Self-doubts further imperil ‘Deal of the Century’ despite economic focus

Members of the Trump administration seem divided and sceptical about the practicability of the plan.

Mamoon Alabbași
London

The yet-to-be-announced US-led conference on the Palestinian-Jewish conflict has received an indifferent response from both the Palestinians and the Arab League. The Arab region is a divided and sceptical about the practicality of the plan.

Speaking in a private meeting with Jewish leaders, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gave a cautious assessment of the plan. In an audio recording of the meeting obtained by the Washington Post, Pompeo noted that “one might argue” that the deal is “unexecutable” and it might not “gain traction.”

Pompeo acknowledged that “frankly, this has taken us longer to roll out our plan than I had originally thought it might.” He confirmed: “It may be rejected. Could be in the end, folks will say. It’s not particularly original. It doesn’t particularly work for me.” That is, “It’s got two good things and nine bad things, I’m out.”

Such concerns were not expressed only by Pompeo. “Pragmatic” conservative and pro-Israel voices close to the White House are increasingly sharing their fears. In their own words: “We hope the plan will get shelved even before the latest political developments in the region. We hope the scheduling of new elections in the West Bank will allow us to rethink the plan. Our hope is that we can keep the plan alive until the scales of war meet.”

Palestinian leaders, who have long accused the US of supporting the continued Israeli occupation, are also concerned about the plan’s feasibility. President Donald Trump, who was a key figure in negotiating the deal, has said that the US was “not willing to be involved in the conference.”

The European Union has also expressed its concerns about the plan. “We are not willing to be involved in the conference,” said the EU’s foreign policy chief. “We are not willing to be involved in the conference.”

The Arab region is divided and sceptical about the practicality of the plan. The Arab Weekly.

The programme seeks to engage with the families of working children and encourage them to get their sons and daughters off the streets. The “Fun Bus” initiative provides support and recreation to street children while giving them the chance to take a respite from street work.

The programme has taken more than 150 children off the streets in the past two years but many challenges remain. It has reached hundreds of children working in Beirut, most of whom are from among the nearly 350,000 registered Syrian refugees living in the country. Their families live below the poverty line, with limited access to employment, often leaving them with no option but to send their children out to work to make ends meet.

Samar Kadi
The Arab Weekly
Travel and Society section editor.

The Arab region on World Environment Day

Qatar, two years after the boycott

The unending business of fighting extremism

Unerstood. President Donald Trump (Front-L) turns to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (C) after signing a proclamation at the White House in Washington, last March. White House adviser Jared Kushner is first on the left.

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Samar Kadi is The Arab Weekly travel and society section editor.

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‘Fun Bus’ a breather for Beirut’s street children

Samar Kadi
Beirut

C laud in her black headscarf and dressed in a long robe, Rayyan hurried to the brightly lit station, waiting as the train pulled into the side of the street at a large intersection in the heart of Beirut. Packing away the boxes of tuna she was selling, the 13-year-old hopped on board the bus, her eyes lowered under the shade of a tree.

“I cannot stay long. My mother will not allow it. I have to go back to work,” she said.

Every Thursday, Rayyan and other Syrian refugee children selling chewing gum and tissue at the busy intersection wait impatiently for the “Fun Bus” where they can enjoy activities such as drawing, watching films and basic learning.

Yazan, 11 years old and originally from Aleppo, said he has been on the bus several times in the two years since he started working on the street to help provide food for his large family. “I like being on the bus because I can learn, draw and watch cartoons,” he said.

The “Fun Bus” initiative, funded by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Union and implemented by the Makhzoumi Foundation, a Lebanese NGO, provides support and recreation for street children while giving them the chance to take a respite from street work.

“Our bus rolls every day, except Sundays, stopping at different locations and neighbourhoods,” said Youssef Tabsh, project manager at the Makhzoumi Foundation.

When the project began in 2017, activities were carried out on the pavement or in open spaces in specific areas, Tabsh said. “The idea of the bus came later. We thought it needed a safe and private space to express themselves,” he said.

“Now when they see our bus they would hurry inside because they feel it is for them. We are taking them off the street for 2 to 3 hours during which they can enjoy activities, go crazy and let go of the steam before going back on the street,” Tabsh added.

On the “Fun Bus,” the youths got to live their childhood for a couple of hours, a welcome change from selling tissues and chewing gum for a few dollars a day. The initiative offers lessons in basic literacy and numeracy, awareness sessions on hygiene, protection issues and the dangers they could face on the streets.

“Most of the children have never set foot in school but, with the basic learning we offer, they are now able to read numbers and words making them better equipped to protect themselves,” Tabsh said.

A welcome change. The “Fun Bus” drives in downtown Beirut (Makhzoumi Foundation)
Washington moves ahead with peace plan despite dim prospects

Distrust and anger. Members of the Palestinian community and their supporters protest in Chicago, Illinois. (AP)

New elections in Israel usher in fresh opportunities for “Deal of the Century”

News & Analysis

Washington has declared its determination to craft a policy for the Israelis and the Palestinians rooted in an acknowledgment of the settlement “facts” that Israel has created on the ground and, as Kushner recently noted, an abiding distrust of the Palestinians’ ability to make themselves heard.

Netanyahu has profited more than any other Israeli leader from this “new look” in US policy under Trump. With welcome support from Washington, the King of Israel expects to triumph yet again in September.

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

Costly setbacks. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (R) attends a cabinet meeting in Jerusalem, June 2.

New elections in Israel undermine chances for ‘Deal of the Century’

Until then Netanyahu, who will soon eclipse David Ben-Gurion as the longest serving leader in Israel’s history, stands unchallenged in the exercise of government authority. History, stands unchallenged in the formation of a new government that promise to consume most of the rest of 2019.

U

President Melaye Johnson of South Sudan, left, and his team, led by son-in-law Jared Kushner, were supposed to rub elbows with a much-anticipated Israeli-Palestinian peace plan soon after Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu formed his new government after the election in April.

That the government did not come into being, and that Israel is headed for new elections in September, not only exasperated Trump but put the peace plan on hold. Nonetheless, Trump, backing conventional wisdom, is likely to use the plan as a cudgel against Democrats in 2020 even if it has virtually no chance of working.

Trump, on June 3, said the political situation in Israel was “all messed up.” He underscored that Israeli politicians “ought to get their act together” but seemed to acknowledge that Iran was not much he could do about it except to wait for the new Israeli elections to settle things.

Trump not only wanted his friends and political allies in Israel to gain a head start in the upcoming campaign, but also to be ready to come out a winner by leading a coalition government that can use that opportunity to make public his administration’s long-awaited peace plan, which he said in 2019 would be the “deal of the century.”

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Sudan likely to hand over Muslim Brotherhood members to Egypt

Amr Emam

Cairo

S udan’s Transitional Military Council is reportedly preparing to deport hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood members who fled Egypt after the ousting of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi. Translational Military Council leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who travelled to Cairo on May 27, reportedly told Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi that Sudan would allow Muslim Brotherhood figures wanted by Egypt to stay in Sudan. The handover of the Brotherhood figures is expected to allay fears in Cairo that the Brotherhood members might turn into a national security threat.

“The Muslim Brotherhood has had plans to turn Sudan into a threat to Egypt through involvement in a number of terror cells that could cause harm to Egypt’s security,” said Tarek al-Ridwani, a specialist in Islamist movements.

Brotherhood figures were supported by the regime of former Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir in their efforts to destabilise Arab countries between Khartoum and Cairo since the early 2000s when al-Bashir allowed Islamist and jihadi groups, including the late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, to establish bases in Sudan. Tensions with Cairo increased 3-month time limit agreed by the African Union in April. This means Egypt has a role to play again to help Sudan’s military rulers circumvent international penalties by the African Union. Egypt has a role to play again to help Sudan’s military rulers circumvent international penalties by the African Union.

The handover of the Brotherhood figures is expected to allay fears in Cairo that the neighbouring country might turn into a national security threat.

Sudan’s transitional authorities are optimistic about weakening the Muslim Brotherhood amid fears that the Islamists would emerge victorious from the strife in the country, analysts said. “Sudan faces a very intricate situation, especially when it comes to the Muslim Brotherhood,” said Samih El, a former Muslim Brotherhood member. “The Islamist movement controlled the deep state in Sudan for 30 years under al-Bashir and now they continue to be everywhere inside Sudanese institutions.”

Tensions with Cairo increased 3-month time limit agreed by the African Union in April. This means Egypt has a role to play again to help Sudan’s military rulers circumvent international penalties by the African Union.

Under scrutiny. A file picture shows former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi sitting behind bars at a court on the outskirts of Cairo. (Reuters)
Houthi blocking humanitarian, denounced by WFP

The Arab Weekly Staff

More than five years into Yemen’s war, international aid agencies are struggling to reach hard-hit areas of the country because of Iran-backed Houthi rebels’ “hostile” activity, they warned.

The World Food Programme (WFP) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in a joint report expressed concern about humanitarian aid efforts in Yemen, released statements claiming the Houthi rebels were hampering their work and putting Yemeni civilians at risk.

In a strong statement, the WFP warned that a dispute with the Houthi militia could disrupt aid distribution in a country already on the brink of famine. Because of fighting, insecurity and interference in its work, the UN agency said it was considering suspending deliveries.

The WFP said, the Houthi rebels have hampered the rollout of a biometric system to identify those in most need. The system, using iris scans, fingerprints or facial recognition, is used in areas controlled by Yemen’s internationally recognised government.

Sources familiar with the discussions said Houthi leaders asked the agency to stop the food registration process in April after realising the system bypasses the supervision of parties associated with the militia in Sana’a.

The Houthi said the process should be run by the Yemeni Social Welfare Fund, an agency in rebel-controlled Sana’a that coordinates with Houthi groups.

The WFP last December pressed the Houthi to implement a biometric registration system to combat corruption in aid distribution after it discovered that food donated in Yemen areas was being diverted through a local partner connected with Houthi authorities.

Distribution lists had been tampered, supposedly from people confirming receipt of food but some 60% of beneficiaries — numérique in Houthi areas was being disconnected.

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Other agencies said problems with the humanitarian aid process, such as harassment of staff members, interference with distribution lists and restrictions on the visa process and freedom of movement, have deepened in Houthi areas in recent months.

“Mission impossible? A Yemeni man carries a box containing bottles of cooking oil in the northern province of Hajjah.”

Hodeidah remains under Houthi control while Yemen forces aligned with the internationally recognised government of Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi are on its outskirst.

Famine and disease affect large segments of Yemen’s population. Approximately 150,000 children in Yemen are suffering severe acute malnutrition. UN relief chief Mark Lowcock told the UN Security Council in May that the "spectre of famine still looms" with a resurgence of cholera striking 200,000 Yemenis this year. Almost 12 million people, 40% of Yemen’s population, are at risk of starvation, WFP said.

The WFP is attempting to feed about 12 million of Yemen’s most vulnerable people – nearly half of the population – an effort that costs about $751 million a month.

Viewpoint

Saudi Arabia ups defence spending in face of Iranian threats

Jaeeer Elwan

Saudi Arabia has earned a unique double distinction in respect to its defence spending, largely the result of the war against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen and bolstering security to thwart threats from Tehran.

Riyadh’s position as a leading global arms importer and No. 1 arms importer in the world has come as some of the kingdom seemingly has begin cutting its military spending.

A report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on global military expenditures for 2018 stated that Saudi Arabia was No. 1 in highest military spending as a percentage of GDP.

There is no doubt that the kingdom’s prioritisation of military-related spending over other budget sectors has been greatly influenced by the 4-year campaign against the Houthis in Yemen, a war that is believed to be costing Riyadh $5 billion to $6 billion a month.

In the overall terms of the funds dedicated to military expenditures in 2018, Saudi Arabia was eclipsed by the United States, which spent $69 billion on defence, followed by China, which spent an estimated $520 billion.

SIPRI said Saudi Arabia was a distant third in 2018 in overall military expenditures at $68 billion, just ahead of India ($70 billion) and France ($64 billion). Russia was sixth, having dropped out of the top five ranking for the first time since 2006, with military expenditures of $64.1 billion.

The top five spenders accounted for 68% of global military expenditure in 2018. Saudi Arabia bumped itself up from fifth place standing in 2009 to third in 2017 — edging past Russia — when Riyadh upped its military spending 9.2% to $64.1 billion, SIPRI’s calculations indicate.

The most significant distinction for Riyadh in the SIPRI analysis is that its defence expenditures for 2018 place Saudi Arabia as the country with the highest military burden in the world — 8.8% of its GDP.

This is in sharp contrast to the top two other spenders: Washington’s hefty defence spending accounts for 3% of US GDP and China’s defense expenditures amount to 1.6% of its GDP. The Saudis are in good company, though, with five other countries running far behind in defence spending as a percentage of GDP.

Oman at 8.2%; Kuwait at 7.7%; Israel at 4.4%; estimates by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) on Saudi military and other security spending suggest an even higher military burden for the kingdom, with Riyadh’s defence-related expenditures accounting for 12.5% and 13.7% of Saudi GDP in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

SIPRI attributed the dramatic leap in weaponry purchases to the war in Yemen, deteriorating relations with Tehran and the political fallout between Riyadh and Doha.

During the last five years, Saudi Arabia turned to the United States for 69% of its arms purchases, making Riyadh the top buyer of American weaponry. In turn, Riyadh accounted for 22% of American arms exports over the same period. SIPRI reported that, from 2014-18, the kingdom received 15 combat aircraft from the United States and 38 from the United Kingdom, with aircraft in both cases equipped with cruise missiles and other guided weapons.

Even as Saudi Arabia attained those top rankings in military spending and arms imports, Riyadh pledged to cut the defence portion of its current budget, at least on paper. In announcing the 2019 national budget last December, which included record spending of $295 billion, the Saudi government indicated that it would reduce defence spending from 9.1% to 8.6%.

Riyadh justified the military-related cuts to freezing funding for other sectors that are the focus of economic development as part of the kingdom’s Vision 2030 fiscal overhaul programme, including infrastructure and transportation and health and social development. However, it is not unheard of that over the years some military-related expenditures have ended up being recorded as off-budget items.

Unless relations with regional adversaries suddenly improve, it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia will quickly move to relinquish its newly acquired defence-related titles.

Jaeeer Elwan reports from Washington on energy issues for The Arab Weekly.
Qatar enters third year of crisis but no lessons learnt

Iman Zayat

he way Qatar is perceived is a regional dispute that has left it weakened and isolated from its Arab neighbours is beyond strange. As Doha loses regional influence and sees its relationships with Arab countries dwindle, it continues to insist that all is well that ends well.

Of course, this is largely due to Doha has weathered the chaos and growing economi- cally self-sufficient, particularly through its resources, from oil and gas to other industries. Does an abundance of oil and gas power and hydropon- ic tomatoes really mean that the tiny Gulf emirate has emerged from the past few years of boycott victory? Of course not, unless it is believed that the country needs only food to thrive and meet the needs of its people.

The reality is that Qatar’s economy has taken a turn for the worse, with its real estate and retail sectors reeling from the effects of the boycott. Reports from inside Doha say shopping malls and hotels have been nearly abandoned in the absence of wealth from oil sales, but the ruling family’s power over its people.

Andy Krieg, a professor at King’s College London, “In psychology, this phenom- enon is known as the illusory truth effect. People tend to be- lieve statements to be true if they are told them repeatedly. To believe or not to believe is not the question. What is at stake is the future of a whole country and population that has been weakened by years of foreign conflicts. First, the Qatari state’s policies, which are informed by desperate measures, such as forbidding people who refuse to leave from mistakes and, second, a systematic campaign to deepen division between families, tribes and people with common roots in culture and history.

Sure, Doha may continue its costly public relations campaign in the United States, Europe and elsewhere to combat the accusa- tions of its rivals but this will in no way help it resolve its dispute with Arab neighbours or help it stave off its hegemony standing after losing influence in Syria, Libya, Sudan and Egypt. It is mis- takenly backed off failure or failing Islamist groups.

Indeed, Qatar can continue to lose money out the window. It does have plenty of money to spare – although not thanks to the good or wise leadership of its leaders but to the country’s huge gas reserves. Some of that money will come to Doha friends or allies in the Arab region, especially in the fight against terrorism and Islamist groups in the region.

 Unlike Doha, other Arab countries cannot afford to see their governments fail or to conceal domestic political issues, whether political, economic or social, through quashed terrorist threats. Qatar should have learned this lesson long ago, when people in Tunisia, Libya, Syria and Egypt turned their backs on state-driven religious groups.

Somehow, Qatar has not learnt this lesson even today. Qatar’s official newspaper Qatar News Agency recently tried to revive political Islam in places such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Sudan. Qatar’s insistence on meddling in the af- fairs of other countries, includ- ing those striving for freedom and democracy, is not part of the dominant view of the Arab world.

Two years after a coalition of Arab countries imposed an economic and diplo- matic boycott on Qatar, Doha has lost significant influence in the region and appears no clos- er to ending the standoff.

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt severed ties with Qatar because of its alleged support for terrorism and relations with Iran. Doha was issued a list of demands that included shutting down the broadcast network Al Jazeera, ending the crisis, losing allies and influ- ence, and that Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser al-Thani’s atten- dance at the summit was a sign of possible reconciliation, suggest- ing that the dispute was not yet over.

At the recent Mec- ca summit in May, Saudi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Assaf indicat- ed that Qatar had made no head- way in solving the crisis and that a resolution would only be possi- ble if Doha returned to the “right path.”

The declaration of the Muslim Brotherhood weakened Qatar’s foreign policy, exposing its role in supporting terror groups.

Qatar, a leading backer of Is- lamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, has taken a hit from the crisis, losing allies and influ- ence across the region. The first blow to Doha’s regional influence was in 2013 when Egypt’s Islamist President Mohamed Morsi was ousted from power. Morsi, a senior Muslim Brotherhood official, had been a close ally to Turkey and Qatar.

Qatar stands to lose clout in other African countries as well, where its allies are increasingly on the defensive. This was most evi- dent in Sudan with the ouster of President Omar al-Bashir, a Qatari ally who long represented foreign aid from the energy-rich country.

“Doha has lost influence in Su- dan amid the revolution,” noted Andreas Kreig, a professor at King’s College London.

Qatar has been a media cam- paign against Sudan’s Transitional Military Council, which has been ruling the country since President al-Ba- shir’s ouster. In response, Sudanese authorities reportedly closed Al Jazeera’s offices and withheld staff members’ work permits.

In Libya, an offensive by the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, to capture Tripoli from Islamist mili- tias loyal to Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj’s Government of National Accord is threatening Doha’s interest.

Turkey has been a vocal critic of Haftar’s offensive.

The LNA also accused Doha of complicity in the assassination of senior Libyan officials, producing a letter from Qatar’s acting charge d’affaires to Libya stating that Doha had deployed military units to the country.

Qatar’s foreign policy, often de- scribed as overly ambitious, relies on a complex web of relationships with rival powers across the re- gion, including radical Islamist groups.

But to advance its interests, Qatar has used its abundant financial resources, including by paying ransoms to radical groups to me- diate the release of hostages, con- tributing to regional and interna- tional funds and investing heavily throughout the world.

However, the decline of the Muslim Brotherhood weakened Qatar’s foreign policy, exposing its role in supporting terror groups and pressuring its neighbours to disengage with it.

Faith Salama is a Lebanese journalist.
Opinion

Editorial

The Arab world on World Environment Day

The celebration of World Environment Day may not have received the attention it deserved in most of the Arab world. One possible reason could have been that it coincided this year with the first and second days of Eid al-Fitr in the region. However, insufficient environmental awareness in the region is not the problem of any one particular year.

Atting a level of ecological sensitivity equal to that in advanced parts of the world would need intiative-building efforts on the part of Arab governments, civil society and political parties. The objective would be to create the necessary regional momentum that would help adopt environmentally-friendly policies paving the way for balanced and sustainable development in the region.

That kind of momentum would have to include the realization of active forces in society and the public that the cause of the environment is relevant for the well-being of their respective countries if not for the survival of their way of life.

Amid wars and upheaval, ecological concerns may not seem to merit the requirements of political to military expediency even if dealing with climate issues is needed to address the simmering socio-economic causes of instability and strife in the Arab world.

The region suffers from serious problems regarding air and sea pollution, soil erosion, rising water levels, desertification as well as floods and droughts that are compounded by climate change factors caused by it.

The most vital challenge across the region is water scarcity. The problem is a major cause for population exodus from rural areas and for the social upheaval experienced in countries such as Syria and Tunisia in 2010. It is the indirect cause of many of the health epidemics as countries import obesity-causing food products instead of using their original farming yield.

Last April, Fatos Grazi- ano da Silva told a meeting of Arab states in Cairo that improving water management strategies should be urgently added on.

“This is really an emergency problem now,” Grazi-ano da Silva told FAO director-general in an interview on the sidelines of the conference.

FAO figures indicate that the per capita ratio of fresh water availability in the region is only 10% of the world average. Farming activities consume more than 5% of the renewable water resources. Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Egypt are among the countries where water scarcity is a major problem. In 2014, only four Arab countries were dealing with water scarcity.

Water management and coordination were among the key issues addressed by the April conference in Cairo.

Not only coordination in this regard is lacking between Arab countries, but not to mention the lack of cooperation from non-Arab countries, such as Greece and Iran. On this issue, Thomas Seibert highlights the predicament of Egypt, which receives water from the receiving end of river flows between Iran and Turkey. In some instances, coordination is lacking between branches of the same Arab government.

“In Egypt,” they have 32 ministers. Most probably of these, 30 ministers deal with water — water is a problem for them. And they don’t have ways to coordinate very efficiently,” complained the FAO chief.

Adding to the complexity of solving the region’s water scarcity problem is the misman-agement of hydric resources. Grazi-ano da Silva noted, for instance, that Egyptian farmers were using century-old wasteful irrigation techniques instead of relying on water-saving techniques such as drip irrigation.

By 2025, the water supply in the Arab region will be only 15% of levels in 1960.

Some Arab countries, with varying degrees of success, have sought desalination as a solution to the problem. And they don’t have ways to coordinate very efficiently,” complained the FAO chief.

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In Trump’s world, there are no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ European Muslims

Rashmee Roshan Lall

Funny though it may sound, to Trump all British Muslim men may look and sound like Mayor Sadiq Khan even when they don’t.

Javid and Khan are clearly at opposite ends of the spectrum in their public reaction to Trump’s support for far-right and Islamophobic positions.

The real danger is in Nasrallah’s Lebanon, where the state is powerless against the power of the world.

Hezbollah is imposing its diktat in Lebanon

The issue of precision rockets, as dangerous as it is for Israel, is a source of danger for Lebanon as well.

Ali Al-Amin

All the LFP wants is to lift Hezbollah’s hands from the internal policies of the Christian community. Samir Geagea seems so suspicious of and so focused on events in Lebanon that the Lebanese For- eign Minister Gebran Bassil that what Hezbollah is doing, despite its gravity, does not provoke him, because it did not pose a threat to Lebanon. It is more dangerous than Nasrallah’s talk about maintaining positions in the admin- istration with or without the dangers posed by Iranian policies.

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Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed's formal entrance into party politics could end his political alliance with Islamists in the country. Chahed is the longest-serving Tunisian prime minister since the country's political and social turmoil early in 2011. The Islamist Ennahda Movement has shoved Chahed's stay in power.

Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi selected Chahed to be prime minister in August 2016 to contribute to the presidential elections of Nidaa Touns, the party he founded. Chahed, however, soon chose an independent path.

He won a bruising political battle with the president's son, Hafedh Caid Essebsi, who leads Nidaa Touns, and he joined Tahya Touns, founded in January by disgruntled secularists, ambitious technocrats and calculating Islamists.

Chahed became president of Tahya Touns on June 1. For Ennahda's leaders, support for Chahed in parliament was an opportunity to fuel division in their rival political camp while guaranteeing their party a presence in the government.

Analysts said Chahed is at a crossroads as president of Tahya Touns with the ambition to reshape the fractured secularist camp and beat the Islamists in elections late this year.

Chahed, 43, who broke with Nidaa Touns last year, has carved his position as head of government if he failed before that to retain Ennahda's support. Ennahda, which has the most seats of any party in parliament, threatened to defect of Nidaa Touns to oust Chahed as prime minister.

Chahed's supporters formed Tahya Touns in January. The founding members did not shy away from criticizing their former party. The prime minister has faced criticism from political opponents and Islamist allies who claim he was forging a "state party" to overthrow a legislative and presidential elections.

To ward off such critics, Tahya Touns Secretary-General Selim Azzabi, stressed then that the head of government has not partaken in a single meeting or activity of Tahya Touns. Chahed waited for the right moment before taking the presidency of the secularist Tahya Touns party months after it was established.

Chahed's hold on the government cannot be threatened for now by his rivals in the secularist camp or Ennahda, even if they were to overtake their ideological divide and joined forces against him. The law shields the prime minister from a no-confidence vote a few months before elections.

However, Chahed needs to draw ideological and political lines with Ennahda, which has the most seats of any party in parliament, threatened to defect of Nidaa Touns to oust Chahed as prime minister.

The interim president and the government have gravitas and need a strong leader. However, the Gulf monarchs have less influence in Algeria than in Sudan. Western influence is stronger and the 43 million Algerians are better educated.

The outcome of this power struggle within Nidaa Touns, Ennahda won the most seats during municipal elections in May 2018, winning control of 70% of local governments, compared to 22% for Nidaa Touns. Such gains in elections and state structures, shattered an unwritten truce, begun in 2014 by Beji Caid Essebsi and Ghannouchi before the president abandoned it last year, that Ennahda restrains its political ambitions to catch its role as junior government partner.

While Ennahda officials suggested the party would extend its outreach in this year’s elections, analysts said that it would lower its ambitions and keep tight ties with potential allies such as Chahed out of its political calculus.

“Ennahda’s reactions against political Islam in the United States and Europe now and tensions and changing the political environment in the Arab region,” said political analyst Slaideddine Jourdi.

“Ennahda aims at winning 70-78 seats in the 217-member parliament to possibly negotiate an alliance with Tahya Touns,” he added. Although much will depend on what Chahed's followers manage to clinch.

Lamine Ghammi is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Tunis.
The West is relinquishing its judicial responsibility for dealing with ISIS fighters

Thorny issue. An Islamic State suspect wearing a red prison suit is led to the Iraqi Criminal Court in Baghdad, May 5.

The attempt to prevent the return of extremists created in the West – to hand this issue off to others – has been a consistent feature of policy from the outbreak of the Islamic State crisis. It is the last thing any of them need. However, political popularity is a powerful tool of the incentive structure when democratic government forms policy. There is another sense in which France is falling in its duties. Putting aside France’s opposition on principle to the death penalty, even the worst citizens deserve a fair trial and there is simply no way of claiming that the terrorists international returned to the Iraqi judicial system.

In December, the New Yorker’s Quraini documented how Iran was dealing with suspected members of ISIS. After a spate of lawless revenge killings, once Mosul was retaken in 2015, those taken into custody are being tried in proceedings that never last more than 15 minutes when capital sentences are virtually universal, even when the defendants are physically incapable of the crimes they are accused of.

The final notable part of this story is the geopolitics. These prisoners were captured in Syria by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the West’s partner force, and handed over to Baghdad. The United States has used the heavily infiltrated Iraqi state to denominate friendly with Iran against ISIS, notably in Deir ez-Zor. That is one element here. The other element is related to the SDF itself, which was chosen precisely because it has cordial relations with Iran and its Syrian ally, Bashar Assad’s regime. Whatever view one takes of the wisdom for the West of replacing ISIS with Iran, the most important flaw was that the populations liberated from ISIS had no intention of accepting the influence of Iran or Assad.

The protests in the SDF areas of eastern Syria, triggered primarily by the SDF sending the region’s oil to fuel the Assad–Iran–Iraqi war machine, threaten to unravel the SDF’s governing structure and with it the West’s stabilisation policy.

Kylie Orton is a Middle East analyst. Follow him on Twitter: @KyleWOrton.

Iraq should care about Arab Gulf security, not fret about Iran

Talib Abdulrazzaq

Talib Abdulrazzaq says that the Mecca summit involving members of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, was a step in the right direction. It is a matter of time before the SDF is not an issue on Syria’s agenda and the focus will be on the impact of Iran’s(SDF) footprint in the Arab Gulf region.

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Idlib fighting sparks war crimes accusations, Russian-Turkish tensions

Thomas Seilbert

The fighting is the most serious setback for Turkey’s cooperation with Russia in Syria and laid bare Ankara’s inability to convince Moscow to take a different path in the crisis.

In the crosshairs. Members of the Syrian Civil Defence carry a wounded man on a stretcher following a reported air strike on the Azazer al-Numan in Idlib, June 3.

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Leveraging the delicate balance of power in jeopardy

Rami Rayes

Liberation's complicated political system is like no other. With diverse political and sectarian forces, the country maintains a delicate balance of power that is crucial to its stability. Every time this balance is upset by political rivalries, the country descends into institutional paralysis or, worse, violence.

This has proven true time and again, with the "Revolution" ousted President Bachar Al-Assad's ouster fell into civil strife that was in retreat to dragging Lebanon into the Baghdad Pact, a military alliance of the Cold War that was formed by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom before being dissolved in 1979. The strife began as a reaction to Lebanon joining the alliance against its disputed Arab identity.

The most catastrophic chapter in Lebanon's history was its civil war from 1975-90. While disagreement over political representation was not the only issue that gave rise to the conflict, it was a key element that should not be disregarded. Intermingled local, regional and international factors were instrumental in deepening the conflict but disproportionate representation among Christians and Muslims (5:3) added to feelings of marginalisation throughout the country.

In 1999, however, Lebanon signed the Taif Agreement, providing a new framework for political representation and set-ting decades-long questions about the country's identity. The treaty described Lebanon as an "Arab country" and enshrined equal representation between Christians and Muslims regardless of demographics.

In addition, Lebanon's semi-presidential system was replaced with a more complex system of governance that gave more power to the president. In 1990, a series of constitutional amendments significantly decreased the power of the presidency.

That groundbreaking agreement is in danger of losing its force as certain politicians seek to shore up their own power. Lebanese President Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), for one, has consistently sought to strengthen his role. After Aoun became president in October 2016, FPM members in parliament and the cabinet boasted that they were amending the constitution to restore power to the presidency.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, who is Aoun's son-in-law, ignited a heated political debate after he said Sunni power was on the rise because of the fall of Christian power. Sunni Prime Minister Saad Hariri, keen to preserve his position in power and maintain a compromise with his political rivals, has done little to counter FPM's efforts. The only other influential political player, Samir Geagea, ex-executive chairman of the Christian-based Lebanese Forces, has refrained from publicly confronting FPM for fear of losing popularity with the Christian community.

With Hezbollah maintaining its 13-year-old Memorandum of Understanding with FPM, which the Shia group dolesy needed as its involvement in the Syrian War since 2011 to bolster alliances, there seems to be only Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), on the front line against their efforts. FPM leaders and their allies have taken all possible measures to weaken the PSP through the electoral law but Jumblatt retaliated by giving his key high votes in the 2018 elections and preserving an eight-member bloc.

It is true that the state of affairs in Lebanon is not tenable but reverting to Lebanon's pre-Tauf agreement system would be a recipe for chaos.

The intensive and acrimonious debate is not new but resurfaces every time Bassil, as the country's political and sectarian patronage, makes their way to the Lebanese presidency, openly challenging the position of the Sunni prime minister.

Bassil and his faction are very clear that Aoun is in a losing position and that one will that would try to sway to their side. Having this tense atmosphere allows them to play both sides. As long as Hariri and Bassil have their arrangement, which includes sanctioning Harool-abs's continued hegemony over all other Lebanese matters, the Lebanese state will become increasingly weaker, resulting in a potentially dangerous political vacuum that threatens stability and makes it easier for terrorists and lone wolves to operate.

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, 1967-1973."

Dangerous bickering. Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri (R) and Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, last February.
WASHINGTON — After the attacks of September 11, 2001, many experts expected there would be further violence on US soil. There wasn’t.

While foreign fighters may have made a difference in the Middle East and Northern Africa — and have been involved in some of the biggest terrorist attacks — experts in Washington said the movement, with some exceptions, has lost its mettle.

“This is something where foreign policy can and often has made a difference,” said Daniel Byman, senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. “In recent times, the news has been quite good.”

The United States and its allies have got better at tracking and deterring fighters, as recruitment has gone down after the failure of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq, as people drawn to some romantic notion of war faced the reality of combat and bad accommodations and as local groups have made it clear they don’t want foreign fighters.

However, laws in many countries have not been updated to handle fighters as they return home; fighter cells remain strong in some countries and Turkey likely faces rough days ahead.

Brookings Institution President John Allen said that, after record numbers of foreign fighters travelled to Syria, people needed to “gird themselves” for the next stage.

As Byman talked about his new book, “Road Warriors: Foreign Fighters in the Armies of Jihad,” May 10 at Brookings, the reappearance of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was in the news. ISIS released a video featuring Baghdadi, appearing for the first time since 2014, emphasising the group’s ability to conduct attacks around the world. It also showed a folder marked “Wilayat Turkey,” which seemed to indicate Turkey could be a target.

“In the short term, it’s quite plausible to me that Turkey is at risk,” Byman said. Turkey has significant networks for jihadists and those networks could potentially be used for attacks.

Those attacks could be precursors to sectarian violence.

Libya remains a potential target as ISIS appears to be attacking Field-Marshals Khalifa Haftar, leader of the Libyan National Army, as he fights Libya’s UN-backed government’s forces.

Byman said that, while local groups may begin a conflict, foreign fighters often start new organisations or cause old organisations to become more dangerous.

They tend to put a new spin on their cause, so, rather than fighting for a nationalist cause, such as Afghanistan, suddenly the locals are expected to fight for a particular version of Islam.

The foreign fighters are also more likely to engage in large-scale terrorist attacks, Byman said, adding that key leaders in the September 11, 2001, attacks had fought in foreign wars. However, he said he’s seeing a shift, especially after ISIS’s defeats in Iraq and Syria.

“If a group isn’t seen as winning, it’s harder to recruit foreign fighters,” Byman said. “Since the attacks in Brussels and Barcelona, many terrorist incidents have been ‘homegrown’ and in the United States there have been ‘virtually no attacks’ since September 11 by foreign fighters, Byman said.

That may be because foreign fighters are easier to track. They can’t simply disappear into another country and when they post potential action on social media, as they often do, they find themselves being arrested, Byman said.

Foreign fighters also discovered they don’t necessarily enjoy living in a developing country with few food options, in too cold or too hot weather, without a bed, with extra bugs and in war zone — often without compensation.

“Vis that not something that a relatively pampered young person from the US or Europe can often do,” he said.

Also, locals aren’t as eager to accept them.

“Foreign fighters often make it worse for the local fighters,” Byman said.

A group such as al-Qaeda can bring US bombings, foreign fighters may serve as spies and locals may not like to have their cause appropriated.

“To have a different group of fighters come in and tell them what to do is not something they’re eager to do,” he said. “So they’re starting to put more restrictions on foreign fighters than they ever have before.”

Many foreign fighters have died and others decided they’d had enough and gone home, Byman said.

There’s now a huge and overwhelming resources shift with few sleeper cells and international al groups and more local groups fighting for local issues.
Fighting Extremism

Is the fight against extremism winnable?

James N. Falk

The current obsession is with the potential to defeat terrorism. It is an important one and while many may describe themselves as experts on countering violent extremism, as one colleague said, “How We Win: How Cutting-Edge Entrepreneurs, Political Visionaries, Enlightened Business Leaders, and Social Media Mavens Can Defeat the Extremist Threat” by Farah Pandith (Custom House, 2019)

While not calling out names, Pandith makes it abundantly clear that, all too often, steps taken by the US government to build trust with Islamic communities did the opposite.

Pandith’s considerable experience with the subject lends particular credibility.

It should be noted, that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, who absolutely needs to build US and international goodwill, has taken positive and significant steps to rein in extremism by making consistent calls for moderation. At a time when both Saudi Arabia and the United States need to find strategic pathways to rebuild the relationship, putting countering violent extremism at the top is a good place to start.

On these and other fronts, Pandith offers a series of prescriptions. For instance, to counter “Shihekib Google,” she calls, setting up online detection centres, regulating tech companies more stringently; and supporting offline interventions in which youth can seek help when approached by recruiters.

Pandith calls for closing foreign-sponsored training centres for imams (Ott, the government of Tunisia and Morocco have been very successful in providing solid instruction and credentialed to imams from Europe and sub-Saharan Africa.) and encouraging others to cut financial support to religious leaders and organisations that incite violence.

These are certainly important goals but how to achieve them?

A central argument throughout the book is that a winning strategy will require the commitment of resources of government, the private sector and philanthropists to recognise that this battle, long before 9/11, will not be won overnight.

A criticism may be made that, while Pandith sets up and solidly discusses many of the potential causes of extremism, her solutions often would require major changes in corporate governance and governmental actions, which would present insurmountable obstacles to many of her recommendations, however valid they are.

That being said, this book is an important one and while many may describe themselves experts on countering violent extremism, as one colleague said, “How We Win: How Cutting-Edge Entrepreneurs, Political Visionaries, Enlightened Business Leaders, and Social Media Mavens Can Defeat the Extremist Threat” by Farah Pandith (Custom House, 2019)

James N. Falk is president and CEO of the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth and host of the podcast Global 10 Minute.

Spotlight

Shifting sands.

A Kosovar woman and a child, who have returned from Syria, leave a detention centre as they reunite with their family members in the village of Vranidoll, April 22.

Kelly Kennedy is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Washington.

Of Indian heritage, she grew up in Massachusetts in the 1970s and ’80s in an environment and time in which being Muslim was not seen as being “other” or threatening. The wave of fear arising from 9/11 lamently continues to permeate the political and social landscape.

While not calling out names, Pandith makes it abundantly clear that, all too often, steps taken by the US government to build trust with Islamic communities did the opposite.

That still today, hard-line interpretations of the Quran are distributed widely throughout the world, including in schools and prisons, is particularly worrisome.

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While not calling out names, Pandith makes it abundantly clear that, all too often, steps taken by the US government to build trust with Islamic communities did the opposite.
Family of Palestinian dead in Turkish jail to file suit with international court

A relative of a Palestinian man declared dead in a Turkish jail in April said he would take the case to international courts against Turkish authorities in international courts.

Zakaria Mubarak, the younger brother of Zaki Mubarak, a Palestinian terrorism suspect who disappeared in Istanbul in April and was declared dead at a jail there, said his brother was killed by Turkish authorities.

“They killed him to cover up the crime they had committed against him,” Zakaria Mubarak said.

Zaki Mubarak, a former explosives department officer in the Gaza Strip, travelled to Istanbul April 1 to meet Samir Shaaban, an old friend, and explore business opportunities in Turkey.

Zakaria Mubarak had said he dreamed of being free and to meet his older brother, and explore business opportunities in Turkey.

Zakaria Mubarak said he had been arrested and accused of plotting for the United Arab Emirates.

His family denied the allegation.

His Egyptian lawyer, Sharif Chalabi, said Mubarak had not been interrogated by Turkish authorities, who only filed a report to the prosecution in which they pressed the charge against him.

Mubarak was referred to the prosecution a few days after his declared arrest and talked on the phone with his family. He reportedly told his brother that he had been tortured.

“He told me that Turkey was far worse than he had ever imagined,” Zakaria Mubarak said.

Zaki Mubarak was scheduled to appear in court April 19. A lawyer commissioned by the Turkish government to press the charge against him and a lawyer hired by his brother said they expected him to be acquitted because of a lack of evidence. However, he was declared dead two days before the court appearance.

“They had to kill him because he would have proved Turkish authorities lying, if he had been proven innocent by the court,” Zakaria Mubarak said.

Zakaria Mubarak and Zaki Mubarak’s Bulgarian wife said they tried to have the body flown to Cairo where it was examined by the Palestinian Embassy-commissioned team.

Zakaria Mubarak filed a request to the Egyptian Forensic Authority to examine the body and issue a certified report about the cause of death.

Forensic Authority experts examined the body May 23, a day after it arrived in Cairo. A day later, they said they had completed the examination but refused to release details. Authority Director Souad Abdel Ghaffar said a report on Zaki Mubarak would be referred to the Egyptian Ministry of Justice.

Zakaria Mubarak said he will include the report in documents in an Egyptian lawyer and a French lawyer who volunteered to take the case will file with the International Criminal Court against Turkey.

“For Erdogan and his followers, Imamoğlu’s run on the political scene and his appearances outside Istanbul are seen as ‘I want to rule not only Istanbul but the entire Turkey’ – an existential threat to the president and his ruling party. The example of jailed People’s Democratic Party Leader Selahattin Demirtas, who is as sharp and sympathetic as Imamoğlu, is alive in people’s memory as how relentless Erdogan can be when he perceives a serious challenge for his throne. So in many ways, Imamoğlu, who in the ‘let’s overcome divis­ions in the society’ motto resem­bles late President Turgut Özal, knows he has entered a minefield. Then again, maybe not.

Given the tense-tyrannical state of the general order in Turkey, where the rule of law practi­cally collapsed and the economy is plunging into recession, the anti-APR cr­oads may have been displaying old defiance, but their enthusiasm may also be slumber. So are the public polls, which, the few untrustworth­y, show again a neck and neck race, with a percentage points of differ­ence in between. Will Imamoğlu win again? If the public polls are a sign, he may very well end up as vice­ựctor. In fairness, he deserves to be acknowledged and allowed to take office but there, at that very point, clouds gather over probabilities and much has to do with what Erdogan has in mind this time.

One theory is as simple as one can think of: Erdogan has run out of political ammunition. He has no longer anything to tell the crowds, and his words – much of them sheer lies – echo these days in the void. So, he may do nothing out of extraordinary to win these ‘repeat’ elections but strike later. The president has enough powers to define the fate of the municipalities, but further legislation plans for deepening the centralisation of power over local councils and he controls the entire judiciary and so-called autonomous state institutions, such as the Supreme Electoral Council.

Erdogan knows that Imamoğlu’s rise resembles what happened with Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu in 2014-15, when he won Istanbul in this election – as Imamoğlu did – could claim the presidency in the next possible occasion. Erdogan and the circles that surround him know that Imamoğlu will not hesitate to make public all the corruption, dirty public tenders and cronyism that have marked AKP rule over Istanbul for 23 years. This is all very dangerous, existen­ce in between.

The real race will start today. Until now, Imamoğlu had to endure accusations on identity – that he is a “Greek” from Pontus, the ancient name of the eastern Black Sea re­gion where a large Christian major­ity was based until a massive ethnic cleansing in 1915-23. The pessimists expect, however, that if Erdogan is fully determined not to let go of Istanbul, during the upcoming period before the election, a lot of ugly scenes could be played out.

They may be right: June 23 will not only show whether they are respectful of Mar­koğlu’s result if they witnessed a repeated loss. Their choice, then, will define the fate of Turkey.

Yavuz Baydar is a Turkish journalist and regular columnist for The Arab Weekly.

**Family of Palestinian dead in Turkish jail to file suit with international court**

June 23 will mark a date when Islamists will show whether they are respectful of an election result if they witness a repeated loss.

**Will Imamoglu score victory in Istanbul election again?**

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Bracing for unrest, Iran intensifies neighbourhood policing

**Tehran tangled in web of disinformation**

**Debate**

Iran

Ali Alfoneh

A US-imposed sanctions begin to bite, Iran is bracing itself for unrest, exemplified in the establishment... the Razavioun neighbourhood patrol initiative, of and approved the Basij's... of the Razavioun movement. Following a dismal performance in the anti-regime protests of 2009, which forced the Basij and the IRGC to intervene, Tehran used considerable resources to reform the LEF. The effects of those reforms were visible in the regime's... The Basij is strong enough to help the government.

The Rohani government has yet to make official statements about the Razavioun, but last November, the Basij's unsolicited initiative appears to have been modified so that its longer a joint initiative between the Basij, the police and the attorney general of Iran. When asked if Iranian President Hassan Rouhani had been informed of and approved the Basij's neighbourhood patrol initiative, Gheibparvar responded: “I wrote... to disinform others and that the only way to... accurate information is the one who values freedom and... caracterised as counter to their worldview. Gleicher said.

The individuals behind this activity, which also took place on other internet platforms and websites, misled people about who they were and what they were doing,” Gleicher was quoted by AFP as saying. Frauds claimed to be in the United States or Europe used fake accounts to run pages or groups and impersonated legitimate news organisations in the Middle East, Facebook said.”

Though in this attitude, given the source of the information, the context and the intervention level, it is obvious the reasons behind this is more faced with malicious intent rather than admiration. Facebook removed 51 accounts, 36 pages and seven groups and another three accounts from Insta- gram after a tip from internet secu- rity firm FireEye, National Security Council Director of Cybersecurity Policy Nathaniel Gleicher said. Twitter told Agence France- Presse that it removed 2,800 insa- thuetic accounts originating in Iran at the beginning of May. “Our in- vestigations into these accounts are ongoing,” a Twitter spokesperson said, declining to discuss details until the analysis was finished. A network of English-language social media accounts misrepre- senting who was behind them was evidently orchestrated to promote Iranian political interests, FireEye said. “In addition to utilising fake American persons that espoused both progressive and conservative political stances, some accounts impersonated real American individuals, including a handful of Republican political candidates that ran for House of Representa- tives seats in 2018,” FireEye said in a blog post.

Muzzling dissent. Members of Basij paramilitary force chant slogans during a rally in Tehran, May 31.}

Tehran wants its increasingly unhappy population to know only the regime has the right to disinform others.

Claude Salhani

then the militia took control of Iran, they banned all music and much of the social contact between the sexes, among a slew of other restrictions that gener- ally considered normal behaviour in the rest of the world. Since then the situation has somewhat improved, though the courts remain very much under the control of the theocracy, which, though somewhat more lenient, continues to frown on anything even remotely resembling what they refer to as “Western decou-Page 15
Page 15

**Iran**

Tehran tangled in web of disinformation


“Food was rationed and black-

outs were regular but, even during those dark days, I remember danc- ing with my friends to music on cassettes bought from illegal music dealers,” Amidi said. Almost at the same time, Tehran abuses social media as part of its influence peddling schemes. Facebook and Twitter said they disabled accounts used in an Iran-based campaign to sway public opinion by impersonating reporters, politi- cians and others. Though in this instance, given the source of the information, the context and the intervention level, it is obvious the reasons behind this is more faced with malicious intent rather than admiration. Facebook removed 51 accounts, 36 pages and seven groups and another three accounts from Insta- gram after a tip from internet secu- rity firm FireEye, National Security Council Director of Cybersecurity Policy Nathaniel Gleicher said. Twitter told Agence France- Presse that it removed 2,800 insa- thuetic accounts originating in Iran at the beginning of May. “Our in- vestigations into these accounts are ongoing,” a Twitter spokesperson said, declining to discuss details until the analysis was finished. A network of English-language social media accounts misrepre- senting who was behind them was evidently orchestrated to promote Iranian political interests, FireEye said. “In addition to utilising fake American persons that espoused both progressive and conservative political stances, some accounts impersonated real American individuals, including a handful of Republican political candidates that ran for House of Representa- tives seats in 2018,” FireEye said in a blog post.

Characters in the influence net- work had material published in US and Israeli media outlets, lobbied journalists to cover certain topics and appear to have orchestrated interviews in the United States and Britain regarding poli- tics, FireEye reported. It was not clear whether the campaign was related to a broader Iran- based social media influence opera- tion uncovered last year, FireEye said. “In addition to utilising fake American persons that espoused both progressive and conservative political stances, some accounts impersonated real American individuals, including a handful of Republican political candidates that ran for House of Representa- tives seats in 2018,” FireEye said in a blog post.

Information minefield. An Iranian woman works on her laptop in Tehran.

The pattern may provoke more anti-regime protests and end up achieving the very opposite of what it desires to achieve.

**Iran**

Bracing for unrest, Iran intensifies neighbourhood policing

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Debate

Post-Brexit prospects in the Middle East

The Middle East is an important investment area for not only the United Kingdom but for the European Union.

The young Prince Charles has always taken most seriously the Queen has been colour-blind throughout her long reign.

What's next? British Prime Minister Theresa May arrives to announce her resignation outside to Downing street in central London, May 24. (AP)
Are the US and Iran on anegotiation track?

Mohamad Kawas

The latest USforeign policy shift is welcome but it is also a warning. The US is back to talking about peace and dialogue. This time, however, it is not a ploy to negotiate with Iran. The US is instead looking to negotiate with the Taliban, which is a new and troubling development.

The USstrategy is based on the assumption that the Taliban is the only serious player in Afghanistan. This is a dangerous assumption. The Taliban is not the only player in Afghanistan, and it is not the only player that the US should negotiate with.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the Taliban is a monolithic entity. This is not the case. The Taliban is a loose coalition of different factions, and each faction has different interests. This makes it difficult to negotiate with the Taliban.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the Taliban is willing to negotiate. This is not the case. The Taliban has repeatedly refused to negotiate with the US. This makes it difficult to negotiate with the Taliban.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the US has the power to negotiate with the Taliban. This is not the case. The US is not the only power in Afghanistan, and it is not the only power that the US should negotiate with.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the US has the right to negotiate with the Taliban. This is not the case. The US has no right to negotiate with the Taliban.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the US has the ability to negotiate with the Taliban. This is not the case. The US does not have the ability to negotiate with the Taliban.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the US has the will to negotiate with the Taliban. This is not the case. The US does not have the will to negotiate with the Taliban.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the US has the courage to negotiate with the Taliban. This is not the case. The US does not have the courage to negotiate with the Taliban.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the US has the resources to negotiate with the Taliban. This is not the case. The US does not have the resources to negotiate with the Taliban.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the US has the support of the international community to negotiate with the Taliban. This is not the case. The international community does not support the US in its negotiations with the Taliban.

The USstrategy is also based on the assumption that the US has the support of the Afghan people to negotiate with the Taliban. This is not the case. The Afghan people do not support the US in its negotiations with the Taliban.

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The transport companies’ merger is important because the companies otherwise would not be able to keep up with the progress in the private sector.

In the first phase, 56 new buses were introduced. There are plans in the company to increase the number of cars to 2,000 vehicles by next year, with the goal of serving 8 million passengers daily without the hassle of using prepaid cards instead of cash payments for tickets.

The transport sector in Egypt has been neglected for years, mainly due to the accumulation of problems, notably the lack of qualified drivers. Egyptian authorities have ignored the disappo...

In April, he noted: “We are currently in discussion with a lot of partners around the world for growing our international gas business.”

Saudi Aramco CEO Amin Nasser also disclosed that Saudi Aramco’s trading arm had made its first LNG sale from Singapore in March to an Indian buyer. The agreement is significant because it marks the first time Saudi Aramco has sold LNG to an Indian buyer, following its entry into the Indian market in early 2019. The deal is expected to further strengthen the relationship between Saudi Arabia and India, which are key players in the global LNG market.

Saudi Aramco’s entry into the Indian market is significant because the country is one of the world’s largest importers of LNG. India’s demand for LNG has been increasing in recent years, driven by the need to diversify its energy mix and reduce dependence on coal. The country has set a target of achieving 10% of its energy requirements from LNG by 2025, making it an attractive market for LNG producers like Saudi Aramco.

The deal comes as part of a broader strategy by Saudi Aramco to diversify its customer base and reduce its reliance on traditional buyers like Japan, South Korea, and China. By entering new markets like India, the company aims to tap into the growing demand for LNG in Asia and expand its global footprint.

Saudi Aramco’s entry into India aligns with the country’s efforts to reduce its carbon footprint and move towards cleaner energy sources. The deal is expected to benefit both parties, with Saudi Aramco gaining access to a new market and India securing a reliable source of LNG to meet its energy needs.

The agreement is also symbolic of the growing cooperation between Saudi Arabia and India, which has been marked by several high-level visits and the signing of multiple bilateral agreements. The two countries have a long history of cooperation in various sectors, including energy, trade, and infrastructure.

Saudi Aramco’s entry into India is not without challenges, however. The company will need to navigate the regulatory environment and competition from existing players in the Indian LNG market. Nonetheless, the deal is a significant step forward in expanding Saudi Aramco’s global footprint and strengthening its position as a leading player in the LNG market.

In conclusion, the agreement between Saudi Aramco and India is a significant milestone in the company’s efforts to diversify its customer base and expand its global reach. The deal highlights the strong potential for cooperation between Saudi Arabia and India in the energy sector and serves as a reminder of the growing importance of LNG in meeting the world’s energy needs.
Will Iraq have enough electricity for coming hot summer days?

Manuel Langendörfer

London

A demonstration in June 2018, protests in Basra in April 2019, and now the current three-day sit-in in the capital: this is a familiar scene to Iraqis as they protest the lack of electricity and water.

With what is likely to be another hot summer ahead, there is increasing pressure on the Baghdad government to improve access to electricity and water.

“It is very hard” to deal with the electricity issues, said Iraqi journalist Fuad Fayyadh, adding that the lack of reliable electricity was not a new problem and affects most parts of the country.

Dozens of people protested June 1 in Karbala, a black box nearby officials for new generators and demanded an improvement to the electricity situation.

In anticipation of high temperatures during Eid al-Fitr, the electricity provider said it was preparing to allocate quotas for measuring electricity consumption and for coming hot months, when temperatures can reach 50 degrees Celsius, drive up the use of air conditioning.

Will Iraq have enough electricity for coming hot summer days? As the hot summer set in early 2018 and cover the entire phase of the project would begin the implementation of the first (STEG) announced in March 2017.

The move to the smart grid had been moving forward with the Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas in Tunis.

Experts said the main difference between the traditional and smart grids is the adoption of advanced infrastructure for measuring electricity consumption and for communication between the power plant and consumers.

The move to the smart grid had been postponed after the Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas (STEG) announced in March 2017 that implementation of the first phase of the project would begin in early 2018 and cover the entire country by 2023. STEG was to have received funding some time ago.

“Tollast said that available electricity supply has increased over the past five years and the gap between supply and demand has widened. The government signed an agreement with German company Siemens this year to upgrade Iraq’s electricity grid. The agreement includes the addition of new and highly efficient power generation capacity, installations and upgrade of existing plants and the expansion of communication and distribution networks,” Siemens said.

The Iraqi prime minister’s office said the 13-year plan would be worth $5.7 billion. The first phase includes the installation of 13 transformer stations, cooling systems for power stations and building a 500-megawatt, gas-fired power plant near the capital.

In an interview with Al-Monitor, Khatteeb said radical changes would happen in 2020, stating that the current situation was not “ide
tal” but “better” because of steps taken recently.

Robert Tollast, of the Iraqi Energy Institute, said the economics of the electricity system is distorted. Subsidies ensured that electricity provided by the national grid is almost free, he said. However, with the subsidies being designed to help the poor, the tariff system discourages them and does not create incentives to consume electricity more efficiently, he said.

A large part of families’ electricity expenditure goes to operators of privately owned generators, which run on fuel. These neighbourhod generators are used to close gaps in the electricity supply but are expensive. Generator operators have sometimes worked with armed groups to prevent upgrades to the grid that could hurt their business.

Until 1990, the Iraq electric-
ty sector was considered among the best in the region. That legacy was destroyed by successive wars and international sanctions.

With Iraq’s population growing at an estimated rate of 1 million per year, peak demands in 2020 might not be as bad as last year, “he concluded.

Manuel Langendörfer is a writer focusing on the MENA region.

Tunisia moves ahead with smart electricity grid

Riadhes Bouazza

Tunisia

The Tunisian parliament on Monday approved taking a $31.7 million loan from the French Development Agency for the implementation of a smart grid project.

Parliament passed legislation regarding the 400 million dinar ($11.7 million) loan plus a grant of $1.2 million.

The loan is to be repaid over 20 years with a grace period of up to 7 years. The new project is part of the Tunisian government’s efforts to establish a strategy of energy switching aimed at reducing costs and enhancing operational efficiency.

The main difference between the traditional and smart grids is the adoption of advanced infrastructure for measuring electricity consumption and for communication between the power plant and consumers.

The move to the smart grid had been postponed after the Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas (STEG) announced in March 2017 that implementation of the first phase of the project would begin in early 2018 and cover the entire country by 2023. STEG was to have received funding some time ago. Last year at the Africa-Smart Grid Summit in Tunis, the company said it would initiate an international tender for 2019 to start the project.

The French funding is to be allocated to implementation of the first phase only, which will involve development of control and communication stations and the improvement of infrastructure. It includes installation of 430,000 “intelligent” meters over three years in Sfax governorate in southern Tunisia. The second phase of the project is planned to extend the programme to the rest of the country.

Smart meters are to be installed in homes and businesses in Sfax account for about 10% of the total number of meters to be deployed in Tunisia.

At the beginning of 2017, the Industrial Company of Metallic Arti-
crafts (ISAM), a Tunisian industrial equipment and machine-
ing company, signed an agreement with Huawei for the Chinese company to supply smart electricity meters.

The value of the deal was not disclosed.

The smart grid is designed to reduce power waste, reduce the number of power outages, fixed bills, prevent consumer fraud, improve the eco-
system and increase competitive-
ness in the electricity sector.

Experts said the main difference between the traditional and smart grids is the adoption of advanced infrastructure for measuring electricity consumption and for communication between the power plant and consumers. The data exchange allows power plants to coordinate electricity production with actual demand.

STEG previously indicated that it had implemented measures to ensure the transition to the smart grid, especially since digitalisation is playing an important role in the energy sector.

The project, which translates Tu-

A much-needed transition. A view of the headquarters of the Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas in Tunis. (AFP)

Manuel Langendörfer

Economy

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A much-needed transition. A view of the headquarters of the Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas in Tunis. (AFP)
Casablanca needs more awareness, strict regulations to protect environment

Hassan Abdel Zaher

Casablanca, Morocco

CASABLANCA — Casablanca’s transport system is in crisis, with the city capital on the receiving end of a large amount of pollutants. Authorities are working to maintain the environment in Cairo but the city’s capital is on the receiving end of a large amount of pollutants. In 2018, 290,000 tonnes of straw were collected from rice farms in the Nile Delta and converted into organic fertiliser and animal fodder, Minister of State for Environmental Affairs Yasmine Fouad said. The Egyptian government had allocated 40,000 Egyptian pounds ($1 million) for the collection of straw from rice farms in Egypt. It was “Beat Air Pollution,“ the annual event for positive environmental actions that commemorated the World Environment Day. The Egyptian cabinet introduced the National Solid Waste Management Programme on June 5 and said the programme would combine the best management practices.

On June 3, the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, said carbon dioxide emissions from petroleum and natural gas consumption in Egypt dropped 5% in 2017-18, compared with the previous year. The drop in the emissions came as Egypt reduces dependence on traditional fuels and increases use of renewable energies, the agency said. The drop, experts said, highlights the need to put the environment at the centre of the attention of the government and the general public.

“There is an urgent need for more awareness about the importance of protecting the environment,” said Sherine Farrag, a member of the Environment and Energy Committee in the Egyptian parliament. “We are also badly in need of laws that punish those who cause pollution.”

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“There is an urgent need for more awareness about the importance of protecting the environment,” said Sherine Farrag, a member of the Environment and Energy Committee in the Egyptian parliament. “We are also badly in need of laws that punish those who cause pollution.”

Traffic jams, filthy streets, decaying buses turn life in Casablanca into daily nightmare

Saad Guerraoui

Casablanca, Morocco

Casablanca — Work on infrastructure projects causing huge traffic jams at peak hours, overcrowded buses and overloaded bins have turned Casablanca into a frustrating and irritating obstacle course. Infrastructure projects that were to improve Casablancans’ life and ease the daily traffic congestion are behind schedule, leaving traffic at some boulevards at almost a standstill.

The projects fall within the Greater Casablanca Development Plan (2015-20), which seeks to improve quality of life for Casablancas’ inhabitants, enhance mobility at the regional level, promote economic attractiveness and improve the business climate, Casablanca said. The development plan includes a construction of a modern public transport system that consists of tramway, underground and railway. It promises to reduce traffic road infrastructure and the upgrading of cultural, sports and animation infrastructures.

A 224-metre cable bridge opened under public pressure May in to ease seemingly endless vehicle traffic at peak times. The bridge was to have opened at the end of 2018. The delay prompted frustrated motorists to turn to social media to denounce authorities for a supposed nonchalant attitude towards residents’ suffering. “Save Casablanca” has become the platform - 163,000 members - and rallying cry of the city’s residents on social media as they express their daily concerns, ranging from transport to cleanliness.

Prior to the opening of the bridge, dozens of publications featured photographs of long vehicle queues, illustrating motorists’ daily struggles.

Entrepreneur Amaan Sami said he had to endure four years of daily traffic jams before the opening of the bridge. “During peak hours, if I leave at 6.30am, it takes me 75 minutes to reach my company in Bouskoura. If I leave at 7.30, it is a 1-hour journey,” said Sami.

Even with the bridge open, Sami now must deal with construction of an underpass in the junction of Brahmi Ramdani and Ghandi boulevards.

“If forced to use a chauffeur for practical reasons due to the driving time I waste besides the stress,” he added.

Younes Abourabia, a 35-year-old IT consultant, said he had to get an automatic taxi to automatic because of the traffic jams that have taken their toll on my knee. Driving is very stressful in Casablanca,“ he added.

Small Serbou, an engineer and expert in risk management, told World Health Organisation. “There is an urgent need for more awareness about the importance of protecting the environment,“ said Sherine Farrag, a member of the Environment and Energy Committee in the Egyptian parliament. “We are also badly in need of laws that punish those who cause pollution.”

Infrastructure projects that were to improve Casablancans’ life and ease the daily traffic congestion are behind schedule, leaving traffic at some boulevards at almost a standstill.

Scores of people have been deploring the degrading state of Morocco’s biggest and richest city and calling on councillors to learn from Tangier’s successful development plan.

“I suggest that the Casablanca’s councillors be taken in a third-cate-

gory coach tour Tangier,” wrote Mohamed Filal Assal on the Save Casablanca Facebook page. “First, they will know how this city has been metamorphosed. Second, they will have time to meditate on their bad governance,” he added.

Vice-Mayor Abdelmalek Lakehlayhi, who is also president of Ain Chouq District, called on citizens to be patient. “We are completely aware of the effect of the cleanliness of inhabitants. We raised the budget to allow the delegated companies to improve their services,” said Lakehlayhi in a video posted on social media.

Saad Guerraoui is a contributor to The Arab Weekly on Maghreb issues.
Lebanese women breaking barriers in civil aviation

Samar Kadi
Beirut

When she challenged a friend who provoked her with sexist comments, Rola Hoteit said she had no idea she would become the first female pilot with Lebanon's flag carrier, Middle East Airlines.

However, a 65-year-old mother of two, is no longer the lone female pilot among MEA's 190 pilots and first officers. Since 2019, five other women joined Middle East Airlines' (MEA) roster of cockpit crews, breaking barriers by moving into the traditionally male-dominated role.

Hoteit said she was studying materials at the American University of Beirut when a male student showed her a newspaper advertisement from MEA that called for "female and male applicants" for pilot positions.

"He brandished the paper and said, ironically, 'Look, they are offering pilot seats for women. That's a joke. Women can hardly park a car!'

"I really angered me and we made a bet. We agreed to apply and see who could pass the entrance exam. I passed. He didn't," she said.

Of nine candidates passed among more than 2,000 applicants, MEA therefore chose Hoteit into the trigger that turned Hoteit's future upside down. She dropped her community college and embarked on a career she hadn't even contemplated.

"After all, I thought I did not want to become a math teacher but I wanted to fly and see the world. I was determined to become a pilot, although my family was utterly against it," she said.

It took 27 years since Hoteit joined the ranks of MEA's pilots and she looks back at the early years of her career with a smile.

"It was not easy to be the first female pilot in Lebanon's history. The problem is that people are judgemental when women doing a job that was mainly a man's job," she said.

"I was sometimes teased by colleagues like when they asked me for a pencil. They would say, 'not eyeliner or lipstick.'

"Hoteit was a first officer, or co-pilot, for 15 years and she said it was easy then because the pilot was a man.

"When I was promoted to the captain's seat, I had to undergo extremely tough training and tests, much tougher than what male colleagues go through," she said.

"I guess, as women we are more emotional and sensitive by nature and we had to test my nerves and self-control in emergency scenarios. They put me under maximum pressure.

"Being the first woman pilot, my training was like a pilot project, a model for future female candidates."

Hoteit's first flight as captain of the plane was a roundtrip to Amman. "It is a 1-hour flight each way but felt like a bit nervous and anxious because of the big responsibility. However, when I landed back in Beirut, all that anxiety was gone and I felt fully confident since then."

While MEA's passengers were not used to being flown by a woman, the majority were encouraging, although there were some negative reactions and comments.

"Some passengers disapproved when they knew the captain of the flight was a woman. One comment I heard: 'My God, the pilot is a stewardess.' They could not imagine that a woman could be the actual pilot and not a stewardess," said Hoteit, who is also the region's chief pilot for Middle East Airline's (MEA) flight operations.

"It was not easy to be the first female pilot but in "opening the way for women piloting," Mansour said.

"We believe in women's capacities despite our culture that sees flying as a male career," said Captain Ahmad Mansour, MEA's head of operations.

"The job does not require muscles. Candidates, be they men or women, must have the passion for flying, the skills and the promptitude to act rightfully and under stress. Flying is no easy task but if one has the will and capacity, he or she can do it," Mansour said.

Hoteit said she believes she succeeded not only in becoming a pilot but in "opening the way for other women to embark on a flying career and breaking stereotypes."

MEA now has six women among its 190 pilots and first officers and is expected to add more female pilots.

groups focused on social development and human rights, as well as cultural fields, opened real opportunities for them to actively participate in the society's progress.

Hakkouzi explained that, over several stages, Morocco had developed indicators to track the development for women in political, economic, social or cultural fields. She mentioned the strategic framework for the intervention of actors, which was put in place at the beginning of the millennium and which constitutes the framework related to the integration of a gender approach in development policies and programmes.

Over several stages, Morocco had developed indicators to track the development for women in political, economic, social or cultural fields.

During a meeting of the technical committee in charge of following up on the government's Ikram 2 equity plan, Fatima Berkane, director of the Women's Affairs Section at the Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development, said the Moroccan Constitution recognised the principles of equality and institutional support of women, which is a priority of the government's Ikram 2 plan in addition to combating discrimination and violence against women.

The goals of both Ikram phases, especially institutionalisation of equality through the creation of mechanisms or introducing sectoral strategies, represent the basis of a culture of gender integrated planning in Morocco, as well as in the economic empowerment of women, which is a priority of the government. The plan includes seven axes, four of which are theme-based and three cross-sectional, supported by a system of governance.

In a previous meeting, Hakkouzi said the plan has 23 goals based on indicators to measure the effects of the programme, as well as the work of technical committees that worked with officials from ministerial departments responsible for monitoring the implementation of Ikram.

Observers from the EU Commission were present during the discussion of the outcomes of workshops included in Ikram 1 and Ikram 2, as well as the discussion of the challenges and difficulties that may hinder the achievement of these goals.

Youssef Hammad is a Moroccan journalist.

Ikram 2, Morocco’s plan for promoting rights of women

Youssef Hammad
Rabat

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Women

June 9, 2019 | The Arab Weekly | 21

(AFP)
The festival will screen debut films from around the world. It will also feature a section in which known film-makers show and discuss both their debut and most recent films. “It (the festival) is in line with the vision of Princess Rym Ali, the festival president, for the development and promotion of an Arab cinema that reflects the region’s creativity and speaks to its current cultural traditional heritage, as well as streamlined procedures and governmental support,” she said. Doumani said organisers were planning a celebration of film and television professions, “It is therefore aptly named as the premiere cultural event in Jordan. We hope it will be a new and qualitative addition to the other film festivals in the region,” she said. Doumani has been working in the media and communication sector for more than 20 years. She received a master’s degree in political science from the American University of Beirut in 1995 and worked in the print and broadcast press in Switzerland, reporting on Middle Eastern affairs in particular. From 1999-2007, Doumani worked as a spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross, both at the organisation’s headquarters in Geneva and in hot spots around the world, including Kosovo, Bunrudi and Iraq. Since 2008, Doumani has been managing the Media and Culture Section of the Jordanian Royal Film Commission. In 2007, she wrote a “Wounds in the Palm Trees,” which chronicled Iraq’s testimonies. She also wrote, produced and directed a documentary film “The Journey of the Place,” which won first prize at an Arab festival in 2009.

Saber Ben Amer is a Tunisian writer.
Deficient restoration a problem for Turkey's heritage

Except for a handful of well-known landmarks, such as the Armenian Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Akdamar Island in Van province, signs of non-Muslim history in Turkey are largely ignored.

**Constance Letisch**

Mosque of the late Ottoman period that now serves as a partially whitened suburban townhouse, framed by PVC window frames that grace a 20th-century castle, a fitted kitchen unit in a medieval shrine or a 2,000-year-old fortress tower that was mocked as resembling the cartoon character SpongeBob in its restoration. The list of botched restorations in Turkey is very long. In one of the latest cases, experts bemoaned a hole drilled into the wall of the Imperial Suleymaniyeh Mosque in Istanbul to fasten a cable. Anyone who cares about the protection of cultural heritage and expert restoration of historical monuments will suffer in Turkey, said Banu Pekol, of the Protection and Cultural Heritage (KMKD). "I know that I cannot save everything. That's a terrible feeling." Archaeologist Nezih Basgelen blamed the huge increase in tourism, a lack of expertise and greed for the lack of historical preservation and restoration shindigs. "Restoration is often handed to private contractors who lack the experience and the expertise," he explained. "They treat these projects like simple construction work." Costs are cut using the cheapest and most plastic, instead of wood; a lick of paint instead of stonework; or moulds pressed into wet concrete instead of cobblestones. Not only are the contractors to blame, employers who want to see quick, cheap results are also responsible. "Municipalities want to take advantage of monuments for tourism purposes as quick as possible," Basgelen said. "That's why they don't have the patience for time-consuming restorations."

Last year, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government passed a highly critical motion that aims to legalise hundreds of thousands of unregistered constructions all over the country and has brought billions in taxes and licence fees into government coffers. The amnesty allows for illegally built or altered buildings to be officially registered in exchange for a fee, a nightmare for preservationists and archaeologists.

"A terrible," Pekol said. "The amnesty has destroyed my hope that things will improve. It means that many buildings that violate preservation standards or that endanger cultural heritage will get state authorisation."

One example, she said, is the illegal building built in Zeyrek, a UNESCO-listed historic neighbourhood in Istanbul that will be eligible for legalisation. She said there is a lack of appreciation of historical cultural heritage in Turkey. Except for a handful of landmarks, the marks, such as the Armenian Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Akdamar Island in Van province, signs of non-Muslim history in Turkey are largely ignored.

"It breaks my heart to see Armenian, Greek and Assyrian villages fall into ruins," Pekol said. "She warned that with the disappearance of tangible heritage, history will fade as well. "Buildings trigger memories. If you could find housing blocks on the site of an Armenian village, people will stop asking who used to live there. They might even assume that there had never been anyone else," she said. Ignorance, too, is a part of the problem of the destruction of cultural heritage and historical monuments, which is why her association organises training programmes. Pekol has seminars for people who live or work in historic buildings, teaches them what problems might arise and how to address them, such as repair work that does not destroy the building's structure.

She criticised that it is mostly experts who are seriously involved in the protection of cultural heritage. She said members of other professions, such as journalists and teachers, should get more involved and KMKD has been organising seminars for them for two years now.

The media can help change attitudes, Pekol said, adding: "Content and the choice of words when writing about cultural monuments play an important role in their protection.

Teachers are encouraged to use and talk about monuments in their lessons. "A math teacher could teach counting using statues or important sites," Pekol said.

Turkey could hold hostage to Anatolia’s cultural heritage and for Iraq

**Thomas Seibert**

Turkey is about to start filling a huge reservoir behind a dam on the Tigris River in the southeastern province, marking the final stage of a project that has raised controversy in Europe and could have consequences for Iraq.

The Ilisu Dam, about 30km north of the Turkish border with Syria, is part of a planned network of 22 dams on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers that Ankara has been developing to generate energy and provide water for irrigation in Turkey’s Kurdish region, one of the poorest areas of the country. A prestige project for the Turkish government more than 20 years in the making, the Ilısu-İnegöl Ilisu Dam has been controversial from the start.

The project drew criticism from European countries that scrapped credit guarantees for their companies ten years ago, accusing Turkey of not doing enough to protect cultural sites in the Tigris Valley and of ignoring the rights of tens of thousands of people who had to leave their homes. Activists said the project would wreak havoc in Turkey and might cause the destruction of a 12,000-year-old town up river from the dam. Laid out as a cultural area of high importance, Hasankeyf has seen the Assyrians, Romans and Seljuks come and go but could soon be submerged by the new lake.

"It could happen as early as next April," Ercan Ayboga, an activist from the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive (HYG), an interest group in Turkey, said at a rally in the south-eastern provincial capital of Mardin. He accused Ankara of being equally sped up to stimulate the Turkish economy, mark the birthday of the Turkish republic. Scientists and other experts advise more diligence. "If fast profits and personal gain are all that matters, the protection of century-old cultural heritage will be nullified. "We are facing a historical matter," Pekol said.

She added that politicians do not have the luxury to plan until the next election. "They are only in power for a certain time but they do not have the luxury to plan until the next election. "They are only in power for a certain time but they do not need to look after any problems or damage," Pekol explained. "Why shouldn’t we use their knowledge to protect the heritage?"

"Buildings trigger memories. If you could find housing blocks on the site of an Armenian village, people will stop asking who used to live there. They might even assume that there had never been anyone else," she said. Ignorance, too, is a part of the problem of the destruction of cultural heritage and historical monuments, which is why her association organises training programmes. Pekol has seminars for people who live or work in historic buildings, teaches them what problems might arise and how to address them, such as repair work that does not destroy the building’s structure.

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Teachers are encouraged to use and talk about monuments in their lessons. "A math teacher could teach counting using statues or important sites," Pekol said.

KMKD also offers training courses for tourists. "They visit historic places much more often than we do, which is why they are often the first to notice any problems or damage," Pekol explained. "Why shouldn’t we use their knowledge to protect the heritage?"

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"Constance Letisch was a contributor to Al Arab Weekly in Istanbul.

Controversial from the start. Trucks are seen on the banks of the Tigris River near Hasankeyf, last December.

(AFP)
Amman Citadel standing guard atop city since antiquity

Roufan Nahhas

Amman

Perched majestically on the highest hill of Jordan’s capital, Amman Citadel stands as the guardian of ancient civilisations that left vestiges inside its 1,700-metre-long wall that dates to the Bronze Age. Used as a rampart protecting the ancient capital of the Ammonites, Rabbath-Ammon – present-day Amman – the citadel went through many construction and reconstruction phases spanning the Iron Age and the Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad eras. It is a colourful site, rich in history and boasts a unique sunset overlooking the Roman Amphitheatre in Amman.

“...It is simply amazing and the setting is remarkable because one is able to see everything with ease. My favourite part is the numerous early Bronze Age caves that are so mysterious. One can let his imagination go wild,” South Korean tourist Su yuk said.

The citadel is a colourful site, rich in history and boasts a unique sunset overlooking the Roman Amphitheatre in Amman.

“...And, of course, the big fingers, part of a hand that belonged to a colossal statue from the Roman period near the temple of Hercules are impressive. You can just imagine the height of such a statute, which was estimated to be 12 metres tall. It is a unique experience that you cannot find anywhere.”

Some of the caves used as burial sites date to 2300BC and often have multiple tombs inside. Visitors can take a small step inside through the openings to view the limestone cavities, which were modified for communal burial during the Middle Bronze Age, 4,000 years ago.

French tourist Jeanne Seuve said the rich history of the citadel “makes it very appealing andnholds it with mystery”.

“We have the Lacques Caves near the village of Montignac, in the department of Dordogne in south-western France. They are so mysterious and very ancient, too, but visiting the citadel is very appealing and inviting because you can walk easily around the monuments and caves and appreciate every single step towards the church or admire the hand and elbow of Hercules or simply just sit on a bench and enjoy the sunset. Who could ask for more?” Seuve said.

Last year, the Italian Embassy in Jordan began the “Resqualification of Citadel-Roman Theatre Trail” initiative, which aligns with the historic role of Italy in protecting Jordan’s heritage sites.

It aims to achieve a comprehensive proposal for requalification and making the pedestrian trail from the citadel to the Roman Theatre attractive for tourists and residents by linking two iconic sites of Amman.

Roufan Nahhas is a journalist based in Jordan.

Amman Citadel receives more than 125,000 visitors each year. “You cannot find a place with so many civilisations that left their marks in a single location. The citadel has this unique diversity that ranges from Assyrians to Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans, as well as the Umayyad and Ayyubid dynasties, a truly unique experience,” Halaseh said.

The Roman Temple of Hercules that dates to the second century is one of the most popular attractions at the citadel. On display is a huge hand, which is believed to be from a 12-metre-high statue of Hercules. The temple also includes two 9-metre tall columns among other ruins.

Next to the temple are remains of buildings that formed the Umayyad Palace, built in the seventh and eighth centuries. Most of the buildings were destroyed by an earthquake but the beautifully domed audience hall remains in unexpectedly good condition. The outside courtyard contains ruins of residential buildings and the reservoir used to dispense water to the palace.

“There is also the remains of a sixth-century Byzantine church with pillars, floor plan and mosaics, a true feast to the eyes. The site hosts the Jordan Archaeological Museum, where visitors can admire many excavated artefacts, jewels and statues,” Halaseh said.

Remains of the Roman Temple of Hercules.

(Roufan Nahhas)

A Bronze Age cave at the Amman Citadel site.

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Used as a rampart protecting the ancient capital of the Ammonites, Rabbath-Ammon – present-day Amman – the citadel went through many construction and reconstruction phases spanning the Iron Age and the Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad eras. It is a colourful site, rich in history and boasts a unique sunset overlooking the Roman Amphitheatre in Amman.

“The site, which is on Jebel Al Qala’a, a hill rising 850 metres above sea level and overlooking the old city, is a popular place with locals and foreigners because of its location and historical significance,” said Bassel Halaseh, an archaeologist at the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.

“Many Jordanians like to visit the citadel and enjoy a lesson in history while breathing fresh air and watching the sunset,” Halaseh said.

The Jordan Tourism Board said the Amman Citadel not only attracts visitors and residents but visiting the citadel is very appealing and holds it with mystery.

The site has three main attractions – the historical and archaeological Jordanian Museum, where visitors can see some of the oldest discoveries in Jordan, such as the Ain Ghazal Statues, which date to 7,000-6,000BC, and other ruins.

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The museum was built in 1951 and hosts some of the oldest known statues in Jordan, such as the Ain Ghazal Statues, which date to 7,000-6,000BC, and assistants from Assur in Mesopotamia, Persians, Greeks and Romans, as well as the Umayyad and Ayyubid dynasties, a truly unique experience,” Halaseh said.

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