Showdown. Tunisian protesters chant slogans during a general strike in Tunis on November 22. (UJFT)

Tunisia's strikes reflect policy deadlock, need for new social contract

A new nationwide strike is expected to affect all government services and state companies on January 17.

**Lamine Ghanmi**

Tunisia finds itself at a turning point as trade unions are ratcheting up their pressure in the government's fifth successive strikes aimed at buttressing their demands for public service wage increases.

A new nationwide strike is expected to affect all government services and state companies on January 17. The country's 673,000 civil servants observed an earlier strike on November 22, the first of its scope in years, to protest the government's rejection of pay hikes.

Several months have come and gone in Tunisia during the last eight years without managing to pull off a much-needed economic recovery to match the country's relatively successful democratic transition.

Reform to return is what the government has been bringing to the country's people as the country faces further economic woes. In recent years, the government has struggled to deal with high inflation and debt.

Tunisia's strikes reflect policy deadlock, need for new social contract. A new nationwide strike is expected to affect all government services and state companies on January 17.

The latest strike has also brought new social contract where the government and the UGTT are driving the country to match the country's relatively successful democratic transition.

Adding to the uncertainty, leaders of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) have now vowed to press the wage issue in the next elections and join the fractious political fray.

UGTT's leader, Noureddine Taiboudi, told a crowd of supporters gathered outside the parliament on November 22 that the next legislative and presidential elections are "an opportunity" to the unions.

"With this huge popular support we will lead the political compass of the country," said in reference to the UGTT's possible alignment with anti-Islamist forces.

Parliament members from the leftist Popular Front and secularist Nidaa Toumi parties joined Taboubi as he addressed the crowd while chanted "We are the UGTT, we are UGTT...".

"We have no alternative but to continue our struggle for our rights and our demands," the leader of the UGTT said.

The latest strike has also brought a head a process sparked by the cancellation of the old social contract that had prevailed in Tunisia since independence. At the same time, it has highlighted the need for a new social contract where the freedom to strike and protest are matched by better economic proactivity and greater initiative, especially with the state becoming increasingly unable to ensure previous commitments.

A few days before the November public service strike, a number of local business federations announced they would not be paying their electricity bills to the public utility company because such bills eat away too much of their margin of profit.

"Tunisia needs a new social contract between all the sides to production but the current political juncture is very sensitive for that, as we are in an election year where conflicts and divisions worsen," said influential political columnist Zied Hmoumi.

"The US also has asked Iran's rival Saudi Arabia to invest in power and other infrastructure in southern Iraq," the paper said, citing an unnamed US official.

The Iranians, meanwhile, are talking about boosting trade with Iraq. "Through bilateral efforts, we can raise this figure [of $2 billion] to $2.72 billion in the near future," President Hassan Rouhani said on November 22 after meeting with the Iraqi president.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on Iraq "irrevocably" to sign the agreements to create "a new strong economic geopolitical actor."
Qatar is trying to embroil Iraq in a foolish conundrum

Bahraini al-Shikhli

Iraq is once again conspiring against Iraq by dragging it into a direct confrontation with the Americans.

Tehran is apparently of the opinion that this five-party coalition would allow it to continue backing the activities of its militias in the region. The plan is to have the militias divert US attention by resorting to terrorist activities and would spare Iran any direct implication. In addition to that, Iran-backed militias would continue to create chaos in the region with Qatari assistance.

Iraqi political analyst Nizar al-Samarrai said Qatar is slowly pushing Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan towards a confrontation with Arab countries through the building of a special relationship with Iran.

That scenario would be catastrophic for Turkey and the region because once Tehran is finished with its Arab targets, it would turn on Turkey. In that case, Iran will be repeating itself. Turkey’s Sultan Selim I will have to rise from his tomb and square off with Shah Ismail al-Safawi in Iraq once again.

By that time, international circumstances would have changed and Iran would enjoy greater international support due to the changes in the balance of power in the region.

Samarrai said Qatar has chosen to ally itself with Iran and to spend its money to weaken the effects of economic sanctions. Qatar puts itself in grave jeopardy even if its goal is to harm Saudi Arabia.

The Iraqis cannot forget that Qatar conspired against their country by allowing the Americans to use its territory to launch air attacks on Iran. Qatar is once again conspiring against Iraq by dragging it into a direct confrontation with the Americans. It is deliberately furing the Iraqi government by allowing an alliance that simply defies the interests of any country in the region.

The United States has made clear that it will take severe measures against any country that stands with Iran. Mohammed al-Halbousi, the Arab Council of Representatives, invited Qatar to the reconstruction conference in the region and invest in the Iraqi economy. He stressed that the parliament would seek to provide the proper environment for a safe investment. All we heard in return from the Qatari minister were vague diplomatic expressions about his country “being ready to open all types of horizons of cooperation and to strengthen the historically friendly ties with the Iraqi government and people.” In other words, nothing but hollow words.

Qatar is involved in shady deals at the expense of Iraq. Official statistics indicate that more than 40,000 barrels of crude oil are smuggled through the Ba’ath province every day towards Iran and Qatar is a daily occurrence to see convoys of hundreds of tanker trucks loaded with crude oil head towards seaports and other crossing points with Iran under the protection of carloads of gunmen.

It is naive to assume that Qatar, which conspired against Iraq and ganged up with Iran to steal its oil, will be the ones to bring to the brink of disaster of its economy, could one day come to the rescue of Reconstruction.

There is no denying that Qatar is seeking to embroil Iraq in the greatest folly in history by enticing it to join an anti-US coalition.

Bahraini al-Shikhli is an Iraqi writer.
Soudia Arabia's efforts at modernization have significantly increased its defence capabilities, said Mahmoud Khalaf, manufacturer in the Arab and African market. The Royal Saudi Navy's acquisition programs can cultivate and support shipbuilding industries as well as naval and support services, such as the maintenance, repair, and overhaul of military and commercial vessels, creating thousands of jobs.

SNEP II is a defence vertical of Vision 2030, a wide-ranging program to turn Saudi Arabia among the world's leading countries for defence production. The Middle East and one of the world's largest oil exporters, with more than 2,500 km of coastline and offshore assets. The navy also plays a crucial role in providing warning and engagement capabilities against air and sea threats for example.

The maritime industry promises opportunities against air and missile attacks, and armoured personnel carriers. Egypt's coastal waters are rich in seafaring history, and the navy's presence is crucial for national security. The Royal Saudi Navy's expansion into the naval sector has allowed it to modernize its fleet by replacing vessels nearing the end of their lifespan, enabling it to significantly expand its naval capabilities.

The coming decade will see Riyadh bolster its military capabilities to reimpose naval dominance in the troubled neighbourhood. Saudi Arabia's decision to enhance its defence capabilities is driven by the need to protect its national interests and respond to regional challenges. The kingdom's naval expansion, which includes the acquisition of advanced warships and defensive technologies, is aimed at maintaining its strategic position in the Gulf and the Red Sea.

Saudi Arabia has sought to diversify its arms importers worldwide, with the aim of reducing reliance on a single source. The kingdom has signed agreements with various countries, including France, China, and Germany, to acquire state-of-the-art military equipment. These agreements reflect Riyadh's commitment to modernizing its military capabilities and enhancing its capabilities in the face of regional and global threats.

The recent decision to modernize its navy is part of a broader regional strategy to reinforce Saudi Arabia's role in the Gulf and the Red Sea. The kingdom's naval expansion, which includes the acquisition of advanced warships and defensive technologies, is aimed at maintaining its strategic position in the Gulf and the Red Sea.

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Saudi Arabia's naval warships could be deployed on four Multi-Mission Surface Combatant (MMSC) ships that Riyadh is acquiring. The MMSC is the most advanced littoral combat ship of its kind in the world. The Saudi Arabian Navy's new vessels are expected to begin designing and planning for construction of four MMSC ships.

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Trump reaffirms position of US as steadfast partner of Saudi Arabia

The Khashoggi Case

We're not going to apologize for our relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Trump said in his statement. "They carry out, regardless of the negotiation processes and whatever the process, this is a relationship that is absolutely vital to America's national security."

And on November 21, US Defense Secretary James Mattis defended the "strategic relationship" between the United States and Saudi Arabia. "We're not going to apologize for our relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Mattis said in a statement. "It is a relationship that is absolutely vital to America's national security."

Pro-government media have openly accused Crown Prince Mohammed of ordering Khashoggi's death. Trump's statement on November 20 made it clear that his administration will not back punitive measures against the prince and will not support calls to strip him of his role as a future king, something Ankara says it would "vote against any future legislation to investigate the death of Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey." The leaks are intended to buttress Trump's attempts at settling scores not just with the Saudi monarchy but also with the United Arab Emirates and Egypt over the Khashoggi case. "The conversations among the murderers, their conversations with Riyadh after committing the murder, dialogues that will prove the crown prince was the one who directly gave the order, perhaps the royal family, and pointed to hundreds of billions of Saudi dollars coming to the United States through investments and arms purchases. "Do people really want me to give up hundreds of thousands of jobs?" Trump told reporters November 22. "And frankly, if we were by this standard, we wouldn't be able to have anybody as an ally." Trump insisted that "foolishly cancelling these contracts" worth billions of dollars would only benefit Russia and China, which would be "very happy to acquire all of this new business. It would be a wonderful gift to them directly from the United States!"

"The US President needed a "counterbalance" to Iran, which calls for a new diplomatic and economic pressure. "If we abandon Saudi Arabia, it would be a terrible mistake," Trump said. Members of the Democratic Party said Trump's defense of the crown prince could backfire by leading the US Congress to block arms sales to Saudi Arabia. US Senator Diane Feinstein, an influential Democrat from California, said on Twitter that the would "vote against any future arms sales and appropriation to Saudi Arabia." Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut and member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Trump's statement "comes to the murder of Khashoggi, the [Trump] administration appears unlikely to take decisive action, so it's up to Congress to determine the consequences."

Writing on Twitter shortly after Trump's statement, Khashoggi's fiancee Hayal Karagul, editor of the Yemeni Saffak daily, wrote a day before Trump's statement: "Karagul predicted the publication of the audio would make Crown Prince Mohammed's position untenable and might also affect Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi and a key ally of the Saudi crown prince. "The Saudi crown prince succeeded in this stage, along with Iran and Islamist groups earlier this year. Having failed to win over Trump for its own position, Ankara could try to boost efforts in the US Congress to force the administration to end support for Crown Prince Mohammed and to enact legislation introducing punitive US measures against Riyadh.

Part of that effort is Ankara's continued attempts at influencing public opinion. Towards that end, media in Turkey, the Arab Gulf, and Turkey are publishing excerpts of two alleged audio recordings that were created shortly before Khashoggi's death and during the last minutes of his life. A prominent pro-government journalist said the audio files would be made public soon. The leaks are intended to buttress Ankara's attempts at settling scores not just with the Saudi monarchy but also with the United Arab Emirates and Egypt over the Khashoggi case. "The conversations among the murderers, their conversations with Riyadh after committing the murder, dialogues that will prove the crown prince was the one who directly gave the order, perhaps the royal family, and pointed to hundreds of billions of Saudi dollars coming to the United States through investments and arms purchases. "Do people really want me to give up hundreds of thousands of jobs?" Trump told reporters November 22. "And frankly, if we were by this standard, we wouldn't be able to have anybody as an ally." Trump insisted that "foolishly cancelling these contracts" worth billions of dollars would only benefit Russia and China, which would be "very happy to acquire all of this new business. It would be a wonderful gift to them directly from the United States!"

Trump acknowledged uncer- tainty over Prince Mohammed's role in the murder in his statement to reporters. "The US President needed a "counterbalance" to Iran, which calls for a new diplomatic and economic pressure. "If we abandon Saudi Arabia, it would be a terrible mistake," Trump said. Members of the Democratic Party said Trump's defense of the crown prince could backfire by leading the US Congress to block arms sales to Saudi Arabia. US Senator Diane Feinstein, an influential Democrat from California, said on Twitter that the would "vote against any future arms sales and appropriation to Saudi Arabia." Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut and member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Trump's statement "comes to the murder of Khashoggi, the [Trump] administration appears unlikely to take decisive action, so it's up to Congress to determine the consequences."

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Thomas Seibert is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Washington.
Stockholm peace talks: A ‘first step’ towards ending Yemen war

The Arab Weekly staff

Abu Dhabi

After much speculation as to whether peace talks between Yemen’s warring parties would take place, US Defence Secretary James Mattis confirmed that UN-led negotiations were slated for early December in Stockholm, Sweden.

“It looks like, very early in the coming month, in up Sweden we’ll see both the Houthi rebel side and the UN-recognised government,” Mattis told reporters on November 21.

Commenting on the improved prospects for negotiations, Mattis said on November 21 that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had halved their offensive against their neighbour’s Yemeni city of Hodeidah and “that despite some fighting, the front lines had not changed in at least 72 hours,” Reuters reported.

During the fall in violence, the UN envoy travelling in Yemen’s capital of Sana’a, before visiting Hodeidah a day later, on November 20.

Matt’s announcement came amid growing regional and international efforts to bring an end to the more than three-year conflict, which has pitted pro-government forces backed by a Saudi-led coalition of nine countries against Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who had overthrown Yemen’s democra
tically elected president in 2012.

The Arab coalition soon inter

viewed in Yemen, lending support to government forces battling the Hou-This three years later, the Houthis rule most of Yemen’s population. The conflict in Yemen has been in a stalemate since the Saudi-led coalition ceased the southern port city of Aden in 2015. While the coalition is en: Secretary General’s envoy for Yemen and Sheffield, UK’s envoy to the UN.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahy-broken off a tense standoff over the port.

The Houthis’ actions suggest they want a political final solution. But if they insist on nullifying the situation they have lost, the United States and Britain believe the Houthis have nothing to offer Yemenis besides illusions, empty slogans and pompous rhetoric that cannot buy food, medicine, the hungry or build a school. The main concern is that the Houthis are completely unconcerned with the precarious situation of the average Yemeni civilian.

For all practical purposes, howev-
er, there is no escape from in-
cluding the Houthis in any political process aimed at reaching some sort of solution to stop the violence. The Houthi’s actions suggest they want to impose a solution that will eventual-
ly lead to the establishment of a state above their own with Sana’a as its capital.

How can we possibly allow the people of Sana’a and their contigu-
ous old cultural heritage to fall to the violence? We need to ask leaders that know only how to chant “Death to Israel, Death to America, Damn the Jews, Victory for Islam!”

The UN envoy for Yemen will be making a major mistake if he continues to believe that a politi-
cal solution can be found with the existing balance of power. By saying this, we’re not suggesting resuming fighting in Hodeidah, on the contra-
y, it is an attempt to avoid further fighting. At the end of the day, if the Houthis are allowed to stay in Hodeidah, it will be the shortest way to make the UAE the only state to impose a solution that will eventually lead to the establishment of a state above their own with Sana’a as its capital.

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cal solution can be found with the existing balance of power. By saying

What is more desirable than ever is finding a way to include the largest number of political forces in the north, south and centre in any national dialogue or negotiations for a political solution.

The only constant in Yemen is that there can be no return to the old formula – that of one Yemen controlled by Sana’a, or the centre as it was called. The old Yemen that was familiar with is now gone.

Perhaps the right formula for a new Yemen is that of a federation or confederation. But there is no hope of reaching such a formula if the vicious circle in not broken.

Khairallah Khairallah is a Lebanese journalist.

Viewpoint

Yemen’s vicious circle must be broken

Khairallah Khairallah

Smoke and mirrors. A Houthi fighter holds a weapon as he looks at smoke rising from a building in Sana’a.

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Gulf

News & Analysis

Precarious task. UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths (C) upon his arrival at Sana’a International Airport, on November 21.

(Al)

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Precarious task. UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths (C) upon his arrival at Sana’a International Airport, on November 21.

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Editorial

The paradoxes of education in the region

The recent publication of a report titled “Education and Expectations: A New Framework for Education in the Middle East” by the World Bank has highlighted the significant discrepancies in educational attainment across different regions of the world. While countries like the United States and Europe have made substantial progress in increasing access to education, several Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, continue to struggle with fundamental challenges in this area.

The report notes that while there has been a general increase in the enrolment of school-age children of both genders, the progress has been uneven. In many cases, girls are still not receiving the same educational opportunities as boys, leading to a significant gender gap in literacy rates and other educational indicators. Additionally, the report highlights the disparity in access to quality education, with urban areas often having better resources and facilities compared to rural regions.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition among policymakers and educators of the importance of investment in education. The report suggests that a comprehensive approach, including improvements in teacher quality, curriculum development, and resource allocation, is necessary to address these disparities. It also emphasizes the need for sustained commitment from governments, international organizations, and civil society to ensure that all children, regardless of gender or other socioeconomic factors, have access to quality education.

Why does Netanyahu want a war?

Mohamad Kawas

The mainstay of survival for Netanyahu and his right-wing allies is fear of having to let go of power. But Netanyahu needs a war these days. He has removed the Gaza threat from his path but the corruption charges hound him, quelling his threat to his survival. In his war speech, he announced that the region was safe for now so that he can join the ranks of the likes of David Ben-Gurion, Ehud Barak, Levi Eshkol, Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Rabin, who all had at some point managed the destiny of the Ministry of Defence. A stretch of Machiavellian political manoeuvring is rising from Netanyahu’s words at the Ministry of Defence. But then again, he may be expressing a pressing tendency among Israel’s ruling elite in favour of a calculated war that would bring order to a lot of the chaos inside Israel’s strategic thinking.

Netanyahu realises that the ruler in Iran is pragmatic enough to reverse course and drive to the edges of what is possible and what is impossible. That’s why Netanyahu is worried that Washington and the West, for that matter, may deal with Tehran against the wishes of Trump, Mike Pompeo and John Bolton. Even if the world were to negotiate and reach an agreement with the Tehran regime, which no one really wants to topple, Netanyahu, who was happy with his visit to Muscat, has realised that he still might have to deal with some exceptional aspects that will not be covered by any agreements.

Backstage behind Netanyahu, someone must be whispering, and perhaps even leaking and misleading, that his “tremendous” in neutralising the Gaza front through a surreal agreement with Hamas is justified by the fact that Israel now regards the Gaza threat as marginal compared to other looming existential dangers. Netanyahu is anxiously watching the rebuke of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who barely met him for a few minutes in Paris, while Israel’s eyes and spy planes are monitoring Hezbollah’s rockets in Lebanon around the clock. The matter might be grave but Netanyahu would rather keep the status quo another year at least until the next elections in November of 2022.

In the end, the decision to have an Israeli war will be made by Netanyahu’s mood, his electoral calculations, and the ambiguity for power. That’s where we should look for the secret peace in Gaza and of war coming in other places.

Mohamad Kawas is a Lebanese political journalist and writer.
Turkey has dug a massive hole for itself in Syria

Whichever its plans are, it’s become clear that Ankara is increasingly sucked into the Syrian calamity — exactly at a time when it should be finding a way to get out.

Stephen Starr

Turkey has dug a massive hole for itself in Syria

Why Saudi rhetorical support for Palestinians matters

Rashmee Roshan Lall

King Salman’s robust assertion of Saudi support for Palestinians offers moral and political ballast to a careening movement.

That should we make of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud’s vexation of the centrality of the Palestinian issue to the Arab view of the region and the world? The king delivered the reassurance in his remarks to the Shoura Council on November 19. The annual monarchial address is meant to outline the kingdom’s priorities for the coming year. So, this much can at least be said: For the next year, so long as King Salman is on the throne, Saudi Arabia will continue to publicly reassert the Palestinian cause. Never mind the quibbling over the rhetorical or real nature of Saudi support for the Palestinians. King Salman’s words are important simply because he said them — and said them at this particular moment in time.

Palestinian refugees currently face an existential crisis like nothing before in their history. They face the prospect of being stripped of refugee status even though there is no imminent, satisfactory settlement available to them and no way they can go home and leave their place of temporary refuge, whether in Lebanon, and the bitherto internationally accepted definition of who is a Palestinian refugee. Is UNRWA’s 5-million-strong flock correctly described as refugees or should they be referred to in Turkey as the originally 700,000 people who fled British Mandate Palestine? The question is complex, emotional and potentially game changing. If there are 5 million Palestinian refugees today, it’s because successive generations of Palestinians descended from the original 700,000 who fled. British Palestine continues to remain in self-determination and statehood struggle. In this context, they are not refugees from their ancestral homeland. If the new Trumpian idea of Palestinian statehood was to be applied, it would sum many decades of struggle by these people who have ever valid, truly and always held.

This is, as Darwish said in 2009, “a country that is a dead matter, a tomb of a soul torn between daily questions, both national and existential... Being Palestinian is not a matter of residence, nor is it a citizen. The only way to be first prime minister, Jawahar- lal Nehru, once described the idea of Palestinian refugee status as a movement with regard to the implementation of the tripartite Sochi agreement. It is impossible to talk about reconciliation or deal making.

Ankergen’s long-term plan for the thousands of extremist fighters his government claims it can persuade to leave Idlib is anyone’s guess. Turkey may hope to eventually integrate them into mainstream societ- ty along the borders and use them to keep Kurds in the region from causing trouble. Last month, Turkey announced plans to bring further terri- tory in northern Syria under its control. But it is not clear how much in reality will be found that, more than two decades. That there is anyone’s guess. Turkey may hope to eventually integrate them into mainstream society along the borders and use them to keep Kurds in the region from causing trouble. Last month, Turkey announced plans to bring further territory in northern Syria under its control. But it is not clear how much in reality will be found that, more than two decades. That there is anyone’s guess. Turkey may hope to eventually integrate them into mainstream society along the borders and use them to keep Kurds in the region from causing trouble. Last month, Turkey announced plans to bring further territory in northern Syria under its control. But it is not clear how much in reality will be found that, more than two decades. That there is anyone’s guess. Turkey may hope to eventually integrate them into mainstream society along the borders and use them to keep Kurds in the region from causing trouble. Last month, Turkey announced plans to bring further territory in northern Syria under its control. But it is not clear how much in reality will be found that, more than two decades. That there is anyone’s guess. Turkey may hope to eventually integrate them into mainstream society along the borders and use them to keep Kurds in the region from causing trouble. Last month, Turkey announced plans to bring further territory in northern Syria under its control. But it is not clear how much in reality will be found that, more than two decades.
Tunisian authorities have reduced it to 10 on strengthening the policy of re-

outside the parliament.

Economists blame successive gov-

Estonia, at the joint press con-

The walkout postponed debate in

alas, no suggestions, on both sides, was

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In September, the IMF endorsed

10-11 in Marrakech.

Morocco's top trading partner, outstripping

the total GDP for the first time in the

Estonia’s top trading partner, outstripping

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Inflation is likely to remain a thorny

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The UGTT vowed to "escalate the

The Central Bank increased its

by local analysts as difficult because

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Morocco is doing all that is in its

counterparts, wrote El Pais.

The two prime ministers agreed

the deteriorating of the middle class’s

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez

Sanchez was accompanied by a govern-

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"If we were to go down the road of

On November 17, the IMF warned

"The easiest thing to do for him

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"Morocco has received Spain's

The European Union agreed in September to provide Morocco with 275 million in aid to help

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Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez

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A second look: The future of

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UN sanctions against militia leader fail to convince Libyan officials

Michel Cousins

Tunis

In early September, after clash-
es broke out in the southern city of Tripoli, the only working airport came under attack, the UN special emissary for Libya, Ghassan Salame, threat-
ed to impose sanctions on any-
one who endangered the city’s security.

When the airport was again at-
tacked a few days later, he repeated the threat but did not specify about it despite having said who he knew who the culprits were - a state of affairs that exposed him to considerable ridicule on Libya’s social media.

Last September, though, in what may have been a warning shot to the belligerents, the UN Security Council sanctioned Libya’s noto-
rious armed group, the 7th Brigade, be-
tween 2014 and 2016 blockaded Libya’s main eastern oil terminals at Zueitina, Sidra and Ras Lanuf and was accused on at least one occasion tried to recapture them, most recently in June.

On November 16, just three days after Salame again warned at the UN conference in Palermo that anyone threatening security in Tripoli would not be sanctioned by the UN Security Council added the name of the Misrata-based military com-
troller commander Salah Badi to its sanctions list, subjecting him to an asset freeze and travel ban.

Badi’s Sonnoma militia had taken a position to support militias fighting September/ Tripoli clashes in which more than several hundred of them civilians.

The move, at the initiative of the United States, UK and France, is seen as a calculated gesture by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), designed primar-
ily to send signals to other militias rather than an end in itself.

That there is more than meets the eye to the move is apparent in the statement by the US Treas-
ury Department, which replicated the sanctions. It claims that Badi’s Sonnoma brigade instigated the violent clashes in late August and that, on entering Tripoli, he had “called for support from other mil-
itia to attack the city, plunging it into turmoil.”

It was not Badi who initiated the August 27 attack on the south Tripoli-
ci suburbs. It was the Tarhouna-
based 7th Brigade, controlled by that town’s notorious Kaniat fam-
ily.

Badi joined the conflict along-
side the 7th Brigade in a joint effort to defeat the Tarhouna’s local militias, which are being retained at great expense to ensure security for the internationally installed President-

The sanctions are seen as a dem-

onstration of Salame’s determina-
tion to make his new security ar-
rangements for Tripoli work, but there are no sanctions against the commander of the 7th Brigade, nominally Arabi and his many brothers who control it, or against any of the Tripoli military com-
manders whose forces have been accused of numerous crimes in the capital.

While Badi is reported to be contemplating another attack on Tripoli, the 7th Brigade.

On November 14, two days before the Badi sanctions were unveiled, there were further clashes in the south of the city as the 7th Brigade tried to expand the territory it con-
trols near the closed Tripoli Inter-
national Airport.

Responding to the sanctions, a number of Libyan figures have crit-
cised their one-sidedness. State Council President Khalid al-Masri complained the sanctions were “selective” because “they did not include other parties that obstruct the political agreement.”

There is already a profound and angry belief that the international community and some individu-
als are playing with Libya’s destiny.

Another member of the State Council, Belgassem Sewehli, a leading political moderate, likewise ques-
tioned the decision. Sanctions, he said, would be “more convincing and more equitable” if they includ-
ed all those in the country who had committed crimes against human-
ity. “Where is the rest of the list?” he asked.

The previous State Council head, Abdulrahman Sewehli, also joined in the fray, describing the move as “selective” and “likely to backfire because it would cause polarisa-
tion.”

Like Badi, Ghat and Sewehli are from Libya’s militarily power-
ful city of Misrata, and their com-
ments are seen by some as a clos-
ing of ranks. In the city itself, there was a small demonstration by Badi supporters against the UN deci-
sion. While he has called on some de-
termined support, Badi is far from widely popular in his hometown and prior to getting involved in the south Tripoli attacks was forced to leave for Turkey.

No friend of his, the municipal council too criticised the UN for being so selective. Singling him out weakened the validity of sanc-
tions, it said, demanding action against all politicians and military leaders “who toy with the security and stability of Libya.”

The wording of the municipal statement was diplomatic and de-
liberate, aimed at preventing any local backlash in support of Badi and ensuring continued backing for the city’s other military son, Fathi Bashagha, now interior min-
ister for the Presidency Council that Badi wants to topple.

The wider Libyan public sees the Palermo conference as a waste of time and is far more concerned with continued soaring prices and making ends meet. Members of the public appear to concur with the comments of the council that the Badi sanctions were an empty gesture that will do nothing to ad-

ress the issue.

There is already a profound and angry belief that the international community and some individual countries are playing with Libya’s destiny. Whether or not that’s true, the Badi sanctions in the wake of Palermo are likely to further that view.

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

Thomas M. Hill and Emily Estelle

Since the ouster of Muamm-
ar Gaddafi in 2011, success-
ful US administrations have 
patched Libya’s continuing 
collapse, believing that the coun-
try’s instability threatens only Eu-

rope. This is a mistake.

Gaddafi’s fall left much of Libya ungoverned or controlled by mili-
tias, criminal gangs and the Islamic State (ISIS) and other terrorists.

The state’s breakdown opened the floodgates to hundreds of thou-
ds of migrants, criminal gang activity, modern-day slave traders. ISIS and other terrorist threats and spreading in-
stability across northern Africa.

It is, however, in Europe, where Russia has a long history of en-
going in, and taxing, illicit activi-
es, that the international political and security crisis, helping to spawn terrorist threats and spreading in-
stability across northern Africa.

Russia, which is building in-
fluence in Libya, has an opportunity to exploit the migrant crisis there.

Libya’s migrant crisis isn’t just a European problem

Troubled waters. Migrants travel in a Libyan Navy boat to the coastal city of Tripoli after being rescued when their boat broke down. (Reuters)

Many of the 5,000 migrants rescued by Libyan authorities near the town of Zawiyah, between 2014 and 2016 blockaded Libya’s main eastern oil terminals at Zueitina, Sidra and Ras Lanuf and was accused on at least one occasion tried to recapture them, most recently in June. An asset freeze and travel ban.

US policy to Libya also as-
sumes that the UN-led political reconciliation process will engen-

erize a central governing authority, which will, in turn, eradicate symptoms of political dysfunction, irregular migration and terrorism among them. Migration, however, is part of a larger system of corrupt-
ions, drug running and terrorism that drives the conflict.

Oil has been allowed people with guns – with real power – to resist any political resolution that would disrupt their highly profit-
able businesses. Breaking this cycle of instability is critical.

Today, Libya is a fertile envi-
roment for ISIS and al-Qaeda to metastasise and launch attacks against US interests in the region and abroad. While US military inter-
ventions have stopped such groups from controlling major cities and the country’s infrastructure, they have not eliminated the threat. ISIS is resurgent in central Libya just two years after a US-backed opera-
tion ousted the group from the city of Sirte. The United Nations envoy to Libya recently warned that ISIS’
The Trump team’s bet on Saudi Arabia as an anti-Iran pillar makes strategic sense but if it cannot bear alone the weight Trump has placed on it.

Kyle Orton

Syria

US losing control in Syria as Russia-Iran axis gains ground

Kyle Orton

Viewpoint

US President Donald Trump may have walked right into the tightrope between the Turks, his country’s historic NATO ally, and Kurdish benefactors on the Syrian battlefield. On a personal level, Trump seems to sincerely believe in Kurdish nationalism and sees them as vital allies in the war on terror, often speaking of”our Kurdish brethren in Iraq and Kurdish allies in Syria” as a significant asset in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS). The Kurds are the only militarized faction on the Syrian battlefield that has been allowed to retain a significant presence in the north of the country, even in areas that at times were controlled by ISIS. This has given the Kurds a significant voice in shaping the conflict in Syria, and their role is likely to continue to be significant even after ISIS is defeated. Despite the change of lines by establishing relations with the Iranian threat but it cannot afford to lose influence in Syria, under-wrote through the Astana process. By 2018, the Astana process had brought the southern provinces of Syria under the control of the Syrian government, paving the way for the reunification of the country. This process has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of foreign fighters in the region, and a decrease in the level of violence in the conflict. Despite the progress made, however, there are still many challenges that need to be overcome, and the conflict in Syria is far from over.
Political Islam in Egypt

**Viewpoint**

Egyp't, Raslan draws the map of Salafist movements

**Hisham Al-Najjar**

The Egyptian minister of endowments, a fervent Salafist, recently revoked the preaching license of a cleric named Saeed Raslan, a well-known Salafist preacher at the Madkhali school of Salafism. The move came at a time when the interior minister revoked the preaching license of Med Saeed Raslan, a long-standing Salafist preacher. It is the second such ban imposed on Islamist movements Khaled Okasha said the ban imposed on Raslan might turn out to be a pass-

Raslan, a student of Madkhali school founder Rabee' ibn Hadi Al-Madkhali, has become a symbol and reference for Madkhali Salafism, which was designed by experts in religious movements, particularly when the discourse of women's rights, multiplicity of faiths and dealing with Copts. This is an Egyptian phenomenon on the political stage. Okasha said the ban imposed on Raslan in his sermons must have pricked the minis-

Raslan's position with respect to the Muslim Brotherhood is clear, he's totally against them. Raslan has often given scathing criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood and other jihadi Salafist movements. The reason and expressions he usually uses in these attacks are full of political significance.

However, the fact remains that Raslan's approach is a pure tra-

Salafist one. This is why many fear the risk of losing the mosque platforms belonging to the group to be used to further spread Salafist ideologies and radical ideas that clash with the state's vision on many topics the state wishes to retain influence.

Many also fear the pragmatic opportunism that Salafist move-

ments have shown since the revolu-

tion of January 2011. They have changed colors and directions, depending on the general mood of the period and reverted to their former selves once the danger passed.

People did not forget how the Salafists had opposed the revolu-

tion and declared taking part in it religiously illegal. Later, they took advantage of the revolution and its consequences. They have been staunch defenders of the revolution and de-

alyzed the Muslim Brotherhood's project to participate in the legis-

lative elections sacrilegious. Later, they participated in all elections. The same scenario happened with respect to their position concerning the 2013 constitution. At first, they opposed any form of institutionalization and opted to remain as a proselytizing movement but then turned to political and hierarchical movement very similar to the Muslim Brothers in terms of the latter's planning and organisational details. When the opportunity to vote the political work opened, scores of Salafist bodies were quickly formed the Building and Development Party, and which calls for a new religious discourse.

Salafist preachers refuse to fol-

low the requirements of the plan and preach opposing views and dogmas, especially in the areas of women's rights, minorities' rights, and dealing with Copts. This opposition embarrases the govern-

ment and hinders its actions.

Rellying on its religious institu-

tions, the Egyptian government is moving in this direction, which was designed by experts in religious movements, particularly when the discourse of women's rights, multiplicity of faiths and dealing with Copts. This is an Egyptian phenomenon on the political stage. Okasha said the ban imposed on Raslan in his sermons must have pricked the minis-

An interview on the website of the party dated October 13, 2018, said that the party backed the upcoming presidential elections, whereas some parties have called for a boycott. A 2013 file picture shows a supporter of Jamaa Islamiya chanting slogans in support of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo. (Reuters)

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Lebanon’s independence celebrations cannot hide the risks it faces

Makram Rabah

Lebanon’s celebrations cannot hide the risks it faces

The Lebanese are under the assumption that the country has achieved the continued Western recognition of the international community, which on many occasions has extended political and economic aid, especially in times of need. This streak of good luck seems to be running out for Lebanon, as it is gradually losing favor with many of the Western countries that no longer see this failing democracy as the regional beacon of freedom it once was.

The US sanctions against Iran and its regional allies squeeze Lebanon’s current predicament, as primarily Hezbollah, which is represented in the Lebanese government, exposes the country and its feeble economy even further. Yet most Lebanese, including government officials, at least publicly claim to be fully aware of the scope of these sanctions, which they simply wave off as insipid.

Unfortunately, the reality is very different. These punitive measures represent a formidable obstacle that the country’s economy and, to a large extent, the people of Lebanon will have to face soon. Financial sanctions intensify the Lebanese government’s financial situation with sickening effect, squeezing Iran’s operators, particularly Hezbollah, while blocking its financial flows and thereby its weapons.

Unfortunately, the unpredictable future sanctions that might re-quire him to simply concede to the bullying of Iran’s operators.

Despite frailties, Lebanon has reason to celebrate

Samar Kadi

Lebanon is a nation of contradictions – small in size and an island of hope in the middle of the sea. It has been a place of opportunity, freedom, and democratic freedoms that are rarely enjoyed in the region. Lebanon is a country, which for decades offered its people a relatively democratic system, a university, and a testament to the incredible health care, proper transportation and communication. In short, good governance by politicians free of corruption.

Now Lebanon is under the Western sanctions that are expected to continue. Hezbollah and forces it to find innovative ways to continue its financial transactions and avoid the US sanctions. Without these sanctions, Hezbollah would not be able to continue its operations and its financial activities. The sanctions will not stop Hezbollah, but they will stop its financial operations.

Lebanon’s celebrations cannot hide the risks it faces

Makram Rabah is a lecturer at the American University of Beirut and author of “A Campus at War: Student Politics at the American University of Beirut, 1967-1975.”

Samar Kadi is the Arab Weekly Society and Travel sections editor.
Ramallah

The hollow victories of Hamas

The reality on the ground. Palestinian villagers react after Israeli security forces demolished a house in an area south of Yatta in the occupied West Bank, on October 17.

The hollow victories of Hamas

Geoffrey Aronson

A Letter from Palestine

A spacious but the

The Hamas-Fatah split looks un- bridgable – a gift to Israel that keeps on giving. The scientific lead- ership of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) has been re- duced to managing the West Bank and Gaza. Hamas won the last Palestinian elections over a deca- de ago but has failed to convert this mandate into the kind of sovereign- ty that expands Palestinian horizons and promotes rather than strangles the prospects of a new generation. Israel’s success in the present and invisible – like the sunshine and moon, an unmark- able part of the scene. Young peo- ple, in particular, accommodate the institutions created by Oslo – the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its security agencies, the ministries and most significantly the separa- tion barrier that defines their hori- zons figuratively and literally. Given this, prescognitives in Ramallah focus on the PA’s fatalism and dubious and dangerous exag- geration, to convert this mandate into the kind of sovereign- ty that expands Palestinian horizons and promotes rather than strangles the prospects of a new generation. Israel’s success in the present and invisible – like the sunshine and moon, an unmark- able part of the scene. Young peo- ple, in particular, accommodate the institutions created by Oslo – the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its security agencies, the ministries and most significantly the separa- tion barrier that defines their hori- zons figuratively and literally. Given this, prescognitives in Ramallah focus on the PA’s fatalism and dubious and dangerous exag- geration, to promote rather than strangle the prospects of a new generation.

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New laws for human rights in Turkey

Yaşar Baydar

The arrogant tone adopted by Erdogan and his cabinet ministers towards Western institutions and figures is now expected in Ankara.

It is increasingly argued that Erdogan is actively looking for a new norm in Turkey. “You have left nothing of the rule of law?” recently wrote Professor Basim Ohran, one of Turkey’s most prominent analysts on domestic and foreign policy. “Let alone international law, you have been breaching the legislation of the Turkish Republic.”

The professor went on to explain exactly how he was addressing it. It is “the One Man Regime,” he said. adding, “I will not call you to rule the metropolis, because after all these things that happened, it’s very difficult, but don’t worry, they’re on the law, that’s all.”

Ohran was obviously addressing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his inner circle. What made him write such a strong piece was the Turkish president’s open defiance of a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

It had come in a case in which a group of jailed Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas and another who has been held for two years as a “political prisoner” and must be released immediately.

The Turkish government’s respecto in answering Erdogan’s furious remarks. He declared it a “coup” and railed against it.

In the course of one week, the Turkish president had also been accused of committing human rights violations while being held for two years as a “political prisoner” and must be released immediately.

The Turkish government’s responses to such attacks were Erdogan’s furious remarks. He declared it a “coup” and railed against it.

The arrogant tone adopted by Erdogan and his cabinet ministers towards Western institutions and figures is now expected in Ankara.

The outrageous against the ECHR, reflected in the government-controlled media in the form of screaming headlines, preceded a key visit by two leading EU figures to Ankara last month.

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 29, 2019 — Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) for whom the EU is an ally, has been in power since 2003. The court, which he has previously denied any rule of law, is the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). It has come in a case in which a group of jailed Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas and another who has been held for two years as a “political prisoner” and must be released immediately.

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I

Too many stakes for Iran to back out from Syria

Simon Speakman Cordall

I

t the Kurdish parties in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) oc-
guit a poor score in the country’s presidential election and in the war against the Islamic State. The results of this election, along with theHELPERS. "US policy in Syria has shifted from a focus on regime change to a focus on the defeat of IS. This is a good thing, but it is not enough. The US needs to do more to support the Syrian opposition and to encourage a peaceful transition to a democratic government."

Aly Alfoneh

Baghdad torn between Tehran’s pressures and US sanctions

Iraqi President Barham Salih’s visits to Tehran on Novem-
ber 17 and Riyadh a day later reflect the delicate balance Baghdad seeks to maintain in a region where two powerful neighbours battle for supremacy. The biggest challenge for Baghdad, however, is Washington’s unilaterally imposed economic sanctions against Iran. Can Salih maintain the balance between Tehran on the one hand and Washington and its allies on the other? If so, how?

Receiving Salih, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned the Iraqi president against “certain ill-intentioned governments and states, which do not want the people of Iraq to taste victory... and do not want Iraq and the region to experience calm.” This further warned against “some governments, within and outside of the region, who bear extreme grudges against Islam... and interfere in internal affairs of Iraq.”

However, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries did not prevent Khamenei from making the following statement about the situation in Iraq: “Formation of The Popular Mobilisation Forces in the struggle against terrorism is an example of relying on the youth, and it must be preserved.”

The Popular Mobilisation Forces are an umbrella organisation composed of various Shia militias, some of which are supported by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps rather than the Iraqi government. In Iraq’s recent parliamentary elections, several of those militias were able to secure a majority of seats in the parliament known as the Fatah Alliance. Doubling up as political pariahs, they are an umbrella organisation composed of various Shia militias, some of which report to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps rather than the Iraqi government. In Iraq’s recent parliamentary elections, several of those militias were able to secure a majority of seats in the parliament known as the Fatah Alliance. Doubling up as political pariahs, they are an umbrella organisation composed of various Shia militias, some of which report to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps rather than the Iraqi government. In Iraq’s recent parliamentary elections, several of those militias were able to secure a majority of seats in the parliament known as the Fatah Alliance. Doubling up as political pariahs, they are

The biggest challenge for Baghdad is Washington’s unilaterally imposed economic sanctions against the Iran.

Any boosting of the Iran-Iraq economic relationship may also be seen as a prelude to large-scale circumvention of American sanctions. Iran will most likely rebrand Iranian products, including oil, as Iraqi in order to maintain its exports to the world market. This will doubtless increase transaction costs for Tehran, but it will help the regime secure foreign currency flows under the sanctions.

Despite Washington’s opposition, it is little that can be done about this. This is partly because of the pacifico-war economic sanctions imposed on the Shia militias. And there is little that Washington can do about the non-tariff barriers imposed on Iranian exports to Iraq in the face of “meeting domestic demand.” This shows Tehran’s willingness and ability to hold Baghdad hostage in its row with Washington. Time will tell if Washington is willing and able to devise a strategy for Iraq that weakens Tehran’s leverage over Baghdad.
Iran is betting on Iran at expense of Iraq

**Mahmud el-Shafey**

In November 2018, the European Union (EU) expressed cautionary support for new economic sanctions against Iran at a time when it is increasingly reliant on Iran to supply fuel to keep a nuclear deal that has already been abandoned by the United States.

The news comes after representatives from 28 of the 28 EU members expressed concern about Iran's role in fueling terrorist attacks in their countries. "The EU held a renewed discussion about common steps against Iran," Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Samuelsen told reporters after the Nov. 16 meeting in Brussels, where the EU did not elaborate on what precise steps were envisaged.

The EU has traditionally been in favor of a softer line towards Tehran, according to diplomats, who are concerned about the impact of the EU's economic support for a softer line towards Tehran. "We have seen many terrorist plots directed against EU citizens, including Thalys and Paris, and the EU is not a soft target. We need to take a harder stance in dealing with Iran," Samuelsen said.

The EU, which has been accused of appeasement in recent years, is not an adult, nor is it an adolescent to be feared simply because its oil wealth has attracted all kinds of evil aspects. It's a concentration of what ought to be feared simply because its oil wealth has attracted all kinds of evil aspects. It's a concentration of what ought to be feared simply because its oil wealth has attracted all kinds of evil aspects. It's a concentration of what ought to be feared simply because its oil wealth has attracted all kinds of evil aspects.

The truth of the matter is that it is in the interest of the EU to use its economic leverage to influence Iran's behavior.

**By supporting the Iran-affiliated Iraqi government, the Europeans prefer to use Iran's payment as a bargaining chip in talks over US sanctions.**

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**Europe is betting on Iran at expense of Iraq**

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**Under pressure, European Union Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini speaks to the media in Brussels, on October 16.**

(Zarif has sought to paint a rosy picture of Iran's economic future, despite the prospect of US sanctions. "We will certainly survive. We will not only survive, we will thrive. We have tried to minimise the impact on the population but the ordinary people are going to suffer, the economy is going to suffer," he said after a meeting with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson.)

However, analysts say that with the EU's sanctions imposed earlier this month, particularly on Iraqi oil exports, Europe will be de-bilitating to Tehran, further raising questions about the country's 'transient' posture in Europe.

"In the medium and long term, then, the latest US sanctions could make things very difficult for Iran," said Michael Tanchum, a fellow at the Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace in an article in Foreign Policy magazine.

"As long as Washington can prevent it from obtaining vital enhanced of recovery technologies, Iran's economy will become increasingly fragile."
Iceland's solidarity with Palestinians unshaken since independence recognition

Yousef Alhelou

London

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is observed on November 29 every year. The United Nations General Assembly established this day in 1967 to mark the decision of the United Nations to show solidarity with the Palestinian people and to call for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

On November 29, 2011, Iceland became the first western European country to recognise Palestine as an independent state, and it has since maintained this position. This recognition is significant because it marks a growing trend among European countries to support the Palestinian cause.

However, Iceland's support for Palestine dates back even further. In 1994, the Icelandic-Palestinian Friendship Association was established, with the goal of raising awareness of and solidarity for the Palestinian cause.

Palmadotti, who is the vice-president of the association, said. "Over the past years we have made great efforts and I can say that the support for Palestine now is 95%. We held many meetings with representatives of the government and members of the various parties. Occasionally we organise solidarity events involving the small Arab community and conduct various educational activities."

Al-Tamimi stressed that Iceland, a NATO member and active in the United Nations, is one of Palestine's biggest supporters in Europe, supporting pro-Palestine resolutions in the UN. "The Palestinian leadership should take advantage of the Icelandic diplomatic support and benefit from our presence, connections and provide us with the logistical and cultural heritage exhibitions such as Dibkah performance for example," said Al-Tamimi.

"We asked our embassy in Oslo to help us translate some of the poems of the great poet Mahmoud Darwish into the Icelandic language and we are waiting for their response," she said. "I was astonished to learn from Professor [that there is a so-called] "accidental fire in Palestine," that is taught in Icelandic secondary schools. It tells the story of a Palestinian girl who was accidentally killed by a British soldier that was planning to kill her father during the British mandate for Palestine between 1919 and 1948. The killing continues in Palestine. But so does the solidarity of the Icelandic people."

Yousef Alhelou is a Palestinian journalist living in London.
Turkey's government faces slowing growth, record inflation

The Turkish government is struggling with record inflation, steep output decline and a growing sense of economic dislocation a year before crucial local elections. Inflation hit a record-high annual rate of 25.5%, the highest level in 15 years. The country's central bank raised its key interest rate for this year from 13.4% to 23.5% and said it would continue to target an inflation rate of 15.2%, up from an estimate of 9.3%. Unemployment stands at 11.2% but is almost twice as high for the 15-24 age bracket, official figures indicate. Trade unions say the real numbers are much higher.

Turkey's economy is in a crisis, Erkut Erdogdu, less optimistic. The rating agency said about promises of fiscal discipline because the move fanned doubts about Erdogan's ability to manage the economy. The lira took a new hit on Monday as Moody's cut its ratings on Turkey's sovereign debt, four out of five Turkish respondents said there is a crisis. More than 40% of potential voters asked told the Metropol polling firm they were concerned that inflation would rise.

Erdogan's approval rating dipped to less than 40% for the first time since 2016, Moody's said. In a survey for another, another polling firm, named the Democracy as Turkey's most important problem, the Hurriyat newspaper reported.

As the economy tightened, some of Erdogan's trademark policies are coming under scrutiny. The government of the year-old veteran leader has overseen several big infrastructure projects, such as new bridges and airports, using a series of mega contracts that let private companies build and run assets before turning them over to the state.

A recent report by Turkey's Court of Accounts showed the government suffered losses of hundreds of millions of dollars because it had to pay compensation to companies operating two new bridges and airports.

The opacity of the government has failed to steer the country in the right direction. The government is unable to manage the economy, while the citizen pays the bill,” opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu was quoted as saying.

Kilicdaroglu's Republican People's Party (CHP) is the main rival of Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in local elections scheduled for March 31. Although the local vote will not decide Erdogan's fate as president, the election will include high profile races, such as mayoral elections in Istanbul, Ankara and Istanbul. The AKP aims to hold on to mayoral posts in Istanbul and Ankara, the CHP holds the mayoral post in Izmir.

The elections will be the first political test for any president as he faces the imminent economic crisis that came after the elections, including pumping money into an economy already on anaesthetics, Erdemir wrote. “Taking advantage of his near-total control of media, he will also try to deflect the electorate's attention from economic issues to polemics around Turkey’s deep cultural cleavages.”

The Turkish president will try to find a way to postpone the elections, including pump money into an economy already on anaesthetics.

According to a tweet from Abdu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, ADNOC’s growth plan will include “gas strategy to enable ADNOC to become self-sufficient and a net exporter.”

ADNOC also reported the recent discovery of 17 trillion cubic feet of gas, adding 7.1% to existing reserves. For the past decade, Qatar has been supplying as much as 1.5 trillion cubic feet of gas per day to Europe.

Libya sees currency stabilising next year

Libya expects to end a long-running liquidity crisis by early 2019, as a foreign currencies regulator, the official and black market exchange rates converge at less than 1 dinar to the dollar, the Tripoli-based deputy prime minister said on November 20.

The chain between the two rates has enabled armed groups and their allies to reap vast profits from oil sales, regulators have blamed after gas off that ADNOC that could still experience a significant economic downturn if it fails.

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Libya’s government faces a significant economic downturn if it fails to fund the conflict that has engulfed Libya since 2011. Mean-while, ordinary Libyans, reliant on imports of everything from milk to meat, have seen living standards tumble. The Tripoli government hopes its currency reforms will help restore confidence in the economy and chart a way out of the turmoil by putting the armed groups out of business.

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Morocco expects economic dividends from high-speed trains

Saad Guerreoud

Morocco’s launch of Africa’s first high-speed train has given it a big impact on the North African country’s economy, said experts and officials.

Moroccan King Mohammed VI and French President Emmanuel Macron inaugurated November 15 the made-in France high-speed train, named “Al Boraq,” riding it from Tangier to Rabat.

“Al Boraq,” derived from the Islamic tradition, evokes “speed and travel,” according to Morocco’s National Railway Office (ONCF).

The inauguration had been planned for 2015 but was hampered by the lengthy exposition procedures.

Tangler will now be 2 hours, 10 minutes from Casablanca by train instead of almost 3 hours as Morocco modernises its public transport infrastructure to boost its international image as a leading African hub for foreign investors.

The €1.4 billion investment in the high-speed line, including 260km of tracks and state-of-the-art train stations, is well below average European costs for a similar project.

Economic expert El Mehdi Faik said the high-speed train would have a tremendous added value on Morocco’s economy because it links the country’s most important economic engines.

“The LGV linking Tangier to Casablanca, Morocco’s major economic and industrial cities, going through Rabat and Kenitra, which is an emerging industrial hub,” Faik said.

“Tangier-Kenitra will now become much easier from Casablanca thanks to the high-speed train as it was a painful journey to make. It’s a single railway line between Kenitra and Tangier,” Faik said, adding that the LGV would also boost local tourism.

ONCF Director Mohamed Raïb Khlie said the new railway line would play a major role in expanding Tangier-Med, citing the example of French manufacturer PSA’s Group’s moving to Kenitra after obtaining guarantees from the government that the vehicles produced in the western city can be transported to Tangier-Med port.

PSA is the second largest French car manufacturer to have moved to Morocco after Renault, which set up its own manufacturing plant in the Kenitra region in 2003.

Despite flaws, any delay in the construction of an LGV track, which will be ready by 2020, is a major employment crisis for neighbouring countries for “scheming to crush economic growth,” as he told Daily Fin. “Basic needs are not met,” he claimed, slamming the bill for its expenditure tool to punish the popular masses.

Proposed projects are nearly identical to those that have been presented 50% of the overall cost of the transport project, “said Khlie.

“The ticket prices are more cost-effective than in the West because the majority of the work was done by Moroccan firms, which represented 95% of the overall cost of the project,” said Khlie.

Fakir emphasised the importance of the expertise gained by Moroccan engineering firms from their French counterparts.

“The know-how gained by Moroccan engineers will allow ONCF to expand its high-speed line business in both Morocco and Africa in the future,” said Fakir.

“The Tangier-Kenitra line will run at a top speed of 250km per hour. However, the rest of the Kenitra-Rabat-Casablanca route will take a third lane that will allow the LGV to run at 26km per hour for conventional trains pending the construction of an LGV track, which will be ready by 2020.

Civil society groups complained that ONCF has harmed the environment, including through deforestation, during the construction process but ONCF insisted it has reforested 2,300 hectares of forests, compared with 130 hectares defor-ested, in line with international environment standards.

The LGV is expected to be operational by the end of November and 6 million passengers are expected to have used it after three years of operation, easing the burden on the often-broken-down conventional trains.

Macron inaugurated November 15 and French President Emmanuel Macron (L) and Morocco’s King Mohammed VI attend the launch ceremony of Africa’s first high-speed train (LGV) in Tangier, November 15, 2018 (Reuters)

Economy

Iraq’s budgetary woes grow audibly

Nazi Falari

Despite flaws, any delay in the ratification of next year’s budget would be most felt by disenfranchised communities and displaced people.

A special report on the preferred choice of ministers to oversee Iraq’s oil and defence institutions raises, the draft budget bill for 2019 is proving calamitously unpopuland intractable to parliaments alike.

As Iraq’s oil production capacity incrementally increases so does the potential to allocate funds in high-priority areas. Experience reveals a litany of missed opportu-
nities. However, as similar chances surface, will budgetary policies change under Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi’s government and can they drive change in a country whose institutions are administered poorly?

Despite his credentials as a former oil minister, Abdul-Mahdi is yet to win the backing of his cabinet and his constituency over the draft budget. Another point of conten-
tion is that the bill was drafted during the latest stages of Haider al-Abadi’s tenure as prime minister but passed after he left government in late October.

Budgetary allocations for the next fiscal year have been slammed by prominent lawmakers as inher-
eadily deinstitutionalised and out of sync with the needs and demands of the Iraqi people.

Federal decisions and the un-

derpinning philosophy guiding the draft, as some criticised, offer no real solutions to the economic hur-

Then the matter lies in the hands of a special committee, headed by Finance Minister Fuad Hussein, appointed by Abdul-Mahdi. Its role responsibilities is to redress the absence of reconstruction expendi-
tures and other contentious provi-
sions, a mission in which ordinary parliament and civil society have little say.

Nazi Falari is an independent journalist whose writings and films focus on Iraq’s recent past and contemporary political scene.

Iraq’s budgetary woes grow audibly
**Society**

**Fears of ‘language war’ in Algeria over status of Tamazight**

**Lamine Ghanmi**

**Tunis**

Berber students in Algeria’s mountainous Kabylie region walked out of school to protest the government’s neglect of their native tongue, Tamazight.

Protests began October 22 at a high school in Beni-Zmenzer, 35km south of Tizi Ouzou, Kabylie’s main city, and spread to schools in Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia and Bouira provinces. Students walked out of class and chanted slogans demanding Tamazight classes, which are not offered in all areas of the country.

“If there is no Tamazight everywhere, no to the other language here,” the students chanted, referring to Arabic.

The pro-Tamazight demonstrations occurred after parents in the eastern Arab-speaking Jijel province pulled their children out of schools to protest required Tamazight classes.

Their frustration was fuelled by Islamist parliament member Nama Salhi, who posted a video on social media lambasting the spread of the language.

“My daughter is a student at a private school where most students are (from) Kabylie,” said Salhi. “Out of innocence, she began learning Tamazight. I did not oppose that since teaching the language has become mandatory at school but I told her: ‘If you hear uttering one word in Tamazight at home, I will kill you.”

In Algeria, Islamists defend Arabic as the dominant language, pointing out that it is the language of the Quran. Reformists, however, say promoting Tamazight is key to preserving the country’s Berber identity and fostering multiculturalism, individual rights and decentralisation. Government leaders have lent credence to this view, with Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika blaming translation for destroying Algerian culture, identity, language and traditions.

In 2002, three years after Bouteflika took office, he changed its constitution to name Tamazight as an “official and national” language alongside Arabic. The government vowed to “promote and develop the language in all its linguistic varieties” and established the “Algerian academy for the Tamazight language.”

However, analysts said the Algerian government’s official measures to promote Tamazight did not translate to change on the local level and that the quality Tamazight textbooks and teachers was lacking. They noted that the recent protests showed more should be done to reduce tensions between ethnic groups and encourage tolerance and multiculturalism.

“It is a worrying development because the protests question the principle of pluralism, including linguistic plurality and tolerance and accepting others despite their differences,” said Algerian political writer Samir Leslous, adding that there was a level of outrage “not seen since the ‘Berber spring’ in April 1980.”

**In Algeria, Islamists defend Arabic as the dominant language, pointing out that it is the language of the Quran.**

That year, Berber protesters demanded an end to what they called the “Arabic-Islamic apartheid,” which they said jeopardised their language and identity. At least 166 people died during the demonstrations.

In 2011, the Tamazight language was promoted and generalised across all Algerian regions while Tamazight is not promoted and generalised across all Algeria,” he said.

The moderate Berber movement Rally for Kabylie, however, warned Berber speakers against attempts to impose Tamazight on all Algerians.

“It is healthy and salutary to say loudly and clearly that enough is enough with the provocations, insults and disparaging of Berber identity and Tamazight language but it is urgent and crucial to avoid being carried away into a language war,” the group said in statement.

Algeria’s approach to Tamazight could be a test for Morocco and Libya, which have their own substantial Berber communities.

In 2001, the Tamazight language made a revival in both Morocco and Libya. Morocco recognised Tamazight as an official language and Berber activists in Libya introduced Tamazight textbooks, dictionaries, magazines and radio stations.

However, a national committee drafting Libya’s constitution ignored calls to officially recognise the language, which had been suppressed during the 42-year rule of Muammar Qaddafi.

**Difficult balance?**

The Berber flag flutters next to the national Algerian flag in Ath Mendes, south of Tizi Ouzou.

( AFP)

**Viewpoint**

New project for religious reform in Morocco focuses on Hadith

**Imrid al-Kabouri**

Moroccan King Mohammed VI has initiated a religious reform project focused on the Prophet Mohammad’s sayings – the Hadith – and aimed at protecting them from manipulation by extremists who would use distortions for dubious purposes or by those who abuse them. The concept stems from Al Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez, and concerns all aspects of the Hadith.

The measures, delivered by Hadith specialists, are to be broadcast on a weekly basis on variety of outlets, including the Mohammed VI television channel for the Holy Quran, the Mohammed VI radio station for the Holy Quran, the internet and social media. The lessons will be interactive, allowing the audience to ask questions.

The project is the continuation of a programme started in 2005 with the establishment of the Mohammed VI radio and television channels for the Holy Quran, an initiative seeking to ease access to proper religious awareness and to educate people about pressing religious issues.

Religious ignorance provides extremists the opportunity to distort concepts, particularly among young people. The 2005 project is considered widely successful. The radio and TV stations have attracted large audiences in Morocco and other African countries.

For nearly two decades, Morocco has been engaged in a battle to eliminate religious extremism, from clerical sermons to education and general religious culture. Ten years ago, the Moham med VI radio and television Quran channels commenced broadcasting, the state revived the scientific chairs, a tradition long held at the Al Qarawiyyin mosque. These teaching chairs were public lessons in which theology and religious practice were discussed. The lectures were broadcast by TV and radio stations, reaching millions of people.

If the new project represents an extension of what has been constructed in Morocco’s religious reform edifice, it would provide a channel linking the scholarly class with the general public. In 2009, King Mohammed VI announced the Charter of Scholars, which was based on two pillars. The first concerned training imams and religious counselors so they could communicate with lay people. The second pillar focused on providing proper religious education to all citizens.

Morocco’s theological traditions and practices provided the ideological framework for these initiatives, which were essential in combating religious extremism.

Imrid al-Kabouri is a Moroccan writer.
Lost generation. Syrian children wait to leave their refugee camp in the Lebanese city of Arsal, last July. (AFP)

T he refugee crisis in the Middle East threatens long-term damage to the "region's development and to breed a new generation of radicalised youths, the head of the Middle East and North Africa Bureau of the United Nations' refugee agency said.

"We cannot empty the Middle East of its minorities. That's an easy way out and we should fight that in every way," Amin Awad, UNHCR director for the Middle East and North Africa Bureau, said in an impassioned speech at the Middle East Institute.

"This is a huge number – the biggest displacement of our time," Awad said at the institute's annual conference in November.

Wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen that have forced millions of people to leave their homes "weaken havoc on the development of these countries," Awad said.

The wars caused "displacement of generations of people that are at a very productive age," he said.

Displacement is particularly grave in Syria, where more than seven years of civil war have led to 6 million people fleeing the country and another 6 million becoming internally displaced in Syria. "We have millions of refugees and IDPs who lost seven years," Awad said. "A child who was 6 or 7 at the beginning of that war today is 15 and did not have an education. There are children who were 12 or 13 at the beginning of the war and are 18 and lost that very important six years of their lives. They are graduating into the world with no junior high or high school degrees."

A generation of young people without education and hope will impair Syria's development and create "a breeding ground for radicalisation and war," Awad said.

When workers with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees surveyed Syrian refugees who fled the Middle East for Europe, the reason they cited most frequently for leaving was the lack of education for their children. "They were coming from countries that had a 93% literacy rate. It was killing the parents to see their children sitting – sitting – in the same tent and not going to school. They picked up their children and started walking," Awad said.

Award's brutal assessment came as the United Nations and the international community struggled to negotiate an end to the Syrian war and as fighting continues in Yemen, Libya and the Palestinian territories and the Islamic State (ISIS) begins a resurgence in Iraq and Syria. Middle East refugees flooded Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon and many went to Europe, causing political tensions across the continent.

Award appeared to chastise the international community by not- ing that the refugee crises of the 1990s were handled much bet- ter following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. "But in the 2000s, we are not near there," Awad said. "The average displacement now continues for 17 years."

Syria, Yemen and Iraq face ma- jor challenges in resettling the millions of refugees and displaced people. Yemen, with 2.1 million displaced people, is facing the most serious situation. 1.9 million of Yemen's 11.8 million people are facing horrible famines of our time, may- be of the last few centuries," Awad said.

Syria needs to guarantee return- ing residents physical security, education and health services and faces major obstacles because "the destruction is huge."

A generation of youth without education and hope will impair Syria's development and create "a breeding ground for radicalisation and war," Awad said.

In Iraq, some of the 3.5 million displaced people have begun to return but the country must figure out how to welcome back religious minorities, such as Christians and Yazidis, who were removed from their long-time homes.

"Evacuating Christian minori- ties to Western Europe and far be- yond is not a solution. These peo- ple have been there for thousands of years. They have a history. They have a heritage. They have prop- erties and they have treasures," Awad said. "We cannot empty the Middle East of its minorities. That's an easy way out and we should fight that in every way."

Gun shops thrive in Baghdad, further aggravating insecurity

Oumayma Omar

Baghdad

T he wide-spread possession of arms in Iraq does not raise eyebrows; however, the legalisation of weapon sales that resulted in a thriving business is a new development in a country that is largely lawless.

In the Baghdadi neighbourhood of Mansour, gun shops have been opening allowing a law was passed last August allowing citizens to carry firearms, semi-automatic rifles and other assault weapons after obtaining official au- thorisation.

"The mechanism for buying weapons has been created by legisla- tion and abides by the rules of the Interior Ministry," says Abu Sajjad, a salamman in the Niz Al Sahara desert said a gun shop who asked to be identified by his nickname.

"The sale cannot be concluded before the client obtains an official permit from the Ministry of Inter- ior. He should be above 25, must have a clear criminal record and no suspected links to terrorism or criminal gangs," Abu Sajjad said.

"Many of his clients are wealthy businessmen or traders who seek weapons for self-defence and to protect their businesses."

"The biggest demand is for indi- vidual handguns, specifically the Croatian HS, in addition to hunting rifles and semi-automatic weapons," Awad said. "Women also use weapons, which they keep in their hand- bags for their personal security. The matter is not restricted to men only. Everybody needs to feel safe," Abu Sajjad said.

Law 51 allowing legal arms posses- sion in Iraq came into effect last summer. The authority said it was aimed at curbing illegal weapons sales and increasing control of gun ownership through regulation.

"It is true that the wide-spread of weapons possession will have an effect on the security conditions in the country necessitating more government control regulations. Nonetheless, licensing gun shops where people can get arms in a fe- miliar way will bring in cash illegal sales," Abu Sajjad added.

After the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the illegal weap- ons trade flourished across the country. Looted guns from ran- sacked police stations and military bases were sold in streets and pub- lic areas. Previously, gun sales were restricted to firearms for hunting and sport.

Pistol prices in Abu Sajjad's shop range from $1,000 to $5,000, while hunting rifles and Kalashnikov assault rifles can be bought for as little as $650 to up to $6,000, depending on the brand and manufacture- origin, he said.

One of Abu Sajjad's clients who asked to be identified as Ahmed said he decided to buy a personal gun and weapons for his employees after re- ceiving threats targeting his car shop in the Baghdad neighbour- hood of Al-Malikiya.

"It is risky business and we of- ten encounter people who try to blackmail us or threaten our fami- lies. The state is unable to protect us from gangs that are operating freely without any denomination or punishment," Ahmed said.

He said he bought several hi- powered arms from a salamman who buys them legally before resell- ing them.

Iraqi sociologist Ali Taher Ham- mond blasted the government's decision to allow legal arms posses- sion and sale as "a wrong and un- fortunate move."

"By doing that, the government conceded to the fact at the ex- pense of enforcing the law. Gun ownership is a huge problem in Iraq and the mentality of using weapons to settle disagreements has torn apart the social fabric of many communities. "This law is a step backward. En- forcing security is the obligation of the state and not the duty of the regu- lar and harmless citizen who is try- ing to protect himself," Hammond said.

"There are 750,000 security mem- bers in the country who are trained to enforce law and secu- rity. Moreover, the government can hire the services of security compa- nies which are well trained and disciplined."

"Arms should be exclusively restricted to the state's security forces and the widespread of weapons will be an additional reason for the armed militias to jeopardise secu- rity under the pretext of legitimate licensing," Hammond added.

"Any person who is not in front of Abu Sajjad's shop window are often found with an arsenal on display. "One reason for the lack of secu- rity and stability is the prevalence of weapons, which are used to re- solve the many problems plaguing the Iraqi society," said 26-year-old Ahmad Sami as he pointed to the weapons markets.

"How on earth could the govern- ment allow people to carry weap- ons when it is supposed to curb it in view of the problems and en- croachment on security that take place daily? This is unacceptable in a country where the rule of law is so weak," Sami added.

Oumayma Omar, based in Baghdad, contributed to the Culture and Society sections of The Arab Weekly.
In recent years the writing of Arab novels has increased significantly, coupled with the establishment of many awards celebrating Arabic literature - the novel in particular.

The London-based Banipal, a literary magazine dedicated to the promotion of contemporary Arab literature through translations in English, recently published a list of the best 100 Arabic novels selected by ten authors, critics, academics, intellectuals and translators.

The books have been ranked according to the number of nominations each title received, with "Season of Migration to the North" (Mawarih al-Hijra ila al-Shamal) by Palestinian academic Walid Masoud) by Palestinian academic Walid Masoud having 41 nominations; "Cities of Love andror" (Al-Khubz al-Hafi) by Mohamed al-Shanti, became second with 41 nominations. Twelve other novels of the best 100 Arabic novels selected by ten authors, critics, academics, intellectuals and translators.

"Season of Migration to the North" (Mawarih al-Hijra ila al-Shamal) by Palestinian academic Walid Masoud ranked first with 61 nominations.

Published in 1966, "Season of Migration to the North" is described as the most important Arab novel of the twentieth century and depicts the lasting effects of colonialism on contemporary Sudanese society. Set in 1966 Sudan, the events are narrated by an unnamed man who, after studying for some time in England, returns to his native village in rural Sudan with hopes of using his Western education to some benefit. However, the narrator is intrigued by an enigmatic new face in the village, Mustafa, known as "the latercomer" because his experiences are more connected than he could have imagined.

"The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist" (1975), published in Cairo, the trilogy traces the turbulent period in Egypt's history spanning from 1939, the year of the resolution of the British colonial powers, to 1954 and the close of the second world war. In "For Bread Alone," published in Arabic in 1982, Choukri presents an astonishing and candid account of his early life in Morocco. Beginning from the famine, which drove his family from their home in the Rif to Tangier, the author describes the struggle to survive amid a society rife with danger and poverty, not to mention the violent rages of his vicious father. Unable to find steady work, he plunges into the simultaneously thrilling and horrifying depths of a world of sex, crime and drugs, until a chance encounter in prison changes the course of his life.

In "The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist," Mahfouz poetically depicts the political reality of the post-1948 Palestinian experience in this modern classic. Saeed, a gullible and comical character, is a Palestinian who becomes an Israeli citizen and informer, narrating his experiences of the suffering and hardships encountered by Arabs in Israel through a series of letters to an Israeli newspaper.

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Samuel Shimon

BANIPAL MAGAZINE'S REVEALING LIST OF 100 BEST ARABIC NOVELS

London

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Cult novel. A copy of "Season of Migration to the North" by Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih. (Twitter)
I
the early 20th century, within view of the Statue of Liberty and blocks from Wall Street, an im-migrant enclave known as Little Syita thrived in lower Manhattan. Since 2011, the Washington Street Historical Society has worked to memorialise and preserve the Arab presence and literary output of Little Syita, which was home to dozens of Arab families and shopkeepers and to writers Khalil Gibran, Amin Rihani and Ella Abu Madi. The society hosts walking tours, maintains an artefact collection and advocates for historic landmark designations from the city. Yet, Little Syita, just more than a mile from Manhattan’s Chinatown and Little Italy and abutting a heav-
ily trafficked tourist zone, remains relatively unrecognized, a historic district buried beneath layers of ur-
ban development.

In October, Society President Todd Fine led a group of mostly Arabs and Arab Americans on a walking tour through Little Syita, which the soci-
ety also refers to as the Lower West Side, breathing life into a neighbour-
hood of construction cranes, finan-
cial institutions and major thorough-
faxes, with descriptions of coffee shops, shisha and Syrian patisserie.

Fine’s tours paint a portrait of Arab life in early 20th century Manhattan through the works of mahjar writers, photographs that capture Arab street life and more than a pinch of neces-
ary imagination from participants. Physical remnant of Little Syita are scant.

Since 9/11, the Lower West Side has been in a state of constant construc-
tion with megaprojects such as the World Trade Centre redevelopment and the Goldman Sachs headquar-
ters. To many, the resulting changes did not benefit average New Yorkers.

The World Trade Centre recon-
struction became something about corporate and luxury real estate, which is not what it was supposed to be,” Fine said. The decline and erasure of Little Syita far precede the tragedy of 9/11, however. In fact, the life and death of Little Syita are intertwined with many key processes in 20th century US history.

Arab assimilation, spatial reloca-
tion into the suburbs and immigra-
tion legislation that virtually banned Arab immigration from the early 1900s until the mid-1960s left Little Syita without many Syrians or Lebanonis, Palestinians, Armenians, Greeks and Moroccanis, who also called the neighbourhood home.

Contrasted development known as urban renewal – the destruction of neighbourhoods to make way for the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel and the World Trade Centre complex – left Lower Manhattan depopulated of residents and physical traces of Lit-
tle Syita.

“Anything involving landmark preservation is especially hard when you have a neighbourhood that is a focus for development,” Fine said.

Three adjoining buildings make up the best evidence of Little Syita: a five-storey tenement, the last build-
ing of its type on Washington Street; the six-storey Downtown Commu-
nity House, once a place that assist-
ed immigrants; and Saint George’s Church, a former Molkite church now unceremoniously occupied by a Chinese restaurant and bar.

While Saint George’s Church, with its notable terracotta facade and re-
lied Saint George, is a designated landmark, the other two buildings are unprotected.

“We thought if we just tell this story, we’ll figure out some way to save these buildings,” Fine said, “but even despite all this attention, we kept getting rejected by the city.”

Still, through the society’s work, recognition of Little Syita has im-
proved.

The city will soon redesign Eliza-
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Through the Washington Street Historical Society’s work, Little Syita has improved.

Scholars and advocates are redis-
covering Arab histories of the Lower West Side in untapped or untrans-
lated archives. A recently found New York Sun article from 1912 head-
lined “Muhamedans Now Have a Place of Worship Here,” described a mosque in Little Syita operated by the Ottoman consulate. Unfortunately, this history was un-
known during the 2001 debate over the proposed Ground Zero mosque, known to many as the “ground zero mosque.” Conservative bloggers and like-minded politicians erupted over the proposed Islamic prayer space and cultural institution.

“The Ottoman mosque is about the same distance from the World Trade Centre site as that ‘ground zero mosque,’” Fine said. “Imagine if at the time people had known this thing.

Many stories from Little Syita are hidden yet within reach. Amid ris-
ing nativism in the United States, each story offers an account of Arab belonging – however gradual or con-
tested – that remains relevant.

Noah Habeeb is a writer in New York who has researched and written about Arab-American communities. His grandfather emigrated from Lebanon to Little Syita in the 1920s.

BOOK REVIEW

Looking at Muslims through a ‘Journey into Europe’

Noah Habeeb

New York

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In October, Society President Todd Fine led a group of mostly Arabs and Arab Americans on a walking tour through Little Syita, which the society also refers to as the Lower West Side, breathing life into a neighbourhood of construction cranes, financial institutions and major thoroughfares, with descriptions of coffee shops, shisha and Syrian patisserie.

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Arab assimilation, spatial relocation into the suburbs and immigration legislation that virtually banned Arab immigration from the early 1900s until the mid-1960s left Little Syita without many Syrians or Lebanonis, Palestinians, Armenians, Greeks and Moroccanis, who also called the neighbourhood home.

Contrasted development known as urban renewal – the destruction of neighbourhoods to make way for the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel and the World Trade Centre complex – left Lower Manhattan depopulated of residents and physical traces of Little Syita.

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Three adjoining buildings make up the best evidence of Little Syita: a five-storey tenement, the last building of its type on Washington Street; the six-storey Downtown Community House, once a place that assisted immigrants; and Saint George’s Church, a former Molkite church now unceremoniously occupied by a Chinese restaurant and bar.

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Hiking in Morocco's High Atlas mountains offers dazzling experience

Saad Guerraoui

I
have long dreamt of a hike in the High Atlas mountains, known for their grandeur and beautiful landscape. I decided to go for the adventure along with seven other people, including friends.

We hit the road from Casablanca towards Imlil on a four-wheel drive on a Friday afternoon in mid-September. Imlil, which is 76km from Marrakech, is a hiking heaven thanks to its surrounding mountains. Most hikers flock to the little town to climb the 4,167-metre Mount Toubkal.

We reached the town in the evening and had to hire mules to take our luggage to the Dar Aymane guesthouse, where the friendly staff made us feel at home. The ambiance was terrific as we sat around a long dining table to share traditional Moroccan dishes for dinner.

The next day we woke very early to a mesmerising view of the peaceful mountains and agricultural land.

Two local guides, one who was also a cook, with two miles to carry luggage were waiting for us. We stopped at the town centre because one of the hikers needed boots to deal with the rough terrain awaiting us on the way to the waterfalls. Hikers from around the world, armed with their walking sticks and backpacks, were roaming the town centre's streets, preparing for long journeys towards various destinations, including Mount Toubkal.

Several guesthouses in Imlil offer interesting 1-day or 2-day guided hikes but some hikers, with smart phones and experience in hiking, choose to navigate on their own. We did not have to worry about food because we paid 1,000 Moroccan dinhams (Mdh) for an all-inclusive package for the trip, excluding the Casablanca-Imlil leg of the journey.

We began our hike with great motivation towards Tamsoult to discover the beauty of its waterfalls. The first few hundred metres were tough because, at 1,800 metres above sea level, we could hardly breathe. The temperature, however, was quite mild compared to the simmering heat in Marrakech.

As we ascended, the terrain became more treacherous with nar-row footpaths across the moun- tains but the view got more and more stunning. We could see Berber hamlets scattered among the foothills of the mountains.

Once we reached the peak of our ascent after a non-stop, 4-hour walk, we took a break under a large tree to enjoy a lunch of vegeta-

ble salad and tinned mackerel. As starving as we were, we wiped out our dishes!

We walked another four hours through pine trees, green valleys filled with goats and mountain creeks to reach the waterfalls just before dusk.

The sound of water tumbling down on the rocky mountains at a striking speed amid clouds of mist was shattering in the otherwise eerily quiet surroundings.

We climbed few rocks to get closer to the mesmerising scene that was worth every single inch of the physically demanding 8-hour hike.

We headed to the beautiful valley of Azadlet to spend the night in our sleeping bags in a homestead after another exhausting 4-hour walk in the darkness. The accommoda-
tion was not what we expected because four of us had to share a room.

The next day was much tougher as we headed back to Imlil in the rain taking a different itinerary. The terrain was tougher because of the muddy footpaths, which greatly tested our stamina.

Nevertheless, the surroundings offered heavenly views among the almond, apple, cherry and walnut trees offering heavenly views amid the almond, apple, cherry and walnut groves. We descended to Aguerzal village where we had the chance to walk on the side of a terraced roadway to Imlil, where the 8-hour walk came to an end.

It was absolutely the best hike ever! Imlil is a small village that had huge importance as the gateway into some of the most dazzling hikes of the High Atlas mountains.

No wonder it is ranked among the most spectacular performances in the Middle East and Europe. In its 20th edition, the festival has become a major annual event that showcases cinema projections, seminars, workshops, debates and tributes.