Erdogan strikes defiant posture but crisis looms with US over Russian missile system

If Turkey was to cancel the deal with Russia, Putin would ask Turkey to leave Syria, potentially allowing the creation of a “statelet” run by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units.

Thomas Seibert

Turkey is facing the biggest test of its relations with the United States in decades over an arms deal with Russia but is determined to go ahead with it. The US has threatened sanctions.

Implementing a $2.5 billion agreement, Moscow began delivery July 12 of two batteries of the S-400 air defence system to Turkey. Turkish media reports said it was concerned.

The S-400 agreement saw Ankara move closer to Russia. Cagaptay and other analysts said Moscow is looking for opportunities to end Ankara’s participation in the F-35 programme to build and deploy the fifth-generation fighters. The United States has threatened to drop Turkey from the F-35 programme to build and deploy the fifth-generation fighters.

If Turkey was to cancel the deal, it would be first on the list no doubt, with the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

This is just the beginning, however, of where the Trump administration seems to be heading. Iran and its various proxies in the Middle East.

US sanctions on Hezbollah to carry long-term impact in Lebanon, Middle East

Sami Moubayed

Beirut

Apart from its symbolism, the sanctions of three top Hezbollah officials by the United States carry no immediate or short-term substantial effect, given that none of the blacklisted persons have direct access to US financial institutions or US financial institutions. They have no political influence.

This is just the beginning, however, of where the Trump administration seems to be heading. If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.

If Hariri or whoever succeeds him the entire country into a confrontational mode, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene, due to its sensitive political scene.
July 14, 2019

I was April 5, 1946, when the US military conflict—battleship remembered as the setting that formally ended World War II—anchored in Bostonport, Istanbul. It had sailed from New York on a special mission—carrying the body of Mehmet Munir Ertegun, ambassador of Turkey, who was a dean of diplomatic corps in Washington.

The visit had a higher symmetry and would come to be remembered as a breaking point. It marked the beginning of a new world—a world that was no longer War all over it—taking shape and the American society placed on Turkey.

Six years later, February 18, 1952, Turkey had officially become a member of NATO. In 1954, a speech delivered gave the United States the right to establish bases and station troops in Turkey.

Nobody could come to be seen as significant as the visit of the American warship 73 years ago. As the first shipments of the sophisticated Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile defence systems arrived in Murted Air Base in Ankara, the sense of a historic shift seemed to be evident.

Turkey’s insistence on acquiring the S-400 system from a NATO adversary, defying the basic principles of “interoperability” of the alliance, is open and unilateral.

Washington on several occasions raises the notion that Ankara is determined to be ostracized from the alliance.

Comparisons between US Mississippi and S-400 are not far fetched. History is filled with such episodes. When Joseph Stalin’s Russia pushed Turkey to the west then, now, in one way or another, it is the other way around.

Nobody can argue that the decision-making that led to the Turkish S-400 purchase of Russia’s sophisticated missile system was based on reflexes.

The underlying reason seems apparent: Since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and end of Cold War, Turkey lost a significant part of its responsibility for an alienation from NATO, which it had decades ago.

The discontent has been brewing along with its inability to transform itself into a democratic state, which failed to develop into a predictable, accountable and transparent-based one.

Turkey has insisted on the long-standing sentiment that it was a special case requiring special treatment, refusing to handle its bleeding issue—the Kurds. Coupled with the failed attempts to meet the Copenhagen Criteria and a synaptic EU leadership, it has perceived the West as the one determining.

When the ruling Justice and Development Party and its leader, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, proved unable to satisfy the society under benighted leadership, the country became a shipwreck.

When the ship was broken by an attempted coup, Turkey in 2016 turned into a state, if not a rogue one, seeking a port where autocracy was the norm. This is where, like in Ankara, the country perceives the interests of the country and themselves.

The rift that developed between Washington and Ankara has a background that strengthens the thesis of a historic breaking point. Since 1989, it was the—then mighty—Turkish generals who felt their long-hidden frustration with the United States come to the surface. It developed to the point that it was the Americans who pushed Turkey to push the Kurds, Muslims more and more to the centre stage of politics in Turkey.

In their dark illusion, they remained in denial that the profound coup that toppled the Turkish political class and bureaucracy was the reason the voters sought alternatives. When Erdogan and his party rose to power, allying themselves with the Fethullah Gulen Movement, they were subjected to revenge by trials and a slow-motion demotion from the centre stage. The military, whose main bulk had always American-acceptable features, didn’t blame Islamists for the methodologies they fought but the Americans.

Paradoxically, after a while, Erdogan—once an adversary of the officers—came to believe the coup did not come out with Gulen, hence he faced one retribution after another, with the US coup attempt in 2016 as the peak point. Erdogan may have been blaming the Gulenists for the coup, the Americans are seeking to topple him from power.

The profound disbelief—if not hostility—towards the United States is the force that brought the so-called Eurasianists and Erdogan together, approximately since 2014-15. Although this alliance that suggests the dissident system may be short-lived, the challenge to NATO and rapprochement with Russia are its products. Turkey is determined to deal with the consequences now expected—mandated US sanctions and further marginalisation within NATO—but the complexities of its objectives with Moscow, Erdogan and his Eurasianists allies in the administration are different views on Syria, jihadis and the Muslim Brotherhood.

It should be argued that with the S-400 components having landed on Turkish soil, adventurism in Ankara has escalated much more dramatically. Turkey is facing, layer upon layer, a deepening crisis that threatens its economic and political ground. Let’s see what the opposition can do.

Yavuz Baydar is a Turkish journalist and regular columnist for The Arab Weekly.
Lebanese cabinet standoff means more trouble to come

Lebanese cabinet standoff means more trouble to come

Lebanese cabinet standoff means more trouble to come

The recent drama is merely a rehearsal for the challenges Hariri will face in the not-too-distant future, including the expected verdict by a special tribunal tasked with designating responsibility for the death of his father, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

When the verdict becomes official – and likely names Hezbollah members as culprits – Hezbollah and its allies will demand that the Lebanese state express solidarity with them and proclaim the tribunal’s findings invalid and conspiratorial.

This might seem far-fetched but was the prospect of an alliance between Hariri and Michel Aoun that catalyzed the latter into the presidency.

If Lebanon’s cabinet dilemma was not enough trouble, US sanctions on two Hezbollah lawmakers presented further challenges to the state, reminding Beirut that it cannot escape its ties to Iran and Hezbollah.

Hariri, meanwhile, strongly defended his decision to maintain the controversial alliance. Putting aside political differences, he argued, is critical to ensuring Lebanon’s economic stability.

While this might sound responsible, Bassil’s efforts to undermine Hariri’s cabinet’s economic plan by details the entire system of governance is evidence that Bassil and Hezbollah are reading from the same script, as the last chapter will not be pleasant.

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, 1967-1977.”

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Syrian refugees facing insoluble dilemma in Lebanon

Surrounded by uncertainties. Syrian refugee children play on rubble of dismantled concrete huts at a makeshift Syrian refugee camp in Arsal, Lebanon, July 4.
Tensions between Iran and Britain are rising as Tehran seeks to overtake oil tanker seized by the Red Sea.
Dubai

The International Atomic Energy Agency has announced that Iran has breached the limit set by the nuclear accord.

The United States is working to step up international monitoring of the region's key sea lanes following a series of tanker attacks.

Iran holds the United States responsible for jeopardising the deal by unilaterally withdrawing from it in May 2018 and imposing hefty economic sanctions on the country. Iran's breaches do not presently represent a major risk but, if it begins enriching to higher levels and growing its nuclear stockpile, the time to a "nuclear break-out" when Iran may have enough material for a weapon, becomes shorter.

The current trajectory is defined by an increasingly high-stakes competition over regional diplomatic efforts, particularly by European leaders, who need to work to find a breakthrough within the coming weeks that eases tensions involving Iran.

Iran's nuclear breaches ratchet up risks in showdown with Washington

The recent IAEA meeting broke up in rancour without agreement or resolution. Why the United States requested the emergency session was left unclear.

The United States is working to step up international monitoring of the region's key sea lanes following a series of tanker attacks.

In Tehran, Ali Shamkhani, Iran's top security official, told the US President Donald Trump that Tehran's decision to increase enrichment was "unchangeable" and criticised the US forforlorn hope. "

The United States is working to save the deal by compensating Iran for losses caused by US sanctions.

The United States criticised Iran for the move as "crude" and described Tehran saying it can no longer trust Washington to uphold any deal.

The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last year, laid down by US Secretary of Energy Agency referred the JCPOA or at least to keep Iran as close as possible to its terms. Tehran has breached them since May by exceeding a limit of 300 kilograms of enriched uranium and more recently by enriching beyond 5%. On the day the IAEA board met, French President Emmanuel Macron's senior advisor, Emmanuel Bonne, was in Tehran seeking an understanding through which Iran would return to JCPOA limits in exchange for the United States moderating its sanctions. The Europeans' gambit was that US President Donald Trump's desire to prevent war may coax him along such a course.

"Europe is moderating its criticism of the US, at least in public, to avoid making even harder the task of persuading the US to offer something in return for Iran staying within, or near to, the JCPOA limits," said a former diplomat commenting on US administration.

"I don't think they have a clear objective," said the former diplomat commenting on US administration.

"I don't think they have a clear objective," said the former diplomat commenting on US administration. "But they're just winging it, expecting Iran to crumble eventually and then negotiate on as many of the 12 points as possible."

The 12 demands are those set by the JCPOA, which was signed with Iran, the United States, Russia, China and the EU (Germany, France and the United Kingdom) and endorsed by the Security Council. The agency does monitor Iran's nuclear programme under Tehran's safeguards agreement as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That enables it to monitor Iran's compliance with the JCPOA.

The EU's statement to the IAEA board described the importance of Tehran continuing to "allow full and unfettered access" to inspections, called on Iran to return to JCPOA limits and requested an urgent meeting of JCPOA signatories. In Tehran, Ali Shamkhani, Iran's top security official, told Bonne that Tehran's decision to increase enrichment was "unchangeable" and criticised Europe's failure to shield Iran from US sanctions. Nonetheless, the United States special purpose vehicle for Iranian trade, is yet to yield results, even on humanitarian goods. In the middle of the European, the Europeans are not just alarmed at Iran's likely steps to expand the nuclear programme or possible moves to restrict the access of IAEA inspectors. They are also puzzled by the Trump administration.

"They're just winging it, expecting Iran to crumble eventually and then negotiate on as many of the 12 points as possible."

The 12 demands are those laid down by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last year, including that Tehran end uranium enrichment, break links with regional allies and abandon its missile programme. With Iran showing no inclination to negotiate on such terms, Trump's wariness over military entanglement leaves a default position of tanker attacks. There is speculation the United States is mulling other measures against Iran short of war, such as additional sanctions, cyber operations and perhaps enhanced support for regional activists challenging the status quo in Iran.

A military conflict against Iran is a scenario the region is keen to avoid considering its highly unpredictable consequences. Europe has limited leverage on the crisis and appears to lack a unified, coherent position on the standoff.

The current trajectory is defined by an increasingly high-stakes competition over regional diplomatic efforts, particularly by European leaders, who need to work to find a breakthrough within the coming weeks that eases tensions involving Iran.

Sabahat Khan, based in Dubai, maintains a cross-disciplinary focus in international security, defence policy and strategic issues.

Gap between Europeans regarding Iran highlighted by IAEA meeting

The recent IAEA meeting broke up in rancour without agreement or resolution. Why the United States requested the emergency session was left unclear.

Europe is working to maintain the JCPOA or at least to keep Iran as close as possible to its terms. Tehran has breached them since May by exceeding a limit of 300 kilograms of enriched uranium and more recently by enriching beyond 5%.

On the day the IAEA board met, French President Emmanuel Macron's senior advisor, Emmanuel Bonne, was in Tehran seeking an understanding through which Iran would return to JCPOA limits in exchange for the United States moderating its sanctions. The Europeans' gambit was that US President Donald Trump's desire to prevent war may coax him along such a course.

"Europe is moderating its criticism of the US, at least in public, to avoid making even harder the task of persuading the US to offer something in return for Iran staying within, or near to, the JCPOA limits," said a former diplomat commenting on US administration. "I don't think they have a clear objective," said the former diplomat commenting on US administration. "But they're just winging it, expecting Iran to crumble eventually and then negotiate on as many of the 12 points as possible."

The 12 demands are those laid down by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last year, including that Tehran end uranium enrichment, break links with regional allies and abandon its missile programme. With Iran showing no inclination to negotiate on such terms, Trump's wariness over military entanglement leaves a default position of tanker attacks. There is speculation the United States is mulling other measures against Iran short of war, such as additional sanctions, cyber operations and perhaps enhanced support for regional activists challenging the status quo in Iran.

A military conflict against Iran is a scenario the region is keen to avoid considering its highly unpredictable consequences. Europe has limited leverage on the crisis and appears to lack a unified, coherent position on the standoff.

The current trajectory is defined by an increasingly high-stakes competition over regional diplomatic efforts, particularly by European leaders, who need to work to find a breakthrough within the coming weeks that eases tensions involving Iran.

Sabahat Khan, based in Dubai, maintains a cross-disciplinary focus in international security, defence policy and strategic issues.

The recent IAEA meeting broke up in rancour without agreement or resolution. Why the United States requested the emergency session was left unclear.
Europe’s refugee policies are inadequate

A s is the case every summer, too many overcrowded boats carrying would-be migrants capsize while attempting the perilous journey across the Mediterranean. This year has been no exception. The tragedies continue even though, since 2017, governments in North Africa and the Middle East have, with the help of Europe, brought their shores under tighter control.

That was not the case, however, in Libya. Despite arrangements between Europe and some of Libya’s actors, would-be migrants continued to depart from the Libyan coast. An incident occurred July 2 when an inflatable boat carrying more than 50 migrants sank off the Tunisian coast after setting off from Libya. The bodies of 27 migrants have not yet been found.

Europe’s strategy has been to prevent the arrival of refugees at any cost. To stem the departure of refugees from Libya, it included questionable deals with dubious militias and an unreliable coast guard. As recently written by Mathieu von Rohr in Die Spiegel, “Europe’s borders are unpoliced, as its authorities have washed their hands of any guilt” through such deals.

He was referring to arrangements between European powers, including Italy and France, with opportunist militias and a coast guard made up of militia members to intercept migrants attempting to leave Libyan shores and take them to detention centres in squad and other dangerous conditions.

To make up for lost revenue after the cancellation of transit fees across the sea, traffickers and the militias did not hesitate to find other uses for the detained refugees. Traffickers at the sub-Saharan end of the smuggling networks have held refugees’ families for ransom.

Strict anti-migration measures in Europe, best illustrated by enforcement of tough policies in Italy since the coming to power in June 2018 of Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, reduced the flow of refugees to a trickle. So far this year, the number of migrants who have reached Italy from Libya via Morocco is 7,292, a reduction of 85% compared to the same period in 2017, a year of 97% compared to 2017.

The reduction in the number of migrants could not, however, stop migrant fatalities nor the shortcomings of Europe’s policy. “This year alone, just under 600 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean. The horrors of the European Union’s migration policies aren’t playing out in front of the media, but are unfolding in North Africa and on the high seas,” pointed out von Rohr.

When dozens of African refugees were killed July 21 in Tajoura, Libya, it was a tragic incident waiting to happen. More than 50 refugees, caught in the crossfire of a battle for the city, were killed that night. Others who tried to flee the detention centre were shot at by local sentries.

For months, there have been indications the refugees in the centre were intended for military purposes. Two refugees told the Associated Press they had been taken to a military camp to be used as a target for attacks.

Media reported they were most likely requisitioned to do work that the Libyan militia led by Libyan General Khalifa Hafter’s “National Army” was supposed to perform.

International actors should have seen this coming. In May, the United Nations called for the evacuation of refugees from the detention centre in Tajoura. UNHCR spokesman Charlie Yaxley said in a Twitter post: “Unacceptably that detention centres in Tripoli are being used to store weapons & military equipment. This is making them a target for attack, putting the lives of those inside in grave danger. Violation of human & international law and must stop.”

Despite the noted danger, Tripoli authorities did not stop transferring refugees into the centre, UN reports said.

After the July 2 incident, UN Special Envoy on Migration to the Mediterranean Vincent Cochetel bemoaned the “blindness among European countries about the situation of migrants in Libya, which has been deteriorating for years.”

Fighting only added to the risks, he said. Even more short-sightedness marks Europe’s approach to stemming the flow of refugees from sub-Saharan Africa without addressing its underlying factors.

“I understand Europe’s strategic interests but we have to move beyond that. Have the conflicts that are spurring people to leave Libya been resolved? There are currently 14 conflicts on the African continent,” he noted. “We have to tackle the issues upstream.”

Another part of the problem has to do with Europe’s own divisive politics. The rise of populist and nationalist movements in Europe has fueled anti-migration trends. Europe’s policies have exposed them to accusations of inhumanity and racism.

Italian intellectual Aminata Traoré has written that Europe’s restrictive policies stem from an “atavistic refusal to form mixed societies.”

Another part of the problem has to do with Europe’s own divisive politics. The rise of populist and nationalist movements in Europe has fueled anti-migration trends. Europe’s policies have exposed them to accusations of inhumanity and racism.

Italian intellectual Aminata Traoré has written that Europe’s restrictive policies stem from an “atavistic refusal to form mixed societies.”

A durable solution requires an European approach that addresses the complex issues of peace, stability and development in the Horn of Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Expedient measures offer only short-lived solutions.

It’s Iran that is taking the initiative. It rushes to act, then waits for others to react. It has never been a sophisticated actor, but its actions have been dramatic while the reactions have been lukewarm and confused. Nothing in Tehran’s response to Washington’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal is surprising. In its responses, Iran is following a predictable map.

The nuclear agreement is not an Iranian affair and has never been an objective of the Islamic Republic’s regime. It was that Washington that oversaw the crafting and negotiating of the deal that included backchannel of Muscat and then marketed it with both with international partners. When Iran threatens international shipping lines in the Bosphorus or the Gulf, it represents a different tussle altogether.

At the same time, when Iran decides to enrich its uranium to levels beyond the nuclear deal, it represents a step that whoever thought could be killed of the nuclear deal should have anticipated. So, Washington is either intentionally drawing Iran into a military and “nuclear” escalation for some sought purpose or US President Donald Trump’s decision to pull out of the nuclear deal was an improvised emotional reaction that politicians in Tehran find easy to deal with.

Tehran has not felt any current threat to its regime. The country is used to sanctions. In fact, the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council with a wide international consensus had been broader before and harsher. Washington accused Tehran of being behind the May 12 bombings of cargo ships off Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates, of targeting two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman in June 27 and of downing an American drone over the Persian Gulf on June 20. And yet, Tehran has not seen any response to the level of these charges.

Worse than that, Tehran has never seen, in mediation attempts, nothing more than a US desire for dialogue rather than for confrontation. Trump confirms this reading through his consistent behind-the-scenes diplomacy. All messages delivered by the prime minister of Japan and by the German, British and French foreign ministers had been to re-establish contact and influence the new US administration.

Tehran understands that negotiations are coming someday but nothing is urgent right now. The US president has not achieved a breakthrough on the North Korean front that could serve as a model for decision-makers in Tehran.

The scene is in Iran’s favour: To produce a nuclear bomb, Iran needs to enrich uranium to levels beyond the nuclear deal. It has increased the rate of enrichment to 4.5% and is threatening to bring it up to 20%, which means that it has a long time ahead of it to play cat and mouse and to enjoy receiving more and new mediation delegations.

Even when the time is right to negotiate, from Tehran’s perspective, it will be done on the premise that Iran is progressing towards developing its nuclear bomb. That would put it in a position of strength rather than being subjected to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s famous 24-conditions.

Observers must conclude that the world is dealing with Iran as a major and fundamental state in the world and that, like it or not, the world must accept, deal, negotiate, and compose with its regime as a definitive and final one.

Iran knows that its gains with the United States has gone into extra time. There is no room for a war to be waged by the United States under the leadership of a president who will be looking at the way things are going to benefit him for his chances for re-election.

Tehran knows that Trump may not launch formal surgical military strikes, as he did in response to Syria’s use of chemical weapons. To do so, he needs assurances that no Iranian response will drag him and his country into a major war that he has no control over its outcomes.

Trump has not been able—or, to put it more accurately, has not tried—to convince the US public that Iran poses a strategic threat to the United States. All previous US administrations had taken such a step before waging wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Yugoslavia.

In the Iranian case, however, the type of showdown that Trump has picked since May 8, 2018, when the United States withdrew from the nuclear agreement, has looked more like a game that Trump and his team have been playing with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his team. If Trump wishes to sit in the White House for a second term, he must resort to a populist discourse that he was good at, promising greatness again to America and speaking of lucrative deals with his country’s allies and rivals.

It does not look like Trump’s approach to the Iranian issue is going to be profitable for Trump the candidate. Tehran knows that, and will do its best not to give him what might ease his way to a second term in his presidential campaign. In fact, it is counting on his failure and the success of one of his Democratic rivals, who, incidentally, all have agreed to return to the nuclear agreement as a definitive and final one.

Until the United States changes its position in November 2020, Iran is unlikely to have to worry about any outside threat.
Why conspiracy theories thrive in the Middle East

Claude Salhani

Conspiracy theorists are found in every country, but they seem to be the most in the Arab world. The words “conspiracy theories” are immediately thrown in any debate with the hope of providing some rationale to an otherwise unintelligible—and demoralizing—political reality. No topic is too small or inappropriate to such treatment. Issues such as private lives of celebrities—be they in the business world, entertainment or sports—are fair game for conspiracists.

One topic seems to come in at the top of the Arab world’s political axis—politics—and the whims of Washington’s role in determining the destinies of countries in the region. Once that role comes into focus, the CIA is not far behind.

Whether it be US missiles to the moon or sending a spacecraft to Mars, many Arabs remain sceptical of US motives.

The closest to the moon ranks high on conspiracists’ list of topics. They are bringing back the memory of how Americans never walked on the moon as the entire moon landing was fabricated inside a Brooklyn sound studio.

Some governments in the region, as well as Islamist movements, encourage the conspiracy spin because it has proven a valuable tool for explaining actions beyond their control or contrary to their narratives, especially if it has to do with Israel and any part of its political reality. It spares many the trouble of admitting much of the blame could go to minds that seem detached from reason and reality. Conspiracy theories enable those who expose them to not deal with their inability to handle the complexity of the real world and its problems.

Among the favourite topics prevalent in the region are the potential conflicts between Yemen and from Syria to Egypt—is anything related to US regional ruff, and to narrow enough, to be a CIA-inspired plot. Any major policy initiative, when the goals seem too high or if the rumors are jucy enough these conspiracists do not need to be limited to major events of political dimension—be it the work of the spy agency. If one reads conspiracy theories, they imply that the CIA has the resources to hire as many people as it wants and is authorized to spend as much money as it deems necessary, given that its operating budget is classified. Almost on an equal pedestal as the CIA in carrying the blame for the failures and associated calamities visiting the Middle East is the Israel’s external intelligence agency, Mossad, added to the powerful Zionist lobby in the United States. Too many Middle Easterners continue to believe that Zionists, combined with the power and influence of the CIA, can appoint some Arab American president as well as install or back from office those od the Middle East as though they were pawns in a giant chess game. Combine runemes, conspiracists, press, the TV and radio and what comes across is an even more powerful vehicle for spreading the dissmisive and crude, but highly effective, “fake news.”

Only bringing back the primacy of reason will save the Arab world from the distorting prism of conspiracy theories.
Haidibu

Protestors in Haidibu on Socotra took to the streets to protest what they said are attempts by Yemen’s al-Islah party to “disrupt stability on the island.” Demonstrators also demanded the removal of Socotra Governor Ra’ad Mahrous.

Although al-Islah is part of Hadi’s coalition government, protesters allege its actions in Socotra had remained largely free of the conflict that has raged on mainland Yemen since 2011. However, island residents say they fear that attempts by al-Islah to widen its influence will increase tensions.

They claim al-Islah provoked serious frictions elsewhere in Yemen, including in Taiz, diverting attention from the main fight with Houthi militia. Regular demonstrations have taken place in Haidibu and other towns, with the support of the STC, other groups and local tribal leaders. Some demonstrators described the protests as “the beginning of a revolution against the Muslim Brotherhood,” in reference to al-Islah. Although al-Islah is part of Yemen’s coalition government, protests allegedly action in Socotra are part of a plan developed in collaboration with Qatar to divert the attention of Saudi-led coalition from its fight against Houthi militias.

Armed al-Islah supporters recently seized a ship carrying vehicles at Socotra’s main port. Al-Islah said the militants had the backing of Qatar. The then local commander of the STC-affiliated Security Belt militia, Hadi bin Zayed, tried to negotiate the release of the vehicles, al-Islah reportedly shot him, causing injuries that necessitated his hospitalisation.

Special correspondent

A statement by the Socotra leadership of Yemen’s Southern Transitional Council (STC) said actions by al-Islah and its supporters hinder activities of organizations from the United Arab Emirates aimed at promoting economic development on the island.

The STC has been promoting the re-establishment of self-governed government in former South Yemen, which merged in 1990 with North Yemen. Since the outbreak of the conflict in Yemen, and in particular since Socotra was hit by a devastating cyclone in 2015, the Emirates’ Red Crescent and the Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation have initiated a major programme of relief, aid and development assistance.

The effort included building schools, allocating financial support for teachers, the expansion and modernisation of the island’s main hospital, the establishment of a main port and the expansion of the power supply network.

Socotra had remained largely free of the fallout of the conflict that has raged on mainland Yemen since 2011. However, island residents say they fear that attempts by al-Islah to widen its influence will increase tensions.

Princess Reema, who has been groomed for this mission from an early age, is the granddaughter of King Talal, brother of the Saudi emir, and her significant influence within the ruling family is seen as a powerful global actor, both politically and economically.

Beyond her significant influence within the ruling family, Princess Reema was also the first woman to be appointed as an ambassador by a member of the Saudi royal family.

A fresh perspective. Saudi Arabia’s new Ambassador to the United States Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan (R) presents her credentials to US President Donald Trump in Washington. (Twitter)
Iraqi US Envoy in Troubled Waters Over Call to Normalize Ties with Israel

Nazi Ali Tarzii

London

Remarks by Iraqi Ambassador Yasseen whipped up a diplomatic storm that moved beyond social media. Yasseen was attacked for encouraging or insinuating the possibility of normalization of relations between Israel and Iraq. “There are objective and timely reasons that call for the resumption of relations with Israel,” Yasseen said, stressing the total absence of such relations and the legal position of zero-tolerance towards normalization. Yasseen’s norm-defiant stance shocked and angered members of the Iraqi parliament, some calling on Baghdad to summon the envoy and others calling for his immediate resignation. The Iraqi Foreign Ministry’s initial response was that reports had twisted the envoy’s words televised on Iraqi satellite station al-Iraqiya. Few appear interested in the wider context to the remarks made – Israel’s insensitive Iraqi diaspora who “cherish and practice local customs and traditions,” the ambassador said. While estimates vary, an estimated 200,000 Israeli citizens are thought to be of Iraqi Jewish descent.

“Of course, there are no relations to the Jews.”

An Iraqi writer.

Hamed al Kilani

Viewpoint

Converting Iraq’s Army into an IRGC Incarnation

Since the beginning of its revolution, the Iranian regime has been in accordance with a doctrinal frame that was the perfect cover for achieving old ambitions emboldened in a specific political system and diplomatic relations operating according to international standards and mechanisms. The concept of authority in Iran is a platform for carrying out the regime’s doctrinal agenda and for mobilising the numerical strength of sects in Iraq. The militias can be considered a new state, a model for other Arab cities in Iraq.

The militias are being mobilised to various missions, foremost of which is inciting sectarian sedition in Iraq’s political and society, in anticipation of any conflict with the United States through shocks and catastrophes that transcend the Islamic State’s style of terror. This requires a campaign of caution, vigilance and mobilisation in preparation for unexpected operations and attacks. Such attacks serve to confuse the international community and force it to intervene after a mini-crisis. All the while, Iran is hoping to transform the nature of its conflict with the international community by obtaining a commitment on the part of Iraq to stand by its commitment to the nuclear agreement.

For a long time, the latter has dealt with its internal concerns and battles by reducing the sanctions of units in the Armenian Army, including the infamous al-Quds brigade, to settling scores with Arab regimes and taking control of Arab territories.

The militias are being mobilised to various missions, foremost of which is inciting sectarian sedition in Iraq’s political and society, in anticipation of any conflict with the United States through shocks and catastrophes that transcend the Islamic State’s style of terror. This requires a campaign of caution, vigilance and mobilisation in preparation for unexpected operations and attacks. Such attacks serve to confuse the international community and force it to intervene after a mini-crisis. All the while, Iran is hoping to transform the nature of its conflict with the international community by obtaining a commitment on the part of Iraq to stand by its commitment to the nuclear agreement.

For a long time, the latter has dealt with its internal concerns and battles by reducing the sanctions of units in the Armenian Army, including the infamous al-Quds brigade, to settling scores with Arab regimes and taking control of Arab territories.
Lamine Ghannmi

Tunisia

Electoral controversies expose Tunisia’s paradoxes, uncertainties

Analysts said the strong showing of the Islamic Renaissance Party could win 29.8% of the vote in parliamentary elections. Ennahda’s electoral support in May to 8.6% in July. Also affected by the amendments is social personality Olfa Terras Ramzi’s electoral ambitions. He reiter- ed the need for pre-electoral controversies could discourage people from voting in October and November. “With this mentality of ‘all rotten,’ we cannot expect a high voter turn- out in the elections and high-skilled people in the parliament,” warned Business News magazine editor Nizar Bahloul.

Heavy losses in Libya’s Islamist ranks trigger concern among supporters

ficulty ratings of Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed. The French Ministry of the Armed Forces said the missiles were intend- ed for “self-protection of a French special forces deployed in Libya.” Paris said July 10 that anti-tank missiles France bought from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have left support to the LNA as a bulwark against the Muslim Brotherhood and other Is- lamist allies since 2014, opinion polls indicated that 77.5% of Tunisian respondents perceived the record of the “ruling system” as “bad” and 51.4% described it as “very bad.” Contrary to their negative views on most aspects of the government’s performance, more than 78% of poll respondents said they saw an im- provement in Tunisia’s security situ- ation over the last five years. Successful polls have indicated mounting disapproval of stances ad- vocated by the Islamists and their al- lies. This trend is expected to benefit anti-establishment formations. Liberal activist Rima Rahhab said the trends reflect “the resentment by citizens towards the current political class.”

Some experts said they fear the pre-electoral controversies could discourage people from voting in October and November. “With this mentality of ‘all rotten,’ we cannot expect a high voter turn- out in the elections and high-skilled people in the parliament,” warned Business News magazine editor Nizar Bahloul.

Lamine Ghannmi is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Tunis.
Sudan after the military and the protest movement the military and the protest movement

Can Sudan move beyond ‘Arab spring’ failures?

Khaiballah Khaiballah

The signing of the agreement on July 14, 2019, which ended the thirty years of the regime of Omar al-Bashir, was the result of a political project of the Alliances for Freedom and Change. They imposed a certain degree of discipline on the rival sides until it had secured an agreement that would be signed and annulled before the ink dried. In such an agreement is guaranteed. An agreement does not mean implementation of such an agreement is guaranteed. Reaching an agreement does not mean implementation of such an agreement is guaranteed. Sudan has taken a major step towards getting out of its predicament. It was necessary for the popular protest movement to overcome its distrust of the military establishment, just as it was necessary for the military to understand that there was no future for it if its ambition was limited to security and the taming of the regime of Bashir. Despite the “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.

The “Arab spring” was a series of catastrophes wherever it landed. In Syria, the world was complicit in a regime disaster for the Syrian people. It was necessary to keep in place for the sake of the Christians in the “Arab spring” to sink the lid of Libya and the possibility that the country will be revived. Libya is paying all the bills resulting from Seamus Quaid’s grandiloquent dreams and failed projects dreams that turned out to be mere nightmares of a sick man. The “Arab spring” was also disastrous in Tunisia where the common people are increasingly expressing regret over the fall of the repressive regime of former President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Yemen is fragmented beyond repair. A piece of its territory under Taiz’s-style rule by the Iran-backed Houthis in the north has become a base for launching missiles and drones against Saudi Arabia. All talk of Yemen’s unity has become a mere talk of returning to the formula of a North Yemen and a South Yemen. The “Arab spring” is meaningless in the present conditions.

There are several failed experiments from which the Sudanese, military and civilians alike, can learn. Which path will they choose? The Sudanese have, so far, taken the path of common sense and reason. The military cannot run the country in the same way al-Bashir did and the civilians cannot manage the country’s affairs alone. Each side needs the other. The agreement that was achieved was a reasonable compromise. What Sudan needs is for responsible civilian leadership to emerge, a leadership that can crystallise a political project for the future.

Sudan has taken a major step towards getting out of its predicament. It was necessary for the popular protest movement to overcome its distrust of the military establishment, just as it was necessary for the military to understand that there was no future for it if its ambition was limited to security and the taming of the regime of Bashir. Sudan’s Transitional Military Council and the Sudanese civilians movement by demanding the ouster of Bashir. It was crucial to pressure both sides to negotiate and reach an agreement, putting to rest the stalemate. How many talks in Sudan have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides? What is striking about Sudan is that the dialogue has been going on for some time and have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides. The “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.

What Sudan needs is for responsible civilian leadership to emerge, a leadership that can crystallise a political project for the future.

All talk of Yemen’s unity has become a mere talk of returning to the formula of a North Yemen and a South Yemen. The “Arab spring” is meaningless in the present conditions. There are several failed experiments from which the Sudanese, military and civilians alike, can learn. Which path will they choose? The Sudanese have, so far, taken the path of common sense and reason. The military cannot run the country in the same way al-Bashir did and the civilians cannot manage the country’s affairs alone. Each side needs the other. The agreement that was achieved was a reasonable compromise. What Sudan needs is for responsible civilian leadership to emerge, a leadership that can crystallise a political project for the future.

What Sudan needs is for responsible civilian leadership to emerge, a leadership that can crystallise a political project for the future.

What is striking about Sudan is that the dialogue has been going on for some time and have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides. The “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.

What is striking about Sudan is that the dialogue has been going on for some time and have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides. The “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.

What is striking about Sudan is that the dialogue has been going on for some time and have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides. The “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.

What is striking about Sudan is that the dialogue has been going on for some time and have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides. The “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.

What is striking about Sudan is that the dialogue has been going on for some time and have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides. The “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.

What is striking about Sudan is that the dialogue has been going on for some time and have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides. The “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.

What is striking about Sudan is that the dialogue has been going on for some time and have not been interrupted, despite the distance that separates the two sides. The “Arab spring” in front of the armed forces’ heads, the Sudanese Army’s senior officers have a chance to prove they are different from al-Bashir.
**Germany snubs US request to send ground troops to Syria**

Simon Speakman Cordell

Tunis

F ollowing Germany’s refusal in 2018 to deploy ground troops to Syria to backfill the draw-down of US forces, lawmakers in Paris and London provided some relief to Washington with commitments to increase their presence in the region by 10-15%. In December 2018, US President Donald Trump announced the complete withdrawal of US troops from Syria. Given what many feel is the immense debt owed to the SDF for its sacrifices in fighting ISIS, as well as the risk of that militant group re-surfacing, the suggestion of leaving the Kurds isolated in Syria is politically unsustainable.

“For the [SDF] to be able to administer northern Syria for the long term, it will need a patron of some sort,” said Jeffrey Martini, a senior researcher at the RAND Corporation. “That could be a continued US presence in this theatre, which deters the regime and Turkey from a large-scale ground invasion to push back the Kurds.”

The situation remains fluid, Martin pointed out, with opposing positions of the regime and the Kurds far from fixed. “The alternative formula would be of the Syrian regime and the Kurds reach an accommodation,” he said. “In that case, no US presence would be necessary to sustain the Kurdish position, although the Kurds would need to make important concessions to the regime.”

Given its history, Germany’s overseas military commitments have been consistently limited in scope.

Though Britain and France have long-standing presences in Syria, Germany’s contribution has largely been limited to air force intelligence.[3] To reverse that, US Special Representative for Syria Engagement James Jeffrey travelled to Germany in early July, telling Deutsche Presse-Agentur and Welt am Sonntag newspaper: “We want ground troops from Germany to partially replace our soldiers.” He said he expected an answer from the German government this month.

The answer came July 6, with a German government spokesman saying: “When I say the government envisages sticking to the current measures in the anti-ISIS (military) coalition, this includes no ground troops, as is well known.”

Though the increase in the military commitment of France and Britain will likely diffuse a potential diplomatic flare-up, analysts said they are sceptical of the contribu-
tion a German deployment to Syria might make.

“Germany’s contribution is mainly in training, intel, support and logistics,” said David Pollack, a fellow at the Washington Institute, “plus use of medical facilities as needed at Ramstein (a large US base in Germany) and elsewhere.”

“It is small and mainly symbolic but politically important to both sides,” Pollack said. He added that he doubted the friction between Germany and the Trump administration, centring not least on Ger-
many’s contributions to NATO, played a significant role in Berlin’s decision making. “It’s much more about internal legal and political issues, as always even before Trump,” Pollack said.

Given its history, Germany’s overseas military commitments in recent decades have been consistently limited in scope and, prior to 1994, non-existent. There is widespread public and political scepticism towards overseas military commitments, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s junior coalition partners, the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the Greens, Liberal FDP Democrats and Left party, urging their leader to de-
cline the United States’ request for troops.

Concerns also exist over German troops’ readiness to engage in a mission that could extend beyond technical support for the SDF to active combat. German forces are known to be lacking in basic supplies, such as protective vests and winter clothing, and, a leaked re-
port from last year indicated, they had resorted to painted broom-
sticks in place of rifles during NATO exercises.

However, the 10-15% increase promised by France and Britain will come as relief to policymakers in Washington tasked with extricating the United States from the Syrian conflict.

Nevertheless, even with an in-
creased contribution from Italy, which is expected, plus further re-
imforcements from Balkan states, the fresh troops will not be enough to compensate for the United States’ planned withdrawal, potentially opening a door for the resur-
gence of ISIS.

Simone Dalton, a senior fellow at the Centre for Strategic and In-
ternational Studies, told Foreign Policy that it was likely ISIS would “over time be able to play upon lo-
cal grievances,” as it did in before its 2014 takeover of major cities, and “reconstitute and be able to take territory.”

Simon Speakman Cordell is a freelance writer.

---

**Security reshuffle consolidates Assad’s posture as Syria’s strongest military power**

The Arab Weekly staff

Beirut

S yrian President Bashar Al-
Asaad declared a major rehash of the security forces apparatus, which led to the retirement of his long-standing Defence Minister General Idris Akef al-Zaouia.

Observers have been analysing the move to determine whether it was mandated by Russia or Iran, the two main backers of the Damascus regime.

Hassan, the most high-profile of the retired officers, was pensioned off, rather than dismissed. Appointed to lead the most widely feared apparatus of Syrian security secu-
rity force thanks to massive Russian air cover.

Jamil Hassan and Suheil al-Has-

sn, who are not related, are from the Alawi sect that has ruled Syria sin-

ce 1970 and from where Assad originates. Suheil General Hassan ismail, Jamil Hassan’s deputy who was chosen as his replacement. All three take orders from Asad, not from Iran or Russia.

The same applies to Hussam Luka, the newly appointed head of Syria’s General Intelligence Direc-
torate. A Sunni Muslim from Kha-

nas in Aleppo province, Luka rose to prominence last November when he was appointed director of po-
tical security. He replaced General Deeb Zettoun, who commanded Syria state security since 2012.

Both are considered Assad’s men who were too junior under the rule of his father and rose to prominence after Bashar Asaad became presi-
dent in 2000.

The security change is very cos-

metic, replacing one Sunni Muslim Ba’athist officer with another Sunni Muslim Ba’athist officer, both As-
sadists. The same applies to General Nasser al-Ali, who became head of political intelligence and General Nasser Deeb, who was appointed director of criminal intelligence.

There is a clear thread indicating Asaad’s ability to fire and hire at will, seemingly telling friends and oppo-

nents alike that he is more powerful than the officers under his rule.

Asaad’s message appears to be that there are no strengthen in Syria apart from the president, who has dis-
missed all senior officers who were in power when the conflict started in 2011 and whom some speculated were more powerful than the president.

Three years ago, Asaad fired the powerful head of political security, Bustam Gazalah, and Rifa Shaba-
deh, commander of military intel-

telligence. Last year, he dismissed the long-standing Defence Minister Hassem al-Frij and, since Jan-
uary 2016, has kept the post of army chief-of-staff vacant.

The dismissals no doubt were made in close coordination with the Russians, who have been work-

ing on revamping the military and security apparatus, ushering in a new generation of officers who are battle-trained by the Russian Army and who are considered “trustwor-
thy” by Russia’s military command.

The Russians clearly don’t want officers who stay in power for too long, like the old guard that worked

Close coordination, Syrian President Bashar Assad (R) receives Russian President’s Special Envoy to Syria Alexander Lavrentiev (2nd L) in Damascus, June 26.

with Hafez Asaad – Bashar Asaad’s father – from 1970 until his death in 2000. Because of the longevity of their tenures, it was difficult to get rid of them by the late 1990s, to make way for Bashair Asaad and his generation of officers.

Hassan had been in a command-

mg position for ten years but, judg-
ing by the age of his successor – 55 – he will be retired within the next 12 months. So will the rest of the officers placed in power recently, preventing them from becoming too strong at their jobs or too inde-

pendent.
Terrorism and the Islamic State (ISIS) are a significant threat to global security. In Libya, there is a particular concern about the re-emergence of ISIS. Putin, the Russian President, has warned of terrorist ‘infiltration of militants into Libya’ from Idlib. This indicates the potential for ISIS to establish a foothold in Libya, which could pose a serious threat to the stability of the region. The continued presence of ISIS in Idlib and the instability in Libya suggest that the fight against terrorism is far from over.

The arrival of ISIS militants fleeing Syria is a worrying development. ISIS is seeking to establish a foothold in Libya, where they can regroup and pose a threat to the stability of the region. The international community must work together to prevent the establishment of a new terror state in Libya. The international community must provide support and assistance to the Libyan National Army to fight against ISIS. This includes political, financial, and military support. The international community must also work to address the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty, inequality, and instability, to prevent the emergence of new militant groups.
Israel targets Iranian arms shipments through Sinai

Amr Emam

Israel’s military role in Sinai and its security coordination with Egypt have been at the center of discussions with the Israeli Air Force conducting strikes against targets in Egyptian territory. Israeli fighter jets have attacked trucks suspected of transporting missiles and weapons from Libya on the road to Gaza, Israeli media said. One of the trucks allegedly held Iranian missiles meant for Islamic Jihad in Gaza, Palestinian sources told the Israeli daily, The Times of Israel.

Israel, the website claimed, was looking to block the delivery of weapons and funds to Hamas and Islamic Jihad through tunnels. Egypt has not officially commented on reports of Israeli statements about coordination in Sinai but news of the Israeli air strikes was no surprise to the Egyptian military and political analysts who pointed to growing security coordination between Cairo and Tel Aviv, two historical enemies that are now united by the fight against extremism and Iran’s destabilising role in the region.

“Israel is moving closer to Egypt and we should not be surprised,” said a security analyst at Cairo University. “Behind this coordination, there are understandings between the two sides on the fight against terrorism.”

In an interview last January with CBS News’ “60 Minutes” program, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi acknowledged coordination between Egypt and Israel, especially in Sinai, said Akram Badreddine, a political science professor at Cairo University. “Behind this coordination, there are understandings between the two sides on the fight against terrorism.”

Israel and Egypt are reportedly collaborating to prevent Gaza from turning into a threat to their security and stave off Iranian influence near their borders. Egypt was the first Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel following a series of wars with the country, most recently the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Sisi has officially met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at least twice since he became president in 2014.

Close coordination between Egypt and Israel has become a national security necessity for both sides, analysts said because ISIS threats in Sinai are as much a threat to Israel’s security as they are to Egypt’s.

The security appendix of the peace treaty between the two countries limits the number of troops Egypt can deploy in Sinai and the type of equipment they can use there.

To fight ISIS, Egypt transferred tons of thousands of troops into Sinai, a deployment that needed approval from Tel Aviv because it could have been considered a violation of the 1979 treaty. In January 2017, Sisi revealed that at Egyptian army battalions — approximately 55,000 personnel — were fighting ISIS in Sinai. Egypt also needed to move heavy equipment, including tanks, personnel carriers and fighter jets, which were banned by the treaty, into Sinai.

Iranian involvement in Gaza is another reason the two countries stepped up coordination, analysts said.

“Egypt has been seeing Iranian involvement in Sinai and in Gaza for a long time now,” said Gehad Auda, a political science professor at Helwan University. Egyptian and Israeli security officials meet twice a year to discuss measures against common security threats. Security coordination between the two countries has stabilised the 1978 peace treaty. Border control and the fight against smuggling gangs along the border between Israel and Sinai are at the center of security talks between the Egyptian and Israeli officials.

Unrest in Libya, Iran’s involvement in backchannels in Sinai and in Gaza and ISIS in Sinai are apparently compounding the common threats facing the two countries.

“Security collaboration serves the best interests of both states,” said retired Army General Moham- ad al-Shahawi. “This collaboration is important for cutting off logistical support to the terrorists in Si- na, especially with the presence of regional sponsors for these terrorist groups.”

Amr Emam is an Arab Weekly contributor in Cairo.
I

Tunis

Israel and Iran have threatened each other with military strikes amid financial and political pressure from the United States on Tehran over its policies in the region.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu warned that Israel’s fighter jets could reach Iran. “Recently, Iran has been threatening the destruction of Israel,” Netanyahu said July 9 at Nevatim Airbase in southern Israel, where he was inspecting F-35 jets. “It would do well to remember that these planes can reach anywhere in the Middle East, including Iran and certainly Syria.”

A senior Iranian parliamentarian said Israel would be destroyed within 30 minutes if the United States attacked Iran.

“If the US attacks us, only half an hour will remain in Israel’s lifespan,” Mojtaba Zolnour, chairman of the Iranian parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said July 9, the semi-official Mehr News Agency reported.

Israel has admitted to attacking Iranian targets and Tehran’s proxies in Syria. Israel boasted in 2018 that it is ready to strike inside Iran and called on European countries to reverse this step and to refrain from further measures that undermine the nuclear deal. US Vice-President Mike Pence said the United States would not waiver from its target of maximum pressure against Iran.

“We will never allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon,” Pence said July 8. “Iran must choose between caring for its people and continuing to fund its proxies which spread violence and terrorism throughout the region and breathe out murderous hatred against Israel.”

Pence’s remarks echoed a warning from US President Donald Trump a day earlier. “Iran better be careful,” Trump said.

Israel recently escalated its rhetoric to warn that it is ready to strike inside Iran over Tehran’s nuclear programme and role in the region.

Netanyahu warned that Israel’s “military might for the event that it is ready to strike inside Iran over Tehran’s nuclear programme and role in the region.”

In a statement in response to Pence’s remarks, Iran denied having military intentions in Syria. Iran announced that it would breach commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers after the United States withdrew from the agreement and imposed sanctions on Tehran.

Tehran hailed, with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu speaking at the Israeli Air Force pilots’ graduation ceremony at Hatzerim Airbase in southern Israel, June 27. (Photo: Reuters)

Tunis

Israel, Iran exchange threats of war and destruction

The Arab Weekly staff

Israel, Iran threats of war and destruction

News & Analysis

The non-violent BDS campaign has raised awareness and generated support for the Palestinians but it remains to be seen if it ends the injustice and discrimination against Palestinians.

Yousef Alhelou is a Palestinian journalist living in London.

Rise of BDS worldwide is worrying Israel

Yousef Alhelou

The boycott, divestment and sanctions movement is gaining ground in Europe. The educational, cultural and business boycott is a Palestinian-led movement for justice, freedom and equality and was inspired by the South African anti-apartheid efforts, the movement, known by its initials “BDS,” urges action to pressure Israel to comply with international law, mainly by ending its prolonged military occupation and colonisation.

Although it is considered by Palestinians as a means of non-violent resistance and struggle, it is seen as an existential threat by Israelis, who claim BDS’s aim is to delegitimise their existence. The global movement, which includes academics, unions, associations and grassroots operations around the world, claimed several recent successes. Last year, 26 singers and artists, including Lana Del Rey, pulled out of a festival in Israel, following a similar move by New Zealand singer Lorde months before. Scores of artists and stars in film, theatre, literature and music have supported the movement.

Israel expressed its worries about BDS and urged its allies to curb the growing movement. Germany, which is Israel’s only country to respond to Israel’s wishes and moved to outlaw the BDS. Germany’s Bundestag became the first parliament in Europe to declare the BDS anti-Semitic, that move effectively labelled supporters of Palestinian human rights as anti-Semitic, saying their actions were reminiscent of the Nazi campaigns against Jews.

The resolution came days after the BDS called for artists to boycott the Eurovision song contest, which took place recently in Tel Aviv. BDS supporters argued that Israel’s hosting of the event amounted to a “whitewashing” of its occupation policies and treatment towards Palestinians.

In Israel, the German move was hailed, with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu welcoming it as an “important” decision. In a statement in response to the German parliament, BDS reiterated that “the academic and cultural boycott of Israel is strictly institutional and does not target individual Israelis.”

“The German parliament’s equation of the non-violent BDS movement for Palestinian rights with anti-Semitism is based on outright lies,” the movement posted on Twitter. “It’s not only anti-Palestinian McCarthyism, it is a breach of international law, German democracy and the fight against real anti-Semitic racism.”

Palestinians in the Israeli-besieged Gaza Strip said they felt insulted by the German move against BDS.

Sami Abu Salem, a Gaza resident, said it was said that Germany alienated itself from the illegal and inhumane Israeli occupation. “Germany’s decision is very shocking because it means it does not support justice and international law,” Salem said.

Abd Nasser, another resident of Gaza, said the accusation of anti-Semitism is being used to silence criticism of Israel. “The term serves as a scarecrow to intimidate those who dare to criticise the actions of the Palestinians,” he said.

Palestinian BDS activist Majed Abusalama, in Germany, said that Palestinians seeking justice should not be falsely accused of being anti-Semitic. “This parliament’s decision is wrong and completely disrespectful to our struggle for justice and equality, completely disrespectful to civil rights in Europe. At this moment, we are stronger and more united in the BDS movement in Germany and Europe,” Abusalama said.

International pro-justice and pro-Palestinian activists vowed they won’t be silenced or deterred following the German resolution. “An outrageous attack on free speech. Human rights activists in Germany will continue to struggle for freedom, justice and equality for the Palestinian people. BDS is an explicitly anti-racist campaign striving for justice. It is an attempt to silence criticism of the apartheid state of Israel by parliamentarians of a state which continuously ignores the oppression of Palestinians,” Irish BDS activist Zoe Lawlor said.

Although the German parliament resolution is symbolic and non-binding, some BDS supporters said they were concerned that other countries might follow suit. Such moves would curb peaceful resistance to occupation.

The non-violent BDS campaign has raised awareness and generated support for the Palestinians but it remains to be seen if it ends the injustice and discrimination against Palestinians, as it did in apartheid South Africa.

Yousef Alhelou is a Palestinian journalist living in London.

The non-violent BDS campaign has raised awareness and generated support for the Palestinians but it remains to be seen if it ends the injustice and discrimination against Palestinians.
Europe must challenge Iran's assertion of impunity

Francis Gihlès

The countries south of the Sahara Desert in the Africa Sahel – Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Libya – remain below the radar of international attention, mostly of the West. So, to a lesser degree, does Libya. One reason is the scale of the human suffering in many of these countries are growing. The listing of refugee and internally displaced people in these Sahel countries is daunting. The conflict in Libya, for instance, has delineated a so-called “no man’s land” between the internationally recognized Government of National Accord and the戈塔军 (GNA), while the recently-recognized Eastern Government of Libya is a shambles. The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, says that 5.5 million people are internally displaced because of conflicts. The country is also hosting 285,000 refugees, who fled violence in the Central African Republic and Southeast Africa, and 100,000 forced out of their homes by Boko Haram. In Chad, that number rises to almost 450,000 refugees, the majority of whom are from Sudan and the Central African Republic, and 150,000 internally displaced people.

There are also large numbers of non-state armed opposition groups with international backing. These groups feed off perceived injustices and insecurity. David North, president of the International Rescue Committee, wrote: “When a humanitarian crisis is not treated as a crisis, it has political ramifications.”

The European Union has been facing a growing refugee crisis in Libya, which has led to the increase of migrants and asylum seekers entering the European Union. The EU has been working closely with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) to improve border control and reduce illegal migration to Europe. However, the situation remains challenging and requires sustained efforts.

Europe is unable to help as bedlam spreads in Sahel

The crisis is made worse by the fast disappearance of Lake Chad. For centuries, the lake was the largest reservoir in the semi-arid belt spanning Africa south of the Sahara Desert, relied upon by 10 million people. Naturally shallow and replenished by monsoons, the lake is shrinking because of seasonal variations of rainfall, which have lessened. The international community remains indifferent to this growing tragedy – the EU appeal for Cameroon is only 9% funded.

The DEBATE replaces the current crisis. Despite not to carry the burden of “the fight against terrorism” – ”All Europe is engaged in the fight against terrorism”, which has equipped a well-armed police, in place of 150,000 to engage militarily in Mali. This remarks observers of the tens of thousands of North African troops that fought in the French Army during the two world wars. Now, as then, the French were short of cannon fodder.

That senior officers and politicians in Paris have even harbour the idea that Algeria might agree to the recreation of the modern version of the regiments of “Titrisseurs algériens” of yesteryear suggests they are caught in a time warp.

Francis Gihlès is an associate fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.

East/West

Fuel to fire, Turkey-made armoured personnel vehicles, shipped to Libya by Government of National Accord, arrive at Tripoli port.

Fuel to fire, Turkey-made armoured personnel vehicles, shipped to Libya by Government of National Accord, arrive at Tripoli port.

Ronalp robahin has announced they exceeded limits imposed on its stockpiles of nuclear material and Iranian nuclear facilities are expected to begin enriching uranium beyond the maximum allowed fissile purity. Iranian President Hassan Rohani has boasted about his government’s ability to produce any amount of enriched uranium it wants, secure in the knowledge that the international community has no mechanism to enforce sanctions against Iran. This is an important development, as it suggests that Iran is prepared to make a Faustian bargain with the international community to gain leverage in its negotiations with the US and other global powers.

Iran’s leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has announced that Iran is prepared to make a Faustian bargain with the international community to gain leverage in its negotiations with the US and other global powers. He has also called for Iran to “decisive juncture.”

Iranian officials have repeatedly affirmed their commitment to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to the nuclear deal. However, they have also made it clear that effective enforcement is not possible without the help of US and the IAEA. The IAEA has repeatedly reported that Iran is not complying with its obligations under the nuclear deal. This has led to increasing tensions and threats from both sides. The IAEA’s recent report, which was released on July 6, found that Iran has continued to increase its enrichment activities, despite the nuclear deal.

Hamid Eshaqzadegan

Iran is officially in violation of the 2015 nuclear deal and the violations will get worse unless the European Union and its members provide meaningful incentives for Iran to comply. The EU has announced it will impose new sanctions if Iran does not come into compliance with the terms of the nuclear deal. This is a significant step, but it is not enough. The EU must urgently engage with Iran to prevent a military conflict.

The European Union did impose sanctions on the Iranian secret service and some of its known operatives but it has a long way to go before it even begins to approach such the “maximum pressure” strategy adopted by the Trump administration. There is still time, because that strategy is developing. Prior to the implementation of sanctions on Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in June, the White House estimated that Iran’s economy was about 80% isolated.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin promised the pressure would continue until it reached 100% or until Iran’s malign behaviour ended. Developments in the region suggest the latter outcome is extremely unlikely. Iran’s officials have repeatedly affirmed their commitment to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to the nuclear deal. However, they have also made it clear that effective enforcement is not possible without the help of US and the IAEA. The IAEA has repeatedly reported that Iran is not complying with its obligations under the nuclear deal. This has led to increasing tensions and threats from both sides.

Europe must challenge Iran’s assertion of impunity
New Zealand Muslims see silver lining after tragedy

F
our months ago, the Muslim community in New Zealand was just another minor- ity in a society that didn't know much about Islam. New Zea-

landers perceived their Muslims just through outward appearances, especially the stereotypical beard-
ed men and veiled women.

Things changed after the attacks on Al Noor Mosque and the Lin-

wood Islamic Centre in Christch-

urch, in which 51 people died. That event led imams in New Zealand to have direct dialogue with govern-

ment officials, to whom they relayed grievances of New Zealand Muslims, and explore ways to pro-
mote religious tolerance. Those ef-
forts are bearing fruit.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on July 6 pledged to have the “Document on Human Fraternity,” signed by Pope Francis on behalf of the Vatican and Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayyeb on behalf of al-Azhar, placed in schools, univer-
sities and other educational insti-
tutions so New Zealand's new gen-
erations grow up bearing a message of peace and goodwill.

Al Noor Mosque has become a shrine for politicians and celebri-
ties from around the world, who visit to show solidarity with the Muslim community.

Since the March 15 attack on Al Noor Mosque, the Muslim com-
munity in New Zealand has made impressive gains, including receiv-
ing government authorisation to open Islamic schools, the use of

Postal

Spotlight

Nader Aboul Foutouh

Cairo

Show of support. Imam Gamal Fouda (C-R) of Al Noor mosque speaks with Britain's Prince William after his visit in Christchurch, last April.

from an Islamic perspective. 

He explained that initiatives aimed at spreading the true concept of Islam require linguistic proficiency. It is important, he pointed out, to choose imams fluent in local dia-
lecs because their task is not only to address Muslims but also to en-
gage dialogue with non-Muslims.

The imams need to strengthen their knowledge of jurisprudence and other faith matters as well as adopt modern religious discourse and be able to address controver-
sial issues related to Islamic heriti-
age.

Fouda said Westerners who at-
tack Islam do not know much about it and, even if they want to know more about it, they would not be able to find suitable refer-
ences. It is, therefore, imperative to engage a long-term effort to trans-
late Islamic references and make them available in Islamic centres, he added, saying that it is important to promote academic studies that address false claims about Islam.

Fouda called for international laws to criminalise racial dis-
course through social media and to counter calls for violence of any kind or purpose.

“The European Union, for exam-
ple, has not been able to impose its control over extremist rhetoric on

the internet despite the fact that its countries have developed preven-
tive educational programmes and videos and that the social media platforms have established clear controls to prevent them from promoting content that encour-
ges extremism and terrorism,” he said.

About 150 New Zealand nation-
als, including a lot of the people who were in the mosque, have visited Al Noor Mosque since the shootings.

Nader Aboul Foutouh is an Egyptian writer.

Viewpoint

‘Re-educating’ Chinese Muslims and all of Denmark

Rashneel Roshan Lall

Under strict surveillance. A Muslim man walks after prayers in front of a mosque in Hotan in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region.

be “re-education” of Muslims in two different parts of the world – China and Denmark – has come sharply into focus.

China’s ambassador to Britain said that China has been following the so-called “vocational training centres” and this and violating the human rights of Muslims.

Neither China nor Denmark will disclose the number of Muslims that have been “re-educated.” A broad term that includes “cultural re-engineering” or “re-education” of society by severing traditional religious and linguistic ties.

Denmark is focusing on 25 urban neighbourhoods where more than half the residents are of non-Western heritage. These are not only the poorest and most crime-ridden in the country, they are also beset by high unemployment.

There have been complaints by Danish Muslims that their children are being taught far too much about Christmas and that it is insulting to have to send a Dane is concentrating on

and scale of the initiatives.

China seems focused on Uighur Muslims and on inoculating against the virus of jihadism, which it fears might be borne on the air – or the other – from other parts of the world. Critics of the Chinese policy say “voca-
tional training” is an anodyne way to describe “cultural re-
engineering” of a society by severing traditional religious and linguistic ties.

Denmark is focusing on 25 urban neighbourhoods where more than half the residents are of non-Western heritage. These are not only the poorest and most crime-ridden in the country, they are also beset by high unemployment and a poorly educated population with few prospects for advancement.

Former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, whose centre-right party created the laws to regulate “ghosts,” once compared the Danes to “black holes on the map of Denmark.”

Despite the charged language, it’s clear there is a basic differ-
ence between China’s “vocational training centres” and Denmark’s

mandatory training in “Danish values” for children in ghetto areas.

Dybvand’s centre-left party, on the other hand, voted for the laws. He insists the laws seek to “transform underprivileged areas” and end “parallel socie-
ties.”

Both China and Denmark say these moves are part of broader attempts to integrate minorities into the life of their respective countries.

In a sense, this expands the defini-
tion of what it means to be a Muslim. Instead, there is an attempt to thread non-white races.

In China, the housing minister has undertaken initiatives and fa-
cultations so New Zealand’s new gen-
derations grow up bearing a message of peace and goodwill.

Having said that, it’s hard to shake off a sense that Muslims are the primary targets of the “re-education” drive in Denmark.

At present, there is increased scrutiny of Muslims in the United States, parts of Europe, China, India, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. In disparate countries, there are varying levels of hostility to Muslims as a faith group.

The spectrum is broad. It is insulting to have to send a member of the Mohamed in Christchurch.

There is no discernible attempt by Denmark to force Muslims in the country to cease to be Muslim.

That said, it is hard to shake off a sense that Muslims are the primary targets of the “re-education” drive in Denmark.

That is understandable but it’s worth considering the Danish strategy in a more holistic way.

The government has spent its efforts promoting content that encour-
ges dialogue with non-Muslims.

There is no discernible attempt by Denmark to force Muslims in the country to cease to be Muslim.

Instead, there is an attempt to send non-white Danes into the national tapestry.

That is understandable but it’s worth considering the Danish strategy in a more holistic way.

The government has spent its efforts promoting content that encour-
ges dialogue with non-Muslims.

Rashneel Roshan Lall is a columnist for The Arab Weekly. Her blog can be found at www.rashneel.com and she is on Twitter: @rashneel.
ECONOMY

Kuwait seeks to further boost economic ties

Manuel Langendorf

London

Addressing the Salamamat Forum earlier this year, King Mansour Al-Sabah said his country is broadening efforts to deepen economic relations with neighboring countries. To the chagrin of the United Arab Emirates, he noted that the signing of several economic agreements with Iran, seen as the most influential outside actor in Iraq,

As they work to expand trade between them, Jordan and Iraq face significant, albeit different, economic challenges.

The developments come after months of high-level diplomacy between the two countries. The prime minister of Jordan, Omar Razzaz, said Jordan would export high-quality Jordanian products into the Iraqi market, adding that the two countries would get preferential tariffs. The Iraqi government has also stated that the flow of Jordanian products into the Iraqi market would be the first step in the two countries' economic cooperation. The agreements would also help to ease pressure on Egyptians who have been hit hard by regional instability and border closures. Other problems, she said, include declining remittances and foreign aid, low levels of productivity and the growing influence of Syrian refugees. In 1990, Jordan's GDP per capita was $10,675. By 2009, it had fallen to $10,370, according to the World Bank. The Jordanian government has been pushing for a bond issuance to help finance the country's budget deficit, which is expected to hit 6.8% of GDP in 2020. The government has also been seeking foreign investments to help fund infrastructure projects and stimulate growth. It is hoped that the bond issuance could help to unlock more foreign investment and aid from international organizations. The World Bank has said that Jordan needs to create a favorable investment climate in order to attract more foreign investment. It has also said that the government needs to improve its business environment and reduce red tape for investors. The government has been working to implement reforms to improve the business environment and attract foreign investment. It has also been seeking to diversify its economy away from dependence on tourism and remittances. The government has been seeking to attract foreign investment in a number of industries, including renewable energy, tourism, and logistics. The government has been offering incentives to foreign investors, including tax breaks and reduced regulatory requirements. It is hoped that these efforts will help to attract more foreign investment and boost growth.

Viewpoint

Foreign investors drawn to Saudi Aramco IPO offer

Jareer Elas

According to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s latest comments, the kingdom’s oil minister sparkled with optimism about the actuality and timing of the limited sale of state crown jewel Saudi Aramco. The Saudi leaders may be emboldened by recent oil market developments on Saudi Aramco’s initial public offering (IPO). The kingdom is experiencing a significant increase in oil prices, which has raised hopes for a successful IPO. According to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s latest comments, the kingdom’s oil minister sparkled with optimism about the actuality and timing of the limited sale of state crown jewel Saudi Aramco. The Saudi leaders may be emboldened by recent oil market developments on Saudi Aramco’s initial public offering (IPO). The kingdom is experiencing a significant increase in oil prices, which has raised hopes for a successful IPO.
Refugee entrepreneurs creating financial value across the world

Khadidja Hamouchi

Ahmad Sufian Bayram (ASB): “Despite the severe conditions in which refugees and migrants live, they have shown incredible strength in finding their own solutions. The efforts of Syrian entrepreneurs have flooded the neighborhoods of 6th of October City in Egypt, into bustling corridors of Syrian restaurants and grocery stores to the point that the area is now called ‘Little Damascus.’”

In Turkey, a total of 8,367 new Syrian companies were founded in 2017, up from a mere 737 in 2012. 800 Syrian industrial establishments have relocated their operations in Jordan. “Given that the act of choosing — when the choice is possible — and moving to another country is inherently brave and risky decision, it should be of no surprise that refugees and immigrants have repeatedly been found to be more entrepreneurial than locals. Those people are hungry to make it work. The desire has more to do with a will to win and less to do with a percentage. For them, it is a survival game.”

ASB: “Refugee entrepreneurs are in all sectors and sometimes the toughest ones. StartShop is a one-stop-shop currently features 460 items made by 40 artisans, both Syrian refugees and Jordanians. The start-up is part of Oasis500, the leading social investment company and business accelerator in Jordan. “In Germany, a group of Syrian refugees developed an application that helps German refugees complete governmental transactions through the translation of application forms into selected languages before automatically filling standard specifications such as name, date of birth and address. "In Berlin, I received the Berlin hackathon Spacehack in June 2016 and was presented to investors and politicians at the Startups Europe Summit 2016 in Berlin.”

TAW: What does tech entrepreneurship look like for internally displaced Syrians in their war-torn country?

ASB: “Syrian entrepreneurs have worked hard trying to solve their local community problems, such as improving the infrastructure, finding an easy way to learning and education and much more.”

Karim Hajji, general manager at Attijari Finances Corporation, said Maroc Telecom’s share price stability over the last three years was an indication of resilience and strength compared to the rest of the market and the interest that institutional investors have for it.

The Casablanca Stock Exchange said the sale would inject $877 million into the state budget.

The left-wing opposition MP said it was unfortunate that the state was selling its property to offset its financial deficit, instead of accepting the proposal made by left-wing parties, which would have been an exceptional tax on oil companies that have “abnormal” profits.

The sale price of Maroc Telecom shares to private firms under Moroccan law is fixed at $12.70, representing 6% of the state. The remaining 94% is to be sold to the public for $12.53 per share. Maroc Telecom said it expected 14,000 new accounts to be opened following the share sale.

The government’s decision comes as the net flow of foreign investment in Morocco reached more than $580 million at the end of April against $796 million, down 23.3% compared to the same period a year ago, the Moroccan Exchange Office said.

The Central Bank forecast this year’s budget deficit to be 4.3% of GDP, slightly more than the government’s projected 3.9%, which would be an additional burden to the state.

The government plans to improve its fiscal deficit through its privatization programme that would generate a revenue of $1 billion. However, more than half of state’s revenue is earmarked for salaries and contributions as the social dialogue agreement and unions on increasing salaries and family allowances is straining state finances.

The Moroccan treasurer said the increase in family benefits involved more than 300,000 civil servants. The salary increase was to be carried out in three stages – May 2019, January 2020 and January 2021.

Benchaib said that 55% of tax revenues would have to cover payroll and pension and social security spending and that payroll costs would reach 13% of GDP.

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

To boost exchange. A sign of Maroc Telecom near a shop in Casablanca.
Thousands of pilgrims start arriving in Saudi Arabia for haj

The Arab Weekly staff

Planes carrying some of the first Muslim pilgrims of the annual haj landed in Saudi Arabia as the country enters the holiest time on the Islamic calendar, when Muslims perform pilgrimage to Mecca.

The annual pilgrimage will draw as many as 2 million Indian worshipers, 63,000 of whom are expected as many as 140,000 Indian worshipers to Mecca.

The annual pilgrimage will draw as many as 2 million Indian worshipers, 63,000 of whom are expected as many as 140,000 Indian worshipers to Mecca.

The steady growth of the gathering, owing to improving transportation and communication, makes it one of the largest logistical operations managed by the Ministry of Haj and Umrah. Authorities must ensure security, traffic control, transportation and accommodation infrastructure and various other services are ready for the pilgrims.

The latest innovation involves smart cards with a built-in tracking device, so that the majority said would be distributed to 250,000 people in a pilot programme. The device will be vital to finding elderly or sick pilgrims lost while performing the rites. Saudi Arabia said “all measures” would be taken against perpetrators, Al Riyadh reported.

Similar warnings are issued almost yearly by the government, religious officials and allies against acts of sabotage whipped up by Iran in pursuit of political ends. Iran has attempted to use political arguments to challenge Saudi Arabia’s status as the custodian of Islam’s holiest sites. Iran has also questioned the competency of haj authorities to improve the management of the world’s largest Muslim gathering.

In 2015, Iran insisted that visas to Iranian pilgrims be issued in Iran even in the absence of an agreement to that effect. Iranian Culture Minister Ali Jannati announced then that “Iranian pilgrims cannot go to haj this year.” A similar government-led boycott drive that lasted 4 years occurred in 1987 following clashes between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces in which 275 Iranians, 85 Saudi security personnel and 42 pilgrims of other nationalities were killed. A year prior to those clashes, Saudi security forces uncovered arms and explosives carried by Iranian pilgrims.

Records suggest the Iranian leadership and clerical class have offensively encouraged the use of haj as a venue for protest. In the 1980s, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini called on pilgrims to stage demonstrations of “disavowal” against the Saudi monarchy.

Those acts led Saudi Arabia to lower the number of pilgrims granted entry from Iran to 1,000 for every 1 million residents, which an agreement reached last year overturned. This year, some 86,558 Iranian will travel to Mecca to perform the religious pilgrimage.

Distribution of print newspapers halted in Saudi Arabia

The Arab Weekly staff

Readers in several Saudi cities were surprised by the announcement from the National Distribution Company that it was stopping print circulation of local newspapers. As the sole national distributor of publications, newspapers and magazines, the National Distribution Company (NDC) said the move would first be applied in Jeddah, Abha, Qassem, Arar and Jouf over the next month. The development met July 8 in Jeddah to discuss challenges faced by the industry.

King Salman stressed the need for newspapers to be circulated during height of haj “through doctrinal and political slogans” or any “action.” He said “all necessary measures” would be taken against perpetrators, Al Riyadh reported.

Copies of local newspapers have not altogether disappeared although many fear the print press will be phased out entirely.

The situation does not mirror successes of the 1990s, when printing processes made their debut in the country. Printed news grew as a natural response to satirical reporting by Al Riyadh and Riyadh’s daily Al Hayat. Between the years 1993 and 1995, 46% of the 1,200-odd daily newspapers’ circulation doubled. A further 39% of respondents accounted for 53% and the remaining 23% who expressed enthusiasm to read daily.

The earliest overhaul of print materials has initiated state-led reforms to scale down “in-house” publications. The state traditionalism disseminated such materials to employees across all sectors but it was noted that oil companies print their own in-house materials, newspapers and journals. The decisions fuelled debate about the place of print in a fast-paced world. Out of 1,016 participants in a poll conducted in 2017 by the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, newspaper readers ranked in at 23%, e-readers accounted for 53% and the remainder expressed equal interest in reading newspapers both print and online.
Tunisia’s Bourguiba school gears up for summer session

Stephen Quillen

Tunis

Established in 1964, the Bourguiba Institute of Modern Languages in Tunis is one of Tunisia’s oldest and most storied educational establishments, priding itself in promoting the Arabic language and establishing cross-cultural connections across the world. At its onset, the school was run largely by US Peace Corps volunteers who taught English. It soon developed into a hub for foreigners seeking to learn Arabic. Today, the school hosts students from across the globe seeking to improve competence in languages ranging from English to Turkish to Chinese.

Outside of the academic year, the Bourguiba school offers intensive courses during July, including 1600 hours for Arabic learners and 80 hours for students of other languages.

The core of the Bourguiba school’s mission is teaching Arabic as a foreign language, for which it has gained a reputation as one of the premier institutes in the region. “In Bourguiba school has an experience of long experience,” said Imed Ben Ammar, the school’s director. “It is the place for teaching Arabic as a foreign language.”

Tunisia is not the only Arab country with a successful Arabic language programme. Jordan’s Qasid Arabic Institute and Egypt’s International Language Institute are also highly regarded. However, the Bourguiba school’s wide-ranging connections and relatively open outlook make for a popular destination for students and professionals looking to live and learn abroad. “People know that Tunisia is an open place, and the Bourguiba school is no exception,” said Ben Ammar. “People are welcomed here.”

Valerie Mayot, a French student at the institute who has lived in Tunis for years, agreed that the Bourguiba school is an “exceptional” place to study. “I know Tunis well and I like this country,” she said.

Even as Tunisia has weathered extremist threats and social and political turbulence since 2011, interest in the school has remained constant, Ritter said. After terror attacks rocked Tunis on June 27, killing one and injuring eight, the school received no cancellations for its summer session.

Traditionally, most foreign students at the Bourguiba school have been European — predominantly Italian, Spanish and French, said Ben Ammar. But recently, it has begun to receive more students from China and South Korea, perhaps a reflection of deepening ties between the two regions.

“The trend is probably related to the fact that interest began to grow in the Arabic and the Islamic world,” Ben Ammar said.

Interest in learning Arabic in South-east Asia is growing in Tunisia as well. In 2018, the Bourguiba school received official accreditation to teach Korean.

It has a foothold in South-east Asia, with relations with Romania. Through Tunisia’s Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Bourguiba school collaborated with the Romanian government to create a Centre for Romanian Culture and Science “to enhance the teaching of Romanian language.”

But for most Tunisians, English and German classes remain a priority because they are critical for many professionals seeking to further their careers abroad.

While the Bourguiba school maintains partnerships with leading universities and institutions, including the Arab World Institute in Paris, it remains open to the public, part of its mission to make high-quality language training available to all who are interested.

“We are open to the public,” said Ben Ammar. “Anyone can e-mail to sign up.”

Mayot, who works with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said her courses have helped her develop skills needed for her job. “I’ve been travelling intensive classes here is exceptional... I’ve had the best teacher in the world here.”

“For my work, I need to be able to quickly understand Arab newspapers and news in Arabic and I am progressing very quickly.”

Outside of the academic year, the Bourguiba school offers intensive courses during July, including 100 hours for Arabic learners and 80 hours for students of other languages.

It provides access to various socio-cultural activities, including workshops in Tunisian art, music, dance and cuisine and guided tours and trips to key sites throughout the country.

The school’s main Tunis campus, in the heart of downtown on the Avenue de la Liberte, was bustling on a recent hot morning. Drawing eager students from around the world, it is a source of pride for many of the Tunisian public who see it as a reflection of the country’s commitment to education, progress and cultural enrichment.

Stephen Quillen is an Arab Weekly correspondent.

Lebanese fashion designer with an eye on sustainable alternatives

Samar Kadi

Beirut

Producing sustainable fashion that trends for the environmen-
tally conscious consumer — particularly one with a conscience — can be part of the design process, according to Swiss fashion designer Mar Mikhael.

“The trend is probably related to the fact that interest began to grow in the Arabic and the Islamic world,” Ben Ammar said.

Interest in learning Arabic in South-east Asia is growing in Tunisia as well. In 2018, the Bourguiba school received official accreditation to teach Korean.

It has a foothold in South-east Asia, with relations with Romania. Through Tunisia’s Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Bourguiba school collaborated with the Romanian government to create a Centre for Romanian Culture and Science “to enhance the teaching of Romanian language.”

But for most Tunisians, English and German classes remain a priority because they are critical for many professionals seeking to further their careers abroad.

While the Bourguiba school maintains partnerships with leading universities and institutions, including the Arab World Institute in Paris, it remains open to the public, part of its mission to make high-quality language training available to all who are interested.

“We are open to the public,” said Ben Ammar. “Anyone can e-mail to sign up.”

Mayot, who works with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said her courses have helped her develop skills needed for her job. “I’ve been travelling intensive classes here is exceptional... I’ve had the best teacher in the world here.”

“For my work, I need to be able to quickly understand Arab newspapers and news in Arabic and I am progressing very quickly.”

Outside of the academic year, the Bourguiba school offers intensive courses during July, including 100 hours for Arabic learners and 80 hours for students of other languages.

It provides access to various socio-cultural activities, including workshops in Tunisian art, music, dance and cuisine and guided tours and trips to key sites throughout the country.

The school’s main Tunis campus, in the heart of downtown on the Avenue de la Liberte, was bustling on a recent hot morning. Drawing eager students from around the world, it is a source of pride for many of the Tunisian public who see it as a reflection of the country’s commitment to education, progress and cultural enrichment.

Stephen Quillen is an Arab Weekly correspondent.

A mix of cultures. A woman goes through clothes at the Emergency Room boutique in Mar Mikhael in Beirut.

Working with an NGO in northern Lebanon that trained underprivi-
eged women in sewing, knitting and embroidery helped Ritter create a clothing brand with a mind of its own.

“I discovered the old souks of Tripoli where there are lots of secondhand cloth shops and many skilled artisans struggling to find work. I also discovered fabric shops that have lots of old stocks not really selling. I thought that something could be done with what is available and decided to launch a new brand that would try to be sustainable,” Ritter said.

Emergency Room uses unique vintage material and stock to create fashion, including from curtains, bed sheets, mats and secondhand fabrics that are locally sourced to create unique pieces providing a conscious and authentic ready-to-wear line. All items are produced in local workshops and cooperatives giving skilled local women a chance to be part of the process.

“Using these fabrics, deconstructing them and reconceiving them into new garments, make for very unique pieces and designs,” Ritter said.

A year after introducing the brand during which he was selling through pop-up shops, he opened an Emergency Room boutique in Beirut’s hip Mar Mikhael neighbour-
hood, displaying a colourful sum-
mer collection.

Lime green, purple and pink are some of the bright colours used in

The brand’s name underlines the urgent need to shift from the polluting and harmful mass production of fast fashion to a sustainable and ethical alternative to clothing production.

A photoshoot campaign Ritter initiated alongside the debut of the boutique, portrayed a wide cast of models who, he said, represented the wide mix of cultures present in Beirut.

“We had 25 models of different ages, body types, gender, sexualities, religions and skin colours. We tried to have one person that represents a category of people that you can find in society. Altogether they kind of represent the whole community. In terms of ages, I had my grandmother modelling. She is almost 80,” Ritter said.

When people are hesitant about buying sustainable fashion, Ritter does double duty, telling the whole story behind it.

“We explain about the fashion in-
dustry and the harm caused by fast fashion,” he said. “It is very compli-
cated because we have treated fash-
on in the last couple of decades as disposable, forgetting that clothes are not consumables. These are things that we buy and stay with us until we eventually end up throw-

them and they stay on Earth for-
ever and ever. It is important to slow down the whole process.”

Ritter used the event inaugurating his boutique to make a fashion state-
ment. Attendees were asked to pick any piece of second-hand clothing from a shopping basket, grab stris-
ces and cut it in whatever way they like.

“The idea was that with whatever they would be cutting we will be us-
ing to create fashion. It was a way of awakening everybody to the fact that it’s OK to use old pieces and to rough them up and that everybody can be part of the design process, that accidents will create new pieces at the end of the day,” Ritter said.

Samar Kadi is The Arab Weekly Travel and Society section editor.
Asilah Arts Festival explores secrets of ‘African creativity’

Saad Guarouani

Art is tied to an efficient educational system, which is a key driver of African countries’ development in various sectors, said experts and politicians at a symposium on the sidelines of the 20th Asilah International Cultural Mousses.

The 3-day symposium “African Creativity in Africa and in the Diaspora,” which kicked off African cultural week in Asilah, included a panel of experts, researchers and politicians from across Africa.

Mohamed Benchoua, secretary-general of the Asilah Forum Foundation and former Moroccan minister of foreign affairs, said: “Asilah is taking this year a major leap towards celebrating Africa by dedicating a whole week to celebrating African creativity in poetry, literature and music.”

Vitor Borges, former foreign minister of Cape Verde, said creativity was associated with innovation in everyday life. “There are no freedoms without communication... Creativity exists as human faculty to defy communication and freedom,” he said. “As soon as communication becomes a risk, it’s creativity’s role to defy it and undermine it. Creativity should also exist among us in order to push freedom beyond its limits.”

Borges pointed out that a major part of Africans’ future identities will be determined by creativity that is shown today at the structural, artistic, societal, economic and political levels.

Sall said those who make up the African diaspora have long parted with their home countries and that Africa’s development must be fully reliant on home-grown talent.

Borges praised the Asilah festival’s pragmatic approach to defying communication and freedom, suggesting that the continent is experiencing an unprecedented brain drain.
Iraqi publishing industry faces challenges in fast-moving landscape

Khubul Al-Fallah
Basra

Safia Diab, who owns Dar Shahriar Publishing House and Bookshop in Basra, said there is still room for book publishing despite challenges posed by digital publishing and copyright infringements.

Diab rejected the notion that digital publishing would replace paper publishing. “The smell of paper and its touch,” he said, “the ways of holding and reading a paper edition, the aesthetics of the cover and print and the simmering thought that a reader has with a print copy can never be replaced by a digital copy.”

If the Arab world, which is far from being subjugated by digital technology, does not offer a measure of where the future of book publishing lies, technologically advanced countries are far from abandoning paper-based books, he said. Dar Shahriar book publishing in Iraq has gone through many changes in the last two decades. Before 2003, there weren’t many publishing houses other than official ones devoted to presenting official discourse and official viewpoints.

2003 was a turning point for the publishing industry in Iraq. In just a few years, hundreds of publishing houses were established, some of which were pressured towards certain editorial and literary agendas while others were focused on making a profit.

“Yet, Diab said, “it is impossible to predict the future of publishing in Iraq. We have to wait to see what remains standing in the cultural arena a few years from now and that would depend on the economic, cultural and even scientific conditions of the country.”

Book publishing in Iraq has gone through many changes in the last two decades.

Diab said non-fiction analytical books have been the bestsellers for his publishing houses since it opened two years ago.

The Iraqi publisher said short stories have also sold well. Since its inception, Dar Shahriar has promoted short stories with more than 20 short-story collections. Some of them were written by Arab or Iraqi writers and others were translated into Arabic.

Diab said some of the figures publishing short stories about the number of copies printed are true and some are “either meaningless or pure fabrication.”

“It’s some books are superficial and some authors unable to even put together a correct sentence. Yet, their books are widely known thanks to Instagram and Facebook so the sales of those books run out of stock in no time,” Diab said. “On the other hand, there are important books that actually need to be put out of print but not necessarily the ones advertised.”

On whether publishing houses in Iraq prefer to publish novels rather than poetry, Diab said: “We cannot really say that publishers intentionally turn their backs on poetry in favour of the novel. This reality is the result of what readers want. There is no market for poetry now, not even for well-known poets. If a poetry collection achieves success and sells well, it is by pure chance, no more.”

He said novels were “currently losing a bit of their luster” because of declining quality.

“Some books just carry the phrase ‘A Novel’ on the cover. The best proof of the loss of popularity of the novel is its dwindling sales at book fairs in the Arab world during the past two years,” he said.

Diab said book piracy “inflicts injuries on the rights of the author and the publisher.”

“The whole remains a form of public theft, whether it is convert-
ing a book to a downloadable PDF format or by photocopying it and selling it cheaply. This eventually causes great problems for readers themselves, he said. Diab said the piracy “inflicts injuries on the rights of the author and the publisher.”

“The whole remains a form of public theft, whether it is convert-
ing a book to a downloadable PDF format or by photocopying it and selling it cheaply. This eventually causes great problems for readers themselves, he said. Diab said the piracy “inflicts injuries on the rights of the author and the publisher.”


(AI Arab)

Sharjah Museum, impressive showcase of Islamic art

N.P. Krishna Kumar

Sharjah

With thousands of his-
torical artefacts from all corners of the Islamic world, the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation offers vis-
itors a unique opportunity to trace the achievements of Islamic life and its universal outlook.

Situated in the historical heart of Sharjah, the museum is housed in what once was a traditional Middle Eastern souk. It was initially in the city’s Her-
tage Area when it opened in 1996 under the name Sharjah Islamic Mu-
seum until it was relocated in 2001. One can trace the grandeur of the building with its arched ceiling and promenade 24-carat gold dome standing out from afar.

Curator Entisar al-Obaidli said the museum has more than 5,000 arte-
facts, many of which are rare. The collection is arranged according to themes and spread over seven gal-
leries and one vault, covering all aspects of Islamic art, science and technology, architecture, archaeology, philosophy, art, science and technology.

Galleries on the ground floor in-
clude the Al Haytham Gallery of Islamic Art, the Ibn Al-
Haytham Gallery of Science and Technology and the Al Maghribi Temporary Exhibi-
tion Gallery along with the Islamic Coins Display in the museum out-
side.

The museum has a large and im-
portant collection of early Islamic coins, including a large number of Umayyad and Abbasid dinars and dirhams. On the first floor are the four gal-
leries on Islamic art arranged accord-
ing to time from the earliest period up to the 20th century.

The Al Bahr Gallery of Islamic Art presents an introduction to Is-
lamic art. The exhibits are arranged to show the five pillars of Islam and a fascinating ac-
count of the history of art.

Ongoing art exhibitions include sections from the ‘The Kaaba in Mecca, rare historical Quran manuscripts as well as mod-
els, photographs, presentations and important facts about mosque archi-
tecture from around the world.

The Ibn Al-Haytham Gallery of Science and Technology Gallery showcases the achievements of Is-

A journey through history. An old Islamic artefact on display at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation.

(Timeless achievements. The Abu Bakr Gallery of Islamic Faith at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation.

(NPG Museum of Islamic Civilisation)

Islamic scientist scholars from 200-1400. Based on Hellenistic prototypes, it was perfected in the Islamic world and became the most commonly used device in astronomy both there and later in Europe. It was used to determine the time during the day or night, to measure latitudes, to ob-
serve the positions of the stars and to locate desired destinations.

A wonderful artefact on the first floor in the Islamic Art Gallery is the Lion or Lyon Censor in bronze from Khorasan, eastern Iran during the 11th-12th centuries, reflecting a pe-
pod of wealth and opulence.

“Twice a year, we organise exhi-

In the Ibn al Haytham Gallery of Islamic Science and Technology in the Museum of Islamic Civilisation.

A journey through history. An old Islamic artefact on display at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation.

(Timeless achievements. The Abu Bakr Gallery of Islamic Faith at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation.

(NPG Museum of Islamic Civilisation)
Tunisia’s Althiburos cave, an artists’ sanctuary in lush landscape

Rouna Khilfi
Dahmani

In the outside, the cave looks like a typical natural sight. Amid green fields, the cave is surrounded by high hills in the distance at Tunisia’s El Kef province. Trees circle the cave, which feels deserted, almost outside time and place. One can sense the solitude of the place. The entrance is narrow and dark. Walking closer to the cave, one is met with an eerie feeling that suggests mystery.

After spending a large period of his life abroad, Belghith returned to his father’s land and wanted to transform the cave into a workshop for artists. For the past few years, the cave served as an art gallery and a workshop.

Having hosted a festival for alternative music in March, the cave is gaining a reputation for being a sanctuary for artists seeking residencies in natural surroundings. The cave of Althiburos is not only a home for legends and mythic that have haunted the people of the village of Dahmani, it is a haven and statutory for those who seek inspiration and peace.

Product designer and artist Yasmine Chelly is a member of the team in charge of cultural programmes at the cave. The goal is to implement a new vision of culture.

“Along with the owner, Ammar Belghith and artist Gaith Neffiti, we are seeking to launch a new concept. The place is an art gallery and an archaeological site but, at the same time, we want to make it an experience,” Chelly explained.

“People are interested in camping on the site to enjoy being in nature. We want to include artistic workshops and residencies to allow people to be inspired by the energy of the place but we don’t want it to be only a question of using the space. We want artists to exchange knowledge and expertise.”

The cave is situated amid beautiful landscapes and has a camping site. There are also rooms to accommodate guests. Spending a couple of days at the cave is guaranteed to restore one’s peace and energy as visitors enjoy strolls in nature as well as traditional cuisine.

“We want to encourage a notion of sharing and learning among people. The experience has to be participatory,” Chelly said. “They are inclusive and we are planning to be the venue for events that also encourage people to be part and to give also.

“Whatever experience they have or skills or expertise, they can share it while they live with us. We want to encourage traditional cuisine and farming. It is a whole life that people should adapt to and to embrace and be connected to nature.”

She added: “The cave will also host a festival for circus arts. The architecture also will be a focal point. We can have architecture students to build small huts or pools using materials that are bio- and eco-friendly. It should be an spiritual experience for one to reconnect.”

Chelly said the idea of using the cave began with a desire to promote a different image of tourism in Tunisia as well as to explore different cultural programmes.

“It started with exploring new places for camping and discovering these gems in Tunisia. Knowing the painter who owns the place, I got to know more and the cave has energy. Ammar wants to turn it to a cultural venue,” Chelly said.

“We don’t want it to just be a venue for events but a spiritual journey to connect with nature and people.”

The site has much to offer, between exploring the mythical side and the natural and historical side. Outside the cave, one can explore the “wells of love,” which is based on a legend that Belghith knows how to tell best. The land belonged to his ancestors and the well has a sad legend that two lovers, Mayas and Marconda, fell in and drowned but returned as trees that stand near the well.

Not far from the cave, one can explore the ruins of Althiburos, an archaeological site that dates to before the third century when it was under Roman rule. The site has remains of a forum, a theatre and a house with mosaics. The theatre is 60 metres long and 35 metres wide.

While it is still being excavated, the site offers a glimpse to the influence of the Roman Empire in north-western Tunisia. The site was chosen by Numidians to build their town, which was granted the status of a municipality under the Roman rule because it was on the route from Carthage.

The Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts, first part of the Jerash International Festival, transforms the ancient Jordanian city of Byblos into one of the world’s liveliest cultural events, with singers, poetry readings, ballet performances, symphony orchestras and art shows. This year’s edition includes artists such as Marcel Khalife, Mohamed Moussa, and the Sultans of Sweden.

Dubai: August 29
Westlife, the four-piece Irish band, is performing at the Coca-Cola Arena. The band is celebrating 20 years of record-breaking success; the members of Westlife have embarked on their highly-anticipated reunion tour, the Twenty Tour.

Tangier: September 15-22
The 20th Tangier’s Jazz Festival will feature international and local jazz artists. Visitors can enjoy free street performances, free dance courses and jazz concerts during the 8-day event. This year’s festival lineup includes Buika, Anne Sila and Nico Muhly.

Through August 9
El Jem: The El Jem Amphitheatre, 160km south of Tunis, hosts classical musicians from all over the world for the International Festival of Symphonic Music of El Jem. In its 34th year, the festival programme includes symphonies and concertos of music from Spain, Italy, Austria, Egypt and Tunisia.

Hammamet: Through August 17
Hammamet, a Tunisian town on the northern shore of the Gulf of Hammamet, is the site of the 55th Hammamet International Festival. Concerts and plays are scheduled for more than a month.

Byblos: Through August 24
Byblis International Festival in the ancient Phoenician port city of Byblos, north of Beirut, features international rock bands and pop singers. This year’s schedule includes French singer Mark Lavoine, Lebanese indie rock band Mashrou’ Leila and Britain’s tribute ensemble Queen Symphonic.

Budiddine: July 18-August 10
The annual Bidgeedine Art Festival, in the Chouf mountains, includes a variety of performances from opera and concerts to theatre and art exhibitions. The festival welcomes more than 50,000 visitors as well as numerous site performers.

Jerash: July 19-27
The Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts, first part of the Jerash International Festival, transforms the ancient Jordanian city of Jerash into one of the world’s liveliest cultural events, with singers, poetry readings, ballet performances, symphony orchestras and art shows. This year’s edition includes artists such as Marcel Khalife, Mohamed Moussa, and the Sultans of Syria.

Dubai: August 29
Westlife, the four-piece Irish band, is performing at the Coca-Cola Arena. The band is celebrating 20 years of record-breaking success; the members of Westlife have embarked on their highly-anticipated reunion tour, the Twenty Tour.

Tangier: September 15-22
The 20th Tangier’s Jazz Festival will feature international and local jazz artists. Visitors can enjoy free street performances, free dance courses and jazz concerts during the 8-day event. This year’s festival lineup includes Buika, Anne Sila and Nico Muhly.

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

Please send tips to:
editor@thearabweekly.com