US-Turkey ‘safe zone’ augurs fracturing of Syria into foreign areas of influence

Despite lingering disagreements, the move demonstrates how foreign powers are establishing separate zones in Syria while the Damascus government cannot do much.

Thomas Seibert

Istanbul

The debate between Turkey and the United States over Syria’s controversial “safe zone” in northeastern Syria is a sign of the complex foreign and regional power politics deepening divisions in the war-torn country.

Ankara and Washington have begun preparations to set up a joint operations centre to manage a “secure zone” along Syria’s northeastern border with Turkey. Even though the two nations have been unable to agree on the size of the zone and on who will patrol it, the move demonstrates how foreign powers are attempting to assert their influence and pursuing their own goals in Syria where the Damascus government cannot do more than register its protest.

Turkey wants the “security zone” to make sure that Syrian-Kurdish fighters do not use the border region to stir up trouble in Turkey itself. The United States, which has about 2,000 soldiers deployed in eastern Syria, wants to protect its Kurdish partners from potential Turkish armed forces. Despite Turkey’s warnings, Kurds want to keep the regional autonomy they have built since Syrian government forces withdrew from their area under Turkish control in the northwestern part of the country.

Some observers said the development could lead to grave consequences.

“Syria is unlikely to be unified for a long time,” said Joshua Landis, director of the Centre for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

“Turkey has territorial ambitions in Syria. Many influential groups in foreign policy circles are also saying that the US should remain in north Syria for the long haul, which is not promising,” Landis said via e-mail.

Turkey denies that it has territorial aspirations in Syria. Ankara argues that plans for a “security zone” in northeastern Syria were triggered by the same reason that led to military interventions by the United States in Syria. General Shouko Wimmen, project director for the European Union’s EU Safe Passage project, said Turkey is likely to be in Syria for the long haul.

Under an agreement with Russia, Turkey has deployed a small number of soldiers in 12 observation points around the Idlib prov-ince in north-western Syria to monitor a ceasefire in the area. Turkish and pro-Isis forces are still active in the region.

The government of Syrian President Bashar Assad has vowed to win back every part of the country, which would include the region of self-rule and areas occupied by Turkish forces, but it has been unable to act upon its goal, Landis said.

“Syria is fractured for the sake of Assad’s forces and has helped the government regain control in several parts of the country. Syria government forces and Russian warplanes have been gaining ground in Idlib but have not driven out rebel forces from the province. Turkey wants to prevent an all-out offensive in Idlib because it is concerned about a possible new inflow of refugees. Winning back Kurdish-ruled re-

n a country that prides itself for having the world’s largest collection of ancient mosaics, Tunisia’s political scene ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections on September 15 looks a bit like a colourful mosaic. Among the four or five candidates whose bids were approved by Tunisia’s Independent Election Authority are of-fering voters diverse views on why they are the most competent to be president and why their rivals are not.

“I am a candidate representing Tunisia’s political and social classes,” said Lamine Ghammi, former Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa, who is courting Islamists and young radicals or the call for a “Third Re-

Political scientist Sabitha Khal-afan said the situation raises a question of change. “Each move-ment has its own candidate. Ennahda, for instance, has fielded a bid by one of its leaders. This will make it possible to know the level of sup-port enjoyed by the party,” she told Paris La Monde newspaper.

Slow economic growth, high un-employment and a deteriorating standard of living have fuelled dis-

Political debates during the cam-paign will be more intense than before. The first round of voting, to take place by early November unless a candi-

discuss the truth about the cases of cases of assassinations, recruitment of jihadists and the secret organisa-

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A separate lawsuit claimed Benahida facilitated recruitment and travel to Syria of hundreds of jihadists. The accusations have been vehemently denied by Benahida.

Chahed is likely also to stress his secularist credentials and how his role in the investigation of accusations to Ennahda about its alleged involve-

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Variegated election landscape reflects changed face of Tunisian politics

Lamine Ghammi

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Lamine Ghammi is an Arabic Weekly correspondent in Tunis.
Turkey presses Syria intervention against Kurdish forces despite agreement with US

Istanbul

Turkish officials said an agreement with the United States about a “security zone” in northern Syria will not prevent intervention by Turkish troops. The YPG is considered by Ankara as a terrorist organization, while the United States sees it as a partner in the fight against the Islamic State (IS).

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, speaking after Turkish and US officials agreed on a deal for northern Syria, indicated intervention by Turkish troops could start before the end of August due to the arrangement with Washington.

In a message to the nation on Mark Ad-dha, Erdogan said a military operation by Ankara in Syria will start August 1 of that year. “This August, God willing, we will add another victory to the ones in our history,” Erdogan said.

The planned incursion would target areas east of the Euphrates and could see Turkish troops push 40km into Syrian territory.

Turkish news reports said.

Turkey does not want to precipitate a war on any side in Syria, in order to promote peace in the region and stress the United States’ priorities in the region. Erdogan, whose country has welcomed Syrian refugees from Syria, is under domestic pressure because of a rising anti-Syrian sentiment among Turks. Erdogan also suggested that the US delegation travelled to the Turkish capital Ankara and that the US delegation aimed at creating a security zone. The three points included the zone as a “peace corridor” to ensure the return of the YPG to their country but it said nothing about the size and nature of the zone or who should guard it. Erdogan also said Turkey would not allow the YPG to cross into Syria.

The US Department of Defense said the agreement would be implemented gradually. A six-person US delegation travelled to the Turkish province of Sanliurfa to work on establishing the operations centre.

Observers said the agreement leaves many questions unanswered. Erdogan’s manoeuvres and his manoeuvres and his intent is to show his countrymen that he has not been tricked or been fooled by the United States.

Turkey and the United States continued to express conflicting priorities in Syria, said Hisam Wimmen, project director for Iraq, Syria and Lebanon at the International Crisis Group. “The fundamental dilemma has not been solved and may not be solvable anyway,” said by telephone. “However, it is not necessarily bad to buy time. As long as the parties keep talking, Turkey will not invade.”

Middle East expert Aaron Stein said there were no indications that Ankara would compromise and the zone as a legitimate actor.

Stein, director of the Middle East Programme at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, said on the institute’s website that the United States and Turkey had different views of the planned joint operations centre.

The US called the YPG “terror corridor.” That Ankara has pledged to establish along the Turkish-Syrian border.

Turkish journalist Fikret Bil added that the agreement was “far away from the model proposed by Turkey.”

Writing in an analysis for the I24 news website, Bilia said priorities of Ankara and Washington in northern Syria remained “180 degrees apart.” While Turkey’s main aim was to break the YPG’s powers, the United States wanted to keep the Kurdish militia strong, he said.

It wouldn’t have been possible for the agreement with Washington to emerge if it didn’t fully conform with Tel Aviv’s requirements and agendas.

Ankara-Washington flaunts Syrian sovereignty

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, speaking after Turkish and US officials agreed on a deal for northern Syria, indicated intervention by Turkish troops could start before the end of August due to the arrangement with Washington. While Washington has been aiming to the SDF, Ankara says the YPG is the Syrian branch of the Kurds’ Workers’ Party (PKK), a militant organisation regarded as a terrorist group by both countries and much of the international community.

Turkey said a system of regional buffer zones in Syria was needed to protect its vassals among the Kurds in return for its submission. While the United States was looking on this new agreement as violating the sovereignty of the Syrian people, it was welcomed by the US as a way to protect its interests in the region.

Syrian cake. A Turkish military truck patrol at the border with Syria in Akcakale in south-eastern Turkey.

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Syrians face deportation even though war is far from over

James Snell

Syria’s war has not concluded, but for many it is convenient to pretend that it has. To those in the regime of Bashar Asad it’s necessary to present the government’s campaign of pacification as having produced peace. For foreign countries that wish to cease their programmes assailed by Syrian people, any opportunity to have their wish fulfilled is seized.

Countries that border Syria and host millions of displaced Syrians – and where refugees are unpopular – gladly used intervals in fighting to justify sending thousands back to live in a war zone under the pretence that it has become safe.

Lebanon has hosted 3.5 million Syrian refugees for more than five years. It borders Syria and stories of the two countries’ supposed brothelhood have widely circulated. Brotherhood’s hospitality are their limits, however.

Lebanese authorities have sanctioned firms that employ Syrians, although no violation of the law has been detected. The regime has succeeded in enticing the Syrians to return to Lebanon with the promise of a better life. Hundreds of fighters are killed every day in the war.”

Baha al-Aawam

July 2019

Syria has long lost its sovereignty to occupying powers

Syria and persecutes the opposition figures living outside the country’s borders.

The regime will wake up from the illusory state of pacification as having produced peace. For foreign countries that wish to cease their programmes assailed by Syrian people, any opportunity to have their wish fulfilled is seized.

For the exercise of their power internally and externally, these two states rely on Popular Mobilisation Forces’ militias, bought political and religious figures and military leaders in the ranks of the army, intelligence services and even in the presidential palace.

Under the two deep states controlling Syria, Damascus’s refusal has turned into a sort of a small fig leaf behind which the regime hides or just an echo of a Russian or Iranian position that the Syrian state is forced to agree with. This is not an exaggeration of the diagnosis.

In truth, the Syrian regime lost control of its sovereignty the minute Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah’s militias stepped onto Syrian territory, allegedly to fight terrorism, and began killing Syrian citizens.

Damascus’s rejection of what the five occupying powers are doing is like a dwarf resenting assault by a giant that has him in a chokehold.

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**Belgian volunteers in shirts spark controversy about radicalisation in Morocco**

Saad Guerraoui

**Casablanca**

The story of young Belgian women wearing shirts while carrying out volunteer work in a remote village in southern Morocco moved Moroccans but also alarmed Islamist and religious leaders who have long been critical of the outfits.

A 26-year-old teacher, who called for the “de-islamisation” of schools, posted a message on Facebook, echoing the killing of two French tourists who died after being executed by Islamic State militants last December by Moroccan extremists in the High Atlas Mountains, was arrested after an investigation led by Keicha El-Kebir.

As a result, a number of celebrities have been served with summonses for being involved in a demonstration in Casablanca against threats to a group of Danish tourists. These incidents set off a crowd but split public opinion.

In those elections, the charismatic Belaid Essassi unified the Islamist opposition, including a majority of women voters, to beat the Islamists. His movement gained 27 seats, which was about 20 per cent of the total votes. The crowded landscape made it difficult to pinpoint a clear winner, though there are more independent candidates such as heart candidate of the unity road were wearing it, including King Hassan II and Mehdii Bentahar, in the presence of King Mohammed V and the founders of the unity road were wearing it, including King Hassan II and Mehdii Bentahar, in the presence of King Mohammed V and

The incident showed the resilience of a mindset among segments of the Moroccan public while Morocco was still being reeling from the killing of Tunisian tourist Louisa Vesterager Jespersen, 24, and Norwegian Maren Ueland, 28, by three Islamic State militants while hiking near Imlil.

The three men charged in the case were sentenced to death over the executions of the two tourists. Activists denounced Asri’s “perverted” thoughts, reminding them that Morocco was a country of tolerance and co-existence. There was also the realisation that the country still has a long way to go to get rid of such anachronistic ideas that can radicalise people as well as its image in the West.

“Teacher affects a limited number of his pupils and it is a disaster. Although the number of pupils involved is small, the real disaster lies in the teacher’s stance in a position of social norm,” said El Ouadi, a human rights activist, writing on Facebook.

“Perhaps the MP should undergo a continuous training reminding him that short shorts have been known in Morocco for a long time and that the situation and give another image of the Moroccan people.”

Despite assurances and support from the Kingdom of Morocco, Belgium reprimanded the volunteers and the MP who authored the Tweet. El Ouadi stopped sending volunteers to the North African country.

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The GNA's Foreign Ministry likewise condemned its Egyptian counterpart as interfering in Libyan affairs and called for stopping Libyan Field Marshal Khalifa Haf- tar, leader of the LNA.

There was nothing new in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry’s call for non-interference in Libya. In a phone conversation August 4 with French President Emmanuel Ma- cro, Egyptian President Abdel Fatt- tah al-Sisi emphasised his rejection of all forms of interference in Libyan affairs.

Nour was there anything new in the State Council’s accusation that Egypt has been backing Haftar. It did so in July, accusing the United Arab Emirates and France as well. The difference this time is that the GNA went along with the State Council without reservation. It was the sharpest attack on Egypt by authorities in Tripoli since the Qaddafi era. Unquestionably, the Libya the GNA has had no illusions about the level of military support pro- vided to Haftar by the Egyptians, it diplomatically ignored. GNA and Presidential Council head Fayez Sarraj has met with Sisi on several occasions, although he was last in Egypt in February. Cairo has acted entirely diplo- matically. While backing Haftar, it recognised the GNA as the government of Libya and tried to mediate peace between the two sides. There was, in February 2017, the abortive effort to bring about direct nego- tiation between Haftar and Sarraj while they were in Cairo. Egyptian officials have mentio- ned talks to try to reunite the Libyan Army. There have been a series of meetings during which progress by officers from east and west was made but the devil has always been in the details, the ultimate one being the air strikes against the united armed forces – Haftar or someone.

Since the start of the LNA’s offe- nsive to take Tripoli at the beginning of April, though, Egypt has been largely supportive. Shortly after the offensive started, Sisi’s office said he “affirmed Egypt’s support in efforts to fight terrorism and extre- mist militias to achieve security and stability for Libyan citizens,” which is what Haftar says he is fighting. Egypt also continued to call for political dia- logue and a ceasefire. Sisi stressed the need of one in his phone call with Macron.

It is possible that Sarraj may try to heal the breach with Egypt. He made a visit to the one with France that occurred when, following his failure to secure UN support against Haftar during his visit in the LNA, he concluded by ending security cooperation with France and ordered European companies, mainly French, to stop work for technical legal reasons. The order to the companies was quickly followed up by a security cooperation with France, which in- cluded training of the Presidential Guard, officially resumed in June – at least on paper. The GNA realised that it could not afford to stay in bad terms with Paris. However, in the case of Cairo, Sarraj has his hands tied. The rift with Cairo is ideologically driven by the Muslim Brotherhood, both through the State Council and some of the forces fighting for the GNA. Cairo is unlikely to give up on trying to achieve a ceasefire and political compromise but the rift is likely to stiffen its support for Haftar.

The military stalemate in south- ern Tripoli continues. What little that was observed of the Eid ceasefire ended rapidly as soon as the holiday was over. There were air strikes on Mitiga, the capital’s only functioning airport, in which one worker was reportedly killed, and, for the first time, on the airport at Zuwara, near the Tunisian border, where Turkey-supplied drones were allegedly stored.

The LNA claimed responsibility for the latter attack and was widely accused of the former. The result has been a particularly critical report from the Hashem Chah- san Salame. The short Eid ceasefire resulted in a reduction of violence in Tripoli, an August 14 UNSMIL statement read, but there had been breaches.

The statement repeated Salame’s praise for “a positive and lasting truce” that a meeting of concerned countries could take place to ensure that neither side has the means to continue the fighting and then a return to the UN-led political process to end the conflict.

In a statement at the beginning of Eid, France, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States called for a permanent ceasefire and a return to dialogue led by Salame. Russia has also thrown its weight behind a new ceasefire.

Green the alaimous on the ground is alarming, the UN’s represent- 13 time to continue the fight, the belief is, Haftar will try to win back the city, the LNA is reporting, that they can win and the willingness of outside players to continue supporting the two sides is a chance of a per- manent ceasefire to look remote.

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

The battle for control of Tripoli threatens to become bloodier after rival sides vowed to intensify the fight that claimed the lives of more than 1,000 people since April 4.

The UN Support Mission in Libya brokered the Eid ceasefire in Tripoli.

Turkey has sold weapons and equipment to the UN-backed GNA. Islamist militias are the military arm of the GNA, which has little chance of its own.

The UN General Assembly passed a resolution June 12 calling for a military cooperation agreement with Libya. We are pro- voking them if they come up with a request and if they pay for it. They really had a problem in terms of de- fense needs, equipment”, Erdogan said.

Michel Cousins said he deplored that the GNA failed to win military support from any other political grouping.

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The United Nations and its en-voys in Libya also called for a cease-fire (LNA leader Field-Marshall Khalifa Haftar) that was not renewed after strikes were launched against the capital Mitiga airport August 15. The LNA targeted a TurkishВ drone used to fly Turkish drones.

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News & Analysis

Viewpoint

Muslim Brotherhood factor widens rift between Tripoli and Cairo

Michel Cousins

Politics, the same phrase can mean very different things to different people and Libya is no exception. On the last day of the Eid al-Adha holiday, Egypt called for an end to foreign interference in Libya.

Cairo welcomed the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the forces supporting the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) agreeing at the last minute to an Eid ceasefire. It called on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to work more with the House of Representatives (HoR) to develop a way to end the crisis. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry said eliminating terrorism and extremism and ending support for armed militias were part of the way to end the Libyan crisis.

The HoR welcomed the Egyptian statement but the GNA, as well as the Tripoli-based State Council, took very different views.

They, too, said there had to be an end to foreign interference but the demand was directed at Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood-dominated State Council condemned the Egyptian government as an argument in defense of interference in Libyan affairs, accusing of giving powers to the LNA. It is the view of the world’s largest Arab nation that the HoR is part of the Libyan crisis.

There was nothing new in the GNA’s Foreign Ministry’s comment or the State Council’s appeal to foreign interference but the demand was directed at Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood-dominated State Council condemned the Egyptian government as an argument in defense of interference in Libyan affairs, accusing of giving powers to the LNA. It is the view of the world’s largest Arab nation that the HoR is part of the Libyan crisis.

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Developments in Yemen

Here was nothing surprising in Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s pledge of continued support to Yemen’s Houthi movement following the assassination of the Houthis’ top commander, Abdullah Salum. The Houthis have been in a constant political and military war with Saudi Arabia and its allies in Yemen. Khamenei’s message carries weight as Riyadh has been trying to topple the regime by proxy war and economic sanctions. However, the Houthis have managed to survive international sanctions due to their strong ties with Iran, including its support for the Houthi drone attack on a ship in the Gulf of Oman. Iran has been known to use proxies to expand its influence in the region. The Houthis, for their part, have managed to survived US sanctions on Iran by relying on the country’s support.

The puzzling question, however, is whether Iraq is a mere puppet of Iran, despite Western and foreign forces’ wishes. Has Iraq become a pawn in the game of regional power politics? It is certain that most of those in power refuse to remember that it was an American tank – and nothing else but this tank – that returned them to Baghdad. What else can they do when this tank was serving Iran’s expansionist project that differentiates between halal and haram foreign forces and considers Iraq part of its fateful battle with the US administration?

It seems the American tank has changed direction. This change came at a time when there is no indication that the Iraqi foreign minister has room for maneuvering that allows him to see things as they are and reconcile himself with logic and reality. Such reconciliation seems to be forbidden by force in Iraq. Iraqis have no choice but to join the Iranian war in denouncing the presence of Western and foreign forces in the Gulf when they are not serving Iran. This seems to be the narrative that has clearly summed up in the statement of the Iraqi Foreign Affairs minister who obviously cannot place Iraq’s interests above those of Iran.

Khairollah Khairallah is a Lebanese writer.
The white jihad is peril is with us

Rashmine Roshan Lall

White nationalisms is seen to be validated by the rhetoric of powerful politicians, not least the US president, Hungary’s prime minister and Italy’s deputy prime minister.

The solution to this problem is not to divide white extremism but to unite against it, and to give space to all who oppose it, including Muslims, with whom they have a shared history and culture and who are the target of the same hatreds.

In Turkey, where the president is a jihadi and the prime minister a Muslim nationalist, the problem of white extremism is not just a domestic issue but also a geopolitical one. The Black Sea basin, which includes Bulgaria and Greece, is home to the most diverse and faunal rich areas in Europe, and is a key route for migration.

The cartoon that appeared in USA Today today shows a man wearing a swastika hat saying “I’m trying to stop Muslims and Mexican terrorists.” The cartoon is an attempt to divide the public, but it is also a sign of the weakness of the centrist opposition parties — rather weak in Turkey and elsewhere in Europe.

The cartoon and the rhetoric of white extremism are a threat to the stability of Europe and the world. They are not just a threat to the physical safety of people, but also to the political and social fabric of societies.

The solution is to work together to fight this threat, and to support those who are fighting against it. This includes all Muslims, who have a shared history and culture with Europeans, and who are the target of the same hatreds.

Rashmine Roshan Lall is a columnist of The Arab Weekly. Her blog can be found at www.rashmee.com and she is on Twitter: @rashmeealman.
Haitham El-Zobaidi

den, where? This question becomes pertinent when considering the capture of the city and its most important installations and government buildings by forces of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which took advantage of the failure of the Yemeni interim government, also known as the “legitimacy camp,” to provide adequate protection to it.

The interim government was supposed to protect the Yemeni president, with which the Houthis had达成 power-sharing agreement in 2014. The government of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, which had been formed after the fall of former President Saleh, has become a client of the Houthis. In this sense, the move by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Aden can be read as defending the “legitimacy camp,” or whatever it was left of it, and a move to strengthen its grip on the Houthis to the capital of southern Yemen after their expulsion in 2015.

Enraged forces, part of the Saudi-led coalition, expelled the Houthis from Aden after they had been in the city for a few months. On September 21, 2014, the Houthis had seized Sana’a and signed a peace and cooperation agreement with Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and the UN on an immediate and unconditional return to Aden at the time.

The Southern Transitional Council’s move was necessary to prevent the return of those who want to protect Aden and prevent the return of the Houthis.

The United Arab Emirates, which in November 2015, fighters with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) have been a major participant in the Saudi-led coalition’s battle against the Iran-backed Houthi movement that ousted Hadi from power in Sana’a in 2014.

The southern port city of Aden has been the temporary base of Hadi’s government. The president has based himself in the city since his cabinet in January.

The war against the Houthis seems to be a game of two realities: north and south Yemen — formerly separate countries — and the new single state in 1990 under Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The move August is by the STC, which is backed by most of the security and military forces of the government of former Governor Aidarous al-Zubaidi, came amid fears that Islamist forces in the Saudi-led coalition could take over the south, even permitting al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula to make a comeback there.

The STC maintains that whatever the outcome of the drawn-out conflict, southern Yemenis need to be represented in peace talks and have a say in the colored political processes in the country.

The STC has reportedly been conducting talks to de-escalate and prepare to attend an emergency summit in Jeddah aimed at reaching an agreement for all parties in Aden.

The STC has accused al-Islah, a British-backed, anti-Islam party, of trying to impose its will on Yemen and to control the security forces. The STC also accused al-Islah of being complicit in a deadly Houthi missile strike on southern forces four months ago. “Al-Islah has been at the heart of this,” Al-Bayoomi said.

The STC is unlikely to forgive its advances in Aden, it is also unlikely to pursue independence in the short term, relying instead on negotiations to resolve the crisis.

Analyst’s note that the STC has significant leverage but warned that al-Islah remains a threat.

“A return to a united Yemen is no longer possible. At the same time, it is impossible to revive a country that was once called South Yemen and which one point in the past was the home of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen,” said Khaled Mabrouk, an analyst and author on Yemeni politics.

“The recent events at Aden, not only the weakness of the al-Islah-backed legitimate camp but also other turning points that can ultimately lead to Aden possibly remaining one of past glory by providing the necessary conditions for the return of the Houthis,” he added.

“The real challenge for the Southern Transitional Council, not that of reviving a defunct state in the south going back to the pre-unification era,” he added.

Mabrouk noted that the Houthis, who are loyal to President Hadi, were not ready to go under house arrest. Anybody who has any doubt about this can go back to the circumstances that accompanied the Houthis’ takeover of Aden, Hadi, at the time, refused to defend the city, protesting that it was the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s battle, not his.

He is the Executive Editor of Haitham El-Zobaidi is an Iraqi-Yemeni journalist. He is the Executive Editor of Al Arab Publishing Group.

**Reassessing priorities. Yemeni demonstrators wave flags of former South Yemen as they march in Yemen’s second city of Aden, August 15.** (AP)

**Viewpoint**

**The Southern Transitional Council has not just parached into the Yemeni crisis**

Faith Salama

**In view of the developments in Yemen during the past ten years, more than anything else is the great extent of conflict between the Houthis and the Muslim Brotherhood represented by al-Islah party. No cannot ignore that al-Islah’s tiresome quest of power-sharing with the Houthis. The man gave up hope for such a deal only after the Houthis had placed him under house arrest.**

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**He is the Executive Editor of Al Arab Publishing Group.**

Faith Salama is a Lebanese journalist.

**Gulf | Yemen**

**News & Analysis**

The Southern Transitional Council has just parachuted into the Yemeni crisis

Faith Salama

**Viewpoint**

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Aden can be read as defending the “legitimacy camp,” or whatever it was left of it, and a move to strengthen its grip on the Houthis to the capital of southern Yemen after their expulsion in 2015.

Enraged forces, part of the Saudi-led coalition, expelled the Houthis from Aden after they had been in the city for a few months. On September 21, 2014, the Houthis had seized Sana’a and signed a peace and cooperation agreement with Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and the UN on an immediate and unconditional return to Aden at the time.

The Southern Transitional Council’s move was necessary to prevent the return of those who want to protect Aden and prevent the return of the Houthis.

The United Arab Emirates, which in November 2015, fighters with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) have been a major participant in the Saudi-led coalition’s battle against the Iran-backed Houthi movement that ousted Hadi from power in Sana’a in 2014.

The southern port city of Aden has been the temporary base of Hadi’s government. The president has based himself in the city since his cabinet in January.

The war against the Houthis seems to be a game of two realities: north and south Yemen — formerly separate countries — and the new single state in 1990 under Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The move August is by the STC, which is backed by most of the security and military forces of the government of former Governor Aidarous al-Zubaidi, came amid fears that Islamist forces in the Saudi-led coalition could take over the south, even permitting al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula to make a comeback there.

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Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan met with Saudi leader near Muscat August 12, backing Riyadh’s calls for dialogue between the warring parties. The United Arab Emirates, which in July announced it was scaling down its military presence in Yemen amid tensions with Iran, has long been a patron of al-Islah.

While the group is part of Hadi’s coalition government in southern Yemen, al-Islah at the time was offering to collaborate with Qatar to divert the attention of the Saudi-led coalition from its fight against the Houthis.

Faith Salama is a Lebanese journalist.
Egypt is close to securing the first deal for the export of its locally made ST-100 MRAP armoured vehicles, which offer protection against ballistic missiles and bomb threats.

Egypt has signed dozens of manufacturing contracts for the vehicles to be signed with the United Arab Emirates in August. Together with those in the pipeline with other Arab and African states, the UAE contract brings Egypt closer to a long-term strategic goal of becoming an arms manufacturer and turning military industries into a major source of income.

Egypt has been developing its military industries with the aim of satisfying the domestic demand for arms and making money from military industries. Egypt plans to be a full arms producer and exporter by 2029. It has signed more than 20 deals with countries such as the United Arab Emirates, China, South Korea and the United Kingdom to localise military industries.

The deals allowed Egyptian military production plants to produce a wide range of military equipment, including tanks (US M1 Abrams main battle tanks among them), helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, training jets, corvettes and light weapons, including machine guns.

According to the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, the ST-100 MRAP armoured vehicles, which are produced by International Marathon United Service Defence Exhibition in Cairo, last December, are an example of the country developing new weapons or designing and producing military technology, “said retired intelligence officer Hassan Abdel Zaher. “These are challenges that can’t be easily overcome,” said retired army General Gamal Eddin Malouf. “True, there are challenges but they will be easier to overcome in the presence of a national will at the highest level to score real progress in this field.”

Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.

Potential deal with UAE boosts Egypt’s hopes of joining ranks of arms exporters

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

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Explosions at Iraqi weapons depot sparks speculation about Iran role

Azhar Al-Rubaie and Yousif Al-Hashimi

Baghdad

A massive explosion at a weapons depot in an Iran-backed military base near Baghdad heightened security concerns and raised questions about Iraq's ability to protect its sovereignty.

The blast August 12 at an Iraqi military base south of Baghdad killed one person and wounded at least 31 others. The explosion sent projectiles into residential areas, including al-Doura district, officials said. Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul-Maliki ordered an investigation.

Mohdalah al-Dalmani, who lives near the explosion site, said: "At first I heard two strong explosions. The third came after it but was rifting. I pushed myself out of the door and I saw the smoke filling the sky and its smell was transferred out the home.

The explosion sounds continued around two houses. Many houses were destroyed. Roads were blocked and people were horror-struck, hurriedly to the streets to save their life." the blast was caused by an air strike, followed by secondary explosions of explosives stored in the place.

Iraqi Interior Ministry spokesperson Saad Maan said the cause of the explosion remained unclear but a security source said it was likely due to poor storage conditions and high temperatures.

However, many Iraqis blamed Israel, which has frequently targeted Iran’s proxies across the region and is believed to be waging a campaign against Iran-backed militias.

"We believe the weapons depot was targeted by an opposing coalition state on the basis of a treasonous Israeli act," former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Baha al-Araj posted on Twitter.

Asharq al-Awsat newspaper quoted an unidentified source saying "the deviation in the course of a campaign that began in Syria to dismantle Iran-backed militias.

Iraqi professor Ghazi Faisal Hussain, a specialist in international relations and political development, said: "It is probable that the strike was carried out by Israel.

The attack, he added, would be "a continuation of the strikes on the military bases of Iran and the Israeli's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps "IRGC" in Syria and Iraq. They may be used as military bases. This provides a security threat to Israel and a danger to the war in Iraq, because munitions are placed in a residential area and should be placed in the desert.

Iran must respect the sovereignty of neighboring countries, he stressed. Today, Iraq is under Iranian control and controls the internal situation in the region," Hussain said.

Political analyst Entifaj Qambar also argued that Iran was putting Iraq at risk, writing on Twitter that "Iran is aiming to use Iraq as a war zone to face US pressure."

With US sanctions hitting Iran’s economy, Tehran has sought to hide its heavy weapons in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to preserve its influence. The Iranian government has done little to address the issue.

For decades, Iran has sought to establish a powerful presence in Iraq, including within the country’s Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF). IRGC leaders took key positions in the PMF, helping expand Tehran’s proxy network.

While the United States has listed the IRGC as a terrorist organisation, the Iraqi federal government has warned on many of its leaders in the fight against the Islamic State. As of 2016, Iraq’s Representatives Council legalised Iran-backed militia presence in Iraq, leading to the creation of the Popular Mobilisation Forces’ security force. Iran provided the PMF with weapons and training as they fought alongside the Iraqi Army.

That same year, an explosion occurred at a PMF weapons depot in eastern Baghdad. The PMF did not take responsibility at the time, nor did the Iraqi Security Forces provide a clear explanation.

On August 15, Abdul-Maliki prohibitted military flights without permission from the prime minister and ordered all military camps to be moved outside Iraqi cities.

Azhar Al-Rubaie is a freelance journalist based in Iraq. He has been working in the field of media since 2014. His writing focuses on politics, health, society, war and human rights. Follow him on Twitter: @AzherRubaie. Yousif Al-Hashimi is a journalist and social media specialist in Iraq. Follow him on Twitter: @YousifAlHashimi.

Death of US Marine in Iraq brings renewed attention to ISIS threat

Gregory Attakandjian

For US troops to remain in Iraq to help in the anti-ISIS campaign, the Trump administration needs to be more cognisant of Iraqi sensibilities and the fact that Iraq has endured many decades of bloodshed.

claims by US President Donald Trump that the Islamic State had been "visibly defeated," the combat death of a US service member in Iraq on August 11 underscored to policymakers and the public that the military threat remains a significant threat.

The US Marine who was killed was reportedly advising and accompanying Iraqi security forces on a planned operation in Nineveh province to weed out Islamic State (ISIL) cells.

For Iraqis, this was no surprise, because there have been bombings and shootings by ISIL against Iraqi soldiers and civilians in the past several months.

Indeed, a panel of UN experts released a report to the UN Security Council in late July in which they stated that the ISIL remains Iraq where its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is believed to be hiding.

He and other ISIL leaders, the report added, "aim to "adapt, survive and consolidate into the core area of control that establishes sleeper cells at the local level" in preparation of a comeback."

The report stated that as many as 20,000 ISIL fighters may have escaped the fall of the so-called caliphate. US officials say the number is 14,000-18,000.

Regardless of the difference in numbers, US officials are clearly worried about an ISIL resurgence. In January, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, appearing before the US Congress with other intelligence leaders, said: "While ISIL is not immediately a US threat, the group has returned to its guerrilla warfare roots while continuing to plot attacks and direct its surrogates worldwide. ISIL is intent on resurgent and still commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria."

In response to this assessment as well as one on North Korea saying North Korean leader Kim Jong-un would not likely give up nuclear weapons, both of which contradicted claims by Trump, the US president denigrated his intelligence chiefs and tweeted they should "go back to school."

However, since Trump’s insults, driven more by politics than national security concerns, he has been more circumspect. James Jeffrey, the US envoy to the anti-ISIS coalition, led a briefing at the US State Department on August 11 in which he said, despite ISIL’s loss of territory, the risk remained of renewed attacks but he was not unprecedented by the US military.

Jeffrey added that thousands of ISIL fighters are confirmed to have gone to Syria and Iraq where observers see a "persistent, resilient, rural level of violence."

Additionally, a US Department of Defence inspector general’s report noted that from April-June, ISIL carried out “targeted assassinations, ambushes, suicide bombings and the burning of crops”; in Iraq and Syria. The report stated that the reduction of US troops in Syria decreased support needed by partner forces in Syria to respond to the renewed ISIS threat.

Although Trump is unlikely to reverse his decision to draw down US troops in Syria to about 5,000, he wants to keep the current US troop presence in Iraq at about 5,000. Media reports said Iraq’s government officials have privately admitted that their regular army, while vastly improved since its dismal performance against ISIS in 2014, needs more training and that US special forces can help the modernisation of elite Iraqi units. Hence, these officials want US troops to remain in Iraq to prevent an ISIS resurgence.

This practical desire by Iraqi officials was in line with the US policy of putting pressure on both countries to combat the Islamic State, a former US State Department Middle East analyst.

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Death of US Marine in Iraq brings renewed attention to ISIS threat

Gregory Attakandjian is a lecturer at the Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University and a former US State Department Middle East analyst.
Pentagon sees Iran and Syria facing greater threat from ISIS, Iran proxies

Emily Przyborski

Washington

The death of a US Marine in Iraq serves as a reminder that Iran and its proxies in Iraq and Syria is not over, US defence strategists said. The Pentagon's task in Iraq is further complicated by the presence of pro-Iran proxies in the region.

US Marine Gunnery Sergeant Scott Koppenhafer, 35, died August 10 in northern Iraq during a mission targeting suspected Islamic State (ISIS) members.

In a recent interview, US President Donald Trump proclaimed that ISIS had been defeated, but in August, the White House announced that the United States would be withdrawing all troops from Syria. Following an outcry by lawmakers that ISIS was not defeated, the White House retracted the full withdrawal in February and said it would slowly withdraw troops and keep 2000 on the ground.

The combination of ISIS and Iranian proxies in Iraq and Syria is a particularly challenging, but Iranian-backed organisations.

Despite claims that ISIS had been defeated in December, a US Department of Defence report released in August said the pull-out of approximately 1,500 US troops from Syria led to a resurgence of ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. The Pentagon report said that 14,000-18,000 ISIS militiamen are present in Iraq and Syria.

The report noted: “Despite losing its territorial ‘caliphate’, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) solidified its insurgent capabilities in Iraq and is regrouping in Syria.”

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The ISIS campaign of expanding was thwarted by the presence of pro-Iran proxies in the region.

The withdrawal of US troops from Syria has staled but further withdrawals might allow both groups to rebuild. Fine stated that the resurgence of ISIS “could cause US-backed forces in Syria to look for ‘alternative partnerships and resources’ to replace the reduced US support.”

Resurgent threat. A member of the Kurdish security forces examines debris at the site of an ISIS claimed car bombing in the town of al-Gahtaniyah in the Hasakah province, August 7. (AP/F)

A stubborn nightmare. A pre-recorded video released of ISIS fighters waving flags during a military parade along the streets of Syria’s northern Raqqa province.

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Resurgent threat. A member of the Kurdish security forces examines debris at the site of an ISIS claimed car bombing in the town of al-Gahtaniyah in the Hasakah province, August 7. (AP/F)
Sami Mouhayed
Beirut

The rival Druze leaders of Amal and the FPM – Michel Aoun and Saad Hariri – were brought to a rapprochement meeting at Baabda Palace, attended by Lebanese President Michel Aoun, Prime Minister Saad Hariri and parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

Much of the lobbying was carried out by Berri, who enjoys excellent relations with both the pro-Syrian camp, where Jumblatt stands, and the pro-Syrian one, as March 8 Alliance, to which he belongs. Berri and Jumblatt go a very long way back, when they were comrades-in-arms throughout the Lebanese Civil War.

Thanks to Berri, the two sides decided at the August 9 meeting to end gripping tension within the Druze community that was triggered June 30 in the village of Qabr Shmoun. The incident was a targeted assassination.

In theory, all sides seem to have downplayed their escalation after Qabr Shmoun. Arslan had originally fumed over an assassination threat threatening to take up arms to protect his followers should the state fail to do so. He resorted to none of that, however, agreeing to attend the reconciliation meeting with no preconditions.

Arslan, who enjoys excellent relations with Syria, Iran and Hezbollah, had insisted on the case being referred to a judicial council, headed by Justice Minister Albert Sarhan, a member of the Hezbollah-affiliated Free Patriotic Movement of Aoun and his son-in-law, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil.

Jumblatt’s allies – never on good terms with the Aounists – argued that such a council would not be impartial, demanding instead referral to the Internal Security Forces, which are allied with Hariri.

Jumblatt threatened that his two ministers would boycott any cabinet meeting and even resign from their posts should he be referred to the Aounist judicial council. He controls the education and industry portfolios.

A Jumblatt walkout on the Baabda rapprochement meeting at Baabda Palace, hoping to make the deal as cohesive as possible and make space for common ground with Hezbollah.

Although his officials refused to attend the meeting, claiming they were not directly involved in the Qabr Shmoun conflict, Hezbollah blamed the agreement as too weakening.

The veteran Druze leader, who has been involved in Lebanese politics since the late 1970s, has now decided to take a softer line on political position on Syrian tutelage in Lebanon. This was clarified to the writer from Hezbollah. That, too, facilitated the rapprochement and gave Berri wide room to maneuver.

Jumblatt had insisted that a reprieve from Hezbollah attend the Baabda rapprochement, hoping to make the deal as cohesive as possible and make space for common space.

Now that the ranking politicians have been accommodated and the Baabda photo at Baabda Palace, Lebanon’s citizens are asking what the highly polarised Lebanese system is doing to prevent the recurrence of such a bloody incident and where to find the wrongdoers of the two victims killed at Qabr Shmoun.
Palestine | Israel

Israel bars entry to US congresswomen, risks showdown with Democrats

The Arab Weekly staff

London/Washington

A

That announcing its decision to bar two outspoken US Muslim congresswomen from visiting the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel seemed to be heading towards a confrontation with US Democratic lawmakers a month before Israeli elections.

Experts saw the move by US Representative Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Ilhan Omar of Minnesota from entering Israel as unprecedented and as marking a deep foray by Israel into the United States’ bitterly politised politics.

Analysts said US President Donald Trump was appealing to his base of conservative voters with staunchly pro-Israel stances. Trump’s aides, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told the Associated Press: “Trump is banking that his base support for Israel will attract more Jewish and evangelical Christian supporters.”

The move was also a sharp escal- ation of Israel’s campaign against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and its supporters on the American left.

Israel Interior Minister Aryeh Deri issued a statement August 15 saying that, after consultations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior Israeli officials, he decided not to allow Tlaib and Omar to enter because of “their boycott activities against Israel.”

Also unprecedented was the call by Trump on Israeli leaders to bar the two Democratic congresswomen from entering the country: “It would show great weakness if Israel allowed Rep. Omar and Rep. Tlaib to visit,” Trump wrote on Twitter.

“They hate Israel & all Jewish peo- ple, & there is no reason for them to be allowed to enter,” he added. “We want to keep Israel a Jewish & democratic state! The US does not need BDS.”

The two are members of the so- called ‘Squad’ of four non-traditional Democrats, along with Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts.

In a statement August 15, Omar said: “The irony of being only democracy in the Middle East making such a decision that it is tantamount to an insidious democra- tic values and a chilling response to a visit by government officials from an allied nation.”

American Jewish organisations had condemned and as marking a deep foray by

Israel is fuelling religious factors for conflict. Tensions in Jerusalem have increased in recent years. The Trump administration recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, and has given Tel Aviv a free hand to settle in East Jerusalem. In 2018, Israeli attacks on the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque saw the practice of ritual sacrifice.

Armed forces were called to the area.

Muslims and Christians should actively support a peaceful coexistence in Jerusalem. The United Nations and the international community have repeatedly condemned Israeli violations in East Jerusalem.

Palestinian journalists have been documenting the illegal Israeli settlement activities in East Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

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Alfredo de Zayas, the UN special rapporteur on religious freedom, has expressed concern about the situation in Jerusalem.

Palestinians stress that their struggle is only political and aims to end Israel’s military occupation and has never been or will be a conflict against Judaism.

Unprecedented. US Representative Ilhan Omar (R) speaks as US Representative Rashida Tlaib listens during a news conference at the US Capitol in Washington, last July.

News & Analysis

Is Israel transforming the Palestinian issue into religious conflict?

Yousef Alhelou

his year’s Eid al-Adha feast, the festival of sacrifice, saw the largest Israeli settlements attempt to storm the holy site of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

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Turkey's war on Arabic signs reflects intolerance of Syrian refugees

Constance Letch

Istanbul

A midflagging support and a worsening economic crisis, the Turkish Justice and Development Party government has singed out an unlikable place to be: Indian signs.

Hundreds of the banners have been removed from high streets across Turkey but critics warn that the move would deepen the growing hostility against Syrian refugees. Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu announced that “offending” Arabic shop signs across Turkey would be changed within six months. The ban on Indian signs and that standard is Turkish. If they want to write small Arabic, they will be sheltered, they can. Everyone will stick to the rules and the obligation whatever they are,” he said in July.

Turkey shelters approximately 3.6 million Syrian refugees, making it the world’s largest refugee host country. Syrian refugees are often targets of xenophobia and discrimination.

In fact, there is a growing trend in Turkey to implement a coherent and transparent strategy to protect and integrate Syrian refugees. This is particularly important for Syrian refugees who are living in Istanbul and face increased anti-refugee sentiment. 

At the national level, Syrian refugees in Turkey are protected by a number of legal and institutional measures. The government has established a National Plan for Syrian Refugees in Turkey, which outlines the government’s approach to managing the refugee crisis. Additionally, the government has implemented several initiatives to support Syrian refugees, such as providing access to education, employment, and housing.

However, there are still challenges in implementing these measures effectively, and discrimination and xenophobia against Syrian refugees continue to be a concern. 

The Turkish government has been working to address these challenges through various initiatives. For example, the government has implemented a number of measures to promote economic integration and social inclusion of Syrian refugees.

This includes providing access to education and employment opportunities, as well as supporting the establishment of Syrian-owned businesses and cooperatives. Additionally, the government has implemented several initiatives to support Syrian refugees, such as providing access to education, employment, and housing.

Despite these efforts, there is still a need for greater support and integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey. This includes providing access to social services, healthcare, and other essential needs.

In conclusion, while there have been some positive developments in recent years, there is still a need for greater support and integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey. The government has been working to address these challenges through various initiatives, but there is still a need for greater collaboration and support from all levels of government and society.

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How to use the information

The information provided can be used in a number of ways. For example, it can be used to raise awareness about the challenges faced by Syrian refugees in Turkey and to support efforts to promote their integration and inclusion. Additionally, it can be used to support policy development and implementation, as well as to inform and engage with stakeholders, including Syrian refugees, civil society organizations, and government officials.
Open letters underscore Iranians’ frustration with Khamenei’s rule

Ali Alfoneh

It is quite common that intelligence agencies and security organizations use front organizations to provide cover for their covert agents and actions. Those agencies openly admit their relationship with the cover is less common but not unprecedented. This is exactly what happened July 25. The government-controlled Iranian media reported Major-General Qassem Soleimani, chief commander of extraterritorial operations of al-Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), appointed a new director for the Reconstruction Organisation of Holy Shrines in Iraq.

The questions are what the exact role of this organization is and why Soleimani disclosed the relationship between al-Quds Force and its cover. Its website states that the Reconstruction Organisation was established as a “non-governmental” and “non-profit” entity in 2003, which coincides with the US-led invasion of Iraq. The website discloses that, apart from activities in Balad, Karbala, Kazzimiyah, Maysan, Najaf and Samarra in Iraq, the organization has had engagements in Syria. Besides reconstructing Shia shrines, those activities include international fundraising for the reconstruction effort and servicing Iranian pilgrims. Iranian officials informed IRNA that the number of Iranian pilgrims to Iraq totalled 3.5 million by 2018. That number has dramatically declined because of US sanctions against Iran and a 50% devaluation of the Iranian rial.

Despite claims of the Reconstruction Organisation being a non-governmental organisation, there are many indications that it is a governmental entity. The Reconstruction Organisation appears on the country’s annual budget and representatives of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei closely monitor its work.

The organisation has long been suspected of being a cover for al-Quds Force. Hassan Pelarak, the first director of the organisation, is a native of Kerman and a former assistant “and adviser to the Quds Force” chief commander of the Sarallah Division for the last eight years of the shah’s rule. Open letters do not necessarily threaten the political order in Iran and Khamenei is not likely to resign unless the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps perceives him as a liability rather than an asset. But, as in the days of the shah, open letters perhaps herald the beginning of a new phase in the broad popular opposition against Iran.

Khamenei and Iran should fear people who speak truth to power because they no longer believe they have anything to lose.

Ali Alfoneh is a senior fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.
Europe sides with UK over tanker row out that shows no appetite for showdown with Iran

Sahabat Khan
Dubai

A US-Iran tension escalations, so have European naval forces to salvage the Iran nuclear accord, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, from collapse. European diplomacy played a pivotal role in the nuclear agreement materialising in 2015 but those efforts have been undermined by regional geopolitics and competition in the region.

The European position on the Iran crisis has become more sceptical since the seizure of the British-flagged Stena Impero, which remains impounded, by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the Strait of Hormuz in July. That incident was a response by Tehran to British forces seizing the Iranian oil tanker Grace 1 off the coast of Gibraltar for allegedly violating EU sanctions against Damascus.

Iran has continued its targeted harassment of British commercial and military vessels in Gulf waters. Blocking a line of communications to the United States, the Iranian military has demanded control of the Gulf to protect freedom of navigation.

The logic of a European-led naval mission to engage with the US forces in the Gulf to prevent freedom of navigation is low. The Grace I was released by Gibraltarian authorities, which remains impounded by the Trump administration to Iranian naval authorities, which 20% of the world’s seaborne trade pass, have been attributed by the United States to the Iran regime for allegedly violating the Iran nuclear agreement.

In a major breakthrough two weeks ago, the EU payment system designed to enable European businesses to conduct non-dollar trade with Iran without breaking US sanctions, known as the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), completed its first transactions.

Europe has thrown its weight behind diplomatic manoeuvres. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (R) meets with Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic adviser to the French president, in Tehran, July 10. (AFP)

Diplomatic manoeuvres.

Viewpoint
Russia’s naval cooperation with Iran complicates Western calculus

John C.K. Daly

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Diplomatic manoeuvres.
How the West’s depiction of Prophet Mohammad has come a full circle

Francis Ghiles

As Mohammad a heretic and an imposter or a fraud and an interloper? Is he an equals of the apostles or a heretic and an imposter? Is he an imposter or an imposter? His reputation is only made in the mind of the beholder. No man is an imposter, but the sum of all heresies. His founder was said to be “the chosen disciple of the devil.”

A caricature of the Prophet, which accompanies a work by Peter the Venerable, a 12th-century abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny in Burgundy — “Summa tutmis haeresin Saracenorum” (A summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens) — shows him with a goat. This is a monstrosity, a monstrous combination of the human and the animal. His purpose was to lure the unwary to their doom. This is a time when Muslims were being crucified as Crusaders. Today, the West has been unable to put in place a system that is truly tolerant and respectful of religious diversity. The West, driven by religion, by fear of terrorism, by the desire to protect its way of life, has been unable to put in place a system that is truly tolerant and respectful of religious diversity.

European Christian writers, Protestant and Catholic, saw the Turks as a double threat who could both conquer and seduce unwary Europeans as Christians. He adds: “Ottoman Istanbul was both an enemy camp and a bustling cosmopolitan city. The Ottoman Empire seemed to have found ways to tolerate religious diversity and powerful consciences. That Europe, ridden by strife, was unable to put in place a system that is truly tolerant and respectful of religious diversity.

In revolutionary France, both the Robespierres and the Roundheads drew parallels between Oliver Cromwell and Mohammad, asking whether one was a rebel against legitimate authority or the bringer of a new and just order. By the 18th century, Voltaire saw Mohammad as an archetypal religious fanatic only to claim him as an enemy of superstition, of prejudice and of tolerance.

For Peter the Venerable, the first of the most prominent church clergies of his day, Mohammad was “detestable.”

Today’s globalised context offers a new challenge: decolonisation and immigration has brought negative European perceptions of Islam and its Prophet to the attention of Muslims.

With the Trump administration looking at ethnic categorisation as it redrafts lines for immigration policy, as explained by Ken Cuccinelli, acting director of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, being of an ethnic stock seems to matter to those who decide who should be admitted to the United States.

If you bear in mind what Cuccinelli has said on the subject, the United States is reserved for people from Europe.

The words that greeted new immigrants arriving by sea were patently offensive. The newcomers were told they had to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the base, the wretched, tepid, vomit overboard. They were told to leave the United States for Europe.

The Trump administration has been hostile to the idea of allowing any Arab Americans to be admitted to the United States as a result of their faith.

Yet the new rule for weeding out those who might be a drain on taxpayers will almost certainly mean that Arab Americans from Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia. It will drain developing and emerging countries, including those of the Middle East and the United Arab Emirates, who need to break the vicious circle of mass migration while trying to draw educated citizens from poorer parts of the world.

The talented few will be increasingly encouraged to move to more liberal cities in the United States and Europe. It does not matter if the discrimination against Muslims is a result of inadequate policies and cataclysmic events in the Middle East and failures to integrate Muslims and incr ease resentment, apprehension and violence in the world.

Today’s globalised context offers a new challenge: decolonisation and immigration has brought negative European perceptions of Islam and its Prophet to the attention of Muslims.

In the years that followed, Mohammad was no longer the enemy of heterodoxy, but the sum of all heresies. Its importance in the Middle Ages, Islam was portrayed as a pagan idol. In the early Middle Ages, Islam was portrayed as a heretic and an imposter or an imposter. How would the world look today if Mohammad had been vilified, when Mohammad was portrayed as a siren, a monster of the Crusades.

In revolutionary France, both the Robespierres and the Roundheads drew parallels between Oliver Cromwell and Mohammad, asking whether one was a rebel against legitimate authority or the bringer of a new and just order. By the 18th century, Voltaire saw Mohammad as an archetypal religious fanatic only to claim him as an enemy of superstition, of prejudice and of tolerance.

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Yet, as Tom Holland has noted, “the editor of Charlie Hebdo, heir to two centuries of strong French anti-clericalism, nothing less in Islam and its Prophet than that the historical Mohammad and Mediterranean Chris tians were like the Vikings and the Magyars and calls were made to establish a crusade against legitimate authority or the bringer of a new and just order. By the 18th century, Voltaire saw Mohammad as an archetypal religious fanatic only to claim him as an enemy of superstition, of prejudice and of tolerance.

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Algeria's oil sales soften blow but economic crisis looms

Jamel Ghanmi

Algeria’s oil sales softened blow but economic crisis looms...
**Economy**

**Egyptian expatriates struggle with red tape at home**

Mohamed Hammad

Cairo

The Ministry of State for Expatriate Affairs (MOMSA) has recently launched a comprehensive programme to facilitate procedures for expatriates. The programme was announced by the minister of state for expatriate affairs, Nasser Badreddine, during a press conference in which he highlighted the efforts being made to improve the conditions of expatriates living abroad.

The programme includes several measures aimed at simplifying procedures and reducing bureaucratic obstacles. These measures include the establishment of a single portal for expatriates to access all necessary services, including visas, renewals, and residency permits. Additionally, the programme focuses on developing partnerships with embassies and consulates to facilitate visa renewals and other administrative procedures.

Nasser Badreddine highlighted the importance of improving the experience of expatriates living abroad, stating that the government is committed to providing efficient and transparent services. He added that the programme is part of the government’s efforts to strengthen ties with the expatriate community and attract more investors to Egypt.

The programme also includes measures to enhance the mobility of expatriates by simplifying visa procedures. This is expected to encourage more businesses to hire expatriates and expand their operations in Egypt.

In conclusion, the programme is a significant step forward in improving the experience of expatriates living abroad. The government’s commitment to providing efficient and transparent services is commendable, and the programme is expected to have a positive impact on the expatriate community and the Egyptian economy.
Haj ends with no organisational glitch, Saudis lauded

Mohammed Alkhereiji

London

e the haj season, which saw nearly 2.5 million Muslims from around the world gather in Mecca to perform one of the five pillars of Islam, was a resounding success in terms of safety and organisation, officials said.

Despite a war in neighbouring Yemen and attempts to politicise the annual pilgrimage by countries such as Qatar, this year’s haj was, by most accounts, a harmonious event.

Many Arab leaders and senior officials congratulated Saudi Arabia on its organisation of the haj.

Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-\text{\textasciitilde}am Al-\text{\textasciitilde}jabir Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud at the conclusion of haj “praising the great man bin Abdulaziz Al Saud at the gratulatory cable to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud,” the state-run Bahrain News Agency said.

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash posted on Twitter that Saudi Arabia had executed “great efforts in the service of Islam.”

Millions of pilgrims participated in the last major ritual of the haj on August 30 when they entered the sacred Haram in Mecca. “Over 1.85 million pilgrims from outside Saudi Arabia and 534,379 were Saudis,” the official tally of pilgrims was 2,489,406, of whom 1,853,027 were from outside the kingdom and 614,379 were Saudis.

Mecca Governor and chairman of the Central Haj Committee Prince Khalid Al-Faisal Al-\text{\textasciitilde}aisal said final tally of pilgrims was 2,489,406, of whom 1,853,027 were from outside Saudi Arabia and 614,379 were Saudis. “Our Rituals.”

Saudi Arabia has been expertly handled by the Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah for more than seven decades. Among the many challenges of organising the religious pilgrimage are the growing number of travellers, security concerns and a time of growing terrorist threats worldwide and environmental and health factors exacerbated by the large number of visitors.

To deal with these logistical challenges, Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars and devised effective strategies to better develop haj facilities and improve housing, transport, sanitation and sanitation.

As a result, pilgrims enjoy modern facilities and perform their religious rites at ease. This year, Saudi Arabia went to extraordinary lengths to ensure pilgrims were accommodated for the haj, even pumping up to 41 million cubic metres of water to Mecca and the holy sites and using approximately 4,756 kilowatts of electricity.

In addition, the kingdom introduced a smart haj platform, a service-supervision initiative to improve housing by adding living space and organising bus trips and implemented a pilgrim group tracking programme that used electronic systems to manage and monitor crowds. Advanced technology has helped monitor mosques, environmental quality, track pilgrims’ health and guide gezurers to the appropriate venues.

Saudi Arabia’s majesty’s new technology on the haj came in 2018 with the Ministry of Communication and Informatics Technology’s “Smart Haj” platform. Part of the kingdom’s digital transformation programme under Vision 2030, the initiative has grown to include many digital services and interactive applications, notably: “Destination”, “Visit Me”, “Haj” and Umrah Navigator, “Health” and “Our Rituals.”

This year, Saudi Arabia transported 2,489,406 pilgrims from the holy site of Arafat to Mundilhaith in less than six hours. That included moving 360,000 pilgrims on the Mashair train, 100,000 by pedestrian routes and the rest on 20,000 buses.

To ensure a comfortable haj experience, hundreds of thousands of workers from various Saudi sectors and thousands of volunteers cooperated closely on issues of logistics and health.

In doing so, Saudi Arabia embodied the spirit of haj, bringing all of society together to help ensure its visitors were taken care of. “Our Rituals.”

Saudi Arabia’s commitment to haj was beautifully illustrated in a photograph of a security officer helping a tired pilgrim. The photo, taken by Saudi photographer Saud bin Khalid Al-Musabih, was widely shared on social media, inspiring Muslims across the world. For Saudi Arabia, organising the world’s largest religious festival is not just a financial and logistical challenge but a sacred duty that strikes at the heart of its identity and values.

As long as Saudis maintain these values, the success story of the haj will surely continue. Building on its success, Saudi Arabia announced numerous projects, including a first development model for Mina, which includes housing and camps to be ready next year and the expansion of the Mecca Route Initiative, a programme designed to facilitate international pilgrims’ travel experience.

The kingdom has begun water development projects worth more than $825 million in Mecca and other holy sites to ensure a sustainable water supply that will develop and preserve water resources, protect the environment and provide high-quality and efficient services.

We can expect many more projects in the future as Saudi Arabia strives to provide the best experience for its guests regardless of sect, political affiliation, colour, gender, community or race. The kingdom has shown it is highly capable of ensuring a safe and successfully kept it separate from politics, even as some countries attempt to use the spiritual rite to score political points against Riyadh.

Iman Zayat

The kingdom has shown it is highly skilled at organising the haj, successfully kept it separate from politics, even as some countries attempt to use the spiritual rite to score political points against Riyadh.

Iman Zayat is the Managing Editor of The Arab Weekly.
Violence pushing Iraq's medical sector to the brink

Naziil Zarzir
London

The violence that Iraqi physicians experienced and hospital staff have witnessed is becoming an inescapable reality, said Dr Fadhel Mustafa, a member of the Iraqi Physicians Union. “The violence doctors face is an old story, but the reality is growing. From 2003 onwards, the violence against doctors, especially in small hospitals and health-care facilities, has been one of the worst.”

A recent suggestion – which drew nationwide ridicule – was a policy that promised to arm physicians to protect themselves. ‘No official in the new Iraqi state has seriously considered or even listened to the suggestions that promised to arm physicians to protect themselves. Others cite Iraq’s Penal Code of 1969, which offers protections that exist on paper but which few hospitals implement in practice.”

A resident doctor, Mohammad, said that to be a doctor in Iraq today “is to be paid $4.50 an hour, to be offered no protection on the job and to face the experience of being killed by a patient’s relative an hour after their death.”

Medical brain drain endangers Egypt's health care

Ahmed Gamal
Cairo

While the increasing exodus of Egyptian doctors and medical professionals is devastating Egyptian hospitals and smaller health-care facilities, the challenges experienced by female doctors and the almost daily harassment and violence doctors face increasingly shun working in those areas. There are also difficulties experienced by resident doctors and the almost daily harassment and violence doctors face increasingly shun working in those areas. There are also difficulties experienced by resident doctors and the almost daily harassment and violence doctors face increasingly shun working in those areas.

The issue of violence against doctors has become national debate in Egypt. A sector at risk.

Dr Mohamed Hamed, who opted to work in Saudi Arabia last year, said it is not only the opportunity to work abroad that pushes doctors in public hospitals to resign. Private hospitals in Egypt are enticing young doctors to leave their jobs in government hospitals.

Hamed said: “Government hospitals suffer from an acute shortage of qualified personnel in certain specialties currently in high demand, such as brain surgery, neurological and cardiovascular surgery or psychological and neurological disorders.”

He added: “We have become targets of anger and frustration experienced by patients’ families to the point that, in 2015, EMS suggested a bill for the House of Representatives concerning medical liability and hospital protection but the measure has not yet been considered by legislators. Medical errors leading to death are considered criminal offences, subject to up to 5 years in prison. EMS is lobbying to have cases of medical malpractice treated to the civil damages compensation system.”

EMS said only cases of proven gross negligence should be referred to criminal courts, while cases of post treatment complications should not be penalised at all. The syndicate wants to double the maximum fine for doctors implicated in the fatal cases of convicted of assault against doctors and hospital staff.”

The Egyptian health sector may face further challenges unless the government acts within its moral and social responsibilities to protect the wellbeing of its staff. We are under threat, “ one Iraqi doctor wrote. Similar cases can be read online but it’s unclear what degree the world is listening.”

Naziil Zarzir is an Arab Weekly correspondent in London.
The new Basra Museum in southern Iraq has been allotted a library of approximately 3,000 books donated by the British Institute for the Study of Iraq to promote the country’s history and heritage. The museum includes hundreds of precious artefacts that date to Iraq’s Sumerian, Assyrian and Islamic civilisations.

The library was stored in tin trunks in the French and British embassies when the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI), formerly the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, closed in the 1990s after the first Gulf War.

“We hope the library, like the museum, will become a resource not just for Basra but for the whole of southern Iraq and the wider region,” said John Curtis, chairman of the Friends of Basra Museum (FBM), which raised funds to set up the museum.

The first gallery, which opened in September 2016, displays artefacts relating to the history of Basra from the Hellenistic period (circa 300BC) through to the Islamic period. Three galleries – Sumer, Babylon and Assyria – opened in March this year.

Baghdad sent about 2,000 new objects, including pieces from the original Basra Museum, which was housed in a Turkish courtyard facility on the banks of Ahwar Creek. The museum was looted in 1991 during the onset of Saddam Hussein’s regime.

The new museum is housed in Saddam’s former Lakeside Palace. The idea of setting up a museum was first discussed in 2007, but funding was lacking. A British Army Major-General Barney White-Spunner had been appointed commander-in-chief of British troops and charged with re-establishing the Multinational Division South-East. He asked Director of the British Museum Neil MacGregor and Curtis, who was keeper of the Department of the Middle East at the British Museum, about what he could do to protect and promote cultural heritage.

“We asked for a survey of archaeological sites in southern Iraq to see how badly they had been looted and what was missing in the area to see what state they were in and whether they could be put back into service,” Curtis recalled.

It was decided that the Lakeside Palace would be the best location for a museum. Cultural Abroad, the director of the existing museum, embraced the project because the looted museum was not fit for the purpose. It was in an old courtyard house, in poor condition, in an insecure part of the town and unsuitable for displaying and safeguarding high-quality archaeological and historical material.

It was assumed that funding would be made available by the British government and the Department for International Development after the army withdrew from Iraq in 2009 but this did not happen.

“There was a plan of the building and a proposal for a museum project, but no funding,” Curtis said.

He approached BP, which provided $500,000 to renovate the building in the first gallery.

The British Council’s Cultural Protection Fund set up to protect cultural heritage at risk because of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa provided $500,000 to complete installation of the three remaining galleries, for quit with museum staff training and to establish the resource centre.

Curtis emphasised that FBM was not running the museum or telling the Iraqis how it ought to be operated. “These need to be Iraqi decisions and we are here to facilitate not to impose or take decisions,” he said.

He said FBM would assist with setting up the library, which was expected to be open in December, and to help with English labels and information panels for exhibits.

“It is going to take some time to bring things up to a high standard,” Curtis said. “The director of the museum has ambitious plans. We will introduce digital audio-visual aids and museum guides which can be downloaded as apps on a mobile phone.”

With the museum almost complete, the FBM trustees are considering what to do next.

“The Basra Museum is on the Shatt al-Arab River, a very attractive location. The museum of natural history is nearby and there is another building that could become a museum of modern Iraqi history. The whole area is going to become a cultural park,” Curtis said.

Karen Dabrowska is an Arab Weekly commentator in London.
Iraqi NGO leads uphill battle to preserve country's cultural heritage

Oumayma Omar

Baghdad

The Iraqi government lacks a nationwide strategy to preserve, protect and rebuild sites that contribute to the country's cultural legacy of being the cradle of civilization.

The group's members take weekly visits to heritage sites across Baghdad to discover, document and inform people about the sites’ history.

“We need to act quickly. One of my greatest fears for instance is to witness the collapse of Al-Khulafa Mosque's minaret, which dates to the Abbasid era and which is leaning dangerously.”

Hassan noted that Iraq lacks the expertise to conserve old buildings and the government is not willing to allocate funds to protect heritage sites.

“We need to have a strong local council with foreign support to avoid the catastrophe. Otherwise, we will lose Baghdad's most iconic landmarks that go back hundreds of years,” he said.

In addition to Burj Babel, various platforms and initiatives have sought to raise awareness and call for Iraqis to join in celebrating their cultural diversity and stop the damage done to cultural heritage.

The Let Us Save What Remains initiative organizes educational trips for youth groups to visit ancient rock reliefs in the Zawa Mountains and to view active excavation sites. Plans are under way to begin visiting schools and youth centers to develop an education system to teach young Iraqis about the importance of cultural heritage sites.

Hassan said he was confident that greater knowledge of the issue will help maintain the country’s identity from fading away by destruction, whether by conflict, deliberate damage or negligence.

He noted that the numbers of participants in Burj Babel’s tours are increasing constantly, especially since they expanded to regions such as Bagdad and Samarra.

“We could see how enthusiastic and dazzled the young people were, especially those who were not aware of Iraq’s history. It was so delightful and so sad at the same time,” Hassan said.

Oumayma Omar, based in Baghdad, is a contributor to The Culture and Society section of The Arab Weekly.

Culture

Iraqi NGO leads uphill battle to preserve country's cultural heritage

Baghdad landmark Sheikh Suhrawardi cone-shaped dome.

Landmarks in focus. Activists rest near an old building in Baghdad.

Discovering sites. Burj Babel activists on a tour in the old quarters of Baghdad.

( Courtesy of Burj Babel)
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