Nations should respect China’s sovereignty. “China has said Xinjiang faces a serious threat from Islamic militants and separatists who plot attacks and stir up tensions between the mostly Muslim Uighurs and the ethnic Han Chinese majority.”

Analysts and pro-Uighur activists noted that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had not commented on the issue. Erdogan is known for sharp criticism of Israel over its approach to the Palestinians and of European countries, which he has accused of Islamophobia.

Last year, Erdogan said Myanmar was committing “genocide” against the Rohingya Muslim minority.

He has lashed out against China in the past. Speaking as prime minister in 2009, Erdogan attacked China’s treatment of the Uighurs with the word “genocide” as he triggered accusations by Beijing that Erdogan was interfering in internal Chinese affairs. Three years ago, tensions between Ankara and Beijing rose when Uighurs sought refuge in Thailand and Turkey offered them shelter against China’s wishes.

This time it is different. Turkey’s currency, the lira, has lost about 40% of its value against the US dollar and the euro since the start of the year. The drop has been made worse by a row between Turkey and the United States that led to US economic sanctions against Turkey.

Aykhan Erdemir, a senior fellow at the Prudent TV Democracy, a Washington think-tank, said Turkey’s economic problems were Erdogan’s main concern. Although Erdogan has presented himself as a champion of Turkey’s ethnic and religious brethren globally, relations with both Russia and China, Erdogan has chosen to turn a blind eye to the plight of Turkish and Muslim victims,” Erdemir said via email.

In the case of Russia, he was referring to the Cossack Tartars, a Muslim minority that says its rights have been violated since Russia annexed the peninsula in 2014, and to Muslims in the Russian region of Chechnya.

“At this point, Erdogan’s political and economic survival concerns at home will trump all other concerns, including the humanitarian ones,” Erdemir added.

China could play an important role in helping Turkey overcome its economic crisis. The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China recently agreed to provide a $3.5 billion loan package to the Turkish energy and transportation sector. Close to 1,000 Chinese companies are active in Turkey and Ankara is working to attract more Chinese tourists.

Erdogan is hoping that Turkey, at the heart of the Belt and Road Initiative, will fit from a Chinese plan to develop overland, sea and air export routes to Europe. The massive project, known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) could mean billions of dollars in investments to Turkey.

Alp Erkin, an Australia-based activist for Uighur Bulletin, a social media campaign for Uighur rights, said economic considerations were the main reason Turkey was avoiding the Uighur issue.

“All those irresistible tourism market and financial deals, as well as the long-term economic benefits [BRI] has to offer for Turkey have effectively made the current un-precedented Uighur persecution taboo for the Turkish government,” Erkin wrote in an email.

Turks feel a special bond with the Uighurs, a Turkish people close to the Turks’ historical home in central Asia. Turkish migration to the region began with the Greek Byzantine Empire, began in the 11th century. The Turkish–Uighur community in Xinjiang was one of the last major news outlets critical of Beep Tayyip Erdogan’s government.

What happened with Turkey’s oldest newspaper was either fully or a shrewd coup. Cumhuriyet was founded with encouragement from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, father of the secular Turkish Republic.

On the surface, Cumhuriyet faced a thorny legal battle over its executive board because its unique in Turkish media outlets because it is structured as a foundation, which is seen as a guaran-tee of independence in a corrupt society.

Former members of the Cumhuriyet board filed lawsuits after 2013, claiming that the election of other members was “null and void.” Now, the High Court of Appeals of Turkey has ruled in favour of the board.

The court ruling had the effect of an earthquake. The victorious plaintiffs declared that Ataturk had come back to the newspaper and a new phase begun. Twenty-three senior staff members handed in their resignations or were sacked. Among them were many authoritative columnists and leading jour-nalists, including Cagdem Toker, arguably the top investigative business reporter in the country.

The court ruling was so deep that the new editorial management refused to print some faceless columns. The irony was that many of those who had to leave had been in prison for nearly two years. They had been convicted in a Kafkaesque trial on charges of aiding and abetting terrorism. The basis of the rationale was that like-minded readership will buy the newspaper for the views rather than just the news.

The heart of the matter, however, was whether print journalism has a future in Turkey. The rift in Cumhuriyet has enormous symbolic value for journalism—a profession of life support—even as these high calibre journalists who had to leave face the prospect of not having an outlet for which to work.

Even so, the new management’s belief that Cumhuriyet can grow from approximately 300,000 copies to have a huge effect is an illusion. In a Turkey in crisis, the most damaged sector is the import-dependent newspaper industry. Small opposition papers are suffering terribly and have had to raise cover prices.

The Cumhuriyet case illustrates the myopic view taken by the AKP and Erdogan administration. They are denying journalism’s new global reality.

Yavuz Baydar is a Turkish journalist and regular columnist for The Arab Weekly.
Iran lures Pakistani Shiites to fight its war in Syria

Suddaf Chaudry

Karachi

Members of Pakistan’s Shia community have been complaining that their relatives are victims of forced disappearances, allegedly by the country’s security services, after returning from the Middle East. The families say their loved ones left to perform pilgrimage to Shia holy sites outside Pakistan but intelligence reports indicated that many were travelling to Iran and Iraq to be trained to fight in Syria.

“It had been two days since [my brother Haider] returned from pilgrimage in Khorassan, Iran, that he was gone. He has no links to Syria. I showed the authorities his passport,” said Samina, a Shia woman, who lives in Karachi.

Intelligence reports say Shia men are being recruited in Karachi, Gilgit Baltistan, Quetta and Parachinar to fight for Iran-backed militias supporting the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The number of Shia Pakistani fighters active in the Syrian conflict is hard to verify.

Iranian Major-General Qassem Soleimani for years has run training camps for foreign fighters who want to take part in the Shia jihad in the region.

Samina said she was unable to determine whether her brother joined the jihadi but added that she should have his day in court. “If he has taken part in fighting for Iran, please try him in a court of law but please let us know. My father died without ever knowing the truth about Haider,” she said.

Pakistani intelligence agencies did not respond for comment.

A Shia imam in Quetta said men had been run training camps for joining Iran-backed militias in Syria and Iraq.

“People come to me and ask ‘Can I choose to settle in Iran rather than here?’” said Suddaf Chaudry, a researcher on Shia and political questions.

The victims may be Iranian Kurds but the message is meant for all Iranians regardless of ethnicity, religion or political belief.

When I mull over the situation, they respond, “Look, help us or we will go without your guidance”, said the imam, who requested to remain anonymous.

Many foreign Shia fighters have reportedly joined the Zainabiyoun Brigade, a secretive militia group created by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran. The name is derived from Zainab, a grand-daughter of Prophet Muhammad, who is revered by Shia.

Zainabiyoun is in Damascus. The Islamic State (IS), which controls a large swathe of Syria’s north-east, has described the Zainabiyoun as a “terrorist organisation”, but they have not specified the basis for this claim.

Many Shia leaders called on volunteers from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq to fight to protect the Shia community.

“The shrine is central to Zainabiyoun’s movement, being protected from destruction by Sunni extremists such as ISIS,” said Sabeha Syed, a Pakistani-based journalist. “Iran in a way wants to express its revolution.”

Zainabiyoun Brigade operations are often carried out in secret for the protection of its members.

Those recruited are often routed through groups that espouse Iran’s radical Islamic ideology, but tend to have a bit more light to it so don’t get its supporters into too much trouble,” said Phillipe Smyth, a researcher on Shia affairs at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

In addition to recruiting fighters on ideological grounds, Iran offers Shia fighters material gains, observers said.

“People pull in fighters with a monetary incentive and ideological centives. It brings tens of thousands more Afghan Shia Pakistanis,” said Ali Amin, a specialist in Iranian affairs at the Middle East Institute in Washington.

“Iran early on realised that [it] wanted to have a strong footing in the Syrian conflict without raising questions at home,” Vatanka said.

Iran was looking for foot soldiers to alleviate damage caused by the decline in manpower from the Assad regime, he added.

Many Pakistani foreign fighters choose to settle in Iran rather than returning home.

"From what I’ve seen, most of the Pakistani fighters that have gone to Syria have one way or another settled in Iran,” said Vatanka.

Iran has not publicly commented on cases of detained Shia militia-men in Pakistan. “They do not want to upset the Pakistanis,” explained Vatanka.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohamad Javad Zarif was the first high-ranking foreign official to visit Pakistan after the election of Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan on August 17.

The number of Shia Pakistani fighters active in the Syrian conflict is hard to verify.

“The total number of people from Pakistan cannot be more than 700 or 800, definitely under 1,000,” said Amin. “We know the number is under 1,200.”

Iran will have to mobilise more than non-Shia Iranian fighters to continue the next phase of the fighting.

Vatanka said Iran will finance the fighters through direct Iranian government funding, underground networks of smuggling and so-called Shia charitable organisations. Fundamentally, the Iranian state is behind funding the protests fighting in Syria.

Iran’s involvement in Syria has not been without cost.

“Iran has played out the long game but its foreign policy is costly. When Iranians at home are shot on bread are they going to assist in the reconstruction of Syria? This would be a very dangerous path,” said Vatanka.

With the Iranian-backed offensive against Idlib looming, it is unknown whether Tehran can rely on more Syrian Shia fighters answering the call in Idlib. Young men from Pakistan’s Shia community would think twice because they are being treated with suspicion by authorities.

Samira showed a document from Pakistani military intelligence stating it apprehended five men, including her brother. She is awaiting further information on Haider’s condition, not knowing whether her brother is alive or dead.

Suddaf Chaudry is a journalist who focuses on the Middle East and South Asia.

Costly game. Iran-backed Shia fighters march during a military-style training in the city of Najaf.

Backer.
Swedish elections show face of ‘new Europe’, leave politics deadlocked

Mahmud el-Shafey

London

The results of the Swedish elections confirm that far-right, anti-migrant sentiment remains a force in Europe. With several important European elections, including in Belgium, Denmark and Finland, as well as European Parliament elections, scheduled for next year, the far-right anti-migrant populist wave has yet to break.

Preliminary results, which were being contested and recounted days after the September 9 election, the far-right Sweden Democrats won more than 27% of the vote, picking up 63 seats in the 349-seat Swedish parliament, the Riksdag. This means the Sweden Democrats, a party that has roots in fascist and white nationalism and that campaigned on a strong anti-migrant and particularly anti-Muslim platform, is the third-largest party in the country.

The ruling centre-left coalition of the Social Democrats, Greens and Left Party won 40.6% of the vote. The opposition centre-right coalition, including the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, the Centre Party and the Liberals, claimed 34.9% of the vote. The split guarantees the Sweden Democrats a strong role in the negotiations over forming a new government in Sweden.

Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven, leader of the Social Democrats, said he intended to remain prime minister. He called on other “responsible” parties not to engage with the Sweden Democrats, dubbing it “a party with roots in Nazism” that would “never offer anything but hatred.”

The Sweden Democrats’ policies focus on migration and the party campaigned for an overhaul of the immigration system, greatly reducing the number of immigrants entering the country and imposing a strict integration process on those who do. The party has also been outspoken regarding Islam, alarming Sweden’s Muslim community, which makes up an estimated 8% of the country’s 10 million populations.

Sweden Democrats Chairman Jimmie Akesson, 70, previously described Muslims as the “greatest foreign threat” Sweden has faced since the second world war. In recent years, Akesson has been at the forefront of the image of the party, expelling members who openly espoused neo-Nazi views and changing the party’s logo from a flaming torch to a friendly blue and yellow flower. While this has paid dividends at the ballot box, the party’s mainstream political parties are left to deal with the Sweden Democrats. “We have a moral responsibility (not to co-operate with the Sweden Democrats),” Lofven said after the elections: “We must gather all good forces. We won’t wimper. We will organise ourselves.”

Both the centre-left and centre-right blocs confirmed they would refuse to consider the Sweden Democrats as a coalition partner. However, even as it seems the Sweden Democrats remain on the outside of government, the politics the party advocates, particularly regarding migration, have entered the mainstream.

Popular sentiment towards migration has shifted radically in Sweden over the last few years, particularly post-2015 when Sweden took in proportionately more refugees than Germany.

In November 2015, Lofven’s centre-left government-initiated cuts on refugee immigration, citing the unprecedented number of asylum applications it had received and the huge pressures Sweden’s social services were facing.

Prior to the 2014 influx, the party had advocated open borders. During the latest election campaign, the Sweden Democrats stumped to articulate a clear message on migration, leaving the door open for the Sweden Democrats to monopolise the issue.

The centre-right opposition has also adopted the increasingly hard-line position on migration since 2015. In late June, Moderate party leader Fredrik Reinfeldt called on the Swedish people to “open their hearts” to large-scale immigration. One year later, the party, the largest of the four parties in the centre-right bloc, completely shifted its pivot to a strong far-right redefinition for new rules, including stricter requirements for family reunification and cuts in welfare benefits.

Whether the far-right Sweden Democrats have become part of the mainstream or not is immaterial, anti-migrant sentiment is becoming increasingly normalised across Europe.

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

Swedish elections show face of ‘new Europe’, leave politics deadlocked

Swedish Democrats have their roots in neo-Nazi groups that have turned respectable.

Sweden Democrats have their roots in neo-Nazi groups that have turned respectable.

Sweden had its first election since the govern- ment allowed 163,000 migrants into the country – the highest per capita in any European nation – and since the migration wave fuelled by the often-overlooked foreign threat Sweden has faced since the second world war, underlines the loss in government and the failure of traditional parties to respond to the sense of discontent that exists, in a context when every other talk show points a vengeful finger at Islam and turmoil in the Middle East, underlines the loss in faith in the political system.

Sweden is not alone in this. Whoever governs Sweden in the years ahead will have a much more restrictive policy towards immigrants and refugees from Africa, the Middle East and South-east Asia. Sweden also joined a future government or give it ad hoc support in parliament, Sweden’s government will yield influence on the country’s politics. The post-1945 world is gone; the euphoria that followed the collapse of the Soviet empire is gone. However much they dislike it, many of Sweden’s Arab and African countries will have to get used to the new Europe.

Francis Ghilès is an associate fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.
Washington remains silent as rights situation worsens in Iran

Thomas Frank

Washington

The Iranian regime’s human rights violations worsened in recent months and are exacerbated by US President Donald Trump as he reimspones sanctions and remains silent about abuses, Iran experts said. Iran President Hassan Rouhani has taken a tough stance against US sanctions, imposing political dissidents and human rights lawyers and ethnic minorities on dubious charges. On September 8, Rouhani executed three Kurdish men accused of participating in a militant group and in attacks on civilians. UN officials and human rights groups denounced the executions, saying the men had been tortured into confessing for crimes they did not commit and were being denied access to their lawyers.

Speaking September 3 at the Atlantic Council’s think-tank in Washington, the Iran experts said the Trump administration’s pledges of support for the Iranian people were hollow and did nothing to improve human rights. Trump and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have said they stand with Iranians but have not made any demands about human rights as they laid down conditions Iran must meet to avoid US economic sanctions.

“Trump’s comments could be helpful if they were backed by an authentic set of ideas [about human rights],” just don’t think there is that set of authentic ideas,” said Doshi Faizhi, director of the Middle East and North Africa programme at Freedom House, a Washington non-profit organisation that monitors human rights.

Faizhi was particularly critical of Pompeo’s demands on the Iranian regime, which he enumerated in May as Trump announced the United States would reimpose sanctions that had been suspended or waived under the 2015 nuclear deal. “There’s nothing on the list that even the Iranian government would help the Iranian people — not one thing,” she said.

“A voice to the unheard. Activists hold a protest to highlight human rights abuses and call for democratic change in Iran, outside the US headquarters in New York, last September. (AP)

“Weaker and more restrictive US sanctions have had a corrosive impact on the lives of ordinary Iranians,” said Aftandilian Gregory, also in his first year in office, Trump did get a bit tough on Egypt. He pressured Sisi to release an imprisoned dual US-Egyptian national who had been incarcerated alongside his wife, and allowed the US State Department to place an executive order on $195 million in military aid to Egypt.

Although then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, reflecting the views of the State Department bureaucracy, emphasised that the Egyptian government was not doing enough to improve human rights in Egypt, the US government had been arguing that the military assistance must remain in place to combat terrorism.

In August, Pompeo released $195 million in aid. By September 31, he will have to make another decision about releasing another $195 million in military aid to Egypt that is tied to congressional conditions. But the betting in Washington is that he will exercise the national security waiver to ensure that the funds are not suspended.

Not only did Trump and Pompeo share similar concerns about Iran, they shared similar, sympathetic views towards Sisi’s government in Egypt. In August, Pompeo released $195 million in aid. By September 31, he will have to make another decision about releasing another $195 million in military aid to Egypt that is tied to congressional conditions. But the betting in Washington is that he will exercise the national security waiver to ensure that the funds are not suspended.

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The informal sector plays an important but unrecognised role in the Maghreb

Samar Kadi

Beirut

Illicit trade through porous borders with Syria costs the Lebanese treasury tens of millions of dollars in lost tax and tariff revenues every year while Lebanon’s public and foreign debt keep accumulating.

The effect of contraband is felt in many sectors, from the tobacco industry to agriculture and pharmaceuticals.

Tobacco and cigarettes are smuggled into Lebanon by air, sea and land through the border with Syria, said Mohammed Daher, anti-smuggling chief at the Lebanese General Delegation of Customs and Tobacco.

“More than 30% of the tobacco products in the Lebanese market are contraband. Smuggling of tobacco and imported cigarettes increased from 19% only two years ago to more than 30% today,” Daher said.

Large quantities of gasoline are smuggled through Baalbek-Hermel, a border area that is largely controlled by Hezbollah.

“They are being smuggled in containers, cars or trucks, concealed under clothes and other goods. This is mainly due to the security situation and the porous border with Syria, the difficult economic conditions in the country and the big number of Syrian refugees (who earn money from smuggling),” Daher said.

According to the Regie, the state-owned monopoly, total up to 12% of the state revenues, Daher said. “The state’s loss from the illicit trade is around $200 million-$250 million annually. Iraq is a main source of cigarettes contraband via Syria,” he said.

Last year, the Regie adopted procedures to combat smuggling. The measures mainly involved improving local industry and producing cigarettes that compete in quality with international offerings and signing agreements to produce international brands locally.

Tobacco is the fifth most important source of state revenues estimated at more than $450 million last year, according to Robert Nauzis of Philip Morris.

“It is a very important sector not only in terms of public revenues but also in terms of economic activity. You have 25,000 families that make a living from planting tobacco in the south, Bekaa, and north Lebanon,” Nauzis said.

Tobacco planting in Lebanon is a vital part of the agricultural economy and creates jobs in farming, fabrication and trading. The industry employs tens of thousands of people and has traditionally suffered from underinvestment and support. The jobs are also often in poorer areas of Lebanon.

“Tobacco producers enjoy very good quality tobacco that is bought by international companies like Philip Morris and others. The larger part of the crop is exported and the rest is used for local production,” Nauzis said.

He maintained that Lebanon’s porous borders and the deteriorating economic conditions in the country caused an unprecedented increase in smuggling tobacco and other goods.

“It is the easiest product to smuggle. It is light, small in size and can be carried in many different ways. Also, there are no serious penalties or sanctions on smuggling as it is the case with the smuggling of pharmaceutical products,” Nauzis said.

While tobacco contraband has been increasing, smuggling of pharmaceuticals has been largely contained after several medicines and their generics were reduced by up to 70% three years ago, pharmaceutical Samaa Batagi said.

“Today, the problem is what we call the "suitcase travellers." These people buy the medicines in Tur- key and transport them in their personal luggage to sell to their neighbours, friends and relatives,” Batagi said.

“Turkish-made pharmaceuticals are of good quality and much cheaper than in Lebanon. People are so impoverished that they would go for smuggled medicines even if that means saving a mere two pounds ($2.60),” she said.

Medicines from Syria are rarely smuggled because they are of poor quality even though much cheaper.

“The Ministry of Health is very strict in that regard. They have shut down pharmacies and retrieved the licences of wrongdoers,” Batagi added.

Smuggling agricultural products to more than 30% of the tobacco products in the country is also hitting state revenues. Large quantities of tobacco smuggled through Baalbek-Hermel, a border area that is largely controlled by Hezbollah.

“There are an estimated 1,300 ille- gal cross-border linkages between Lebanon and Syria that are used by smugglers,” said Tony Tohme, of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture in the Bekaa. “In one instance, some 30 gasoline tanks crossed into Upper Hermel while customs could intercept only one tank.”

In the latter case, the balance tends to tilt towards criminal activities in times of civil turmoil — Algeria and Morocco with the collapse of sanctions, and Tunisia with the collapse in state authority after 2011.

In Tunisia, gymnuring and drug trade across borders, notably with Libya, have been added to more traditional smuggling activities, a long-time characteristic of economic and personal relations between Southern Tunisia and Trigolitania. Western-led sanctions against Libya lasted for two decades and created chaotic situations of Tunisia a kind of golden age that enriched people beyond the immediate vicinity of the frontier, notably in the industrial city of Sfax.

Smuggling has long been seen by government officials and many development experts in the Maghreb region in a negative light: activities that were illicit, failed to pay taxes and did not allow the full majority of the state to operate. It was further stigmatised as encouraging a grey market and unregulated and competitive sector was introduced into in-

In the 1970s, El-Oued in south-eastern Algeria was known as the country’s “coffee capital” and you could get a better cup of coffee in neighbouring Gafsa in Tunisia than in Algeria. Algeria also had Algerian coffee haemorrhaging into its neighbour in the 1990s and Tunisia with the collapse of sanctions against Libya lasted for two decades and created chaotic situations of Tunisia a kind of golden age that enriched people beyond the immediate vicinity of the frontier, notably in the industrial city of Sfax.

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nauzis said. Algeria and Morocco are over-administrated and come with no clear national economic policies. The informal sector is a bit like vernacular Arabic: It is despised but used by everyone. People pretend to speak classical Arabic, which the majority of Maghrabis, including political leaders, do not master. All seminars with the World Bank, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union and in Tunisia use “official statistics,” which do not tell the whole story.

Tunisian officials, in particular, were, until 2011 at least, masters at pretending they were ahead of slightly less sophisticated Algeria and Morocco and dressing up the statistics of their economy. This helped convince Western partners they had a model econ-

In the mid-1970s, the OPEC boom in the Gulf, combined with the discovery of large oil reserves in North Africa, led to massive investment in the hydrocarbon sector. The boom had a profound impact on the region’s economies, particularly in terms of employment and income generation. However, the benefits of the oil boom were not evenly distributed, and a large number of people remained excluded from the formal economy.

The informal sector, which includes activities that are not registered with the government or do not comply with tax laws, has been a significant source of income for many people in the Maghreb region. The informal sector is often associated with activities such as street vending, the sale of illegal goods, and the provision of services such as hairdressing, beauty treatments, and small-scale manufacturing.

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by the informal sector, the three Maghreb countries would “ex- plose” socially, yet this is unac- ceptable a burden on the political class.

Recognising the essential contribution of the informal sector makes to the economy in no way means excusing drug trafficking or any smuggling across borders. Tunisia could do worse than to respect all existing rules, he may as well never start a company. This burden of government or bureaucratic deadweight explains the growing corruption that acts like cancer in the body politics.

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Algerian government pursues high spending for 2019 as it eyes elections

Lamine Ghanmi

The Algerian government plans to increase spending in 2019, coinciding with the country’s presidential elections. The new budget, released by the government indicated, Algeria increased spending 22% this year, reaching $3.2 trillion, or 32% of GDP, to temper effects of previous years’ austerity policies following a sharp decline in oil and gas exports. While the government insisted the 2018 budget increase to a “balanced budget trajectory and steady growth path beginning 2019,” next year’s draft budget revealed high social outlays.

The government released a draft budget overspending 33% (4.7 trillion dinars; $77 billion) for 2019, which would Finance Minister Abderrahmane Bouafia attributed to investments in cultural and water development, infrastructure and subsidies to consumer goods. It would result in a deficit equal to 5.2% of GDP.

“Expenditure and economic arrangements included in the draft budget are for the sake of economic development and political considerations than by economic imperatives of efficient economic growth,” said Algerian economist Hassan Hadj-Boubker.

“Ensuring social peace, especially in a year of elections, is the main impetus behind the spending choices of the government. Spending programs amounting to 7.2 trillion dinars ($116.6 billion) were allocated for poor families and middle class to finance subsidies of essential consumer goods, education, housing and health-care programmes.”

Youcef Ben可以说，阿尔及利亚的咨询机构研究了数亿美元。他认为，政府的计划是为了在2019年大选中获胜。他指出，这些支出包括在2013年的一个项目，该项目大规模地削减了国家的预算赤字，同时也帮助政府在2014年推出了一个旨在帮助低收入家庭的项目。阿尔及利亚政府表示，这些项目有助于改善社会和平，尤其是对那些在2019年大选中获胜的候选人来说，他们可能执政。

“确保社会和平，尤其是在选举年，是政府选择支出的主要原因。这些支出计划包括为贫困家庭和中产阶级提供的补贴，用于购买基本生活必需品，如教育、住房、卫生和医疗保健项目。”

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Cairo University seeks to lead intellectual momentum to fight extremist discourse

During the 1970s, Islamist groups infiltrated Cairo University and spread to most universities in Egypt. For 50 years, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups worked their way deep inside colleges and replaced the ideological content offered to students by one based on obedience and segregation.

At Cairo University, Elkhosht implemented a modernisation programme by overhauling class syllabi and tying them to philosophical backgrounds. Thus, 11 new curricula and 27 new programmes were created, 44 new courses were added and 18 graduate courses were upgraded. Elkhosht’s reforms are in tune with the overall vision for reforming religious discourse in Egypt. He, however, refuses to just revive traditional religious discourse — that would be like reconstructing an old building. Instead he is for erecting a new “religious building” by relying on new concepts and terminology and on removing subjective interpretations of the sacred text.

Elkhosht said modernising thought processes at the university will start with two fundamental courses offered to all university students: Critical Thinking and Business Entrepreneurship. In both courses, students learn to analyse and synthesise with concepts and ideas, identify preconceived ideas and learn how to create self-reliance in managing their future projects.

Cairo University President Mohamed Othman Elkhosht said he hopes its success will convince other universities to embark on academic cooperation programmes with Arab and international universities. The university will soon open an international branch, which will offer joint programmes in advanced technologies and business entrepreneurship with Hiroshima, Cambridge, Manches-
ter, Georgia and Liverpool universities.

Ahmed Gamal is an Egyptian writer.

**Comprehensive approach. Cairo University President Mohamed Othman Elkhosht.** (Courtesy of Mohamed Othman Elkhosht)

**Introduction of dialect in school textbooks divides Moroccans**

**Casablanca**

**Ahmed Gamal**

The introduction of dialectal words in primary school textbooks draws strong reactions in Morocco, whose educational system has been subject to severe criticism despite reforms to overhaul its structure and content.

Moroccans expressed dismay about the Education Ministry’s decision to include dialectal words in the school textbooks, which has long been a thorny debate between Darja — Moroccan dialect — and Arabic camps.

“The intrusion of Darja was not discussed. We were forced to see it without being consulted,” said the philosopher and intellectual Hassan Ben Gholam, adding that the students of the mission (for-}
Maryam Matar aims to be the first Arab woman to be awarded Nobel Prize in medicine

Shahd Khaleed

Bucharest

Thanks to her tireless and successful work in medicine, Dr Maryam Matar for two years in a row was ranked fourth in the Arab world and seventh in the world and the most powerful Emirati female researcher.

Matar is an enthusiastic and dedicated researcher who is a source of inspiration to everyone. She is a tireless advocate of public education and awareness about genetic disorders. With her research, she has worked on charting the genetic map of the Arab population and is the founder and chairwoman of the UAE Genetic Diseases Association, which educates people about the dangers of genetic diseases.

Matar was the first woman in the United Arab Emirates to hold the position of director general of public health. In that position and being a fervent advocate of public and community health, she almost doubled the number of community health centres in the UAE to 17.

Matar has an impressive number of academic degrees, diplomas and certificates in medical sciences from reputed universities in Dubai, the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan. She is the first Arab woman to be certified in genetic diseases by the Arab League.

Matar comes from a modest home in Dubai. Her parents were illiterate but encouraged their daughter to pursue the highest degrees possible. Her maternal grandmother was a popular healer.

Matar likes to tell how her grandmother had a great influence on what she wanted to be when she grew up. “When my grandmother died, many people came to offer their condolences and they were crying. I asked my mother who they were and she said that they were my grandmother’s. So I asked my mother, ‘If it’s become a death and people love me like they loved my grandmother,’ and she said yes. From that moment, I wanted to become a doctor and I studied very hard for it.”

Matar began studying medicine in Dubai and then finished her graduate studies in the United Kingdom. She did research in the United States and went to the Far East to specialise in genetic disorders and diseases.

Matar founded UAE Down Syndrome Awareness and Education and the UAE Genetic Diseases Association, non-profit organisations that run special initiatives. Both provide care and support to many and collaborate with some ministries and were instrumental in pushing for institutional pre-marital medical examinations.

The associations introduced numerous social awareness campaigns about Down syndrome, in addition to the 2012 “UAE Five of Trilogy” campaign, in addition to establishing primary care centres in Emirates engineering schools and Dubai Ladies Club.

Matar has been recognised as one of the most influential Arab female scientists by the Islamic Sciences Journal published in the United Kingdom.

In 2012, Matar was named by the Arabian Business magazine as the most powerful Emirati Female Scientist and Researcher. The Arabic League enlisted her as a goodwill ambassador for women and children.

Her pioneering work garnered numerous prizes and awards. She is the recipient of Shakh Rashid Award for Scientific Outstanding in the School of Medicine, and of the best health project at the level of the Higher Colleges of Technology in the United Arab Emirates, the award for best employee in the health sector in Dubai Government Excellence Programme and an award for the Mohammed Bin Rashid Leaders’ Programme in the category of Best Social Programme.

Matar was recognised as one of the most influential Muslim female scientists by the Islamic Sciences Journal published in the United Kingdom. “I look at every title and appointment as a heavy responsibility that motivates me to give more,” said Matar. “I’m very honoured by the trust put in me by our government. The best recognition that one can get is the one that comes from one’s home country. Still, being in the service of people and helping those who are far from me all the same are for me better than any award.”

In the Arab world, women doctors are looked at in a better light than Arab doctors. Matar said the phenomenon was because of a lack of self-confidence by Arab doctors. “As Emirati and Arab doctors, we must become self-confident through our constant work and through keeping up with every development in our field,” she said. “We have to talk with our patients and explain the ailments to them. This nourishes our self-confidence since we become aware that we have the right knowledge and we are capable of communicating it to our patients in simple language.”

“The society will come to trust us through the care we provide and the support to many and connections we establish with our patients.”

Matar said treatments are the same everywhere and the main differences lie in the health-care systems adopted by each country. She said health-care systems in the most Western countries reached maturity 100 years ago as a result of experimentation and learning from mistakes.

She said there is no harm in learning from the West’s experiences in health care, provided it is done in carefully paced steps so health-care managers have a chance to experience and evaluate what they think that the health and social contexts in the Arab world are different from the West.

Matar said there must be a balance between health-care systems in the Arab world because a phase of distrust in those systems is a sign of lack of trust, and it is in the system and social contexts in the Arab world that People need to accept that it is part of their responsibility to be a better system.

Some doctors might ask if we are experimenting fields. The answer is yes, but this is exactly what had happened in America or Britain,” Matar said. “They, too, have gone through a phase of experimentation and learning from their mistakes.

“We must show patience. No doctor has all of the answers for his or her patients. The system must create the right conditions for doctors to do their jobs without having to worry about side issues.”

In the Arab world, Matar stresses the importance of doctors and nurses going out of their fields through international medical conferences. “There aren’t enough Westerner how knowledgeable doctors become and that there are others with more experience.

By listening to those experts and learning from their experiences, Arab physicians can reach the right comprehensive health-care systems that protect both patients and care providers.

Matar said her dream is to go as far as she can in scientific knowledge and experience. She is not alone, she has many initiatives around the world dreaming of being awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine.

Many people may see this dream unreachable, but in the case of an Arab woman who has dedicated her life to educating others and serving her community but Matar said it is within her reach. She strives for it every day in her work and is keeping her hopes high.

Shahd Khaleed is a Bucharest-based writer.

Source of inspiration. Dr Maryam Matar, founder and chairwoman of the UAE Genetic Diseases Association.
Taha, Algerian-French singer who fused rock and Arab music

Samar Kadi

Beirut

Many in the West and the Arab world danced to his smash hit “Ya Rayah” (“You, the one leaving”), which brought him international popularity in the 1990s. Algerian-French singer Rachid Taha, who thrillingly blended Arabic music with rock and techno, died in France. He was 59.

Born September 18, 1958, in Algiers, Taha died September 12 from a heart attack in his sleep at his home in the Paris suburb of Les Lilas.

Taha’s unexpected death caused shock and sadness among fans and friends.

The son of Algerian immigrants, Taha moved to France at age 10 with his parents. He had recently finished recording an album due for release in 2019. He was also scheduled to film the music video for one of the new songs, “I’m an African” (“I am African”), said Believe Digital, which owns Taha’s second label, Naive.

Taha was an iconic revolutionary figure on the French musical scene due to his eclectic blend of native rai and chaabi. At times he wore blue contact lenses to protest anti-Arab prejudice in France.

In an interview in 2009 with French daily L’Alsace, Taha recalled his difficult first years in France. He was quoted as saying: “I had joined a primary school of the French Republic. I practically did not speak a word of French. Everybody was speaking Alsatian and I was speaking in Arabic.”

With his group Carte de Sejour (Residence Permit), Taha caused a stir in France in 1986 with a heavy-voiced rock cover of legendary singer-songwriter Charles Trenet’s “Sweet France.” The group distributed copies of the song in France’s parliament as lawmakers debated changes to the country’s nationality laws.

He and Carte de Sejour became the standard-bearers of the second generation of the Franco-Algerian and Franco-Moroccan community in France.

Taha’s celebrity skyrocketed with his 2004 remake of the Clash’s “Rock the Casbah,” for which he was widely acclaimed, including by a Clash member, Mick Jones, who declared he preferred Taha’s re-make to the original version.

Taha’s 1998 popular album “Dis war” featured Algerian Chaabi songs, including smash hit “Ya Rayah,” which reached number one on the French single charts. The same year, a trio performance “I,2,3, Solsée,” with Faoued and Cheb Khaled at Palais Bevy in Paris in tribute to rai music was a high-light in his career.

Taha’s unexpected death caused shock and sadness among fans and friends. “All those memories: the success of ‘Ya Rayah’; the historic ‘1,2,3, Solsée’; the parties, the chats and laughter all night long! How sad…! RIP dear friend,” producer Pascal Negrè wrote on Twitter.

French-Moroccan comedian Jamel Debouze tweeted: “My brother Rachid was one of the rare artists with his music, his heart and his lyrics.”

French-Malian rapper Ahmed Puccino commented: “The world has just lost some of its colours.”

French Minister of Culture Frank-Cosse Nyssen paid tribute to Taha, saying: “He knew how to sing and reinvent everything – the Clash as much as Trenet.”

“I can sing, slam and pound for 17 hours non-stop,” Taha was once quoted as saying, adding that he was singing “to make people love God even if he did not exist.”

Rachid Taha, one of France’s wildest rockers who helped make Algerian music popular globally, is to be buried in his native Algeria, French newspaper Le Parisien reported.

“Interference” light festival brings medina of Tunis to life

Roua Khilif

Tunis

Unlike most nights, the alleys and walls of Tunisia’s medina did not sink into pitch black and silence in early September but came to life as the site of a sprawling art festival attracting thousands of visitors.

“Interference,” a biannual light festival in Tunis, took festivalgoers on a nocturnal journey through the medina and its nearby streets, where works of art were showcased with light as an elemental medium.

The event has proven popular with people looking to explore the deep corners of Tunisia’s old medi-na, and showing the country’s unique architecture and cultural heritage. Thousands of visitors enjoyed vibrant art installations around the medina and attended discussions of contemporary art. Festival co-founder Aymen Gharbi said “Interference” was an important learning experience for artists and participants.

“We started in 2016 and the idea was to tackle the issue of contemporary art in the medina of Tunis. The idea was to highlight the heart of the medina and its gems,” Gharbi said. “This year, we had 49 artists from different parts of the world.”

Featureing dozens of artworks from international and national artists, “Interference” was the first light festival of its kind in Africa.

Taha’s unexpected death caused shock and sadness among fans and friends.

For me, the medina is a 1,200 years of layers of history from people from all over the region. It is rich with a vastness of cultures that have come together to become something unique in Tunisia.”

Other artists sought to combine other elements with light to explore the medina’s heritage. French visual artist Yako Ngegni, for instance, connected music with light in a mesmerizing performance.

“Gharbi said. “The idea is to immerse the artists in the medina and to explore the nocturnal side of the medina through the art installation in public spaces and outside the medina,” he said. “We also work on the interference between art and the medina as artists participate in residency to live and immerse themselves in the medina.”

This year, the festival focused on the cultural heritage and patrimony of the medina.

“Culture encodes different elements and its construction is a collective process that everyone contributes to,” Gharbi said. “This is why we wanted to focus in this edition of interference on the idea of reflecting on decoding the concepts that make up culture.”

American artist Andy Behrle used his artwork to explore different manifestations of light in the tiles and doors of the medina.

“One of my artwork is called ‘Bath’ which was created using digital video footage that captured the sea in motion replacing the wood of the doors. The way I came to understand the history of Tunis in Tunisia is that the sea has always been a doorway, a gateway in the world. I wanted to bring those ideas together,” Behrle said.

“Taha’s unexpected death caused shock and sadness among fans and friends.”

“Interference” took Tunisians on a nocturnal journey through the medina and its nearby streets, where works of art were showcased with light as an elemental medium.

Tunisian artist Aziz Aissaoui, inspired by his passion for environmental advocacy, used straw in his light installation to draw people’s attention to the issue of plastic waste.

“The issue with straws is that they can’t be recycled,” Aissaoui said. “In 25 years, the mass of waste will be more than the mass of the fish.”

He added: “Cultural heritage can be the environment that surrounds us, which is very important for me. That is something to always reflect on. For me working on an environmental cause touches our cultural heritage. Heritage is not just man-made. It is also what we have in our environment that needs to be preserved.”

With unique works of art creatively exhibited throughout Tunisia’s charming medina, “Interference” was a beautiful display of Tunisian rich artistic and architectural value.
New book explores Arab youths' struggles seven years after uprisings

Dunia El-Zobaidi

"Fractured Destinies" offers a window into Palestinian nostalgia and loss

Gareth Smyth

Madhoun the novelist proposes no solutions but rather paints finely shaded pictures of characters and places.

In 18 years at al-Sharq al-Awsat, Rabab al-Madhoun has written fiction while keeping up her day-job reporting stories about the Palestinian territories. In 2008, I published my last article saying farewell to reporters like her. At that time, I believed the Pales-
tinians were in a circle that was never to come to an end. I believed the Pales-
tinians would continue living in what post-1967 was called the "occupied terri-
tories" or "the Palestinian terri-
tories" or even as citizens of Israel.

The novel reveals and colours their differing experiences.

Jinn, a novice, is an Israeli citizen while his husband Basim, a US passport-
holder from Bethlehem in the West Bank, cannot gain a work permit in Jaffa.

Walid, Jinn’s relative and also a novice, is from al-Majdal Aqsalan, a town in southern Palestine. Walid and his family left al-Majdal Aqsalan in 1948 for the Khan Younis camp in Gaza, from where he moved to Britain and later to "the British lady's" house in Jinin. His wife, Julie, who plans to reparator her mother’s ashes to Old Acre or Jerusalem, is the child of a British doctor father and a Palestinian mother.

Madhoun bases Walid partly on himself. The author was born in al-Majdal Aqsalan and his description of Walid’s visit there echoes personal experience. At that time, it was considered a city, of around 12,000 popula-
tion,” he said. "Most of the people left. When I went back I found only two families there now.

He writes in “Fractured Destinies.” "Behind me was some ground stripped of its features by American Caterpillars. That, what my mother had described to me when we were just young, barren land, and it was difficult to be sure that houses had ever stood there... I went back to looking bitterly at the remains of the great city of Jaffa." The houses had been turned into a museum when Madhoun was there.

In further play on form, within the novel, Jinn is writing a novel. Its title “Fatima’s Tays” might translate as “The Stub-
born Palestinian” or “The Palestinian He-Goat” and centres on a man doubly labeled The Remainer, who stays in Pales-
tine in his family’s house.

"In our language, from one side he is stubborn from another he is strong," Madhoun said. "Like a donkey, he insists on not moving but the devil, determined to stay in his country? The people who stayed in Israel in 1948 were not always respected and were even seen as some kind of traitor. How could they stay with the enemy who took their land? But those who stayed, other Palestinians also envied them because they had the safety."

The Remainer seems a harsh, obstinate man, but the reader warms to him and his kindness to a Jewish neighbour trauma-
tised by her suffering in Ukraine. A Communist and Siuf, The Remainer plans a silent protest as the novel-writer into the novel and the novel itself moves towards their close. Will Basim leave Jinn before he cannot work in Israel? Will Julie persuade Walid to move back to the Palestinian territories?

Oddly, Madhoun had no contact with it, the fear of falling into poverty took first. More than the youths, most of all for Egyptians, they were facing more difficult times after 1948. Madhoun the novelist bases Walid partly on himself. The author was born in al-Majdal Aqsalan and his description of Walid’s visit there echoes personal experience.

The authors said in Yemen, Tunisia and Lebanon the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties. For Syrian refugees, Palestinians and Egyptians, the sense of growing insecurity ranked first among anxieties.
Chefchaouen: Morocco’s blue pearl

Saad Guerraoui

Looking for magic? Then browse hundreds of thousands of pictures of the little northern Moroccan town of Chefchaouen, which has stolen many tourists’ hearts.

Known as the “blue pearl” for its blue-painted old town that differentiates it from other old towns, Chefchaouen is one of the cheapest tourist destinations in Morocco, especially in the summer compared to M’diq, Martil and Tangier, where accommodations prices skyrocket in August.

There are several theories behind the talc- or chalk-based blue paint. Some say it keeps mosquitoes and facilitates a cool temperature inside the houses and tangier, where accommodations prices skyrocket in August. Others say that Jewish refugees who fled Nazi persecution while others say that Jewish refugees who fled Nazi persecution during the Second World War and Jewish refugees

Chefchaouen is famous for its hand-woven blankets and shawls and wool garments besides the popular red hats adorned with colourful woven wooden tassels that are a traditional feature in the northern region. There are plenty of riads and guesthouses to choose from in Chefchaouen. The newly refurbished Dar Sfar, in the quiet Souika neighbourhood, offers apartments with fine architectural designs and furnished with local crafts from 474 a night. The view from the rooftop terrace over the Rif Mountains is mesmerising.

“Have a portion of cheese before you buy it,” said shop owner Mohamed El Qammah, showing me the kind hospitality that locals are known for.

Chefchaouen was founded in 1471 by Moulay Ali Ben Moussa Ben Rached El Alami, who used it as fortress to guard against Portuguese invaders.

Visitors walk in Place Outa El Hammam. (Saad Guerraoui)

The Grand Mosque in Place Outa El Hammam. (Saad Guerraoui)

The 15th-century Kasbah in Place Outa El Hammam is well-preserved and can be accessed for $310. The tower of the ochre-hued fortress offers spectacular views over all sides of Chefchaouen. Its garden with luscious trees is a perfect spot for taking refuge from the heat.

The Kasbah has a small but interesting Ethnographic Museum that showcases Moroccan handicraft with wood, plaster and tiles.

Leaving the Kasbah, Place Outa El Hammam buzzes with locals and foreign tourists buying souvenirs, taking photos of each other wearing traditional Chefchaoueni hats and dresses, holding their hands decorated with henna or filling the terraces of cafes and restaurants.

I had to take a break from the long walk in the old town and quench my thirst with freshly squeezed orange juice in a cafe in the square near the busy Morisco restaurant that offers a variety of Moroccan dishes at moderate prices.

What captivated my mind was the laid back atmosphere in the little square, which is a far cry from the bustling fassis of Fes in Marrakech where tourists are approached by often aggressive snake charmers, fortune tellers and benna ladies.

The Grand Mosque, painted white, brown and beige, embellishes the square with its stone octagonal minaret. An old Moroccan lady sitting on a bench by the mosque’s stairs listens to a guitar played by foreign tourists, giving a perfect picture of tolerance and co-existence in the town.

In Mellah — the old Jewish quarter — there is a small store selling handmade lamps, one of the few surviving shops to have withihutod “made-in-China” merchandise imports.

“The lamp-making craft is originally Jewish. It was my grandfather who started this business and it has been passed from father to son,” said Imam El Atoui, his hands busy turning metal wall-hanging and ceiling lamps.

On the way out of the old town, I stopped by a shop to indulge in the brown olives and mouth-watering local goat cheese at El Kharraz quarter near Abi Khanna Mosque.

The second MOGA Festival of electronic music and culture will take place in Essaouira, Morocco. Performances, educational workshops, beach parties and digital media installations are among events scheduled.

The 18th Amman International Book Fair welcomes 500 printing hours, photographers and entrepreneurs. Egypt will be the guest of honour for this year’s fair.

We welcome submissions of calendar items related to cultural events of interest to travellers in the Middle East and North Africa.

Please send tips to: editor@thearabweekly.com

Dubai: Through December 31

“The Perle” features 65 artists from 23 countries performing amazing stunts and aerial antics above an on-stage pool filled with 2.7 million litres of water in a state-of-the-art, custom-built theatre. The show takes place at Al Habtoor City.

Beirut: September 19-23

The 2018 edition of the Beirut Art Fair will take place at Beirut New Waterfront. The fair gives Lebanese and international artists opportunities to exhibit and perform. Contemporary Art shows, photography and art galleries are scheduled.

Tangier: September 20-23

The 19th Tangier Jazz Festival will feature international and local jazz artists. Over four days, visitors can enjoy free street performances, free dance courses and jazz concerts. This year’s festival will host performers Fluo Bass, Michael Lauren, Matt Bianco and United Colors of Mediterranean.

El Gouna: September 29-28

El Gouna, on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, will host the second El Gouna Film Festival. A diverse selection of films is scheduled. The programme includes documentary, narrative and short film competitions in addition to the Audience Award.

Amman: September 26-October 6

The 18th Amman International Book Fair welcomes 500 printing hours, photographers and entrepreneurs. Egypt will be the guest of honour for this year’s fair.

Cairo: September 27-29

CairoComix Festival, produced at the American University in Cairo’s Taha Said Campus, brings together artists, publishers, speakers and fans of comics from around the world for an extensive programme of exhibitions, talks and workshops about the comics industry.

Dubai: October 1-2

Dubai Opera will host Latin singer Julio Iglesias for two concerts as part of his 50th anniversary world tour.

Abu Dhabi: October 5

Caribbean Beach Festival is the premiere music, food and dance festival celebrating Caribbean, African, American and Latino cultures through music, food and dance. The event at Yal Beach features an array of food trucks, sift walkers and games.

Essaouira: October 12-14

The second MOGA Festival of electronic music and culture will take place in Essaouira, Morocco. Performances, educational workshops, beach parties and digital video installations are among events scheduled.

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