Istanbul

Israel could face some limits on its ability to strike Iranian targets in Syria. The downing of a Russian military plane but is unlikely to suffer a crippling setback for its war within the war in the neighbouring country.

To contain the political and military fallout from the September 17 incident over northern Syria, Israel sent its air force chief, Amikam Norkin, to Moscow. He briefed Russian officials on the nature of Israeli investigation into the crash in which an Israeli surveillance plane went down near Latakia. All 15 people on board were killed.

Moscow has been sending mixed messages. On one hand, Russian President Vladimir Putin refrained from putting all the blame on Israel and President Vladimir Putin refrained from putting all the blame on Israel, “Israel remains steadfast in preventing Iran from entrenching itself in Syria,” Vaez added, “and Israel remains steadfast in preventing Iran from entrenching itself in Syria.”

“Iran is still focused on consolidating the Assad regime” Vaez said in an email. “Iran is still focused on consolidating the Assad regime” Vaez said in an email.

The report outlined “wide-spread anti-Muslim sentiment across the country.” “Anti-Muslim prejudice took different forms, with a tendency to stereotype Muslims as a homogeneous group whose values and lifestyle are incompatible with the British way of life.” They believed that British culture was under threat because people were “forced, usually by schools and councils, to pander to ‘political correctness’ and the sensitivities of Muslims. Anti-Muslim prejudice underpinned broader views about immigration.”

A report commissioned by the British government ahead of Brexit that migrants, specifically those from within the European Union, had an overall positive effect on the British economy and public services. The report of the Migration Advisory Committee, released September 17, said that migrants who were living and working in the United Kingdom had little effect on local wages, paid more in taxes, had no adverse effect on British education system, were not linked to increasing crime and contributed “much more” to the National Health Service (NHS) than they consumed.

Despite this, dissatisfaction with high levels of immigration was one of the main reasons cited by Britons who voted to leave the European Union, with many saying the scapegoating of immigrants that was seen during the Brexit campaign has become part of wider political discourse.

**52% of those asked said that public services were under strain due to immigrants.**

*The Brexit campaign was never really about the EU or even immigration. It was about foreigners. Foreigners became a scapegoat for all the things that are not working properly — including in the NHS and in schools,* wrote Rodney Barker, a professor of government at the London School of Economics.

Mahmud el-Shafey is an Arab
Weekly correspondent in London.
Israel withs crisis with Russia, sees need for better coordination

Mamoon Alabbasi

The questions of course, are how long can IRGC commanders hide the losses from the Iranian public and at what point does the Iranian public begin to perceive the IRGC as weak?

Ali Alfoneh

Illegal Israeli air strikes in Syria over the last five months have killed some 140 people from Iran's military forces and allied militias, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in its September 17 estimate. The majority of those killed, 113, occurred in the last two months. Those estimates seem to confirm the words of Israeli Intelligence Minister Yuval Katz, when, during an address at Herzliya college he said: “(1) the last two years, Israel has taken military action more than two hundred times within Syria itself.”

Remarkably, the regime in Tehran remains silent in the face of Israeli air strikes against Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and allied Shia militias in Syria. Iranian authorities are not acknowledging their losses in Syria even as the IRGC and its allies military presence in Syria remains unchanged and there is no prospect for immediate IRGC or allied retaliation against Israel.

Data from Persian- and Arabic-language open-source content produce a much lower number than the 140 losses reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. My survey of funeral services in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon for Shia fighters killed in combat in Syria shows that at least 48 fatalities since April 1. Of these, 19 were Afghan Shia Fatemiyoun Division fighters, 16 were IRGC forces, ten were Lebanese Hezbollah fighters and there were members of Pakistan’s Shia Zainabiyoun Brigade.

The mismatch between the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights figure and the IRGC’s account of its losses in Syria is not just as likely to reflect the IRGC’s unwillingness to disclose the scale of losses caused by Israel. Shia militia media outlets proudly reported their gains - and even the losses - in the struggle against the Islamic State (ISIS) but there is no incentive to admit losses caused by the Israeli Defence Force, against which the Shia militias have taken few, largely symbolic, actions. This is hardly a source of prestige for militias that purport to destroy ISIS.

There also seems to be more continuity than change in the military presence of the IRGC and its allied Shia militias in Syria. The exception, of course, is an area 85km from the line of demarcation between Syria and Israel. In July, the IRGC was persuaded by Moscow to pull back from the area. Israeli authorities deem the pullback insufficient and demanded Iran’s total withdrawal from Syria. It is a demand that the Iranian public seems to be paying the price for such a plan of deterrence but is not willing to admit its losses to the Iranian public.

If anything, the IRGC and its allied Shia militias are entrenching themselves in Syria, perhaps to establish a deterrence against their Israeli neighbour.

The IRGC’s reluctance to retaliate against Israel must also be seen in this perspective. As long as the IRGC and allied Shia militias can sustain the losses, they patently believe the deterrence that the IRGC and militias falls into Israel’s trap and respond to the threat, the deterrence is done away with and Tehran must embark on a new approach.

The questions, of course, are how long can IRGC commanders hide the losses from the Iranian public and at what point does the Iranian public begin to perceive the IRGC as weak?
Syria

Idlib understandings set the stage for next battle

Geoffrey Aronson

I n a high-risk move, Turkey is trying to expand its role in Idlib by entering into an agreement with Russia over the rebel-held province of Idlib. On October 15, it agreed to a deal struck by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin on September 17 to create a 15-20km wide demilitarised zone along Idlib’s borders with Syria and conduct joint patrols by Turkish and Russian forces in the demilitarised zones to reduce the presence and the arsenals of rebel forces, who, until now, were supported by Ankara.

Washington remains on the sidelines of both the war and its resolution. As was the case in the recent engagements in the south around Daraa, US support for opposition forces in Idlib appears limited to the detention value of Washington’s threat to respond militarily to the use of chemical weapons. Only if this red line is crossed does Washington appear ready to respond, however inadequately, with armed opposition instead of more manageable pieces and were were produced without producing a massive humanitarian disaster.

Speaking after his meeting with Erdogan, Putin detailed their agreement to create a 15-20km demilitarised zone between rebels and Syrian government forces by mid-October to reduce the presence and the arsenals of rebel forces, who, until now, were supported by Ankara.

The terms of the Russian-Turkish agreement, announced September 17, are important to the view that the campaign for Idlib will be decided in the upcoming campaigns in Daraa and elsewhere – battles that confirmed the power of the regime and its allies, split the faltering armed opposition into more manageable pieces and were produced without producing a massive humanitarian disaster.

Ankara’s immediate concern is that an attack could trigger a new wave of refugees from Idlib, where 3 million civilians and tens of thousands of battle-hardened rebels have taken shelter from Syrian government forces. However, the agreement with Putin and Erdogan, the scene for the next battle is set.

Geoffrey Aronson is a non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington.

Idlib understandings set the stage for next battle

Temporary reprieve. Islamist fighters from al-Nusra Front ride a motorbike in the city of Ariha in Idlib province.
Endless disputes mar process of naming leaders of top Iraq posts

London

The process of naming the parliament speaker, the president and the prime minister in Iraq since June’s election has been marred by disputes, serious accusations and U-turns.

Iraqi members of parliament elected a speaker on September 15, more than four months after the elections, which were complicated by vote fraud allegations and a partial ballot recount.

The selection of Mohammed al-Halbousi as parliament speaker, however, did not pass without controversy. Halbousi, a Sunni politician, won the vote thanks to controversial Halbousi as parliament speaker, the elections, which were complicated by vote fraud allegations and a partial ballot recount.

"What happened was a mark of disgrace on parliament. I saw it with my own eyes... members of parliament were selling their conscience," lawmaker Majda al-Tamimi told a local radio station in Basra.

"When I spoke to him (a member of parliament), he said 'I am a buyer and there are sellers.' I told them that 'you shouldn't buy anything,'" added Tamimi, who belongs to the bloc headed by caretaker Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, did not comment after Halbousi was elected but other lawmakers protested that some of their colleagues were taking payoffs and writing down the names of parliamentarians who voted for Halbousi.

"Iraq's most serious rival blocs are struggling to agree on whom to field for the post of next prime minister despite the withdrawal of rival heavyweight parties from the race."

"Iran's influence in Iraq has its limits and those limits are being openly tested like never before. Yet the Iraqi state remains inherently weak, structurally too basic to provide services and rein in corruption, deliver a depoliticised bureaucracy and, perhaps most important, command with regional and international geopolitics continue to regard Iraq as a legitimate battleground for regional maneuvering."

"Iraq's rival Kurdish politicians broke with tradition in the fielding of their nomination for the country's presidency. The last two Iraqi presidents were from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) but this term the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) wants the presidency. The KDP nationalised while the pro-Iran bloc vying for the post of parliament speaker had a clear majority of lawmakers in parliament."

The PUK named veteran politician Barham Salih as its candidate. Salih had led the PUK in 2012 to found the Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CDJ). He has resigned from the CDJ and rejoined the KDP so he can be nominated for president. The KDP said it rejected Salih's candidacy but the party has yet to announce its own candidate. Reports suggested that former minister Housoyar Zebari could be the KDP's pick.

"Zebari, who is a maternal uncle of KDP leader Massoud Barzani, is likely to be viewed as less fitting for Iraq's presidency than Salih given Zebari's fervent support for the secession of the Kurdistan region from the rest of the country."

"Zebart went from representing Iraq as foreign minister for a decade to leading the Kurdish referendum to divide the country. Someone like former Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih would be a more suitable candidate because he is well liked across Iraq based on the fact he has always spoken of a united and federal Iraq, something a ceremonial position like the presidency needs," wrote Iraqi commentator Hamzeh Hadad for the website irin-magazine.com.
Reaper drones crucial to US keeping eyes on ISIS

Mark Habeck

One of the most important tools employed by US forces in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) and like-minded groups in Iraq and Syria is the MQ-9 Reaper drone, the latest version of which was introduced into combat in 2007.

The Reaper, a remotely piloted aircraft, can be armed with precision weapons and used for military strikes; it is equally used for intelligence gathering and reconnaissance. It has played both roles in the war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria and against al-Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia. The Reaper can fly at altitudes of more than 15,000 metres and has a range of 18,000 kilometres.

Considering the Reaper’s prominent role in operations against terrorist groups, the Pentagon is understandably eager to maintain access to regional bases from which the Reaper can be deployed. A report by the RAND Corporation explored the challenges of finding such bases in what the report terms the “post-ISIS” regional environment, using another acronym for the Islamic State. RAND regularly prepares a wide range of analytical studies under contract with the US Department of Defence.

The RAND report starts with the assumption that while ISIS has been defeated in Syria and Iraq, the group is no longer a threat but notes that “what comes next is unclear.”

What is clear, however, is that the conflict against ISIS is entering a new phase, with the political factors playing an ever-evolving role in the changing environment characterised by “ever-evolving threats, shifting policy priorities and other sources of political dynamism.” RAND’s goal was to find basing options that would provide the widest area of coverage for the Reaper as well as the quickest response time, with the focus on “adversary targets” in and around Syria, the Sinai Peninsula and Yemen.

RAND researchers said that, in terms of “aeronautical geography,” the best locations for Reaper bases targeting Syria and the Sinai would be in northern Saudi Arabia, north-eastern Egypt, southern Turkey, Cyprus or other nations near the Mediterranean. Fused strike and reconnaissance operations in Yemen, the ideal locations would be southern Saudi Arabia or Oman. If only one option was available, however, the RAND study concluded that “Lebanon would be the single location of greatest benefit to basing robustness.”

One thing that the RAND study did not consider was the role that political factors play in securing base rights in the Middle East or anywhere else. Christoffer Mourant, one of the study’s authors, said “we focused on aeronautical geography, which does not directly incorporate the political considerations.”

While the RAND study was intended to provide a purely technical analysis — identifying the best options in an ideal world — implementing its findings will depend on political considerations.

For example, it is hard to imagine that Hezbollah, the dominant pro-Iranian force in Lebanon and Lebanese politics, would allow the United States to establish a Reaper base in Lebanon, despite Hezbollah regarding ISIS as a mortal foe. For political considerations, a declared presence of such a US base would be controversial in most Arab countries.

The United States operates Reaper drones from Incirlik Airbase in southern Turkey, the most strategically significant base. Incirlik is a vital location to US forces in the Middle East and Gulf region, “must, therefore, plan for the possibility of losing access to Iraqi bases and airspace. If US forces lose access to these bases, they may become the main tool in the war against terrorist groups.”

Mark Habeck is East-West Editor of the Arab Weekly and adjunct professor of Global Politics and Security at Georgetown University in Washington.

Security backlash. A member of the Iraqi security forces stands guard at a street in central Baghdad.

Number of terrorism deaths dipped in 2017, Iraq experienced most attacks

Thomas Frank

The number of people killed in terrorism attacks in the Middle East and North Africa fell substantially from 2016 to 2017 but terrorist activity and safe havens remain substantial, a report from the US State Department’s terrorism coordinator says.

Iraq experienced the most terror- ist attacks — it had more than twice the number in the second place Afghanistan in 2017 — yet the number of terrorism-related deaths in Iraq fell to 4,269 last year from 9,782 the year before, the State Department’s annual report on global terrorism states.

The decline resulted from the lib- eration in 2017 of Iraq’s territory held by the Islamic State (ISIS), which made US forces safer but prompted ISIS to adjust its strategy.

“The terrorist landscape grew more complex in 2017. ISIS, al-Qaeda’s leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, said the group would focus on a new strategy of “resistance and guerilla warfare” against the US and its allies,” the report states.

The decline in terrorism-related deaths in Iraq was the main factor behind a drop in the number of people killed in terrorist attacks.

“The security situation is back- sliding [in Iraq]. There’s no point denying that. ISIS is re-emerging,” said Ahmad Al, director of the Iraq programme at the National Endow- ment for Democracy, an organisa- tion in Washington that promotes democratic institutions globally.

Iraqi officials insist that the security situation is improving but there is little support for the claim.

The decline in terrorism-related deaths in Iraq was the main factor behind a drop in the number of people killed in terrorist attacks.

There were 16,973 terrorism-related deaths in 2017, down from 25,722 in 2016, the State Department report said. Those figures include perpe- trators, who account for about one- quarter of the deaths.

Although terrorist attacks took place in approximately half of the nearly 200 countries in the world, the deaths were concentrated in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Somalia, which accounted for 70% of the terrorism-related deaths. Syria saw its terrorism death toll fall from 1,096 in 2017 to 2,119 in 2016.

Thomas Frank is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Washington.
The global threat of terrorism

here is some comforting news but still much reason for alarm in the latest US State Department “Country Reports on Terrorism.” The number of terrorist attacks and casualties in 2017 declined, compared to 2016. Across the globe, the number of attacks decreased 23% and deaths caused by terrorism dropped 27%.

In the Middle East and North Africa region there have been “sharp declines” in the number of attacks and casualties. However, the decrease, which is largely attributed to the severe losses sustained by the Islamic State (ISIS), cannot hide the fact that the peoples of the Arab world remain the primary victims of the terrorism. Iraq and Syria are among the top five countries worldwide in which 70% of terrorism-related deaths occurred in 2017.

The US State Department report, which talks about “dramatically fewer attacks and deaths in Iraq,” cannot gloss over the dark reality of Iraq and its people. Iraqis are in an abyss, one from which there seems no way out. Despite the decrease in terrorist attacks, Iraq suffered no fewer than 4,259 attacks in 2017, which caused at least 4,269 deaths.

The report mentions a 77% decrease in kidnap victims or hostages in Iraq, but, at 1,900, the number for 2017 is still too high to imagine anything but a life of fear and anguish for most Iraqis.

Against the global trend, the death toll rose in Egypt, with 655 people killed in terrorist attacks last year, a 124% increase on 2016.

What’s clear in the potentially perpetuators of terrorist attacks lurk everywhere in the region. ISIS has proven resilient and has “adjusted” to the new hard-edged reality of its situation in many countries, including Iraq, Libya, Somalia and Yemen.

As the US report says, al-Qaeda “quickly expanded its membership and operations in 2017.” Its offshoots, be they al-Nusra Front in Syria, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, remain active.

The other potent threat is Iran, which Nathan Sales, US coordinator for counterterrorism, pointed out remains “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism.” It continues to engage in destabilizing activities through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Quds Force and the Lebanon-based terrorist group Hezbollah.

Sales added: “The Iranian government maintains a robust offensive cyber programme and has sponsored cyber-attacks against foreign government and private sector entities.”

Also, many of the factors that provided a “fertile ground for recruitment” remain in place. While the immediate dynamics that led terrorism in Syria since 2014 have diminished, Sales said, “other factors that terrorists exploit to spread remain a challenge, such as sectarianism, failing states and political conflict zones.”

Sales did not even mention the outflow of jihadists from the former Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the inadequate policies for youth and children in conflict and the lack of an integrationist approach towards vulnerable communities.

The war on terrorism has not been won and may not be— at least not anytime soon.

Iraq’s cyber mischief

The world commemorated the International Day of Democracy on September 15. Iraq’s parliament offered another sorry sight of democratic principles put to shame.

The humiliating manner in which the election of Mohammed al-Halbousi as speaker of Iraq’s Council of Representatives took place and the controversy it created are nothing new in brave new Iraq. Not much has changed in the country’s state of affairs since the Americans offered it 15 years ago on a silver platter to Iraq.

During all that time, the Americans have done nothing in Iraq except try to accommodate Iran and its Iraqi proxies, even when the latter were jeopardising US interests in the entire region.

The first to congratulate Halbousi — after, of course — was the US government. The United States and the European Union soon followed suit. This happened even though many have either read or heard dangerous testimonies by current and former representatives and ministers that Halbousi had spent about $3 million to ensure his victory and that the heads of pro-Iranian militias had unabashedly and in broad daylight exerted pressure inside parliament and used direct threats to ensure that Hollow victory.

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi demonstrators had pinned their hopes on the United States and on Iraq judiciary to support their demands. They had hoped to get rid of the deeply corrupt old guard that had been monopolising power for years in Iraq. Their hopes were in vain. The same ominous faces have been splashed on the TV screens and the same old corrupt Iraqi political system is still in place.

The really strange thing is that Iraq, through its same old insolent and shameless agents, has brazenly and openly interfered with US affairs to ensure that the next Iraqi parliament is 100% pro-Iranian and it got what it wanted while the United States and the rest of the free world watched.

The next strange thing is when the spokeswoman of the US Department of State not only congratulated Halbousi but praised him and his previous services to the United States, especially his unwavering support for American interests in Arabia.

Spokeswoman Heather Nauert did not omit to mention that Halbousi was among the Sunni ministers that Halbousi had spent about $3 million to ensure his victory and that the heads of pro-Iranian militias had unabashedly and in broad daylight exerted pressure inside parliament and used direct threats to ensure that Hollow victory.

Ibrahim Zobeidi

Ibrahim Zobeidi is an Iraqi writer and US-born analyst. He is a frequent contributor to The Arab Weekly.
Hamas and the Palestinian Authority are both trading in the Palestinian cause

FAROUK YOUSSEF

Opinion

It is essential for the international community to realise that UNRWA has nothing to do with politics and politicking.

September 23, 2018 | The Arab Weekly

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The other ‘is hounded in Germany. Sound familiar?

Rashmee Roshan Lall

Germany’s problems, just like those of Italy, cannot be seen in isolation and their response can no longer be dismissed as a temporary slide.

Rashmee Roshan Lall is an Iraqi writer.

Discosnct. A 2017 file picture shows Fatah’s Azamz Al-Ahmad (R) and Saleh al-Aruri (L) of Hamas signing a reconciliation deal at the Egyptian intelligence services headquarters in Cairo.

Al Arab Publishing House Quadrant Building
173-175 Hammenthor Road
London W6 8BS
Tel: (+44) 20 7602 3999
Fax: (+44) 20 7602 8778

US Publisher:
The Arab Weekly USA LLC.
info@arabweeklyusa.com
izobedi@gmail.com
Tel: 246-679-6624

Al Arab Publishing House
Tunis
London
Casablanca
(345x583)
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Saudi Arabia brokers Ethiopia-Eritrea peace accord

Mohammed Alkhereiji

London

Saudi Arabia’s and the United Arab Emirates’ diplomatic efforts in the Horn of Africa are yielding results, exemplified by the peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea to end decades of war, which could result in a similar deal between it and Eritrea.

Eritrean President Isaias Afwerkii and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed a peace accord Sept. 16 in Jeddah with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, African Union Commission Chair Moussa Faki, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan in attendance.

“The peace deal resulted in normalization of relations between the two countries, on the basis of the close bonds of geography, history and culture between the two nations and their peoples,” Saudi Arabia said in a statement, adding that this new phase “will bring significant developments in the relations between the two nations in all fields.”

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan praised the agreement as “a victory for Saudi diplomacy.”

One day after the signing of the peace accord there was the first face-to-face talks between the presidents of Eritrea and Djibouti in more than a decade.

“The Saudi patronage of the peace agreement is yet another addition to its historic initiatives that signify its international presence and influence in strengthening world peace,” said Faki.

As part of its counterterrorism strategy, the UAE signed an agreement to establish a military base in Somaliland, where it provides training and support to local security forces. This represents much-needed security cover for Somaliland authorities because their borders are not recognised by neighbouring Somalia and Eritrea and much of the Somaliland region is controlled by theHouthi rebels in Yemen.

New phase. Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (C), Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (R) and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerkii in Jeddah, on September 16.

US policy in Yemen may face growing challenge from Congress

Gregory Aftandilian

The Trump administration is facing increasing criticism from members of the US Congress, humanitarian organisations and rights groups about its military and diplomatic involvement in the Yemen conflict.

The administration, however, says that if it reduces such support, not only would relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates suffer but Iran would be the chief beneficiary.

If the Trump administration reduces its support, not only would relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates suffer but Iran would be the chief beneficiary.

One of the biggest UAE investments in Africa has been through Dubai-based DP World, which began the building of a large port in Djibouti in 2006. Ten years later the firm announced a $420 million agreement with the Somali government to develop and operate a regional trade and logistics hub at Berbera Port, the largest single investment deal in Somaliland.

Mohammed Alkhereiji is the Gulf section editor of The Arab Weekly.
Forty years after Camp David, Egyptian-Israeli ‘cold peace’ endures

Mona Salem and Aziz El Massasni

Cairo

Forty years after signing the Camp David Accords, Egypt and Israel live in uneasy peace, as cool diplomatic ties have failed to unfreeze other relations.

“There is still a psychological barrier between us and the Israeli people,” said former Egyptian lawmaker Anwar Sadat, nephew of former President Anwar Mohammed Sadat, making peace with Israel at the US presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland, on September 17, 1978.

Mohammed Sadat proudly keeps a photo of his late uncle in his Cairo office. Anwar Sadat risked everything in 1979, saw regional power-house Egypt temporarily shunned by the rest of the Arab world and Sadat was assassinated on October 6, 1981.

The late president “had great courage and a vision for the future,” his nephew said, adding that the peace “has always been cold.”

While many Egyptians welcome the absence of war, they remain hostile to Israel.

“Egypt’s acceptance of full diplomatic and political normalisation” has not translated into “a cultural or popular normalisation,” said Mustafa Kamal Sayed, a professor of political sciences at Cairo University.

This uneasy-but-stable status quo is reflected on Cairo’s streets, where posters depicting Sadat are common and the resulting chaos in which they live is reflected on Cairo’s streets, where posters depicting Sadat are common.

Egyptians often invite Israeli tourists to their homes.

“Israel is a hot topic for Egyptian talk shows, guaranteed to stoke the kind of high feelings seen in debates on gay rights.”

“The Israelis have not adhered to the principles of peace with the Palestinians or the Arabs,” said another Egyptian.

He blames Israel’s government, rather than its citizens. “In the end, nobody truly chooses his government,” he said.

Israel has a “hot topic for Egyptian talk shows, guaranteed to stoke the kind of high feelings seen in debates on gay rights.”

More than 15% of Egyptians alive were not yet born when the Camp David summit took place but Egypt’s public rejection of Israel is a constant.

National politics is also affected, despite decades of formal diplomatic ties.

In March 2016, Egyptian lawmaker Tawfiq Okasha paid a high price for inviting Israel’s ambassador to dinner at his home. Accused of discussing issues linked to national security, he was ousted from parliament in a two-thirds majority vote.

Even the country’s all-important tourism industry is a victim of “cold peace” – of the 3.5 million tourists who visited Israel in 2017, only 7,200 were from neighbouring Egypt.

(Agence France-Presse)

Egypt moves to cement ties with Eritrea, enhance presence in Horn of Africa

Ahmed Megahid

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry’s recent trip to Eritrea marked another attempt by Cairo to get closer to a vital Horn of Africa country, part of a diplomatic approach that Egypt has been pursuing with several African countries.

Egypt hopes to restore relations with Eritrea to where they were before the 2011 uprising in Egypt and the resulting chaos in which Egypt’s foreign relations, particularly in Africa, were often neglected.

“We have made a lot of effort in the past few years to bring relations with all Horn of Africa states back on track,” Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid said. “We are so keen on the stability of and security in the southern Red Sea region.”

The accords, cemented by a peace treaty in 1979, saw regional power-house Egypt temporarily shunned by the rest of the Arab world and Sadat was assassinated on October 6, 1981.

The late president “had great courage and a vision for the future,” his nephew said, adding that the peace “has always been cold.”

While many Egyptians welcome the absence of war, they remain hostile to Israel.

“Egypt’s acceptance of full diplomatic and political normalisation” has not translated into “a cultural or popular normalisation,” said Mustafa Kamal Sayed, a professor of political sciences at Cairo University.

This uneasy-but-stable status quo is reflected on Cairo’s streets, where posters depicting Sadat are common and the resulting chaos in which they live is reflected on Cairo’s streets, where posters depicting Sadat are common.

Egyptians often invite Israeli tourists to their homes.

“Israel is a hot topic for Egyptian talk shows, guaranteed to stoke the kind of high feelings seen in debates on gay rights.”

“The Israelis have not adhered to the principles of peace with the Palestinians or the Arabs,” said another Egyptian.

He blames Israel’s government, rather than its citizens. “In the end, nobody truly chooses his government,” he said.

Israel has a “hot topic for Egyptian talk shows, guaranteed to stoke the kind of high feelings seen in debates on gay rights.”

More than 15% of Egyptians alive were not yet born when the Camp David summit took place but Egypt’s public rejection of Israel is a constant.

National politics is also affected, despite decades of formal diplomatic ties.

In March 2016, Egyptian lawmaker Tawfiq Okasha paid a high price for inviting Israel’s ambassador to dinner at his home. Accused of discussing issues linked to national security, he was ousted from parliament in a two-thirds majority vote.

Even the country’s all-important tourism industry is a victim of “cold peace” – of the 3.5 million tourists who visited Israel in 2017, only 7,200 were from neighbouring Egypt.

(Agence France-Presse)

Egypt's efforts to return to the region are part of wider attempts by some Arab countries to secure a position of influence, particularly given competition from Iran, Qatar and Turkey.

“This made it necessary for moderate Arab states to start acting,” said Egyptian MP Hatem Bashat, a member of parliament’s African Affairs Committee. “We cannot stand idly by and watch enemy states gaining presence in a region that is important to our national security and is irreplaceable.”

This might explain why Cairo, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are becoming a new source of support for Horn of Africa leaders. On September 16, Saudi Arabia hosted the leaders of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti for a meeting during which a reconciliation deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea was signed. Talks also considered ending tensions between Eritrea and Djibouti.

Saudi Arabia had been instrumental in reducing tensions between Eritrea and Djibouti, even as Somalia and Ethiopia appeared to play a major role in this regard.

The United Arab Emirates also had a significant part in helping Ethiopia and Eritrea end years of fighting that left tens of thousands of people on both sides dead.

“Egyptian and Arab presence in this region means an end to Iran’s and Qatar’s presence in it,” said Tarek Fahmi, a professor of political science at Cairo University.

“The absence of moderate Arab states from the region in the past years has had very negative consequences for Arab security.”

Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.
In a clear breach of the ceasefire, rockets were fired September 11 at Mitiga International Airport, just east of Tripoli's city centre. It was attacked again September 20 and remains closed. Far more serious was fighting that had broken out September 11 along Airport Road, which leads to the old Tripoli International Airport, destroyed in fighting four years ago.

The 7th Battalion of the Tripoli militias against a radical militia from Misrata led by the 7th Battalion and is an example of the complexities and convoluted self-interest that drive the Libyan crisis.

The leaders of the two groups – the Central Security Force in Tripoli's Abu Sleen district and the mainly Muslim Sosma Brigade – were once allies. Abdelghani Al-Salame, a former member of GNA's Mirage 2000 fighter pilot, said Badi fought together for four years against the old airport.

However, with the arrival in March of 2016 of the PC, they split. And in May 2017, GNA's forces and other militias drove Badi and other hard-line Misratan and quasi-Islamist forces out of Tripoli.

Badi wants to destroy GNA's forces and his forces, it is said, take over the strategic Abu Sleen district. It has also been reported that he was controlled by the 7th Battalion, itself run by the Tarhouna's powerful Kaniat family, and that it was the Kaniats who gave him the green light to attack their disatisfaction with the post-ceasefire security arrangements drawn up by Salame and Sarraj.

The 7th Battalion is supposedly under the authority of the PC's Interior Ministry, as are the Tripoli militias fighting the battalion. Badi and his Somoud Brigade want to overthrow the PC and destroy the pro-Islamist-LNA down regime that controlled Tripoli from 2014-16.

What Salame did not say was that it was the UN Support Mission in Libya (USMIL) that, in early 2016, gave the militias the job of securing Tripoli for the PC.

One year later, the UN action plan for Libya is dead. In September 2017, Ghasan Salame, the PC's special representative to Libya and a general, presented a revised action plan for addressing Libya's political stalemate.

The Salame plan's main aim was to establish a political entity that could move the country to the moment to move the country to elections. This was the central sticking point in the PC's political stalemate.

Salame announced a UN-sponsored national conference that would bring together Libya's political entities and as marginally fractured to foster inclusivity ahead of the final stages of the action plan. The conference would be backed by the PC and internationally backed government of National Accord (GNA) – to discuss amendments to the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA).

The LPA had set up a unity government, but the unity government had been hampered by the legitimacy of the GNA. The LPA had been unable to move the forward and, one year later, however, Libya has witnessed further deteriorations in security.

Salame's national conference was to feature dozens of meetings and town halls across Libya meant to inform a report with conclusions and, in the way, Salame avoided the challenges of convening a huge forum, including security and perceptions of fair representation. Yet it also reflected the persistent difficulty in physically bringing Libyans together in a single venue in the country's fractured and insecure environment.

The most ambitious aspects of the plan were the assumptions it implicitly made about the international context. Since 2014, the Libyan conflict has been influenced by outside actors, in effect making Libya the arena for a proxy battle. This reality was apparent when Badi attacked the airport, destroying in fighting four years ago.

Thus, while key international players backed Salame's action plan, they were also prescientizing their own interests in Libya and they have continued to do so throughout 2018, effectively paralysing Salame's plan. In May, Paris was positioning itself as the key mediator. Italy blurred at Macron's actions and expressed emphatic opposition to elections in December and took unilateral steps to leverage its influence in Libya. In July, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced that Italy would have its own Libyan conference and Italian Foreign Minister Enzo Moavero Milanesi recently met with Haftar in Benghazi to boost ties.

The fundamental problem that undercut Salame's action plan remains and are likely to hamper any UN-led attempts unless those international actors intervening in Libya are brought to heel. In the absence of that condition, which seems unlikely, there is little reason for optimism.
Migration and the Maghreb

Merkel, Bouteflika talk on migration; Algeria pledges to speed up repatriation

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunis

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geria pledged to speed up repatriations of its citizens living illegally in Germany by the end of 2017, following a meeting between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Bouteflika, 81, has suffered a series of health problems and rarely been seen in public since suffering to struggle to address Merkel officials, Bouteflika was filmed appearing to address a gathering of people.

"The two leaders talked about migration and the Maghreb," Bouteflika sought to display a strong image ahead of presidential elections in April.

Merkel, whose immigration policy made it possible for Germany to welcome more than a million refugees in 2015, was the first foreign leader to meet with Bouteflika after his return from a medical check-up abroad.

"That explains the swiftness of the Algerian side to quickly address the issue of illegal migrants and please the German delegation with the clear and precise decision to repatriate the Algerian illegal migrants," said Chih.

Algerian political analyst Arab Chih also said the meeting was meant to deliver a message that Bouteflika was in good health.

"The president’s advisers have certainly programmed the visit six months ahead of the elections to deliver a message that the president has the capacity to lead," Chih said.

In February 2017, Merkel cancelled a planned visit to Algeria at the request of Algerian leaders after Bouteflika fell ill.

Ouyahia, who presided over the latest talks with Merkel on migration and economic cooperation, said to his meeting with Merkel as a "dispute began to emerge after Bouteflika’s fall..."

"Are we ready to receive 3,700 nationals from Algeria who are illegal in Germany? I confirm to you that Algeria will repatriate all its sons, whether they are 200,000 or 5,000,000," he said in response to a German reporter’s question.

Merkel’s visit to Algeria followed a tour in Niger, Chad and Senegal, three of West Africa’s most economically weak economies.

Bouteflika’s trip comes as Bouteflika’s government faces a crisis in Morocco.

"I would like to point out that the government in Algiers is determined to put an end to illegal migration and to speed up repatriations of its citizens," Bouteflika said.

"This is both cruel and unlawful. It represents a worrying backslide for a country which is both crucial and lawful. It represents a worrying backslide for a country which is both crucial and lawful."

Business, trade and migration. Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (R) meets with visiting German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Algiers, on September 17.

(Marocko News & Analysis)

Morocco gets EU aid to help stem illegal migration

Saad Guerraoui

Casablanca

Morocco has recently seen a surge in the number of migrants trying to cross to Spain by land and sea, prompting the European Union to boost its aid to Rabat to stop the illegal migration.

More than 38,000 arrivals to Spain have been recorded this year, making Spain the main entry point to Europe in 2018 and outstripping the numbers crossing from North Africa to Italy, which closed its ports to most asylum seekers.

The European Union agreed to provide Rabat with 875 million euros aid to help with basic services and support job creation to halt a flow of illegal migrants from Morocco. Bloomberg News reported.

EU Commissioner for Regional Policy and Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn and Moroccan Finance Minister Mohamed Benchaib signed agreements for the funding of social development and the combativeness of the private sector through two programmes: “Competitiveness and Green Growth” and “Support for Social Protection Reform in Morocco.”

The “Competitiveness and Green Growth” programme will support the government’s effort to boost self-entrepreneurs, first-time exporters and improve the business climate and the emergence of recycling channels.

It will back a new national strategy for financial inclusion and particularly the minor investor programme implemented by Morocco’s Caisse Centrale de Garantie.

The “Support for Social Protection Reform in Morocco” programme seeks to help Morocco’s efforts in reducing inequalities and improving social cohesion and human development through the promotion of equitable access to basic social services.

Rabat has repeatedly asked the European Union for financial and technical support to deal with illegal migration.

"The government is working to strengthen this strategy and cooperate with the Algerian’s Defence Ministry in the north-east town of Ain Smara, producing ships and vehicles for troop transport as part of the military agreement.

German automobile maker Daimler has a joint venture with Algeria’s Societe Nationale des Voitures Industrielles to manufacture military vehicles.

Ouyahia said a dozen projects had been discussed to increase cooperation between the two countries, with Algeria looking to Germany for help in diversifying its economy through growing its manufacturing sector.

Morocco has encouraged businesses to invest in Algeria and other African countries to foster economic alternatives for citizens at home and reduce migration to Europe.

While, by far the largest country in the region, Spain, Morocco, and Niger in the south, through which many migrants travel as they attempt to reach the Mediterranean and Europe.

Despite Algeria’s economic potential, it remains heavily reliant on oil and gas exports and economists are little sign of change, saying the country is likely to use increased oil revenue on imports rather than job-creating initiatives.

Overall unemployment was 11.5% in the first three months of this year, official figures show, but 25% among those under 30, who make up more than two-thirds of Algeria’s population of 43 million.

Germany has expanded business ties with Algeria and the rest of Africa, resulting in a considerable expansion of trade. Germany trade with Africa increased 35% in 2016 compared to the previous year and 12% in 2017, totalling $52.7 billion official data indicate.

Lamine Ghanmi is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Tunis.

More than 38,000 arrivals to Spain have been recorded this year, making Spain the main entry point to Europe in 2018.

EU leaders are considering setting up “disembarkation platforms” in North African countries where officials could screen refugees refused at sea to determine which are eligible for protection and which would be deported to their countries of origin.

More rejected the idea of "disembarkation platforms," with Morocco’s Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita last June calling them "counterproductive mechanisms."

claim Aoun’s work day has been openly. On Army Day celebration, reached by consensus at Baabda Palace. His election was due to the Shia community’s hegemony at the presidential seat in Lebanon. Only one of Lebanon’s 17 presidents has died without a replacement. The presidency remains a hushed topic in Beirut. Michel Aoun is a familiar face that should not be a problem. The president’s health, early elections are a necessity at the presidential seat in Lebanon. "There shouldn’t be a Christian president anymore by the old concept of ‘Christian Lebanon.’" Saeed said: "Back in time, the Maronites had argued that Lebanon was a Maronite invention, so they naturally had the right to govern it. Today the Shiites are saying: ‘We are the ones who have protected Lebanon from Israel and terrorism’ and he who protects the land governs the people." Of course, he continues, "the main beneficiary of this internal Christian conflict is Hezbollah, as long as the backing partners stay within the boundaries of the party’s will and agenda. Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, the future president of the country, said: ‘The idea that Maronite Christians must only be a Lebanese project and its Free Patriotic Movement (FPM).’" Some media sources in Beirut claim Aoun’s work day has been restricted to 2-3 hours, with his staff handling run-of-the-mill affairs.

Within Lebanon, many said that Aoun’s 48-year-old son-in-law Gebran Bassil, the current foreign minister, has his eyes set on succeeding Aoun as president. "Lebanese President Michel Aoun’s day has been restricted to 2-3 hours, with his staff handling run-of-the-mill affairs."

Within Lebanon, many said that Aoun’s 48-year-old son-in-law Gebran Bassil, the current foreign minister, has his eyes set on succeeding Aoun as president. "Lebanese President Michel Aoun’s day has been restricted to 2-3 hours, with his staff handling run-of-the-mill affairs."
The Palestinians’ Washington comeback is not going to be easy

A new generation of Palestinian leaders needs to grasp the significance of the climb of the extremist right in Israel since 2000.
**News & Analysis**

**Turkey**

**Erdogan under pressure after ‘gift’ of $500 million flying palace from Qatar**

Thomas Seibert

**Istanbul**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is coming under growing criticism over a key political ally in Ankara after it accepted a $500 million luxury plane as a “gift” from Qatar in the middle of Turkey’s worsening financial crisis.

The arrival of the custom-fitted Boeing 747-8 “flying conference hall, bedrooms and a medical facility, dubbed a ‘flying palace’ by Turkey’s opposition, came only weeks after the Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani pledged to invest $15 billion into Turkey’s economy.

Critics accuse Erdogan of centralising political power and of wasting taxpayer money on extravagance.

With the Turkish lira losing about 40% of its value against the US dollar since the start of the year and a deep crisis between Ankara and Washington, Turkey has been looking for help from partners in the Gulf region and Europe. Erdogan is to visit Berlin this month.

“By sending the plane to Erdogan, on the heels of its $15 billion aid pledge, Doha is bolstering a relationship with a critical partner,” Owen Daniels, associate director of the Middle East Peace and Security Initiative at the Atlantic Council in Washington, said via e-mail.

Turkey and Qatar, the world’s biggest supplier of liquefied natural gas, have been allies for years. Together with Iran, Turkey sent troops to Qatar last year after Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Doha and closed the land border.

Both Turkey and Qatar have argued the Saudi-led quadrangle is supporting extremists. Both Turkey and Qatar have ignored the Saud-led quadrangle’s designation as a terrorist group.

opposition leader Kemal Kilichhoro-glu said, addressing Erdogan. “If someone gave you a second hand plane as a gift, it’s an even bigger shame.”

Critics accuse Erdogan, who lives in a palace with 1,000 rooms in Ankara, of centralising political power and of wasting taxpayer money on extravagance. His fleet of government planes includes an Airbus A340 that belonged to Sheikh Turki bin Hamad al-Thani in Ankara, on August 15. (Reuters)

**Royal trappings. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R) and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in Ankara, on August 15.**

**Sochi agreement has Turkey gain time and lose ground**

Yavuz Baydar

The Turkish public is poorly informed about how arduous the task is that has been set by the Sochi agreement for the country.

The agreement, completed September 17 by Putin and Erdogan, is a key part of Russia’s foreign policy in Syria. It has had a significant impact on the future of the region’s future. The 10-point arrangement made a splash because it contained concrete objectives and set the clock ticking for Idlib by offering a clear deadline.

That plan allows Turkey to “strengthen” its observation posts, establish a 15-20km-wide demilitarised zone along the Turkish-Syrian border and have all warring sides withdraw within a week. The truce, which began October 15, is being closely monitored by Turkish and Russian forces and security forces for two arterial highways – the M4, which con- nects Aleppo and Latakia, and the M5, which links Aleppo and Hama – is still in force.

One question looms larger than all others, however: Will Turkey be able to disarm jihadist groups – some 30,000 fighters, all armed to the teeth – by the deadline? What would happen if this is accom- plished and what happens if it isn’t? Erdogan sent troops to a Turkish military base in the emirate last year to prevent an unexpected military intervention by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. The cri- sis has beenlingering ever since.

The Kremlin’s sudden support for a Turkish-Qatari co-operation had economic advantages. Erdogan is a key player along with Iran and Russia, which has been an economic success; its high level of foreign investment is fuelled by its investment in infrastructure, though this isn’t unique among the GCC (Gulf Cooperation COUN- cil) states.

Even before the recent promise of $15 billion for Turkey’s econo- my, Qatar had invested around $20 billion in Turkey, Doha said. Some observers say that figure is exaggerated because several promised projects have not come through. More than 300 Turkish companies are active in Qatar, managing projects with a combined value of more than $4 billion.

Erdogan’s promise of economic help for Turkey was seen as a ges- ture by the emirate to thank Anka- ra for its crucial support in the GCC crisis but a key Erdogan ally in Ankara and the opposition said it was wrong for Erdogan to accept the jet from Doha.

“The Turkish Republic does not accept presents or donations,” said Devlet Bahceli, leader of the far- right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) that forms an alliance with Erdogan’s Justice and Develop- ment Party in parliament. “If the Turkish presidency and the state government need a plane for in- ternational trips, they can buy it. If there is no need for it, one does not have to get one.” He added that Erdogan “should not have ac- cepted the plane.”

The opposition Republican Peo- ple’s Party (CHP) and the MHP support a bill calling for the return of the plane when the assembly returns from recess in October. “If you bought it, it’s a great shame,” Erdogan said about $500 million but Sheikh Tamim said he would present the jet to Turkey as a gift. Erdogan added: “I can’t take money from Turkey; I give this as a present to Turkey.” There was no comment from the govern- ment in Doha.

Erdogan shrugged off criticism by saying the plane belonged to the state. Erdogan and the aeroplane was being repainted and, once it was finished, “we will travel with it but you will get it on the plane of the Republic of Turkey, not my plane.”

He said he started legal proceedings against opposition officials and parties that criticised him for accepting the plane.

Some critics said they do not believe the luxury jumbo was just a “gift.” “If you give something it means you expect something in return,” opposition politician Omer Oyemsen, a former Turkish ambas- sador, told the Cumhuriyet newspaper. “This should be discussed and cleaned up in parliament.”

The opposition newspaper Sözcü speculated that Erdogan would give government shares of Turkish Airlines to Qatar busi- nessmen in return for the plane. Erdogan recently appointed him- self head of Turkey’s sovereign wealth fund, which includes the government stake in the airline. Turkish media reports stated that Qatari companies are keen to buy real estate and factories in Turkey.

The Turkish public is poorly informed about how arduous the task is that has been set by the Sochi agreement for the country. The factions that are not persuaded to disarm will be targeted and may turn against Turkey. Finally, asked Yaks, “to what extent can one rely on the word of a terro- rist who says he has decided to lay down arms?”

The Turkish public is poorly informed about how arduous the task is that has been set by the Sochi agreement for the country. Approximately 60% of Idlib is under the control of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which Turkey recently designated a terrorist group. There are areas controlled by smaller jihadist factions.

If disarmament is achieved, which is a huge challenge, the compliant jihadist groups will have little reason to stay in the area because they will fear retaliation from others. They will have to turn to their de facto allies inside Turkey, which were embodied by the regime-change policy on Syria.

The ideological basis remains strong enough to threaten Turkey’s internal security, already fragile because of social polarisation. If Turkey secretly intends to use disarmed jihadist groups against Kurdish-controlled areas, that, too, will run counter to both Russia’s and the United States’ interests.

**Sochi agreement has Turkey gain time and lose ground**

Yavuz Baydar is a Turkish journalist and regular contributor for The Arab Weekly.
Woodward tells story of Trump’s policymaking and sources of influence on Iran

As former Iranian vice-president goes to jail, the ‘Ahmadinejadis’ are down but not out

As former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (L) and his close ally Esfandiar Rahim Mashaee in Tehran. (AP)

Oppinions differ as to how much Mashaee and Ahmadinejad are a serious problem for Iran’s establishment.

Mashaee became the bete noire of conservative clerics, who openly warned he led a “deviant current.”

Down but not far out. A 2013 file picture shows former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (L) and his close ally Esfandiar Rahim Mashaee in Tehran.

An account of office intrigues. Copies of “Fear: Trump in the White House” by Bob Woodward on display at Book Passage in Corte Madera in California. (AP)

I t benefitted since 1945. However, as Woodward’s discussion of the Trump administration’s Iran policy demonstrates, undoing Obama’s legacy was sometimes more important to Trump than to uphold it.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal, could have served as a tool for Trump. He could have used the deal to abandon America’s allies in the Middle East, leaving them to their own devices. After all, there was a deal, and so long as Iran complied with its obligations, Washington could ditch the deal without harming itself from the Middle East.

However, even as a candidate, Trump railed against the Obama administration over the JCPOA, which he called the “worst deal ever made.” Once in the White House, Trump’s obsession with undoing the JCPOA intensified. Woodward said then-Advisor of State Rex Tillerson repeatedly emphasised that Tehran was “not in violation” of the agreement.

The front is barely functioning since its 2010 court decision in violation of the agreement.

As former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (L) and his close ally Esfandiar Rahim Mashaee in Tehran.

This should be a source of concern for the ‘Ahmadinejadis’. The rest of us should be concerned about Washington’s lack of preparation for what is likely to replace the regime in Tehran. Mashaee is fondly remembered by many Iranians and the cash handouts introduced by his government have proved too popular for Iranian President Hassan Rohani and parliament simply to remove.

Sadegh Larjani could have another reason to counter Ahmadinejad. The judiciary chief is considered one of these main candidates in the looming succession to Khamenei, 79, in an interview last year with Radio Farda, Larjani suggested the judiciary lacked “systematic power” in which he could have a say, a chance to shut up Ahmadinejad as well.

Gareth Smyth is a regular contributor to The Arab Weekly. He has reported from the Middle East since 1992.
Algeria welcomes Macron’s admission of France’s role in pro-Algerian activist’s death

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunis

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lgeria warmly welcomed French President Emmanuel Macron’s recognition that France instigated a “system” that led to torture during Algeria’s war of independence, an admission long sought by Algerians. Macron also formally recognised the French military’s culpability in the likely torture and death of Algerian communist activist Maurice Audin, who disappeared after French soldiers arrested him in 1957.

Macron met with Audin’s 87-year-old widow near Paris and asked for her “pardon” on behalf of France, a historic gesture aimed at repairing longstanding issues between Algeria and France. Macron also said he would no longer allow national archives on the war as part of France’s quest to ensure everyone “knows the truth.” “The president of the republic has decided that it was time for the nation to perform the task of accuracy and truth on this matter,” read a statement by the French presidency following the meeting. “It recognises in the name of the French Republic that Maurice Audin had been tortured and executed or tortured to death by soldiers who had arrested him at his home.”

“If the death of Maurice Audin is the ultimate act of some people, it has nevertheless been made possible by a system legally established, the system of arrest-detention.”

It means the end of a system that the French government granted the military special powers to undermine the Algerian nationalist movement, of which Audin was a part, in the early years of the war. Audin, a mathematician at Algiers University and a member of the Algerian Communist Party whose leading act was a key role in Algerian nationalism. His home served as a safe house during the war, sheltering nationalists hunted by the French authorities and tending to wounded fighters.

In Algeria, Audin’s 50-year disappearance has come to symbolise the brutal nature of French tactics during the independent war. Macron’s efforts to come to grips with that legacy were hailed by Algerian officials and nationalist survivors as a “huge step” towards reconciliation, which is key to maintaining the two countries’ cultural, economic and military links.

However, the admissions were criticised by Macron’s political opponents in France who say they betray his lack of patriotism, underlining the competing narratives over the two countries’ shared history. Algeria has made clear that it will consider France a “hostile power” until the country expresses “repentance” for colonial-era abuses.

Algeria has pushed back against a French military presence in the Sa

Algeria is real but, as with former French President Francois Mitterrand in 1985, it was “an associate of the Islamists” and that the war was fought by “a people who had been driven out of their homes.”

Still, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika called on France to seek a “pardon from the Algerian nation” for its “outside occupation.” “Our people always demand the recognition by France of the sufferings endured during colonisation,” Bouteflika said earlier this month. Macron’s outreach to Audin’s widow, a French national, won praise in Algeria from government officials and war survivors.

“This night is very, very moved,” said Louise Ighilizari, a veteran Algerian independence fighter whose account of being tortured and raped in French military prison was told in French media in 2000. “It was difficult to hold back my tears. I have been waiting for this news,” Ighilizari said.

Algerian Minister of MejlisOdah (veteran fighters) Tayeb Zitouni said Macron’s recognition of the French state’s role in Audin’s presumed death was a “huge step forward.” “French crimes in Algeria are denied only by those forgetful and ignorant of history,” he added in a statement.

Viewpoint

Being honest with history can help France and others build a better future

Francis Ghilès

France’s official recognition of responsibility for its role in the deaths of two Algerian intellectuals in the colonial war by French President Emmanuel Macron is a landmark event. It is a key step towards building trust between France and Maghreb countries.

Being honest with history can help France and others build a better future.
The Iranian regime must really be desperate to bet on Kerry’s help

John Kerry’s grasp of Middle East issues has been limited from the start. What he says in his new book, “Every Day Is Extra,” about the personality of Syrian President Bashar Assad shows he may have been less attuned to facts of the region than realized. He did not necessarily seize his political opportunities.

Before he took over from Hillary Clinton as secretary of state in US President Barack Obama’s second term, Kerry was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He writes in his book of how Assad looked him straight in the eye and denied the existence of a nuclear reactor in Dair ez-Zour, which Israeli warplanes destroyed in September 2013. Kerry knew the details of the operation and concluded that Assad was a liar.

After the assassination of Rafik Hariri in Beirut in 2005, Kerry and his wife were guests of Assad in Damascus. Kerry helped rehabilitate the Syrian regime on the international scene without raising the slightest question about its role in the horrible bombing in Beirut. Likewise in the Iraqi case, Kerry could not see that the problem with Iran lies more in its expansionist project than with its nuclear programme.

Kerry was a key player in setting US foreign policy objectives after 9/11. He had landed the big points for a deal with Iran since his time on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and he used Oman’s media to negotiate with the deal with Iran. He didn’t let a finger to redress Obama’s misguided position on US policy towards Iran. He shows that Kerry remains captive of Zarif’s deceptive games.

Thomas Frank

Washington

A top US diplomat warned that Iran’s “lawless pursuit of ballistic missiles” is endangering the Middle East and countries as far away as Western Europe, which Tehran could target if it continues developing its missile programme.

The discovery of Iran-made missiles in Saudi Arabia – fired by Houthi rebels from neighbouring Yemen – illustrates the danger of Iran’s programme to develop short-, medium- and long-range ballistic missiles, Brian Hook, US State Department special envoy for Iran, said in a speech September 19.

“When you look at the number of [Iranian] missiles launched from Yemen to inside Saudi Arabia, this is truly a threat to international peace and security. This is very dangerous work that they’re doing,” Hook said.

Hook’s warnings come less than two weeks after reports that Iran transferred short-range ballistic missiles to its Shia proxies in Iraq and that satellite photos revealed an Iranian missile-production facility in western Syria. Iran’s Foreign Ministry denied transferring missiles to Iraq.

Hook’s speech was part of a campaign by the administration of US President Donald Trump to draw attention to Iran’s missile programme, which has been overshadowed by Iran’s nuclear programme. The efforts to develop missiles and nuclear weapons are tightly linked, Hook said, noting that the ballistic missiles under development could be used to carry nuclear weapons to Europe.

“Enhancements in ballistic systems often go hand-in-hand with nuclear development. Ballistic missiles are the most likely way Iran would deliver a nuclear weapon. They must be addressed together with Iranian nuclear weapons,” Hook said.

A ballistic missile has a high, arcing trajectory, falls to the ground unpowered and can travel thousands of miles. Ballistic missiles have a greater range but less accuracy than cruise missiles, which are self-propelled for almost their entire flight. Hook noted that Iran has said it was trying to develop a long-range, precision-guided cruise missile and recently unveiled two short-range ballistic missiles that could hit targets 500-700km away.

The exclusion of Iran’s missile programme from the nuclear accord negotiated in 2015 drew criticism from some US officials and lawmakers at the time and was a major reason that Trump withdrew from the deal in May.

Former US President Barack Obama and his European partners at the time said it would be impossible to get Iran to agree to curb both its nuclear and missile programme.

Iran’s compliance with the nuclear accord, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), “somehow became a seal of approval that Iran was fine in all the other categories” of Iranian malfeasance, such as supporting terrorism and destabilising the Middle East, Hook said.

The JCPOA was accompanied by a UN Security Council resolution that weakened prohibitions on Iran’s missile programme that had been contained in an earlier resolution.

“The reality that UN member states ignore at their peril is that Iran has continued to develop and test ballistic missiles. Iran’s pace of missiles did not diminish after the Iran [nuclear] deal was implement- ed in January 2016. They’ve con- ducted multiple ballistic missile launches since then,” Hook said.

Hook said the State Department was working with allies in the Middle East and Europe to constrain Iran’s missile programme. After his speech at a Washington think-tank, Hook avoided answering a question from the audience about whether the United States would consider taking action to continue to import Iranian oil if those coun- tries helped put pressure on Iran over its missile programme.

Disastrous legacy

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry takes part in a discussion titled “The Iran Nuclear Deal: Reflections on the First Two Years” at Chatham House in London, last November. (AP)

Hook spoke generally about the reinstatement of US sanctions but said nothing about possible waiv- ers to certain countries.

The United States intends to re- instate sanctions on Iranian oil ex- ports in early November and Hook said the goal was “to get imports of Iran oil to zero.” China and India are major importers of Iranian oil. China has said it intended to con- tinue to buy Iranian crude, a move that could draw US sanctions. India reduced its purchases of Iranian oil and is asking the United States for a waiver from sanctions so it can continue some imports.
Qatar Airways posts $69 million loss amid Gulf row

The Arab Weekly staff

Dubai

Qatar Airways announced that it lost $69 million in the financial year that ended last March 31, the clearest admission yet of the effect sanctions imposed by the Saudi-led Arab Quartet have had on the Qatari economy.

The Qatari national airline said the period had been “the most challenging year” in its 20-year history.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain broke off diplomatic relations with Qatar on June 5, 2017. They closed all land, sea and air links with Doha over its close ties with Iran and alleged support for radical Islamist groups.

The announcement was the clearest admission yet of the effect sanctions imposed by the Saudi-led Arab Quartet have had on the Qatari economy.

Qatar Airways said the boycott directly affected its revenues. The airline said seat occupancy on flights leaving Qatar was down 19% in the year to March 31, down from 32 million a year earlier.

“This turbulent year has inevitably had an impact on our financial results,” said Qatar Airways Group CEO Akbar al-Baker. However, he said, “the effect has... certainly not been as negative as our neighbouring countries may have hoped for.”

The dispute cost Qatar Airways access to 18 cities, including popular destinations in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It had to operate longer flights on some routes to avoid the airspace of the four countries, which increases costs.

The company warned in recent months that it might need to ask the Qatari government for a capital injection.

“The option of a government bail-out was raised last May by al-Baker but described as “some time away.”

“At the moment I don’t need it, but if this blockade continues then I’m sure that the government will be prepared to inject capital, because Qatar Airways is a very important economic tool,” he said.

(Qatar Airways CEO Akbar al-Baker speaking at a news conference. (AP))


The alternative is to let the economy burn, keep blaming it on little green men and ask the media to sell it to the populace. Should the spin not be continued, societal goodwill is, there is always the option, again well-honed, of demonising those who object, irrespective of prior records of loyalty.

Erdogan has shown himself capable of triggering economic downturns through a feed-forward loop, one in which escalating economic pain feeds on itself and prolongs. Such an approach is highly destabilising. It serves the purpose of keeping Erdogan’s supporters base on solid ground as economic pain grows but precludes much natural entrepreneurship.

Turkey’s economy depends on foreign investment and much of the cash comes from the United States and Europe, another prominent villain in Erdogan’s narratives.

For years, Erdogan got away with this because investors viewed his rhetoric as meant for domestic consumption and did not reflect his real beliefs.

The situation amounts to a feed-forward loop, one in which increasing economic problems engender increasingly hostile conspiracy theories that further undermine the economy.

Erdogan has shown himself capable of playing with a merry-go-round cast of rivals and ne’er-do-wells are intent on thwarting. Latest in the firing line is the option of a government bail-out.

Photograph: Recep Tayyip Erdogan for sale at a market in Istanbul. (AP)

People walk past a street vendor offering Turkish flags and posters of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. (AP)

The economic implications of the airlines’ modifications of its routes were the source of additional pressures. “It is painful because there are many routes that slide as much as 2 1/2 hours longer, and there are routes that are narrow-body routes where we had to convert to wide-body in order to carry enough fuel to go the longer distances,” said the Qatar Airways CEO.

The airline tried to mitigate the effects of the dispute by establishing flights to 14 new destinations, increasing flights on existing routes and leasing aircraft to other airlines. Its effort was not, however, fully successful.

“New destinations come with launch costs and the necessity to establish market presence, which resulted in an overall net loss,” Qatar Airways said.

The airline said it carried 29.2 million passengers in the year to March 31, down from 32 million a year earlier.

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Turkey’s economy is in dead end under Erdogan

Viewpoint

Turkey’s economy is in dead end under Erdogan

For Erdogan, there is no easy way out, primarily because he has conflated what is good for him personally with what is good for Turkey.

Olive Wright completed a Doctorate in Psychology at the University of Surrey. He is the author of The Psychology of Bilkent and Bahçeşehir universities. This article originally appeared on aljazeera.com. It is reprinted with permission.

Not interested. People walk past a street vendor offering Turkish flags and posters of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for sale at a market in Istanbul. (AP)

(AP)
### Economy

**Tourism grows in MENA region with Dubai drawing one-third of foreign tourism receipts**

Caline Makle

**Abu Dhabi**

**T**he Middle East and North Africa region is increasingly attracting tourists from clear waters, sun-drenched beaches, luxury real estate, and traditional markets. Tourism is a growing sector in the region, with many countries in the Middle East and North Africa region seeing strong growth in tourist arrivals in recent years. The International Tourism Market (ITM) report for 2019, released by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), indicates that the Middle East and North Africa region saw a 13% increase in tourist arrivals in 2018, with a 55.1% increase in arrivals in the United Arab Emirates, continued to enjoy traditionally popular spots, and the Arabian peninsula saw strong growth in tourist arrivals, with the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)’s City Travel and Tourism Impact 2017 Middle East and Africa report noting that 3.8% of jobs in the region are provided by travel and tourism. The Middle East accounted for 6.9% of the global travel and tourism GDP. These numbers are only set to grow in the near future, Hemedan added. Therefore, we expect this high-potential sector to carry on with enabling sustainable economic growth, job creation, and diversification, in the region.

Meanwhile, the World Tourism Organization also presents significant opportunities for upskilling in destination management, tourism provisions, infrastructure development, and other tourism-led activities, while sustained infrastructural investments, and infrastructural improvements, will better support the growing tourism sector.

The industry is said to represent a formidable economic proposition for the future of the region as it gradually shifts away from oil. “The economy cannot survive on oil as it has been for so many years,” Malatia said. “We believe that the UAE can survive without depending on oil and oil products, especially if you see a good lead in terms of cultural attraction.”

“Oman has also become a destination in the eyes of the world, with high-end luxury hotels and resorts in the region offering a high-quality experience, a unique combination of natural beauty and cultural heritage. This is a unique value proposition that attracts visitors to the region.”

Experts agree that from 2017, “The Russian tourists stopped coming because of the crisis in terms of the shooting down of the Russian jet. The Russian government made it a bit more difficult for Russian tourists to go to Turkey and therefore they stopped coming.”

Tourism figures from 2016 and 2017 bear out the changing nature of Turkey’s relationship with Russia. In 2016, Turkey drew just more than 85,000 Russian visitors. In 2017, after relations between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan improved, the number skyrocketed to just less than 4.7 million — 15% of all visitors to Turkey.

**Viewpoint**

Tourism growth a ‘mixed blessing’ in some countries in the Middle East

Tom Regan

For the start of the “Arab spring” in 2010-11, tourism in the Middle East “doubled. Perceptions were changing — the region had moved away from the image of conflict and terrorism to one of adventure and economic opportunities,” said Ali Al Attar, head of the Tourism Research Centre at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, in Dubai. That may have ended.

The United Nations’ World Tourism Organisation’s 2018 report has encouraged news. The region saw a 13% increase in tourist arrivals, Bahrain, Jordan and the Palestinian territories saw a welcoming gesture towards tourists, and the United Arab Emirates, continued to enjoy sustained growth. But that changing picture is not because tourists from Europe and North America are returning, but because many Middle Eastern countries are tapping new markets.

They are being attracted to destinations that have grown in recent years, including Dubai, which is a growing tourist destination, and the United Arab Emirates, which is a growing tourist destination. Dubai has a planned tourist destination in the region, and the United Arab Emirates, which is a growing tourist destination, is a popular tourist destination. Dubai has a planned tourist destination in the region, and the United Arab Emirates, which is a growing tourist destination, is a popular tourist destination.

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Dubai

Driven by digital transformation projects that began by businesses and government, the MENA cybersecurity industry is seeing many transitions. With newer technologies, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data and the internet of things (IoT), businesses are introducing the demand for skilled professionals, data scientists and cybersecurity experts is increasing.

Cybersecurity has become a top priority for companies and government to protect the region’s critical systems, enterprises and citizens.

However, several industry reports stated there is a large shortage in cybersecurity skills and the demand-supply gap is increasing.

Fady Youssef, operations director of East Region at Cisco Middle East, said demand for cybersecurity experts has grown three times faster than any other IT role, with more than 1 million cybersecurity positions available worldwide.

The deficit is estimated to rise to 2 million next year.

Youssef said the gap in the cyber-security skills lies in the disconnection between the reality and quality of security preparedness. “While many people and cybersecurity officers believe their security processes are operational and their security tools are effective, we believe that their security readiness likely needs improvement,” he said.

“Disconnection, along with rapidly evolving regulatory requirements and networking technology, further accelerates the cybersecurity skills gap. Matters don’t get easier if you think that the gap will go down before it morphs into its mature shape,” he said.

By 2030, it is projected that 500 billion devices will be connected to the internet. As the IoT gains traction, the lack of security standards in the region is exacerbated by the severity of the security skills gap.

“Security skills would be a major concern in the Middle East for industries and the way IoT investment such as manufacture, transportation of oil and gas, retail, health care, and retail,” he continued.

In a world where everything is connected, everything is exposed and the increasingly digital world is more exposed to cyberattacks and cyberespionage.

“These attacks are dramatically impacting businesses, their bottom line, customers and often their most prized asset, trust and integrity. According to Cisco’s recently released ‘2018 Annual Cybersecurity Report,’ more than half of all attacks resulted in financial damages of more than $500,000. Defending against the bad guys has never been more challenging and as rewarding as it is now,” Youssef said.

The Cisco ‘2018 Security Capabilities Benchmark Study’ stated that a shortage of qualified candidates was one of the main obstacles to security with 27% of those asked citing a deficit of trained professionals top from 25% in 2016 and 22% in 2015.

“As a technology company, we are committed to helping our customers tackle this cybersecurity skills gap. Through our Cisco Networking Academy, we offer free training at universities, schools, NGOs, government entities and vocational colleges across the region. We have trained over 300,000 students across 572 academies in 14 countries in the Middle East over the last 20 years,” Youssef said.

The solution is in teaching appropriate digital skills in schools.

James Lyne, head of research and development at the SANS Institute, said cybersecurity should be a key consideration for every organisation and this includes developing a pipeline of skilled industry professionals.

“The very digital nature of our lives, meaning that our critical infrastructure, commercial systems, citizens and national IT were at greater risk of attack from ‘cybercriminals than ever, ” Lyne said.

He said this was demonstrated by WannaCry, the cyberattack against state-owned energy enterprises in Saudi Arabia, “as well as other attacks on public sector institutions like health care, which have raised the profile of cybersecurity among the wider population.”

“Industrial control systems have been widely adapted throughout the region and there is a great interest in automation projects like Smart Cities. These developments represent a great opportunity in the region, but they are also attractive targets for cybercriminals, as attacks like Triton/Trojan demonstrate,” Lyne added.

While cybersecurity industry overall suffers a serious skills shortage, the United Arab Emirates’ National Media Council (NMC) introduced new licensing norms for commercial bloggers and influencers, and this has become a more realistic path for social media accounts conducting activities of a commercial nature.

“The government wishes to ensure that media outlets, including their digital platforms, better conduct their activities and promote in online and social media, are complying with the various content regulations that are in force in the region,” said Sanaa Robertson, senior associate – technology media and telecommunications, with law firm Al Tamimi and Company.

She said the National Media Council, in consultation with the Ministry of Information and Culture, has developed a list of categories for influencers – an industry that has long been a grey area for regulators; a partnership licence for small groups of friends or families who can set up a company to go down this path and one for practitioners to assist entrepreneurs, with support from cybersecurity agencies certified by the NMC.

The number of influencers skyrockets: from more than 25,000 in 2016 and 2017 to over 500,000 in 2018. “The lack of regulation was leading many influencers to work under the radar to filter,” said Sanaa Robertson. “This allows IT to offload the mundane and routine tasks to ‘selfies’ and influencers, and facilitates them to ‘selfie’ away and build a following without adhering to ethical and content regulations that are in place.”

The issue of licensing did overshadow the overall necessity to comply with the content regulations and I do think that we cannot emphasise this aspect enough,” said Robertson. Those who operate commercially as online content publishers should not make assumptions about their ability to post any and all content. There is a fine line between content that is edgy and content that is illegal.

Feras Arafeh, managing director of Influencer Lab, the region’s first data-driven influencer marketing platform, said: “Influencer marketing has a funny hate-love relationship in the industry. There’s something of a negative stigma around influencers but there’s not getting away from the fact that brands can’t seem to get enough of them.”

The number of influencers skyrocketed and reached a peak of more than 25,000 in 2016 and is set to reach 35,000 in 2018. “We believe the industry is still very much in its early days and has plenty of different paths to go down before it morphs into its mature shape,” he said. “This particular law has actually done a lot of good in that it has slowed down the growth of the everybody’s an influencer phase – something which was for a while completely spinning out of control.”

“The new regulations have provided a framework to ensure real content creators didn’t have to compete with ‘selfies’ looking for a few freebies in return for minimal effort and a handful of artfully taken photos.”

Content creator Lowi Sahi

The new law is very far, earlier, people used to step into social media just for the money and not for the storytelling, which made all platforms difficult to filter.”

Mai Marzouk, social media analyst at GroupM, has been a full-time job, so social media is just a hobby for now.”

“I think transparency in social media usage and not just the storytelling, which made all platforms difficult to filter.”

Content creator Lowi Sahi, whose innovative storytelling has attracted a big audience, said he welcomed the move. “It makes sense that any type of business you do should be official and visible to the government that’s providing you indirectly the tools to practise that business,” he said.

“The law is very fair, as earlier, people used to step into social media just for the money and not for the storytelling, which made all platforms difficult to filter.”

Media IT

Necessary skills. Participants require extensive cybersecurity training at SANS Institute, (SANS Institute)
Syrian refugees have changed Egypt's work culture, customer relations

Mustafa Abid

gy is capable of absorbing many of the cultural mores of foreigners who settle there. The number of Syrian refugees who have flocked to Egypt has sparked calls on Egyptian authorities to set up reception camps for them so they simply melted in the Egyptian pot. Syrian refugees in particular, however, left clear marks on the work ethic and habits of the Egyptian society. Syrian refugees have changed customer treatment became obvious in daily transactions in Egypt. They are efficient and transformed for the better long- neglected work traditions in business and public administration.

Many of the projects set up by Syrian refugees in Egypt are in restaurants, perfumemaking and manufacturing and selling clothing. Specialised artisans have gone into production in the cities of Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria. Many Egyptian professionals in those fields had long seen the competition created by the Syrian refugees.

Nader said there were many reasons Syrian refugees favoured Egypt as a place of settlement. Syrians and Egyptians have much in common: they speak the same language, share traditions and behaviour. Many of the first-wave refugees who had been intermarried through long-range ties. The Egyptians, then, were not shocked by the behaviour of Syrian refugees and the latter were not surprised by Egyptian traditions.

There are also the relatively affordable living conditions in Egypt, compared to neighbouring countries. Despite the economic crisis in the country, many goods are produced. Syrian refugees, for example, work in the electric and electronic repair.

Syria is a refugee describing his feelings about by the Syrian competition. Nader said there were many competitors in the food industry. The Egyptians, then, were not shocked by the behaviour of Syrian refugees and the latter were not surprised by Egyptian traditions.

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Imed Mahmud, an accountant in Egypt, said: “Syrian designers are the best at dating, offering rare insight into Syrian refugees in a humane light. The documentary shares different opinions about refugees from Americans. In one scene, Syrians are in an elevator with Americans and a young African girl hides behind her father, apparently frightened by two women wearing a headscarf. Another scene shows the tugging of the headscarf of one of the refugees. In a bus.

However, there are some Americans who recognize their responsibility towards refugees. “We want to be the greatest country in the world in the way we do, treat refugees like we’re the greatest country in the world,” an aid worker said, tearying.

A national survey indicated that 53% of American respondents said the United States has a responsibility to accept refugees into the country, while 45% said it does not.

The most heart-warming scene in the documentary describing his feeling about missing Syria, his home and country. He calls Syria “my heart” and gives an emotional tribute to the country.

The world is becoming desensitised to the scores of refugees, so this documentary reminds viewers these refugees are not just numbers but people. It highlights the importance of integration within the community for refugees to feel more at home. One of the last scenes shows a church with people coming together to sell tickets for a Syrian cuisine supper cooked by one of the refugees.

One of many ways of showing financial and emotional support is by giving the family a chance to share their story of their journey from Syria to India and then to the United States.

The documentary ends with a poignant picture of the families that sharply contrasts with reality. Imed Mahmud, an accountant in Egypt, said: “Syrian designers are the best at dating, offering rare insight into Syrian refugees in a humane light. The documentary shares different opinions about refugees from Americans. In one scene, Syrians are in an elevator with Americans and a young African girl hides behind her father, apparently frightened by two women wearing a headscarf. Another scene shows the tugging of the headscarf of one of the refugees. In a bus.

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Culture

Saudia writer Ahmed al-Duwaihi optimistic about prospects for modernity at home despite resistance

Zaki al-Soudeir

Duwaihi said writing is an expression of civilisation requiring that writers be always on top of their art, technically and in terms of contemporary knowledge. This allows him to decipher and give meaning to reality. He said art has a guiding mission. It points out shortcomings but it is an integral part of the advance and progress of forward-looking countries.

Duwaihi said that during the last couple of decades, writing novels in Saudi Arabia surpassed all expectations in terms of volume. “Every year, we witness the publication of more than two novels written by people of both sexes and this is really unprecedented,” he said. “We used to be happy with the publication of just one novel each year. “Of course, with the sudden opening of the floodgates is both a literary and cultural renaissance for one country. Our country is like a wide landscape with various cultures. Such a flood of creativity received attention from the outside because it is the art of revealing the hidden. Saudi writing is a beauty shrouded in secrecy.

“Besides, creative movement must be followed by a critical evaluation. I believe that this could have happened here in Saudi Arabia if we had the relevant research centres and I’m hopeful that it will eventually happen,” he said.

Duwaihi talked about freedom of thought and the freedom of the press, in particular in Saudi Arabia and especially in the context of changes at the national level.

“I have spent many years serving the Fourth Estate,” he said. “I’ve dedicated my life to this field as a contributor and employee to the press through the gates of literature and it has welcomed me with open arms.

“The press as a profession and industry played an important role by becoming a sincere and honest critic of various government agencies. “At one time, the press had a constructive approach for the benefit of the citizen and the nation.”

Duwaihi added: “Now, the role of the press is waning because of modern technologies. Overall, it’s the entire country that is going through very delicate transformations and we are perfectly aware that any modernising effort brings its own set of challenges and problems.

“Let’s not forget that our society has faced many changes in recent decades and will continue to resist modernisation trends. Having said that, “I’m convinced that the new era will be one of creative transformation. I say this because...”

Hoping for a better world

“Change,” he said, “must come from inside the society and in stages. The government must play the role of the engine behind this change.”

It is a world that has turned into a mirage from a society that obsesses over tribal allegiances. I remember that within the society of the era of the 50s featured by practices of modernity and the other social groups must have gone through vicious battles with this oppressive movement,” he said.

“Continuing from the decades, the movement transformed the Saudi social and cultural atmosphere. Anyone who knows the society of smaller proportions like me, I come from, will recognise how this idea was carried out. It wiped out the spirit of tolerance, relegated women to the background. “To them, the sadness of joy and killed everything beautiful and promising in their society. “I’m sure the same could be said about the society of modern civilised nations in Saudi Arabia.”

“Is this why changes introduced by the government and have rekindled our hope for a new normal reality. It would be a mistake to think that this oppressive modernity has been eradicated for good. It is still here, hidden among us and you can see samples of it in every house.”

About the challenge posed by modernisers to the revivalist movement said: “At the time, unfortunately, modernisers felt they could go beyond every stage of ignorance, relegating women to the power of those who pretend to be the guardians of virtue.”

“Change,” he said, “must come from inside the society and in stages. The government must play the role of the engine behind this change. “Back then, we saw a miracle from a society that obsesses over tribal allegiances. I remember that within the society of the era of the 50s featured by practices of modernity and the other social groups must have gone through vicious battles with this oppressive movement,” he said.

He said: “Today, hope lies in what we can call the ‘soft culture.’ We are witnessing an increase in the presence of women in football stadiums, cinema theatres, book fairs, markets and behind car steering wheels. There is new legislation giving them more rights and placing limits on the fascist male culture as well as on the power of those who pretend to be the guardians of virtue.”

Regarding the changes in Saudi Arabia and the ability of Saudi intellectuals to grasp their significance, Duwaihi said that “the entire population, not just intellectuals, has high expectations for the changes and hopes that the new era will be one of progress and development.

“As citizens and intellectuals, we realise the importance of the changes going on in the world around us, especially in the Arab world, and realise their effect on us and elsewhere,” Duwaihi said. “Therefore, our country must be placed above all the insignificant details. The only place for a country like ours with its significant size, history, relevance and wealth can only be in our hearts and in the pupils of our eyes.”

Zaki al-Soudeir is a Saudi writer.

Mohammad Abdul Ghaffar

Kuwait City

The recent appearance of 3D-printed models of human figures has raised a lot of controversy among artists, researchers, scholars, politicians and activists.

Reports on social media said a shop in Kuwait was manufacturing human statues and figures. The shop, the reports claimed, was using advanced technology to print 3D models of human figures and that these spots are allowed to pay for them to be kept as keepsakes.

Critics considered the figurines to be idols and said their manufacture should be banned. Activists labelled such criticism as attempts to suppress freedom of expression.

The management of the company making the models withdrew the 3D-printed human models from its stores, despite the Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry saying the company had not broken any laws.

Al-Arabi newspaper quoted a member of the 3D-printing company, as saying it withdrew the models out of concern for its employees’ safety.

Yousoof denied rumours that state authorities forced the company to withdraw the figures. He said the company formally asked its parent company to bring in non-human models made using the same technology.

He said that recently a meeting with the Ministry of Commerce took place after a complaint against the company and that the issue stems from a desire to engage in “political bargaining.”

Yousoof explained that 3D-printing technology has been on the market for nearly three years but Scuba technology is much more precise and has unique size options. It is used in medicine and architecture, as well as for entertainment and souvenirs.

“Some people said they were puzzled at the campaign against the 3D models, this sudden war was described as idols. Under the hashtag ‘#Hawaladunma,’ Salah Al-Lussani tweeted: ‘A shop in Kuwait prints for you and your family figurines as souvenirs and the sheikhs of religion say the statues lead to idolatry (Shirk) and that people will later start worshipping them.’

“Certainly, we must have gone beyond every stage of ignorance,” Yousoof wrote. “I don’t have words to describe the stage we’re in now!”

Using the same hashtag, Arwa al-Waqain tweeted: “The machine prints a model of your body, not of Al-Lat or Al-Uzza. Please spare us these futile good-for-nothing fables.”

Bashar al-Sayegh, secretary general of the liberal National Democratic Alliance, said: “Conjuring up religious issues and using them as ‘religious terrorism’ is a violation of human rights and freedoms.”

Yousef described what happened as “religious terrorism in which excommunication and threats were used as weapons” and warned of the “seriousness of issuing such abhorrent statements and of targeting them according to political events.”

The Muslim Brotherhood party of the liberal Kuwaiti Democratic Forum also declared: “We deplore the description of the models as ‘idols.’”

He stated that “what is happening is nothing but contempt for people’s minds and a new attempt to suppress freedoms and creativity under the pretext of religion.”

The controversy started after Islamist member of the Kuwaiti parliament Mohammad Hafez al-Mutair unloaded a wave of condemnation about the 3D models through his Twitter account. “The manufacturing of these statues and figurines must be forbidden, as they have invaded the Arab Peninsula. Complacency has reached a point where teams with research centres have been established in some Gulf states,” he tweeted.

Some people said they were puzzled at the campaigns against the figurines and how they were described as idols.

“In Kuwait, there is a shop exhibiting and selling figurine copies of human beings. This is vile happenings in the land of monotheism, in which idols were destroyed and forbidden. Their return is a sign of the coming of the apocalypse and the minister of commerce must ban them,” a Kuwaiti informant said.

Salafist preacher Othman al-Khaisan was asked on his Twitter account about the figurines and replied: “What this shop is doing is evil and it must be closed immediately – if it actually exists.”

Khaisan later described the issue as “more dangerous than liquor stores because it revives the issue of idols, which may prompt some people to make idols for their children. Therefore, the shop must be closed.”

Former Kuwaiti Minister of Justice and Endowments Nayef al-Ajmi, also posting on Twitter, said: “Making statues using modern technology is haram according to Sharia. It should only be used with the limits of Sharia, such as making educational models for medical students.”

Al-Ajmi said that “the figurines should not be described as idols, because statues are classified as idols only if they are worshipped.”

As for the image, it is said to be a statue and it is not said to be an idol. Needless to say that statues should not be considered as idols. Such an action was condemned by Sheikh Jumah Al-Shammari and the most prominent reason for their prohibitions,” Al-Ajmi added.

Mohammad Abdul Ghaffar is a Kuwaiti journalist.

(Anadolu news agency)
Music scene in Palestinian territories echoes resistance to occupation

Beirut’s poetry slams: A revolution in free verse

Khadija Hamouchi

Beirut

I

one of Beirut’s busiest cafes, 50 young people gather every Wednesday to listen to peers who describe themselves as poets.

The event, called Sidewalk, features poetry in Arabic and English and youthful writers, many of them not yet 16 years old or still at school. The poets read energetically, in open-mic style; the audience listens intently, responding as needed.

Clearly, poetry is not dead in the digital era. These poets, from Syria, Lebanon and the United Kingdom, are part of a new wave in the city — poetry as performance.

Sidewalk poets cover sensitive subjects, such as mental health, sexuality, feminism and politics.

The Wednesday poetry slams are increasing in popularity across Beirut and Sidewalk recently organised a regional poetry slam. The competition was put together in collaboration with Roundhouse, a British performing arts and concert venue. The winner will represent the Middle East at the World Poetry Slam in Paris in 2019.

Sidewalk organisers said they hope there will be a regional slam every year. Two years ago, a regional poetry competition was organised by Roundhouse but there was no follow-up in 2017.

Lisa Luxx, an award-winning British Arab poet and a judge at the 2016 regional poetry competition, said: “Sorry to the fans I’m letting down and to the same festival, said: “Sorry to the supporters attempting to access the territories.

If music is emerging as an act of resistance in the Palestinian territories, it is only a natural progression for a breakthrough for the Palestinian underground to be supported and show their talent on the international stage.

By defying spatial and social restrictions, Israelis impose on these artists, they provide hope and inspiration to their audiences. With lyrics attacking the occupiers, the occupying forces and even the Palestinian Authority, they offer a possible alternative. The growing concern on the international music scene is pushing BDS wins forward.

The growing concern on the international music scene is even so, the Sidewalk committee said it plans to connect with other Arab countries to share its experience of an unexpected success story in free verse.

Khadija Hamouchi is a Belgian Moroccan social entrepreneur and founder of SEJAAL, an initiative that is building an app for young people.

Viewpoint

Music scene in Palestinian territories echoes resistance to occupation

Act of resistance. A Palestinian band performs a concert during clashes near the border with Israel, last February.

(Mohammad Asad/ AFP)

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Culture
Leisurely cycling through Carthage’s 668-year history

Omar el-Huni
Tunis

While gazing over the Carthaginian ruins, Zied Gaaloul looked at me. “Over a 668-year history, Carthage began and ended in burning flames,” he said.

I’d spent the afternoon cycling around the various archaeological sites of the old Carthage. We’d arrived at the Tetaphet of Carthage and explored the ancient children’s burial site that served as a temple to the ancient gods Baal and Tanit.

The tour, conducted by Le Lemon Tour, a cycling tour company established at the beginning of the year, went through some of Carthage’s most famous archaeological sites, such as the Punic Port and the Baths of Antonius.

Le Lemon Tour starts with a trek to the Acropolium of Carthage, also known as Saint Louis Cathedral, built in honour of the French King Louis IX. It then takes cyclists to the baths of Antonius, one of the third largest thermae built by the Roman Empire, as well as a prominent meeting site.

The third site is the Punic Port, which served as a key military port. Designed as a narrow channel linking the northern circular naval port to the southern oblique military port, the port hid the military fort from the outside, while allowing the Carthaginians to see towards the sea.

The tour ends on the Tetaphet, a religious burial site for children, which doubles as a shrine to the chief deities of Carthaginians.

Throughout the tour, participants are educated on the history of Carthage, from its founding by Dido (Elissa), the ancient city’s first queen and her death in the pyre, to Scipio Aemilianus’s victory in the Third Punic War and subsequent burning of Carthage, an event that lasting potential to expand cycling routes and areas. “Cornell said there is significant potential to expand cycling routes and areas.”

Participants rest near the Punic Port in Carthage.

The tour’s guests are a mix of Tunisians, expats and tourists interested in cycling, history and architecture. In addition to the company’s regular guided tours, it hosts two or three events a week during which up to 20 guests are taken on different routes around old and modern Carthage.

Le Lemon Tour’s operators said they hoped to “consolidate (their) tour service. They also wanted to show that ‘small projects can equal big results.’”

The company is self-funded and relies on 50 locally made bicycles.

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